



speed skating Page 16



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## Kuwait and Uzbekistan strengthen ties with 4 new agreements

### Amir hosts Uzbek prez

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17, (KUNA): 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 welcomed Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and his delegation at the international airport.

Also present were Chief of the Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Sheikh Mubarak Al-Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, Advisor at the Amiri Diwan Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Shereeda Al-Mousherji, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya and other senior officials of the state.

Amiri Diwan Advisor Mohammad Abulhasan heads the honor delegation.

Later, at Bayan Palace, His Highness the Amir received President Mirziyoyev, where official talks were held. The discussions, attended by top Kuwaiti and Uzbek officials, focused on strengthening bilateral relations, expanding cooperation, and addressing mutual interests. Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Sabah stated that the talks emphasized enhancing ties across various sectors.

Continued on Page 5



Left: His Highness the Amir welcomes Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and his delegation at the international airport. Right: HH the Amir and Uzbek president oversee the signing of four agreements at Bayan Palace.



Amiri Diwan photos



### Opinion

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

## Yellow flags that brought death to Lebanon?

FOR the first time in 33 years, Lebanon has managed to rid itself of the grip of the "blocking third" in the government and is finally free from Iranian influence over its decision-making.

For the first time in nearly 50 years, since the beginning of the civil war, Lebanon is emerging from the shadow of the Syrian regime and shaking off the consequences of decisions made in Damascus.

For the first time, this beloved country of all Arabs is finding its way out of the tunnel of yellow, green, and other flags that have overshadowed the Lebanese flag.

After the riots that took place on the road leading to Rafic Hariri International Airport and the subsequent response from the Lebanese Army, the Lebanese people began to sense that the prestige of official institutions had returned.

The inspection of Iranian planes and the prevention of their landing at Beirut Airport marked the first step toward Lebanon's resurgence. The Lebanese people understood that liberation from the Israeli occupation would only be achieved through the unity among them

rather than being monopolized by any single sect.

Now, the Republic has a president, and a technocratic government is in place. Everyone is acting according to their national conscience, placing Lebanon above sects, denominations, and leaders.

Arab trust is gradually returning, as Beirut begins to reclaim its status as the capital of beauty, culture, Arabism, and joy.

For the first time in many years, visitors to Beirut no longer encounter images of Hezbollah leaders, Tehran regime officials, or yellow flags, all of which used to mar Lebanon's face with death and destruction.

The road to the international airport

Continued on Page 5

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# Kuwait raises blood money to KD 20,000

Fair compensation to match times



Minister of Social, Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah and Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Eng. Noura Al-Fassam wave Kuwait flags during the National Holidays celebration at the Ministries Complex. - See Page 2

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17, (KUNA): Kuwait Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait announced on Monday, raising the amount of legal blood money to KD 20,000 to achieve the principle of preserving life and strengthening the concept of fair compensation.

The Ministry of Justice stated on X platform that the Cabinet approved amending Article 251 of the Civil Code, which aims to re-estimate the value of legal blood money to reflect its true reality per the provisions of Islamic Sharia and the requirements of justice.

This comes within the framework of ongoing efforts to strengthen the legislative system and ensure its compatibility with

Continued on Page 5

## Abeer Al-Awadhi appointed head of National Cybersecurity Center

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17, (KUNA): The Cabinet issued a decision on Sunday, appointing Abeer Anwar Al-Awadhi as head of Kuwait National Cybersecurity Center for a period of four years, renewable for one term.

The following is the text of the decision:

- After reviewing the Constitution,
- And the Amiri Decree issued on May 10, 2024
- Law Decree No. 15 of 1979 regarding the Civil Service, and amended laws.

Continued on Page 5



Abeer Al-Awadhi

## Kuwait moves to resolve legal hurdles for citizens' wives with revoked nationalities

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: In fulfillment of the pledge he made during his open meeting with editors-in chief of various newspapers in December 2024 to secure a decent life for the Kuwaiti citizens' wives whose nationalities were revoked under Article 8, the acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah chaired a meeting yesterday with leaders of government agencies to follow up on facilitating procedures and completing all transactions related to this group, reports Al-Seyassah daily. Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef affirmed the need for govern-

ment agencies to expedite solutions and address the conditions of some cases within this group.

He stressed the keenness and readiness of the government to resolve these issues by amending certain laws, decisions, and regulations that may obstruct Decree Law No.158/2024, which amends Article 16 of the Amiri Decree No.15/1959 on the Kuwaiti Nationality Law in a way that ensures a decent life for those affected.

Continued on Page 5

### Day by Day

THE process of forming ministries in Kuwait over the past forty years has been frustrating, as there were ministers whose positions were unstable, which led to instability in institutions. One cannot be a minister at night, and then retire the next morning.

I say this while observing the active and moving butterfly, the Minister of Field Works, performing her fieldwork amid the dust and noise of construction sites. It is true that there are mistakes, but there are also many successes worth praising. She is indeed a productive and admirable butterfly.

Humans are not free from error. We are tired of bad roads. We want them to be comfortable and clean. That is why we want you, dear butterfly, to always be out of your office, because not all supervisors are honest in their profession. Some, as the saying goes, turn a blind eye for personal gain. ... Yet tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar

## Al-Mutairi advocates for tourism role in 'economic diversification'

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17, (KUNA): Kuwait Minister of Information and Culture, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Chairman of the Ninth Meeting of Tourism Ministers in

the GCC Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi stressed Monday that tourism has become an effective tool for supporting the economy and diversifying sources of income.

During his speech at the meeting, Minister Al-Mutairi conveyed the greetings of 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 His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmed Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and their heartfelt wishes for the success of this meeting.

"Our meeting today reflects our firm belief in the importance of coordinating efforts and unifying visions to enhance the tourism sector, especially in light of global changes and challenges facing this vital sector," said the Kuwaiti minister.

The minister stated that with the development of technologies and changes in traveling preferences, it

Continued on Page 5



KUNA photo

Kuwait Minister of Information and Culture, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Chairman of the Ninth Meeting of Tourism Ministers in the GCC Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi delivers his speech.

## 'Iraqi invasion was US policy turning point'

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17, (KUNA): Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 marked a turning point in the US's Middle East policy, particularly towards Gulf

Arab states, American diplomat Richard Haass said on Sunday.

Haass, who served as a close advisor to former Secretary of State Colin Powell, under President George W. Bush's administration, told a foreign ministry-organized seminar that US foreign policy back then faced challenges in shoring up national support for the military operation to liberate Kuwait, especially at a time where Washington was still feeling the ramifications of the Vietnam war, he said.

When the incursion into Kuwait in the wee hours of August 2, 1990 morphed into a full-blown invasion, the diplomat recalled that US political leaders then ultimately agreed that a military intervention was necessary to halt the aggression.

At Sheikh Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Diplomatic Institute, Haas reminisced about the role of Kuwait's then-ambassador

Continued on Page 5

## Shops pledge no price increase for Ramadan

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: A team from the Commercial Control Department and the Technical Authority for Supervision of Goods and Price Determination at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, headed by Director of Control Faisal Al-Ansari, conducted an inspection tour of date markets, as well as coffee, tea, and food mills in Shuwaikh Industrial, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The campaign resulted in the issuance of nine citations and seizure reports against shops, which will be referred to the Commercial Prosecution. Violations included discrepancies in coffee weights, absence of price tags on some food products, failure to mention the country of origin, and display of expired goods. This inspection campaign coincides with the approach of the holy month of Ramadan.

Continued on Page 5

### NewsWatch

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwait's Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) on Monday partnered with global media group The Business Year on a gathering aiming to map out the nation's urban and economic future, saying that the initiative allows intellectual leaders to share their views on the matter.

The event, which focuses on urban development and investment, served as a reminder on the necessity to push forward an economic transition led by the private sector, a KDIPA statement cited State Minister for Housing and Municipal Affairs Abdulatif Al-Meshari as saying.

## Prayer Timings

Fajr ..... 05:06 Asr ..... 15:14  
Sunrise .. 06:26 Maghrib .. 17:39  
Zohr ..... 12:02 Isha ..... 18:56

## Local

## Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

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

**By Night:** Cold with light to moderate northwesterly wind,

## Weather

with speeds of 12-35 km/h.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec	Jahra	21	12
Kuwait City	20	12	Failaka Island	18	14
Kuwait Airport	21	13	Salmiyah	20	14
Abdaly	20	10	Ahmad	21	09
Bubyan	18	13	Jal Aliyah	21	12
			Nuwaisib	21	12

## Kuwait Amir congratulates Kosovo

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Monday a cable to President of Kosovo Dr. Vjosa Osmani, congratulating her on the country's Independence Day.

His Highness the Amir wished President Osmani good health, her country and people further progress and prosperity.

His Highness the Crown Prince

Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also sent a congratulatory cable to President of Kosovo Dr. Vjosa Osmani, on her country's Independence Day, wishing her good health and further progress and prosperity.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah then sent a similar cable to President of Kosovo Dr. Vjosa Osmani, congratulating her on the country's Independence Day.

## 'Kuwait country of tolerance, accepts all races and faiths'

Muslims top count as Christians stand second: report

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: The latest statistics from the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) revealed that there are 488,272 people of unclear religions in the humanitarian country as at the end of December 2024 compared to 349,539 in 2020.**

This is in application of the slogan, "Religion is for Allah and the homeland is for everyone". It is also a confirmation that Kuwait is a country of tolerance and acceptance of others.

The newspaper obtained a copy of the statistics, which revealed that the number of Muslims in the country reached 3,724,445; while the number of Christians reached 755,109.

In addition, the statistics showed the number of Muslims according to nationality as follows: 1,567,731 Kuwaitis; 1,247,681 Arabs; 866,340 Asians; 22,052 non-Arab Afri-

cans; 8,231 Europeans; 11,708 North Americans; 1,548 South Americans and 1,154 Australians.

The Christians include 230 Kuwaitis; 67,926 Arabs; 669,777 non-Arab Asians; 22,268 non-Arab Africans; 7,683 Europeans; 6,289 North Americans; 739 South Americans and 197 Australians.

Most of those with unknown religions are Asians -- 464,082; while 10,213 are from Africa; 1,347 from Europe; 964 from North America; 177 from South America; 48 from Australia, 11,419 are Arabs and 22 are Kuwaitis.



KUNA photo  
Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi receives UAE Minister of Economy Abdullah Al-Marri upon his arrival in the country to participate in the ninth ministerial meeting of tourism officials in the GCC countries.

## Boost eyed in GCC tourism sector

KUWAIT, Feb 17, (KUNA): Kuwait Minister of Information and Culture and State Minister for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi received UAE Minister of Economy Abdullah Al-Marri on Monday to participate in the ninth meeting of the GCC Ministers of Tourism in Kuwait.

In remarks to KUNA, Minister Al-Mutairi emphasized the importance of this meeting in enhancing tourism integration between the GCC countries, noting that the agenda includes several

important topics that contribute to the development of the tourism sector in the GCC.

He praised the pioneering model presented by the UAE in developing tourism, stressing that the exchange of experiences and expertise between the GCC countries enhances their competitive capabilities on the global tourism map.

Minister Al-Mutairi hoped that the meeting would result in practical initiatives that support tourism development in the GCC countries.

## Other Voices

## How did the myth of West shatter and truth emerge?

By Ahmad alsarraf

SINCE the mid-sixties, as I became aware of the world around me, I developed a deep admiration for Western civilization, its culture, and the lifestyle of its countries. This feeling of admiration will most likely remain for the rest of my life.

However, the positions taken by certain senior Western politicians such as the American President Joe Biden, the British Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, and the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, as well as the horrific tragedy endured by over two million Gazans, left me profoundly shocked. The shock was not only due to their shameful stances on the tragedy but also their stubbornness in disregarding the overwhelming reports from the press, television, and international organizations documenting the death toll, particularly among innocent civilians.

These reports detailed the horrors of a tragedy spanning 15 months, marked by massacres that no city in the 20th century had witnessed. In addition, the heinous crimes carried out by Israeli soldiers deliberately and openly in front of dozens of TV cameras without any fear or shame only deepened this shock. All of the above had a profound impact in exposing the emptiness of Western civilization, as no civilization can truly exist without humanity.

There was no justification or understanding for the positions taken by the leaders of these countries and others regarding the violence that unfolded before the eyes and ears of the entire world. It was carried out with financial backing and massive military support from Western democratic nations, causing psychological distress for millions, particularly in the West and among those who admired the West. They were forced to listen to and witness the screams of hundreds of innocent people, as they watched their homes, loved ones, farms, schools, hospitals, mosques, and churches being destroyed.

All this killing and destruction was being carried out without mercy, with no head of state who sup-

ported Israel or adopted its point of view offering any sympathy or even the slightest care. I specifically refer to those who shamelessly gloated over the suffering of the Palestinians. They have all contributed to the collapse of everything that Western civilization has built since the end of World War II, including the foundations of international law and the moral code.

We have all begun to live in insecurity, having entered an era of barbarism, an era where the strong are granted the right to do as they please to the weak.

Foreign Policy magazine (FP), regarded as one of America's serious publications, is published by Graham Holdings, the former owner of the Washington Post. FP often reflects the views of Washington's political and academic elite, and advocates for America's role in leading the global order and promoting democracy and human rights.

On February 7, FP published an article titled "How Gaza Shattered the Myth of the West?" by the well-known Indian writer Pankaj Mishra. It was an excerpt from his upcoming book "The World After Gaza", set to be released by Penguin in ten days.

Below is the article, with some modifications:

On April 19, 1943, a few hundred young Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto seized whatever weapons they could find and fought back against their Nazi persecutors.

By that time, most of the Jews in the ghetto had already been deported to extermination camps. The fighters, as Marek Edelman, one of their commanders, explained, were attempting to preserve what little dignity they had left.

Marek Edelman recalled, "In the end, all that mattered to us was not allowing them to slaughter us when our turn came. We had no choice but to choose how we would die.

After several weeks of desperate resistance, the fighters were eventually overwhelmed by despair. Most were killed, while some of the survivors took their own lives in the final hours of the uprising in the command bunker while the Nazis pumped gas inside. Only a few managed to escape through the sewer pipes. The German soldiers then set fire to the entire ghetto, using horrific flamethrowers."

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## We stand united: Dr Al-Huwailah

## National, Liberation Days marked at Ministries Complex

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: Minister of Social, Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah has stressed the significance of national celebrations as a symbol of joy and happiness; indicating the events at the Ministries Complex are considered a milestone as it is the first time that all ministries joined the celebration.

In her speech at the opening ceremony, Al-Huwailah asserted "we are happy to be at the Ministries Complex celebrating the national holidays, united by our love for Kuwait."

Present at the event were several dignitaries, including Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Eng. Noura Al-Fassam, Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel, Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait, as well as numerous undersecretaries, assistant undersecretaries, employees and visitors.

The event featured a vibrant Ardha band performance and national folk songs at the entrance of the complex, organized by the Ministry of Social Affairs, with the participation of the Popular Cafés Administration.

The highlight of the event was the opening of the 'Pride and Honor 3' exhibition, showcasing the achievements and services of the four participating ministries. The exhibition includes the entries of private companies and banks in support of the national celebrations.

Al-Huwailah also expressed her joy over attending the Vocational Rehabilitation Department's National Day celebrations at the Public Authority for Disabled Affairs (PADA).

She said this event signifies the integration of people with disabilities into society and their sense of patriotism.

Director of the Vocational Rehabilitation Department Al-Anoud Al-Wazzan pointed out that the National and Liberation Days are



Photo by Rizk Taufiq  
Minister of Social, Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah at the exhibition.

considered a valuable opportunity to strengthen national unity and the sense of belongingness, as well as enhancing the integration of children with disability into society.

She added that building a com-

prehensive and cohesive community necessitates opening doors for everyone and providing a supportive environment that enables them to be creative and contribute effectively to the nation's advancement.

## MC meets on issues of people with disabilities

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: The Environmental Affairs Committee at the Municipal Council on Monday organized the first workshop for people with disabilities to introduce the Kuwait Code for Accessibility according to the general design in order to pave the way for its implementation.

The representatives of 31 concerned government, civil and private entities presented five recommendations at the workshop as follows:

■ Organize introductory courses on Kuwait Code for Accessibility according to the general design for the concerned government agencies.

■ Notify the Union of Kuwaiti Engineering Offices and Consultant Houses to circulate the Kuwait Code for Accessibility to the engineering offices and consultant houses.

■ Qualify engineers, architects and specialists to implement the Kuwait Code for Accessibility.

■ Circulate Ministerial Resolution No. 696/2024 to implement the Kuwait Code for Accessibility in public buildings and facilities by instructing the concerned government

agencies.

■ Assign the Kuwait Municipality to study the penalties and sanctions for not implementing the Kuwait Code for Accessibility and submit them to the Municipal Council for study and inclusion in the building regulations.

Meanwhile, head of Committee for Disabled Affairs in the council Farah Al-Roumi emphasized the importance of the Kuwait Code for Accessibility; affirming that it is in line with the 2035 Kuwait Vision for persons with disabilities.

She explained that the code aims to transform the built environment into an environment that is prepared and supportive of persons with disabilities and improve their opportunities for integration into society; especially after its approval in the council's session held on July 22, 2024 and the issuance of Ministerial Resolution No. 696/2024.

Rapporteur of the Committee for the Architecturally Disabled Sherifa Al-Shalfan underscored the need to apply the code to guarantee a prepared urban environment that meets the needs of everyone. She confirmed that the code is consistent with the integrated development



Photo by Rizk Taufiq  
The workshop in progress

trend towards more inclusive and sustainable cities.

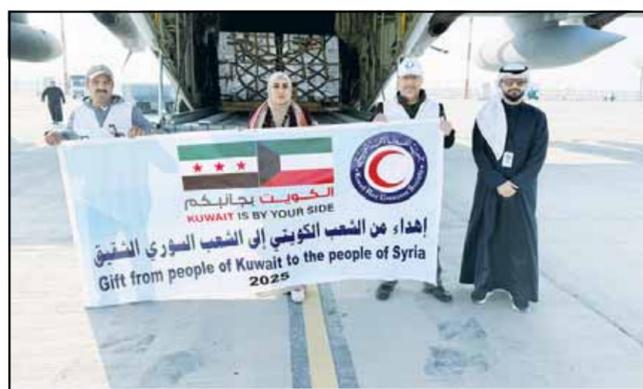
She said the aim of the first workshop for people with disabilities, which was organized in cooperation with PADA, is to familiarize architects with the design requirements, as well as the municipal engineers responsible for issuing building permits.

She concluded by emphasizing that setting building standards, which take into account the needs of people with disabilities, is not just a legal obligation, but also an investment in the quality of life and the promotion of the principle of social justice. "It also contributes to enhancing the participation of people with disabilities in economic and social life, which supports sustainable development and achieves a

more equal urban environment," she asserted.

Council member Dr. Hassan Kamal said that the workshop participants expressed their readiness to cooperate and work hard to develop this code, if necessary, to include the needs of people with disabilities. He added that the council and the Municipality included in the building regulations a special clause on adherence to the code in the design phase.

Council member Munira Al-Amir stated that the workshop is an important step to introduce the accessibility code. She also stressed the need to continue holding workshops and transferring them to various government agencies to introduce the details of the code to raised public awareness in this regard.



KUNA photo  
Officials taking part in the dispatch of 29th relief aid plane to Syria.

## Kuwait sends 29th relief plane to Syria

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17, (KUNA): Kuwait's 29th relief flight from Kuwait's air bridge departed on Monday to Damascus International Airport, carrying 10 tons of food aid as part of "Kuwait By Your Side" campaign.

Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), in coordination with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense, as well as Kuwait Air Force organized this latest initiative. Chairman of Board of Directors Ambassador Khaled Al-Qemlas stated to KUNA, before take-off, that the campaign continues to dis-

patch relief materials to implement the directives of the Kuwaiti leadership to support and assist the people of Syria.

He stated that cooperation with Syrian Arab Red Crescent aims to assess urgent needs for essential food, medicine and shelter, and ensuring aid reaches the ministry of health, bakeries and residents.

This plane is KRCS eighth relief flight, bringing its total aid shipments to 170 tons, he cumulative assistance delivered through the Kuwaiti air bridge to Syria now stands at 717 tons.

## Kuwait witnesses 11.8 pc increase in elderly people

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: In line with the Ministry of Health's launching of the National Survey of Elderly Health project, statistics from the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) revealed an 11.8 percent increase in the number of elderly in the country -- above 65 years old.

The statistics revealed that the total number of elderly people, who are above 65 years old, reached 140,114 -- 59 percent of whom are Kuwaitis and 41 percent are expatriates. This is an increase of 16,487 compared to the July 2023 statistics.

The PACI statistics on the elderly at the end of 2024 showed that the total number of males reached 70,162 (33,018 Kuwaitis and 36,244 non-Kuwaitis) -- an increase of 11.5 percent (8,084); while the number of females reached 69,952 (48,786 Kuwaitis and 21,166 non-Kuwaitis) -- an increase of 12 percent (8,403).

**Support for students:** As part of the Ministry of Higher Education's commitment to support Kuwaitis studying abroad Assistant Undersecretary for the Scholarships, Equivalencies and Cultural Relations Sector Ghaida Madhkur will visit the United Kingdom on Feb 17-21 as per the directive of Minister Dr. Nader Al-Jalal, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

During her visit, Madhkur will meet Kuwaiti students and deans of educational institutions to strengthen national identity and social responsibility among the students, while directing them towards academic and personal excellence.



Top and above: Pictures taken during the event.

## Kuwaiti-British military drill 'Desert Warrior 8' ends

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: In the presence of the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Kuwait Armed Forces, Major General Pilot Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and the British Ambassador to the State of Kuwait, Belinda Lewis, the activities of the joint Kuwaiti-British Exercise "Desert Warrior 8" concluded Sunday morning at the 15th Mubarak Armoured Brigade.

This four-week exercise - one of a series of military drills between Kuwait and friendly nations - facilitated the exchange of expertise while improving the combat readiness of both sides.

The Deputy Chief of Staff, Major General Pilot Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, emphasized that the exercise reflects the strong

and historic relations between Kuwait and the United Kingdom: "The purpose of this exercise was to unify concepts and strengthen military cooperation with British Forces, enhancing the combat readiness of both sides."

British Ambassador Lewis, said: "Defence and security collaboration is a cornerstone of the UK and Kuwait's partnership. Exercise Desert Warrior began just two months on from the successful conclusion of Exercise Iron Shield 2 - and this regular drumbeat of large-scale joint training exercises reflects our shared commitment to strengthening our capabilities to tackle a range of threats together. We will continue our ever-growing collaboration across multiple fields to up-

hold our mutual security and prosperity."

UK Defence Attaché, Captain Neil Marriott (Royal Navy), added, "We are proud to continue our strong partnership with the Kuwait Armed Forces through this four-week training exercise. This collaboration strengthens our shared commitment to regional security and enhances the interoperability between our forces. By training together, we not only improve our operational readiness but also build lasting bonds of trust and cooperation that are crucial in today's dynamic security environment."

The closing ceremony was also attended by several senior officers from both sides, including the Commander of the Kuwait Land Forces.

## Sustainable reforms vital for private health sector success

"The private health sector in Kuwait plays a vital role in supporting the public health system and driving economic and social development. However, this sector faces several challenges, including the lack of a clear strategic plan from the Ministry of Health and the instability of health-related decisions, which complicates long-term investment planning", former Minister of Health **Mohammad Al-Jarallah** wrote for **Al-Jarida** daily.

"The investment environment suffers from bureaucracy, difficulties in recruiting medical staff, and the lack of a sustainable financing system to support health projects. Also, the lack of accurate data on market needs and the absence of a geographical map of health facilities obstruct the fair distribution of medical services."

"To develop the private health sector, it is necessary to adopt a reform strategy based on long-term planning, stable regulations, and the enhancement of public-private partnerships."

"In this context, we propose a series of strategic recommendations that we hope will be incorporated into the Ministry of Health's work program:

1. A clear vision for the role of the private sector in the health system: The Ministry of Health should announce a clear strategic vision for healthcare services, specifying precisely what the ministry will provide over the next ten years and what will be delegated to the private sector. Investors cannot make long-term plans in an unstable regulatory environment.

2. Legislative and regulatory stability: The instability of regulations and health-related decisions hinders investment planning in the medical sector. A clear, stable legal and regulatory framework must be put in place, with changes occurring only in limited circumstances and at intervals of no less than five years. Sudden decisions that impact the sector's economy, without prior consultations, are unacceptable, as has been the case in recent years.

3. Establish an institutional dialogue mechanism between the ministry and the private sector: Regular and documented communication channels should be established between the Ministry of Health and private sector representatives, ensuring that consultation is mandatory before issuing any regulatory decisions with significant financial or investment implications. This includes regulations related to doctors, medications, pharmacies, and medical responsibilities, guaranteeing clarity in policies and the protection of mutual interests.

4. Enhance transparency and provide health data: The lack of accurate data on the health market's needs results in poorly informed investment decisions. The Ministry of Health should provide transparent information regarding the distribution of hospitals, service demand, and areas with inadequate health coverage. A national health map should be made available to investors, clearly outlining future needs.

5. Develop a sustainable financing system for health projects: Kuwait currently lacks a long-term health financing system that encourages investors to direct their funds into the sector. Coordination between the Ministry of Health, the Central Bank, and local banks is necessary to create fi-

ancing mechanisms for health projects with terms ranging from 15 to 30 years. Financial and organizational support should also be extended to therapeutic and preventive programs that may not be economically viable for the private sector but are necessary for society, such as care for permanent disabilities, palliative cancer treatment, and medical rehabilitation.

6. Geographic redistribution of health services: Private hospitals and medical centers are concentrated in specific regions, leading to an imbalance in the distribution of health services. The ministry should guide private investment towards areas with higher demand by offering incentives for institutions that establish medical facilities in remote or underserved regions.

7. Raise quality standards and international accreditation: Private hospitals and medical centers should be encouraged to pursue the highest international professional accreditations, without imposing standards more stringent than those required for government health facilities. Ensuring a balance in quality standards between the public and private sectors is essential for maintaining competitive fairness and improving the overall level of health services in the country.

8. Strengthen public-private partnerships: Global successful partnership models should be used to establish model hospitals operated by leading international medical institutions, with the government providing logistical support and oversight. This approach will enhance the efficiency of the health system, offer advanced care to citizens, and do so without placing additional burdens on the public budget.

9. Regulate the pharmaceutical market with a balanced mechanism: The pharmaceutical sector has witnessed poorly planned regulatory decisions that have led to a decline in investments. These regulations should be reevaluated to ensure patient safety while maintaining a favorable investment environment. A fair pricing system should be developed that balances the rights of both investors and consumers.

10. Reform the medical liability law: This law should be reviewed to ensure a balance between protecting patients' rights and safeguarding doctors and investors from baseless lawsuits. Representatives from the private medical sector must be included in these discussions to ensure that the necessary reforms are in line with international standards.

11. Establish specialized medical courts: Medical cases are often complex and technical. Hence, specialized medical courts should be established that will focus exclusively on such cases and build expertise, similar to financial market courts. This will expedite legal procedures and ensure fair decisions based on specialized medical knowledge, thereby protecting the rights of both patients and doctors.

"In conclusion, we would like to stress that the development of the private health sector in Kuwait requires a comprehensive vision and sustainable reforms that ensure policy clarity, legal stability, encourage investment, and foster public-private partnerships. By implementing these recommendations, Kuwait can achieve a huge improvement in the quality of healthcare services, ensure the long-term sustainability of the health system, and solidify its position as a regional leader in advanced medical care."

— Compiled by Simi K. Kutty

## Kuwaiti citizen gets 12 years jail for attacking security officer with sword

Student jailed three years for insulting ruling entity

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: The Criminal Court sentenced a Kuwaiti citizen to 12-year imprisonment for assaulting a security officer and severing four tendons in his hand using a Japanese-made sword.**

The court also ordered the detention of the convict's Ukrainian wife in Shamiya, as drugs, Kalashnikov rifles, pistols, and ammunition were seized from the defendant.

During the court session, the officer's defense counsel Lawyer Abdul Mohsen Al-Qattan filed a civil claim for KD 5,001 in compensation, asserting that the citizen had attempted to murder his client.

**Ex-MP Al-Mutair acquitted:** The Criminal Court acquitted former MP Muhammad Al-Mutair but sentenced former MP Bader Al-Dahoum to one-year imprisonment with hard labor and a KD 5,000 fine. The court also decided to suspend the imprisonment sentence until the final verdict is issued regarding the allegations against Al-Dahoum, which include offending the Amiri position and the judiciary.

Previously, the Public Prosecution had charged Al-Mutair and Al-Dahoum with insulting the Amiri position and the judiciary during a press conference held at Al-Dahoum's diwaniya.

In addition, the Criminal Court adjourned the State Security case filed against former MP Muhammad Al-Sayer until the end of the session. He is accused of insulting the Amiri authorities, spreading false news, and misusing his smartphone.

On January 7, 2025, the Public Prosecution released Al-Sayer on bail of KD 1,000. Al-Sayer had denied the allegations leveled against him during the investigation conducted by the Public Prosecution.



Al-Sayer

**Student jailed in royal insult:** The Court of Appeals upheld the verdict issued by the Court of First Instance to sentence a Kuwaiti university student to three-year imprisonment for insulting the Amiri position and spreading false news on the X platform through articles posted from a fake account. However, the court acquitted the student of the charge of inciting the overthrow of Kuwait's ruling regime.

The court also ordered the closure of her X account for one year and the cancellation of police surveillance for a period of five years following the completion of her sentence.

During the trial, the student denied writing the articles, claiming that an expatriate living abroad had threatened her and posted the articles in her name.

**Traffic crackdown:** The Hawally Traffic Department recently carried out an intensive security campaign that resulted in the issuance of 982 citations for various traffic violations; including 124 contraflow violations, reports Al-Anba daily.

The campaign also led to the impounding of two cars and a motorcycle whose owners are wanted by law for involvement in different cases, arrest of nine people of different nationalities who are wanted by law, referral of three violators to the detention center at the General Traffic Department (GTD) as they were caught in the act of driving recklessly and engaging in car racing, and impounding of 14 cars and motorcycles.

A security source disclosed that several checkpoints were established during the campaign; especially in areas where the number of traffic violations has increased significantly like speeding, contraflow, and dropping off or loading passengers in areas other than those specified for this purpose.

The source added that several individuals were apprehended for driving recklessly and engaging in car racing. Sources affirmed these individuals were referred to the traffic police, while their cars were impounded.

The source added that this campaign is part of the efforts of GTD to regulate traffic movement and ensure the safety of all road users, indicating the department conducts its traffic campaigns round the clock.



Undersecretary of the National Guard: We look forward to strengthening cooperation with the Bangladeshi army and exchanging experiences in exercises and courses.

## Kuwait, B'desh to boost military ties

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17, (KUNA): Undersecretary of the Kuwaiti National Guard (KNG) Lieutenant General Hashim Al-Refai expressed keenness to enhance cooperation with the Bangladeshi Army, through expertise exchange, visits and military training courses.

According to a press release by the KNG on Monday, this came during Al-

Refai's reception of Chief of Bangladesh Army Waker Uz Zaman and his accompanying delegation to Kuwait.

The statement added that Al-Refai welcomed the delegation and conveyed the greetings of Chief of the Kuwaiti National Guard Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and his Deputy Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

## Pay KD 20,000 comp in death of patient: court

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: The Civil Circuit of the Court of First Instance has ordered a well-known medical center to pay KD 20,000 in legal blood money and compensation to a Kuwaiti citizen after her daughter tragically died due to medical error.

The incident occurred after the daughter underwent a tummy tuck and liposuction procedures at the center, which led to acute bacterial infection in the cellular tissues and resulted in her death.

Lawyer Ali Jawhar, representing the victim's mother, explained that the victim suffered severe health complications and eventually passed away. The cause of death was confirmed as acute bacterial infection in the cellular tissues.

The Medical Liability Authority investigated the incident and came to the conclusion that the center violated licensing requirements for same-day surgeries. The center had kept the patient for seven days without contracting with a hospital for extended care.

Furthermore, the center extracted four liters of fat, thus exceeding the maximum permissible limit of one and a half liters. This established a direct link between the center's errors and the resulting death of his client's daughter.

**Asian commits suicide:** An Asian man died in Mahboula after jumping from the top of a building. His body was referred to the Forensic Medicine Department at the Interior Ministry.

According to police sources, the ministry's Operations Unit received a report about the incident, and dispatched police officers and ambulance personnel to the scene.

A case was registered and investigations are ongoing to determine the circumstances that prompted the Asian to end his own life.



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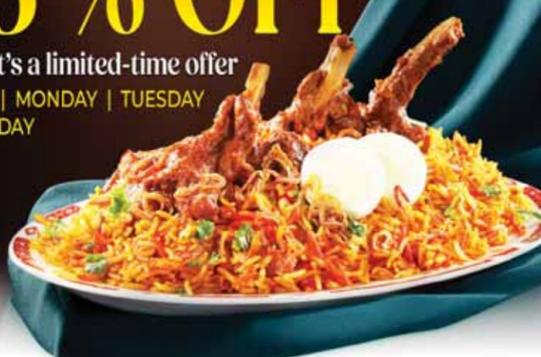
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# 'Strong persona, sound mind vital to face crises'

Late Amir, Bush Sr., lauded for helping liberate Kuwait



Former Special Assistant to the late US President George Bush Dr. Richard Haass and Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah participate in the dialogue.



Vice Chairman and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Sheikh Nawaf Al-Saud Al-Sabah, Former Special Assistant to the late US President George Bush Sr. Richard Haass and former Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah at the gathering.



Photos by Rizk Taufiq  
Distinguished guests listening to the dialogue.

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: Vice Chairman and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Sheikh Nawaf Al-Saud Al-Sabah said the most important factors in finding solutions during crises include the ability to make decisions according to clear principles, and benefit from strong personal relationships with all the concerned parties to build trust and facilitate communication and co-**

**operation, whether at the commercial or political level.**

The CEO made the statement during a dialogue session organized by KPC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Sunday with the theme, "Decision Making: Liberating the State of Kuwait". Former Special Assistant to the late US President George Bush Sr. Richard Haass and Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah participated in the dialogue.

During the session, which was moderated by Sheikh Nawaf Al-Saud, Haas shed light on how to make decisions during serious crises. He cited the historic decisions taken by the late President George Bush Sr. since the sinful aggression on Kuwait until its liberation from the clutches of the hateful occupation.

Haas revealed (for the first time) the backstage of the visit of HH the then Amir

of the State of Kuwait Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the United States of America in September 1990 and the historic decisions of the administration of the late President George Bush Sr., which led to the establishment of an unprecedented international coalition to liberate the State of Kuwait.

He also referred to the tremendous efforts made by the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the United States at the time Sheikh Saud Nasser Al-Saud Al-Sabah, as he defended his country through diplomacy, media coordination, and cooperation with pressure groups and decision-makers until the country was liberated on Feb 26, 1991.

Also present at the session were His Highness the former Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Minister of Oil and Chairman of the Board of Directors of KPC Tariq Al-Roumi, leaders, ambassadors and prominent figures who witnessed the ordeal of the brutal Iraqi invasion and the international diplomatic corps.

## 31,000 Kuwaitis visited Azerbaijan in 2024: Minister Rafiyev

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17:** Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Yalchin Ilgar Rafiyev revealed that his country's Foreign Affairs Minister Jeyhun Bayramov will visit Kuwait at the end of April to attend the joint committee meeting on initiatives and pledges concerning both countries.

In a press conference held at the conclusion of his meetings with Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Sheikh Jarrah Al-Jaber and a number of officials in the presence of Azer-

baijan Ambassador to Kuwait Emil Karimov, Ilgar stressed that "Azerbaijan and Kuwait are sisterly countries. We consider Kuwait one of our closest friends around the world, whether bilaterally or with international organizations. We have strong cooperation and a positive record of mutual support. At the same time, we believe that from a political perspective, this strong partnership must be integrated with the economic and trade partnership."

He added that "at the present, we need to strengthen the existing trade and economic partnership. I am sure

that our visit, which will be followed by a meeting of the joint committee between the two countries, will certainly serve this purpose. In the humanitarian field, we have very strong cooperation as well, in addition to education. Communication between the two peoples is very important."

He also pointed out that last year, about 31,000 Kuwaitis visited Azerbaijan, considering this a very good number, compared to the population of Kuwait. "We have three flights a day from Kuwait to Azerbaijan and vice versa by different airlines. This is an evidence of the fact that Ku-

waitis are interested in visiting Azerbaijan, and the Azerbaijanis are also interested in visiting Kuwait."

Rafiyev said that "exchange of visits at a high level is very important to develop bilateral relations. We met at the level of deputy ministers, and our Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov is scheduled visit on April 29-30. President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has extended an invitation to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. We hope that His Highness will visit Azerbaijan this year."



KUNA photos  
Top: The Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Sabah chairs the meeting. Above: Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Sabah meets his Arab counterparts.

## Call for joint Arab action to face current challenges: Kuwait MoD

**TUNIS, Feb 17, (KUNA):** Minister of Defense (MoD) Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Sabah chaired on Sunday Kuwait's delegation to the 42nd session of the Arab Interior Ministers' Council which kicked off in Tunis under the patronage of President Kais Saied.

Sheikh Abdullah, who is partaking in the meeting on behalf of Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, was handed over Kuwait's presidency of this session, Kuwait's Ministry of Defense said in a news statement.

In an inaugural speech, Sheikh Abdullah affirmed the importance of boosting joint Arab security action to face current challenges, it added.

He stressed the need of intensifying efforts to combat drugs and enhancing coordination among Arab security apparatuses to fight terror, dry up its funding, and prevent the spread of extremist thought, it noted.

According to the statement, the Kuwaiti minister pointed to the significance of keeping pace with technical developments to fight cybercrimes and boost sharing information and expertise to combat organized crime in all its forms mainly money laundering and human trafficking.

Sheikh Abdullah emphasized Kuwait's commitment to backing all efforts aiming to boost security and stability in the region.

He also commended the Council's role in upgrading mechanisms of Arab security collaboration, and sharing information and expertise in combating organized crime, including cross-border crime.

Sheikh Abdullah expressed appreciation to Tunisia for warm reception and good organization of this session.

During opening the session, Secretary General of the Council Mohammad Kuman stressed, in his speech, the importance of joint Arab action to curb security risks.

The Minister of Defense held talks with Ministers of Interior of the UAE, Palestine, and Yemen.

A statement by the ministry said the meeting was held on the side lines of the 42nd session of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers in the Tunisian capital, on behalf of the Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah.

The meeting revolved around topics of joint interest, and ways of strengthening cooperation in security measures were discussed in order to better secure and stabilize conditions in the region.

Support for economy eyed

## 'Set up pharmacies at fuel stations'

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17:** The National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises Development asked the Municipal Council to allow the inclusion of the pharmacy activity in fuel stations for small and medium enterprises funded by it, explaining that this system is applied in some neighboring countries and others.

The newspaper obtained a copy of the fund's letter to the council, stating that one of the companies specialized in pharmacies and funded it submitted a letter requesting support by allowing the inclusion of the pharmacy activity in fuel stations in order to achieve certain goals, the most important of which are enhancing community services, supporting the local economy, establishing the position of the

National Fund, and supporting small and medium enterprises.

The fund pointed out that the company obtained initial approval from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Interior to include the pharmacy activity in fuel stations once the required approvals from the relevant authorities are completed.

The National Fund's letter on the subject also included three reasons for the initiative to allow pharmacies to operate inside gas stations: spread of the service and coverage of remote areas outside residential areas (highways), population density in some areas where there is only one pharmacy, and achieving a higher sales volume, as the proposed location has a competitive advantage over other competitors to achieve a higher net profit.

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KUNA photo

Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to India, Meshal Al-Shemali, meets with Director General of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Nandini Singla, in New Delhi.

## Kuwait, India 'deepen' cultural partnership in New Delhi talks

NEW DELHI, Feb 17, (KUNA): Kuwait Ambassador to India Meshal Al-Shemali held talks on Monday with the Director General of Indian Council for Cultural Relations Nandini Singla in New Delhi to enhance cooperation in the cultural and educational fields.

In a statement to KUNA, Al-Shemali said, during his meeting with Singla the discussed expanding areas of cooperation, especially in cultural and educational areas, pointing out that the Indian-Kuwaiti relation was built on deep-rooted cultural and social fields dating back to centuries.

The ambassador stressed the importance of exchanging visits between officials of the two countries working in the cultural field to enhance communication and open new cultural and scientific windows.

He also underscored the importance of ex-

change between scholars and intellectuals of the two countries and creating opportunities to engage for students from both the countries.

Al-Shemali pointed out that Kuwait's Ministry of Information launched a program on Kuwait Radio for Indians in April 2024 in response to the needs of the Indian community based on the importance Kuwait leadership gives to spreading Indian culture and arts.

On her part, Singla expressed her happiness on the strong cultural relations between the two countries, stressing the importance of further strengthening and upgrading them.

The first agreement in the field of cultural and educational cooperation was signed in 1970, and the cultural cooperation agreement was renewed for the period 2025-2029 during the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in December 2024.

## Continued from Page 1

### Yellow flags

was an example of the time when Lebanon was oppressed by some of its own sons who monopolized decision-making for the benefit of certain sects and imposed their will on the rest of the people.

Instead of competence being the basis for assuming positions, as former Lebanese President Fouad Chehab had envisioned, sectarian, denominational, and partisan affiliation became the guiding force behind the Lebanese administration. Corruption transformed into an organized institution that resulted in the impoverishment of all Lebanese, except for the influential few who gained power either from foreign backing against their own nation or through bribery and looting.

Thus, Lebanon was reduced from being the great Arab publishing hub to a Captagon factory. It shifted from being a source of culture to becoming a hub for smuggling drugs, particularly to the Arab Gulf states. Lebanon seemed to be stricken by a plague, and the world turned its back on it. For several decades, a metaphorical "gravestone" was placed upon it.

Yes, Lebanon, the "Switzerland of the East", is beginning to emerge from the political embrace of both Arab and international powers, and is rediscovering itself as a jewel buried by Iranian conflicts and the influence of some Arab and international regimes. As a result, Arabs, especially those from the Gulf countries, and those with properties in Lebanon's mountains and cities, are filled with hope as they anticipate positive changes. This optimism is fueled by the election of a president, Joseph Aoun, who emerged from the military field and embodies the Army's motto of "honor, sacrifice, loyalty", and a prime minister, Dr. Nawaf Salam, who came from high international judicial positions to establish justice in the country.

All of this is promising. The most important aspect is President Joseph Aoun's commitment to his oath and his work with Prime Minister Dr. Nawaf Salam to create a modern electoral law that deals with the flaws in parliament. This will enable the election of a capable Speaker of Parliament, and ensure the completion of the three branches of government and the revival of institutional vitality.

Lebanon is poised to emerge from the grip of the "blocking third" in the legislative council. The Lebanese parliament will face huge tasks ahead, including extensive legislative reforms. Social reform will begin before institutional reform, and financial reform will lead into economic reform, with the goal of restoring Lebanon's status as the "Switzerland of the East."

### Kuwait raises

economic and social changes, said the minister.

This amendment came in response to the changes witnessed in

### Direct contract

CAPT approves PACI's request

By Mohammad Ghanem Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: Majority of the members of the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) approved the request of the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) to directly sign a contract with a company to supply smart civil identification card models and packaging for a period of three years at a total cost of KD 23,005 million as per Article 19 of Public Tenders Law No. 49/2016, which stipulates "contracting by the concerned party without the permission of the agency."

Three CAPT members, including the representative of the Ministry of Finance, rejected the request.

It can be recalled that the newspaper published a report on Sunday, stating that CAPT rejected the authority's request for direct contracting based on Article 18 of the Public Tenders Law; which stipulates "the concerned party may undertake to carry out purchasing operations through limited practice or direct order, provided it obtains permission from the agency based on a rational written request and the decision on this request is issued through a two-thirds majority vote of its present members.

the financial and economic conditions during the past decades, as the previous estimate no longer reflects the actual value of blood money as stipulated by Sharia, he added.

Al-Sumait stressed that this amendment comes within the framework of the government's keenness to develop the legislative system in a way that achieves justice and preserves rights, in line with established Islamic principles and economic and social developments in the country.

### 'Iraqi invasion

to Washington Sheikh Saud; ratcheting up US and international support for a military intervention to rid Kuwait of the Iraqi invaders, saying that former president Bush was determined to liberate Kuwait through military means even if the move failed to garner congressional support.

Haas underlined that history would always remember Washington's contributions towards the liberation of Kuwait; while the event should serve as a lesson in how crucial the role of diplomacy is in preserving national security and stability.

### Kuwait moves

Meanwhile, the acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs Dr. Khaled Al-Ajmi announced during the meeting that the profits from contributions to cooperative societies for this category during the previous period will be disbursed after the end of the fiscal year for each cooperative society.

Furthermore, the acting Director of the Public Institution for Social Security Ahmad Al-Thunayan affirmed that the institution will continue to pay retirement pensions and shares to this category on the specified date, which is the 9th of each month.

In the same context, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry Ziad Al-Najem stated that the validity of commercial licenses for business owners in this category will remain in effect unless the owner is subject to any security restrictions.

He stressed that if anyone from this category establishes a new company, their maximum share in the new company will be 49 percent of the ownership.

In addition, the office assigned to follow up the Article 8 citizenship affairs affirmed its commitment to continue communicating with individuals from this category who have contacted the office.

It highlighted its coordination with the relevant state agencies to receive forms and communications related to this group.

### Shops pledge

In response, the ministry's Price

Authority Department secured pledges from shops not to raise prices before or during the holy month.

### Abeer Al-Awadhi

And the Decree issued on April 4, 1979 regarding the Civil Service System, and related decrees amendments.

■ And Decree No. 37 of 2022 on establishing the National Cybersecurity Center, which was amended by Decree No. 182 of 2023.

■ Cabinet Resolution No. 117 of 2022 appointing the Minister supervising the National Cybersecurity Center.

■ And Decree No. 84 of 2024 regarding ministerial solutions and delegations, and amended decrees.

■ And based on a presentation by the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior.

The cabinet has decided:

#### Article One:

Appointing Abeer Anwar Abdullah Al-Awadhi as Head of the National Cyber Security Center, for a period of four years, renewable for one term.

#### Article Two:

Minister of Interior shall implement the decision, which shall be effective from the date of its issuance, and shall be published in the official Gazette.

The decision was signed by the acting Prime Minister Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah on February 16, 2025.

### Al-Mutairi

has become necessary to develop innovative tourism experiences that enhance the competitiveness of the sector and make it more attractive to tourists from within and outside the region.

He pointed out that the GCC countries possess rich and diverse tourism components that combine authentic heritage and ancient cultural legacy, in addition to the unique natural environment and advanced infrastructure.

Moreover, he said that it is required to develop unified policies and strategies that enhance Gulf tourism cooperation and achieve maximum benefit from the available capabilities.

In turn, the GCC Secretary-General Jassem Al-Budaiwi congratulated Minister Al-Mutairi, on his nomination as Chairman of the Regional Commission for the Middle East of the UN Tourism Organization for two years.

He also congratulated Kuwait on winning the bid to host the Arab Capital of Culture and Media 2025, an achievement that reflects the leading position of Kuwait and the GCC countries in supporting culture and arts and strengthening Arab identity.

He expressed his great pride for the remarkable achievements made by the Gulf countries that enhance their position on the international stage, congratulating the UAE on selecting Al-Ain

as the Gulf Tourism Capital for 2025.

Al-Budaiwi congratulated Oman on the launch of the unified promotional identity of the Sultanate, which will contribute to enhancing its position as a tourist and investment destination regionally and globally.

He also congratulated Saudi Arabia on winning the bid to host the 2034 World Cup, which reflects the great excellence in the fields of sports and infrastructure and confirms the Kingdom's ability to organize the largest global sporting events.

Further, Al-Budaiwi stressed that the tourism sector in the GCC countries is witnessing a qualitative transformation thanks to the lofty directives of the GCC leaders and then thanks to the tireless efforts of the ministers.

Al-Budaiwi thanked the ministers for their support and approval of the General Secretariat's idea of holding a joint Gulf tourism event that will be organized on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos next year to enhance and highlight the efforts of our countries in the field of tourism globally and the global status they have achieved in this field.

### Kuwait and

During the visit, His Highness the Amir and President Mirziyoyev oversaw the signing of four agreements at Bayan Palace.

Present at the signing ceremony at Bayan Palace were His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah.

The first agreement between the two countries focused on expanding cooperation within labor force in the private sector. It was signed by Acting Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef and Uzbek Foreign Minister Baxtiyor Saidov.

The second agreement was a protocol to amend an agreement on air cargo cooperation signed by Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya and his Uzbek counterpart Saidov.

The third agreement was development cooperation between the two sides within the domain of smart cities. It was signed by Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Abdullatif Al-Meshari and Uzbek Foreign Minister Saidov.

The fourth agreement was within the sector of industrial cooperation signed by Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Askar and Uzbekistan's Minister of Industry, Trade and Investment Laziz Kudratov.

To mark the visit, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah held at Bayan Palace a luncheon in honor of President Mirziyoyev and his accompanying delegation.



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## Ministry of Commerce and Industry



### RECALL INFORMATION

Mercedes-Benz  
Model: 223  
Model year: 2023-2021  
Total Vehicles: 48



### RECALL REASON

Mercedes-Benz AG has determined that on certain S-Class (223 platform) vehicles with 8-cylinder gasoline engine, the lambda control in the software of the engine control unit might not meet specifications. In the event of an independent hardware failure, the amount of injected fuel might be erroneously increased by the lambda control system in case of a cylinder deactivation. As a result, an increase of exhaust temperatures and a damage of surrounding components (e.g. engine wiring harness, catalytic converter) might occur.

### REMEDY

As a precautionary measure, Mercedes-Benz service organization will update the software of the engine control unit on the affected vehicles. The required work certainly be fixed free.

### CONTACT

Please contact Al Mulla Automobiles Co  
Phone 1-887-888  
Mercedes-Benz Service Centre - Al Shuwaikh Industrial Area - 9 street  
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This Recall is run pursuant to articles (42,43,44,45,46,47 and 48) of no.27/2015 issuing the executive by laws of law no.39/2014 on Consumer Protection.



## JOINT OPERATIONS

SAUDI ARABIAN CHEVRON INC. (SAC) KUWAIT GULF OIL COMPANY (K.S.C.)

Joint Operations (Saudi Arabian Chevron Inc. / Kuwait Gulf Oil Company), announces the under-mentioned Public Tenders for procurement of materials.

Kuwaiti and Saudi Merchants, registered with either Company wishing to participate in any of the under-mentioned Tenders are invited to collect the Tender documents from Purchasing Section, Purchasing & Logistic Division, Administration Building, Ground Floor, Joint Operations, Wafra, during the official working hours from **18 FEB 2025** up to **11 MAR 2025** for a non-refundable fee mentioned against each tender. Tender Fees to be deposited in the National bank of Kuwait (NBK) Account No. 1001132057. Saudi Suppliers can collect the tender documents from Saudi Arabian Chevron office in Al-Khobar Telephone No.: (013) 8645104 - Fax No.: (013) 8985436

The closing date for the following Tenders will be on **Tuesday, 18 MAR 2025 @ 10:00 AM.**

S.NO.	TENDER NO.	MATERIALS	FEES ( KD )
1	030996	STRUCTURAL STEEL	5
2	029866-R1	S/F SULZER PUMP	5
3	031840	MISCELLANEOUS VALVES	15
4	031842	MISCELLANEOUS VALVES	35
5	031843	ELECTRICAL CROSS ARM	5
6	031844	ELECTRICAL CABLES	35
7	031846	METAL PLATES	35
8	032123	CISCO SERVERS AND ACCESSORIES	15
9	032129	PIPES & PIPE SPOOLS	25
10	032131	CONTROL VALVES	25
11	032399	INSTRUMENTATION CABLES	100
12	032398	JUNCTION BOX	15
13	031845	SINKER BARS & SUCKER RODS	25
14	032128	STUFFING BOX, BOTTOM NIPPLE & SUCKER ROD COUPLINGS	5
15	032479	TWO PHASE PRODUCTION SEPARATOR	25

**Notes:** Gate Passes are required for Suppliers entering JO-Wafra Administrative Offices to collect the tender document and gate pass processing time is 48 hours. Please fill request for gate pass along with legible copies of Authorization letter, Civil ID, Car Registration, Supplier Registration (KGOC or SAC) to e-mail [hbjh@chevron.com](mailto:hbjh@chevron.com) and [cbms@chevron.com](mailto:cbms@chevron.com) at least 48 hours prior to arrival.

For additional information, you may contact: Telephone No.: **23983639** - Ext. : **2502 - 3477**

'DOGE's blind cost cutting will put communities at risk'

# WH tries to bring back fired nuclear weapons workers in DOGE reversal

WASHINGTON, Feb. 17, (AP) — The Trump administration has halted the firings of hundreds of federal employees who were tasked with working on the nation's nuclear weapons programs, in an about-face that has left workers confused and experts cautioning that DOGE's blind cost cutting will put communities at risk.

Three US officials who spoke to The Associated Press said up to 350 employees at the National Nuclear Security Administration were abruptly laid off late Thursday, with some losing access to email before they'd learned they were fired, only to try to enter their offices on Friday morning to find they were locked out. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

One of the hardest hit offices was the Pantex Plant near Amarillo, Texas, which saw about 30% of the cuts. Those employees work on reassess-

ing warheads, one of the most sensitive jobs across the nuclear weapons enterprise, with the highest levels of clearance.

The hundreds let go at NNSA were part of a DOGE purge across the Department of Energy that targeted about 2,000 employees.

"The DOGE people are coming in with absolutely no knowledge of what these departments are responsible for," said Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, referencing Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency team. "They don't seem to realize that it's actually the department of nuclear weapons more than it is the Department of Energy."

By late Friday night, the agency's acting director, Teresa Robbins, issued a memo rescinding the firings for all but 28 of those hundreds of fired staff members.

"This letter serves as formal notifica-



Supporters raise signs as New York Attorney General Letitia James and Connecticut Attorney General William Tong hold a news conference outside Manhattan federal court on Feb 14, in New York. (AP)

tion that the termination decision issued to you on Feb. 13, 2025 has been rescinded, effective immediately," said the memo, which was obtained by the AP.

The accounts from the three officials contradict an official statement from the Department of Energy, which said fewer than 50 National Nuclear Security Administration staffers were let go, calling them "probationary employees" who "held primarily administrative and clerical roles."

But that wasn't the case. The firings prompted one NNSA senior staffer to post a warning and call to action.

"This is a pivotal moment. We must decide whether we are truly committed to leading on the world stage or if we are content with undermining the very systems that secure our nation's future," deputy division director Rob Plonski posted to LinkedIn. "Cutting the federal workforce responsible for these functions may be seen as reckless at best

and adversely opportunistic at worst."

While some of the Energy Department employees who were fired dealt with energy efficiency and the effects of climate change, issues not seen as priorities by the Trump administration, many others dealt with nuclear issues, even if they didn't directly work on weapons programs. This included managing massive radioactive waste sites and ensuring the material there doesn't further contaminate nearby communities.

That includes the Savannah River National Laboratory in Jackson, South Carolina; the Hanford Nuclear Site in Washington state, where workers secure 177 high-level waste tanks from the site's previous work producing plutonium for the atomic bomb; and the Oak Ridge Reservation in Tennessee, a Superfund contamination site where much of the early work on the Manhattan Project was done, among others.

## Dismantling of federal efforts to monitor election interference creates opening for foreign meddling

NEW YORK, Feb. 17, (AP) — When a suspicious video of ballots being ripped up in Pennsylvania gained attention on social media last October, federal agencies responded quickly and called it out as Russian disinformation.

On Election Day in November, bomb threats to polling places in numerous states caused relatively few disruptions to voting. It's one of the many scenarios covered by the nation's cybersecurity agency in its outreach to state and local officials.

The future of that assistance is now uncertain.

The Trump administration's downsizing and disbanding of federal agencies has hit efforts that improve election security and monitor foreign influence. That could create gaps for America's enemies to exploit the next time the country holds a major election.

"Our adversaries are upping their game every day," said former Department of Homeland Security cyber chief Suzanne Spaulding. "I'm worried that we are, at the same time, tearing down our defenses."

Last week, new Attorney General Pam Bondi disbanded an FBI task force focused on investigating foreign influence operations, including those that target US elections. She also limited the scope of enforcement actions on people who do not disclose lobby-



Emergency and law enforcement agencies respond to a possible hazmat situation at the King County Elections office in Renton, Wash., Nov. 8, 2023. (AP)

ing on behalf of foreign governments. She wrote that the changes would "free resources to address more pressing priorities, and end risks of further weaponization and abuses of prosecutorial discretion."

The Trump administration also has made sweeping cuts at the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, which oversees the nation's critical infrastructure, including election systems. On Saturday, a senior

sonnel. The agency was ending its involvement in a voluntary program that shared information about cyber defenses with state and local election officials.

The actions send a message that securing US elections against interference from countries such as Russia, China and Iran is no longer a federal government priority, said Larry Norden, an election expert with the Brennan Center for Justice.

"I think we would be naive to think that the bad guys don't get that message, too, that there's going to be less of a cop on the beat to protect our elections," he said.

State and local governments run elections in the US, but federal support in recent years has helped them protect against escalating threats, coordinate with other election offices on security and expose foreign influence campaigns designed to undermine voter confidence.

Los Angeles County Registrar Dean Logan recalled two times when the federal government was the first to be aware of a threat toward his office. In 2023, federal officials warned of a suspicious envelope heading to its election facilities early enough that it could be intercepted. In 2024, the federal government notified him of an emailed bomb threat to his office before he was aware of it.

DHS official said mass firings of federal employees in probationary status had resulted in cuts of more than 130 employees at CISA. It was not immediately clear whether those included 17 employees who had worked on election security who were placed on leave last week.

The DHS official on Saturday also said CISA was pausing all election security activities pending a review of their funding, activities and per-

### America

**US faces severe weather:** Harsh weather moved west on Monday as a polar vortex was expected to grip the Rockies and the northern Plains after winter storms pummeled the eastern US over the weekend, killing at least 10 people, including nine victims in Kentucky who died during flooding from heavy rains.

The National Weather Service warned of "life-threatening cold" into Tuesday, with temperatures in northeastern Montana predicted to dip as low as 45 degrees below zero (-42.7 degrees Celsius) with wind chills down to 60 below (-51 degrees Celsius).

Meteorologists said several states would experience the 10th and coldest polar vortex event this season. Weather forces in the Arctic are combining to push the chilly air that usually stays near the North Pole into the US and Europe.

In Kentucky, Gov. Andy Beshear said Sunday that the death toll rose to nine. (AP)



Beshear

**2 killed in plane crash:** Two people were killed when a single-engine plane crashed shortly after takeoff late Saturday from a small airport east of Atlanta, authorities said.

The Rockwell Commander with two people on board crashed near Covington Municipal Airport around 11:40 p.m., according to the Federal Aviation Administration.

"There was no further communication from the aircraft after takeoff," police said in a statement.

Police said responding officers found the aircraft and the two victims in woods just north of the runway in Newton County, about 35 miles (55 kilometers) east of downtown Atlanta. (AP)

**Accident shuts interstate 20:** A fatal accident involving multiple vehicles and a tractor-trailer shut down traffic for a time on a stretch of Interstate 20 in the Dallas area early Sunday, authorities said.

The tractor-trailer fell off an interstate highway ramp and onto the ground before it eventually caught fire, said Dallas Fire-Rescue Department spokesperson Jason Evans.

When the tractor-trailer crashed on the ground, it hit another truck below and killed its driver, according to the Dallas County Sheriff's Department. No other fatalities have been confirmed. (AP)



United States Vice-President JD Vance, (second right), meets with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, (second left), during a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in Munich, Germany on Feb 14. (AP)

## Top Russian and American officials to hold talks on ending Ukraine war without Kyiv

MOSCOW, Feb. 17, (AP) — Senior American and Russian officials, including the countries' top diplomats, will hold talks on improving their ties and negotiating an end to the war in Ukraine, the Kremlin said Monday, in what would be the most significant meeting between the sides since Moscow's full-scale invasion nearly three years ago.

The talks, scheduled for Tuesday in Saudi Arabia, mark another powerful step by the Trump administration to reverse U.S. policy on isolating Russia, and are meant to pave the way for a meeting between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The moves have sent Kyiv and key allies scrambling to ensure a seat at the table, and France called an emergency meeting of European Union countries and the UK on Monday to decide how to address the UK blitz.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov will fly to the Saudi capital later in the day. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, national security adviser Mike Waltz, and Special Envoy Steve Witkoff will meet the Russian delegation, State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said. Ukraine will not participate.

Peskov said the talks will be primarily focused on "restoring the entire complex of US-Russian relations, as well as preparing possible talks on the Ukrainian settlement

and organizing a meeting of the two presidents."

Speaking on Fox News Channel's "Sunday Morning Futures" program, Witkoff said he and Waltz will be "having meetings at the direction of the president," and hope to make "some really good progress with regard to Russia-Ukraine."

In his TV interview, Witkoff didn't directly respond to a question about whether Ukraine would have to give up a "significant portion" of its territory as part of any negotiated settlement. U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said last week that NATO membership for Ukraine was unrealistic and suggested Kyiv should abandon hopes of winning all its territory back from Russia — two key items on Putin's wish list.

Lavrov and then-US Secretary of State Antony Blinken talked briefly on the sidelines of a G-20 meeting in India nearly two years ago. The two chatted for about 10 minutes, and there was no indication of any movement toward easing the intense tensions between their two nations at the time. In the fall of 2022, US and Russian spymasters met in Turkey.

Tuesday's talks will follow last week's telephone call between US President Donald Trump and Putin in which Trump said they "agreed to have our respective teams start negotiations immediately." The call ended years of US policy, ending the isolation of Moscow over its Feb 24,

2022, invasion of Ukraine. After the call, Trump phoned Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to inform him about their conversation.

Trump on Sunday told reporters that Zelenskyy "will be involved," but did not elaborate. Zelenskyy said Monday his country had not been invited to the upcoming talks and won't accept the outcome if Ukraine doesn't take part. Ukraine's participation in any peace talks had been a bedrock of U.S. policy under Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden.

Speaking to journalists on a conference call from the United Arab Emirates, Zelenskyy said the meeting would "yield no results," given the absence of any Ukrainian officials.

Zelenskyy said he would travel to Turkey on Monday and to Saudi Arabia on Wednesday, but that his trip to the Arab nation was unrelated to planned US-Russia talks there on Tuesday. Andriy Yermak, a top Zelenskyy adviser, has said there is no possibility of Ukrainian and Russian representatives meeting directly "until we develop a plan" to end the war and bring about a "just peace."

EU officials have pushed for the bloc to have a say in any Ukraine peace talks, and Zelenskyy and his officials also insisted that Europe needs to be present at the negotiations.

Lavrov on Monday was dismissive when asked about a possible role for Europe, saying that "I don't know what they have to do at the negotiations table."

## PM to press Egypt to release Soueif

LONDON, Feb. 17, (AP) — British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has told a mother who has been on hunger strike for 140 days that he will press the Egyptian government to release her son.

In a statement Sunday, Starmer confirmed that he met Laila Soueif and said he will do "all that I can" to secure the release of Alaa Abd el-Fattah, a British-Egyptian dual national who has who has spent more than five years in an Egyptian prison, accused of "spreading false news" on social media.

"We will continue to raise his case at the highest levels of the Egyptian government and press for his release," Starmer said.

A representative of the family said the meeting took place on Friday morning inside the prime minister's offices at 10 Downing Street and that it was the first time the pair had met.

Soueif, 68, has been on hunger strike since Sep. 29, the day her son was supposed to be released, consuming nothing but herbal tea, black coffee and rehydration salts. After more than four months, Soueif has lost around 25 kilograms (55 pounds).



Starmer

## Ukraine's President Zelenskyy travels to United Arab Emirates

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates, Feb. 17, (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy traveled to the United Arab Emirates late Sunday as momentum grows for potential peace talks ending Moscow's war on the country.

The UAE, home to Abu Dhabi and Dubai, long has been floated as a possible site for peace talks as well given the large population of Russian and Ukrainian expatriates who have flooded the country since the war began, and due to the Emirates' work on prisoner exchanges in the past.

Zelenskyy arrived in Abu Dhabi after attending the Munich Security Conference in Germany. Footage released by his office showed him and his wife, Olena Zelenska, being greeted by an Emirati official and honor guard at the airport late Sunday night.

Zelenska has traveled to the UAE since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, but this trip is Zelenskyy's first to the UAE since the war began.

"Our top priority is bringing even more of our people home from captivity," Zelenskyy's



office said in messages online. "We will also focus on investments and economic partnership, as well as a large-scale humanitarian program."

The United Arab Emirates' state-run WAM news agency did not immediately report on Zelenskyy's arrival, which was unusual.

## EU leaders gather for emergency meeting over fear Trump isolated age-old allies

PARIS, Feb. 17, (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron called leaders from key European Union nations and the United Kingdom to his ornate Elysee Palace on Monday for an emergency meeting on how to react to the US diplomatic blitz on Ukraine, which left the once rock-solid partner as a potential political liability.

The first visit by top US officials to Europe has left the impression that the Trump administration was ready to embrace the Kremlin while it cold-shouldered many of its age-old European allies.

Despite belligerent warnings for months ahead of Donald Trump's reelection as US president, EU leaders publicly ignored the ominous forebodings and somehow hoped Trump would stand side by side with Europe, while the continent would finally start to act on beefing up its defenses and become less reliant on the firepower of Washington.

But a flurry of speeches by Vice President JD Vance and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth during their initial visits to Europe last week questioned both Europe's security commitments and its fundamental democratic prin-



ciples. Macron said their stinging rebukes and threats of non-cooperation in the face of military danger felt like a shock to the system.

The tipping point came when Trump decided to upend years of US policy by

holding talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in hopes of ending the Russia-Ukraine war. Then, Trump's special envoy for Ukraine and Russia on Saturday all but ruled out the inclusion of other Europeans in any Ukraine peace talks.

Annalena Baerbock, Germany's foreign minister, called the week "an existential moment. It's a moment where Europe has to stand up."

That's where Macron hopes to step in with Monday's meeting. Even if Jean-Noël Barrot, Macron's foreign minister, sought to play down the significance of the emergency huddle of Europe's main leaders, the weekend scramble to set up the meeting underscored something much more fundamental.

Ever since World War II, the United States and western European nations have basically walked in lockstep as they confronted the Soviet Union during the Cold War right up to the increasingly aggressive actions of current-day Russia close to its borders. Even if there had long been US complaints about the reluctance of many European NATO nations to step up their defense efforts, they never boiled up to the political surface as they have over the past days.

## Cambodian king praises PM Hun Manet for social stability

PHNOM PENH, Feb 17. (Xinhua): Cambodian King Norodom Sihamoni on Monday praised Prime Minister Hun Manet for his sound policies to ensure the kingdom's economic growth and social stability.

The monarch made the remarks during the inauguration of the residence of the Great Supreme Patriarch Chuon Nath at Unnalom Pagoda in Phnom Penh.

Hun Manet "is wise and has appropriate policies to ensure growth and enhance social stability," Sihamoni said in a speech broadcast live on the state-owned TVK.

Hun Manet, 47, has been in office as the prime minister of Cambodia since August 2023, succeeding his father Samdech Techo Hun Sen, 72, who now serves as the president of the Senate.

Cambodia's economy achieved a growth rate of 6 percent in 2024 and the growth is projected at a higher rate of 6.3 percent in 2025, which will push up gross domestic product

(GDP) to about 51.4 billion US dollars, according to the government's forecast.

In his speech, the king also expressed his appreciation to Hun Sen for being "a wise and brilliant founder" in reviving Buddhism and Buddhist pagodas, leading to social stability and peace.

Sihamoni highlighted the role of the Buddhist or Khmer pagodas, saying that they have played a prominent role in promoting morality and virtue, which are part of Buddhist ethics, making Cambodian society harmonious in both religious and social aspects.

Cambodia is a Buddhist country, where about 95 percent of the population are Buddhist devotees.

Meanwhile, Cambodia has required users to declare their unmanned aerial vehicles or drones at local police stations after a drone attack plot on the residence of Senate President Samdech Techo Hun Sen has been foiled.

An Inter-Ministerial Prakas (edict), signed by the ministers of interior, agriculture, and civil aviation on Friday and publicized on Saturday, said the measure aims to manage the use of drones to ensure security, public order, and social safety in the Southeast Asian country.



Hun Manet

## Philippines former president Duterte faces criminal complaint over 'kill senators' comment at rally

MANILA, Philippines, Feb 17. (Agencies): Former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte is facing a criminal complaint Monday over comments he made during a campaign rally when he said 15 senators should be killed in a bomb attack to allow more vacant seats for his political party's candidates to contest.

The alleged illegal utterances and inciting to sedition were contained in a complaint filed by police Maj Gen Nicolas Torre III to the Department of Justice. They are the latest legal trouble to face the former president and his family under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

Campaigning is underway for half of the 24 Senate seats for the May 12 mid-term elections in the Philippines. The former president's camp said his remarks were just a joke uttered to liven up a political rally on Thursday for the nine senatorial candidates of his PDP-Laban party.

"Let's kill senators now so there will be vacancies," Duterte said at the proclamation rally of his party's senatorial candidates. "If we can kill about 15 senators, we're in...the only way to do it is, let's just stage an explosion."

Torre said the tumultuous era during Duterte's six-year presidency, when he could just publicly threaten to kill any-



Former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte listens during a senate inquiry on the so-called war on drugs during his administration at the Philippine Senate on Oct 28, 2024, in Manila, Philippines. (AP)

body, was over.

"Our country went through a lot of troubles in those past six years," Torre told reporters. "Do we want those troubles to continue, the constant threats of killings that they will dismiss later by just saying that these were just a joke?"

The danger with such remarks, Torre added, was that followers may

take Duterte's remarks seriously and carry them out.

Duterte's daughter, Vice President Sara Duterte, is facing an impeachment trial partly for publicly threatening to have Marcos, his wife and House Speaker Martin Romualdez assassinated if she herself were fatally attacked amid an escalating political rivalry between the two highest lead-

ers of one of Asia's most unwieldy democracies.

The vice president has denied that her remarks in an online news conference in November amounted to a threat to kill Marcos although that was what she literally said.

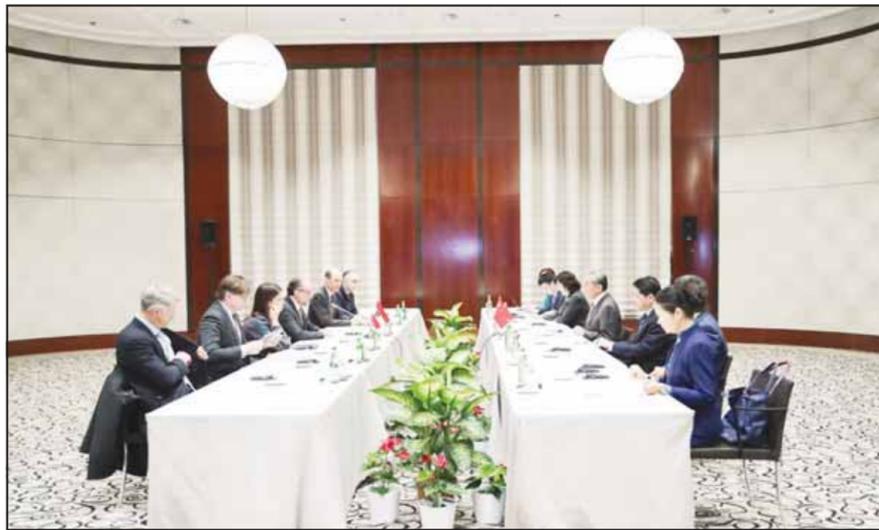
The International Criminal Court has been investigating the large number of killings that happened under the former president's crackdowns against illegal drugs, which left thousands of mostly poor suspect dead, as a possible crime against humanity.

Duterte has denied he authorized extrajudicial killings under his anti-drugs crackdowns while he was in office, but he has openly and repeatedly threatened to kill suspected drug dealers while in power.

Meanwhile, three people have been killed and six others injured in a nine-vehicle collision on a highway in Ilocos Sur province in the northern Philippines, police said Monday.

Police said the crash happened around noon on Sunday in Candon City, where an out-of-control sports utility vehicle (SUV) plowed into multiple motorcycles and cars on a busy street.

One passenger of the SUV and two motorcycle drivers were pronounced dead when taken to the hospital.



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, meets with Austrian interim Chancellor and Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, in Munich, Germany on Feb 15. (Xinhua)

### China to work with Austria to uphold multilateralism: Wang

China is ready to work with Austria to jointly voice support for upholding multilateralism, maintaining the authority of the United Nations, defending the international rule of law and rejecting unilateral bullying, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks when meeting with Austrian interim Chancellor and Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference.

Noting that the world currently faces overlapping security challenges and economic risks as well as factors of instability and uncertainty, Wang said that the international community is concerned about division and confrontation while yearning for peace and stability.

Calling the focus of this year's Munich Security Con-

ference on multipolarization timely, Wang said China's original aspirations remain unchanged, which conforms to the trend of peaceful development and consistently plays a positive role in a changing world.

Wang noted that Austria, as a permanently neutral country, has long played the role of a bridge-builder and mediator in international affairs.

China welcomes Austria to seize new opportunities brought by China's development, deepen mutually beneficial cooperation, and advance China-Austria relations to continue leading China-EU relations, he said.

As this year marks the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and the EU, China stands ready to work with EU countries, including Austria, to invigorate China-EU relations and drive progress in the next 50 years, he added. (Xinhua)

### Beijing slams Washington

## 'US has gravely backpedaled on Taiwan'

BEIJING, Feb 17. (Agencies): China's Foreign Ministry took issue Monday with a revised US government fact sheet that removed a line on American opposition to independence for Taiwan.

The United States has "gravely backpedaled" on its position on Taiwan and sent the wrong message to "separatist forces" on the island, ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said.

Taiwan and China split in 1949 during the civil war that brought the communists to power in China. The defeated Nationalists fled to Taiwan and set up a rival government there. Taiwan has its own government and military but has never declared formal independence from China.

"We urge the US to ... stop emboldening and supporting Taiwan independence and avoid further damaging China-US relations and the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait," Guo said when asked about the revision at a daily media briefing.

The Taiwan Strait is a narrow waterway that separates the island of Taiwan from China's east coast.

The US State Department removed the phrase "we do not support Taiwan independence" from the fact sheet last week. The document on America's relations with the self-governing island is posted on its website.

Taiwan's government welcomed the move, though a statement sent to The Associated Press on Monday did not mention the language specifically.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has noted that the U.S. State Department updated the 'Current State of US-Taiwan Relations' page ... with text that is positive and friendly toward us, reflecting the close and amicable



In this photo released by the Taiwan Presidential Office, Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te speaks at a press conference after a security meeting about US President Trump's tariffs on trade partners and semiconductors at the Presidential office in Taipei on Feb 14. (AP)

partnership between Taiwan and the United States," it said.

It's not the first time the State Department has removed the phrase. It did so in May 2022 but restored it a few weeks later after a strong protest from China. It's unclear why the State Department changed the language again and whether it signals any shift in policy under President Donald Trump, who returned to the White House last month.

The government in Taiwan is worried that Trump might not be as steadfast a supporter of the island as his predecessor, former President Joe Biden.

The US does not recognize Taiwan as a country but is its strongest backer and biggest arms supplier.

Trump said last week that Taiwan, a leading maker of semiconductors, had taken the chip business away from the US and that he wants it to come back.

China, which says that Taiwan must come under its control, has stepped up military exercises around the island of 23 million people in recent years. The US government fact sheet says that it expects "differences to be resolved by peaceful means, free from coercion, in a manner acceptable to the people on both sides."

Meanwhile, the Chinese military monitored the passage of a Canadian frigate through the Taiwan Strait on Sunday and has effectively dealt with it, said a spokesperson for the Eastern Theater Command of the People's Liberation Army.

The theater command deployed naval and air forces to monitor and remain on alert throughout the transit of the vessel, said Li Xi, according to a statement released by the theater command on Monday.

Li denounced the Canadian warship's transit as an act that deliberately stirred up trouble and undermined peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

He stressed that the theater command will remain on high alert and resolutely take countermeasures against any threats or provocations.

In another development, a public prosecution has been initiated against Qin Ruppel, former vice chairman of the people's government of south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, on suspicion of bribery, the Supreme People's Procuratorate (SPP) said Sunday.

## India court sentences man to life in prison for murdering Irish backpacker

NEW DELHI, Feb 17. (Agencies): A court in India's western Goa state on Monday sentenced a 31-year-old man to life in prison for raping and murdering an Irish woman at a popular tourist resort nearly eight years ago.

The body of 28-year-old Danielle McLaughlin was found by a farmer on a beach popular with holidaymakers in Goa in March 2017. An autopsy showed that cerebral damage and con-

striction of the neck caused her death.

Vikat Bhagat was found guilty of the crime on Friday. McLaughlin's family in a statement had said they and her friends were "thankful to the public prosecutor and the investigating officer for justice."

Usually, rape victims cannot be named under Indian law. In this case, the victim's family spoke to the media to raise awareness of her case.

The crime highlighted persistent violence against women in India despite tougher laws against sexual assault imposed after the 2012 death of a young woman who was gang-raped on a bus in New Delhi. Goa is a popular backpacking destination in India. Millions of tourists visit its numerous beach resorts every year.

### Also:

**NEW DELHI:** A US military plane carrying 112 illegal Indian immigrants landed at an airport in the northern Indian city of Amritsar, officials said Monday.

This is the third batch of Indians deported from the United States as part of President Donald Trump's campaign against illegal immigrants in his country.

According to the officials, the C-17 US military aircraft landed at the airport in Amritsar on Sunday night.

The officials said that the deportees will be allowed to head to their homes after completion of all formalities, including immigration, verification and background checks. On Saturday night, a US military plane brought 116 Indian immigrants to Amritsar. Earlier on Feb. 5, 104 Indians have been sent back from the United States.



Policemen escort an illegal immigrant from the airport, deported from the United States, who was among those who arrived in a U.S. military plane in Amritsar, India on Feb 16. (AP)

## M23 rebels occupy second major city in Congo

BUKAVU, Congo, Feb 17. (AP): Rwanda-backed rebels have occupied a second, major city in mineral-rich eastern Congo, the government said Sunday, as M23 rebels confirmed they were in the city to restore order after it was abandoned by Congolese forces.

The Congo River Alliance, a coalition of rebel groups that includes the M23, said in a statement that its fighters "decided to assist the population of Bukavu" in addressing its security challenges under the "old regime" in the city of 1.3 million people.

"Our forces have been working to restore the security for the people and their property, much to the satisfaction of the entire population," alliance



M23 rebels guard outside the South Kivu province administrative office, at the centre of east Congo's second-largest city, Bukavu on Feb 16. (AP)

spokesperson Lawrence Kanyuka said in a statement.

The rebels saw little resistance from government forces against the unprecedented expansion of their reach after years of fighting. Congo's government vowed to restore order in Bukavu but there was no sign of soldiers. Many were seen fleeing on Saturday alongside thousands of civilians.

The M23 are the most prominent of more than 100 armed groups vying for control of eastern Congo's trillions of dollars in mineral wealth that's critical for much of the world's technology. The rebels are supported by about 4,000 troops from neighboring Rwanda, according to the United Nations experts.



A demonstrator holds a banner that reads in Spanish 'The 2025 budget, starving us death' as Argentina's President Javier Milei presents next year's budget in Congress in Buenos Aires, Argentina on Sept 15, 2024. (AP)

## Argentine lawyers accuse President Milei of fraud over cryptocurrency promotion

MONTEVIDEO, Uruguay, Feb 17. (AP): Argentine lawyers filed fraud complaints against President Javier Milei in criminal court on Sunday for promoting a cryptocurrency on his social media, one of the lawyers told The Associated Press.

On Friday, Milei posted on X about \$LIBRA, a coin that he said was aimed at "encouraging economic growth by funding small businesses and startups."

He deleted the post a few hours later and the value of the currency collapsed, causing millions of dollars in losses to its brief investors, according to financial site Dexscreener. The coin, developed by KIP Protocol and Hayden Davis, could be obtained by accessing a link that directed users to a website called vivalibertadproject.com, referring to the well-known phrase with which Milei closes speeches and messages on his social media.

The President's Office said in a Saturday statement that Milei was not involved in any stage of the cryptocurrency's development and decided to remove the post to avoid speculation and limit further exposure, following the public reaction to the project's launch.

Jonatan Baldiviezo, a lawyer and one of the plaintiffs, told the AP that they saw an illicit association to commit "an indeterminate number of frauds" in the episode. "Within this illicit association, the crime of fraud was committed, in which the president's actions were essential," he said. Baldiviezo signed the petition with Marcos Zelaya, another lawyer; the engineer Maria Eva

Koutsovitis; and the economist Claudio Lozano, who presided over the Argentine Central Bank during former president Alberto Fernández's administration. Criminal justice is expected to assign a judge to the case or refer it to a prosecutor for further investigation on Monday.

The plaintiffs saw in Milei's action an operation known in the crypto world as "rug pull." This occurs when a developer launches an attractive token to lure investors but later abandons it after funds become over-piced, making the tokens worthless. Baldiviezo also added that Milei violated the Public Ethics Law.

"The President shared a post on his personal accounts announcing the launch of KIP Protocol's project, as he does daily with many entrepreneurs who wish to launch projects in Argentina to create jobs and attract investments," the President's Office said.

After deleting the post, Milei said on X he was unaware of the currency's development and blamed his political opponents for trying to exploit the episode. "I was not aware of the details of the project, and after getting informed, I decided not to continue promoting it (which is why I deleted the tweet)," he said.

The President's Office said the country's Anti-Corruption Office, which operates under the Executive Branch, would act immediately. The administration also acknowledged that Milei and members of his administration recently met with representatives of KIP Protocol at the presidential office.

## CBK Bonds and related Tawarruq

The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK Bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KWD (200) million for (3) months with Rate of Return (4.125%).

## Bank offers over 250 e-services

### KFH leads digital transformation with enhanced financial services

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: As part of its endeavors to lead the digital transformation sphere in the banking sector, Kuwait Finance House (KFH) continues to launch high-quality digital financial services and solutions, enhancing its technological infrastructure, and improving the means of providing technical assistance to KFH customers through different platforms, smart branches and self-service machines.



KFHOnline

KFH is striving to capitalize on the swift advancements in Artificial Intelligence, Data Engineering, Fintech, E-marketing, and Digital Product Design and stringent cybersecurity protocols. Ultimately, KFH succeeded in converting many processes and functions from the manual system to the automated system using the Robotic Process Automation (RPA) application. The use of this technology increases better utilization of resources, enhances production efficiency, reduces service time for customers, achieves their satisfaction, deepens their confidence, and enhances their banking experience.

Additionally, KFHonline (available through both a mobile app and website) offers over 200 services, whereas XTM devices and KFH Go smart branches offer around 50 different services. Accordingly, the customer has the option to choose between around 250 e-services offered through apps and other various means.

KFH services also include e-payment solutions, online account opening, instant card printing, selling and buying gold in addition to the many branchless banking transactions.

KFH also launched a new digital service called (WAMD). This service allows customers to send and receive money instantly and for free using their mobile numbers, 24/7.

KFH has succeeded in opening accounts for new customers through digital vending machines. This was made possible by the first mobile device in the market called D-POS, which allows new customers to open accounts on KFH systems instantly and from any location.

KFH also facilitated the exchange of credit and prepaid cards for KFH customers within 3 minutes using instant card issuance machines. Furthermore, it launched the first corporate mobile banking which provides five essential services to support their business. The Bank has also successfully implemented facial recognition technology based

on biometric identity in its branches.

KFH customers can open a foreign currency account via KFH Online, which was previously only possible in branches. Also, KFH collaborated with Western Union to offer co-branded international money transfer services through the KFHOnline app. KFH also offers instant transfer service to the GCC countries through AFAQ network.

Customers are now able to open foreign currency savings accounts through KFH Online.

Moreover, KFH offers its customers several banking card services, allowing its customers to temporarily suspend and deactivate their cards and view their Baitak Rewards Program points through KFHonline app. The Bank has also made progress in updating customer's Civil ID and authentication without the use of a physical card. Customers can transfer their funds from their prepaid card to their personal bank account. In addition, KFH customers who have an additional family card can now control the additional card's limits.

The launch of Zabe, a digital payment platform for businesses, has enhanced KFH's relationship with companies, and allowed corporate customers to easily pay by generating payment links and QR codes, eliminating the need for POS devices.

KFH also introduced three new debit card products with various features specifically designed for corporate customers for government use. One of these cards is issued with limited acceptance only on government KNET POS/PG terminals. This card has received positive feedback and attracted the interest of merchants.

## KPC excludes 'private bids' for navigational supplies for KOTC

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: The Higher Purchasing Committee for Tenders at Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) and its subsidiaries announced through the official gazette -- 'Kuwait Al-Yaum' -- the exclusion of bids submitted by some private companies to supply navigational maps, navigation notices and publications for the fleet of Kuwait Oil Tanker Company (KOTC) due to failure to meet the conditions.

On the other hand, KOTC announced the extension of the tender deadline for the supply of 320,000 liquefied gas cylinders (12-kilogram size), made of solid iron with a valve for the two liquefied gas filling branches -- Shuaiba and Umm Al-Aish -- until March 11,

instead of Feb 11.

The deadline for the tender to supply 40,000 liquefied gas cylinders (24-kilogram size), made of solid iron with a valve and 5,000 liquefied gas cylinders (five-kilogram size), made of solid iron with a valve for the two liquefied gas filling branches Shuaiba and Umm Al-Aish is also extended until March 11, instead of Feb 11.

The closing date for the limited tender for the comprehensive contract for the drydocking and maintenance of eight tankers has been extended to March 4 instead of Feb 18.

KPC also announced the awarding of the tender for the exploitation and management of the oil complex cafeteria to provide snacks and refreshments (coffee shop) to Alghanim International Company at a cost of KD 86,796.

# Business

## Kuwait projects KD 6.3 bln deficit in FY25/26 budget

Oil revenue decline expected amid lower price assumptions

By National Bank of Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: The government recently approved the draft FY25/26 budget, which projects a wider deficit of KD6.3 billion (13% of GDP), from KD 5.6 billion in the FY24/25 budget. Some spending restraint is evident in the fact that current expenditures are little changed over the previous budget, although budgeted spending remains elevated and not far from historical highs, suggesting that structural reforms will be needed to put the public finances on a more sustainable path.

Oil revenues are expected to decline on a lower oil price assumption, outweighing a solid increase in projected non-oil revenues. 2025 should be a pivotal year for the public finances, as the government prepares numerous fiscal measures to help boost liquidity, enhance non-oil revenues and rationalize spending going forward. We view this budget as a start ahead of potentially more meaningful fiscal adjustments later on.

Expenditures in FY2025/26 are budgeted at KD24.5 billion, down by a negligible 0.1% b/b, representing a modest degree of spending restraint as the government signals its intention to adhere to the previously announced spending ceiling. The budget expects a 1.6% increase in employee compensation, offset by lower allocations for subsidies (-2.2%), other expenses (-3.7%) and capital expenditure (-1.7%). The budgeted decline in the latter extends a four-year sequence of lower spending and is despite the need to progress towards Vision 2035 infrastructure development goals. Amid these lower spending commitments, structural issues are yet to be fully addressed, such as disproportionately large spending on wages and subsidies -- almost 80% of all expenditures -- while the share of capex continues to trend lower (9.1%). Liquidity constraints may partly explain why capex outlays have been limited in recent years.

On the revenue side, the budget projects lower oil income of KD15.3 billion (-5.7% y/y) on a lower assumed oil price of \$68/bbl compared to \$70 in the previous budget and slightly lower oil production of 2.50 mb/d from 2.55 mb/d. (Table 1.) This is expected to outweigh a projected increase in non-oil revenues of 9% y/y to KD2.9 billion, a record high that reflects new revenue measures. In January, a new corporate income tax on large multinationals (15% minimum top-up tax), in line with the OECD initiative, was introduced, which should eventually raise tax income to KD250 million (from KD160 million in FY24/25 budget), according to ministry estimates. Also included is a new traffic law, with much higher penalties for infringements, which is due to come into effect in April. Finally, a new law allowing ministries to review and set their relevant fees (subject to cabinet approval) will likely lead to a broad repricing of government service fees. Within the scope of the law are administrative, judicial, health, and public property lease rates.

**New debt law on the table**

A new public debt law is reportedly imminent. Once approved, it should allow the government to return to the bond market for the first time since the expiration of the debt law in 2017. According to media reports, the new debt law could sanction

	Budget			% y/y	
	FY23/24	FY24/25	FY25/26	FY24/25	FY25/26
Revenues	19.5	18.9	18.2	-2.8	-3.6
Oil Revenues	17.2	16.2	15.3	-5.4	-5.7
Non-oil Revenues	2.3	2.7	2.9	16.8	9.0
Total Expenditures	26.3	24.6	24.5	-6.6	-0.1
Current Expenditures	23.8	22.3	22.3	-6.4	0.1
Salaries	14.9	14.8	15.1	-0.8	1.6
Subsidies	5.9	4.5	4.4	-23.8	-2.2
Other expenditures	2.9	2.9	2.8	0.6	-3.7
Capital Expenditures	2.5	2.3	2.2	-7.9	-1.7
Budget Balance (Surplus/ Deficit)	-6.8	-5.6	-6.3	-	-
KEC oil price (\$/bbl)	70.0	70.0	68.0	0.0	-2.9
Oil production (bbl/d)	2.68	2.55	2.50	-4.85	-1.96

Chart 1: Fiscal balance

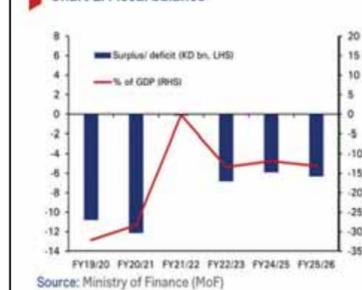


Chart 2: Budgeted expenditures

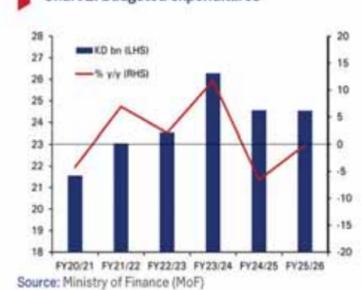


Chart 3: FY25/26 budget spending breakdown

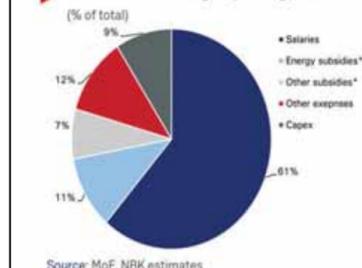
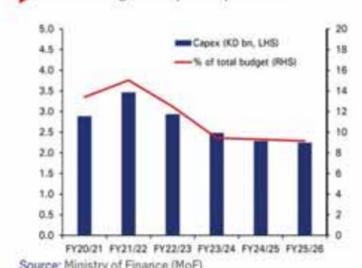


Chart 4: Budgeted capital expenditure



borrowing of up to KD20-30 billion over 50 years, which is feasible given Kuwait's low public debt (around KD1.4 billion in public outstanding debt) and lower debt service costs compared to regional peers. The law could be followed by legislation to regulate withdrawals from the Future Generations Fund, Kuwait's sovereign wealth fund, whose assets under management were reported to have surpassed \$1 trillion recently according to the Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute. The measures would serve to boost liquidity and provide more fiscal space for deficit financing and higher capital spending in subsequent budgets, especially given pressures on liquidity in the state treasury in recent years as the sole source of deficit financing.

**Budget could be a starting point towards larger reforms**

With only a marginal increase in employee compensation and no change in overall current spending, there is little new impetus for strong growth in private consumption. Furthermore, the slight decline in the capex allocation signals less

support for higher investment outlays, although we believe that actual capex could still rise given previous underspending relative to the budget allocation. Overall, we would not see this budget as having an expansionary impact unless there is a marked increase in budgeted capex utilization. Spending restraint, coupled with the tapping of new, albeit modest revenue streams could be an indication that this is the start of more meaningful fiscal adjustments ahead.

The government seems to have stepped up the legislative pace this year, which is promising for a raft of fiscal and economic reforms awaiting final cabinet approval. This includes the potential restructuring and merging of government units, the privatization law, the public private partnership law, and the housing financing law. The service repricing law could have significant fiscal implications, given the potential to phase out energy and water subsidies, one of the largest expenditure items, as has been put into effect successfully in Kuwait's GCC peers Saudi Arabia and UAE.

## Initiative supports Kuwait's transition to a low-carbon economy

### NBK and LOYAC sign 'Sustainability for Kuwait' agreement

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: As part of the continuing collaboration between National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) and LOYAC, both parties have signed the "Sustainability for Kuwait" agreement -- a strategic partnership dedicated to empowering and developing Kuwaiti youth while fostering a more sustainable future.

As part of the ongoing agreement, NBK is collaborating with LOYAC to implement hands-on training programs that equip young people with the knowledge and skills to drive environmental and social change. By fostering greater awareness and responsibility, the initiative aims to create a lasting positive impact, aligning with the growing global focus on climate change, global warming, and their far-reaching effects on the economy and society.

The practical programs will prioritize environmental impact through a range of sustainability-driven initiatives, including planting diverse tree species, promoting regenerative farming practices, enhancing soil health, and advocating for water conservation and sustainable agriculture. Additionally, the programs will incorporate innovative solutions such as plastic recycling for prostheses and waste-to-energy initiatives.

Marking this milestone, Manal Al-Mattar, Head of Group Corporate Communications at National Bank of Kuwait stated: "As a responsible and sustainable financial institution,



Manal Al-Mattar and Faraa Al-Saqqaf during the signing of the agreement.

we remain committed to driving positive change and making a lasting impact. Our ongoing efforts over the years reflect our dedication to social responsibility, advancing sustainability practices, and supporting the country's agenda to reduce carbon emissions."

"Our long-standing partnership with LOYAC stands as a successful model of collaboration between the banking sector and civil society institutions. Through this alliance, we aim to support initiatives that align

with our vision for environmental, social, and corporate sustainability. By launching impactful programs, we seek to empower young people, develop their skills, and deepen their awareness of sustainability and environmental conservation," she added.

She emphasized that this agreement is not merely a short-term initiative, but a shared vision aimed at creating a tangible and lasting impact. She also highlighted NBK's unwavering commitment to driving positive changes and enhancing the



A group photo of the National Bank of Kuwait and LOYAC teams on the sidelines of the agreement signing ceremony.

well-being of the communities it serves, with a steadfast focus on investing in community development and providing meaningful opportunities for youth empowerment and growth.

Emphasizing the significance of this collaboration, Ms.Faraa Al-Saqqaf, Chairperson and Managing Director at LOYAC, stated: "Our strategic partnership with NBK stands as a testament to our shared commitment to sustainability. This

agreement is more than just cooperation between two institutions -- it reflects a unified vision to build a more sustainable future for Kuwait while reinforcing our responsibility toward society and the environment."

"Together with NBK, we are committed to tackling environmental and climate challenges, championing social responsibility, and equipping young people with the skills and knowledge to become future leaders in driving a more sustainable soci-

ety," Al-Saqqaf affirmed.

NBK has consistently led the way in supporting projects and initiatives that drive sustainability efforts. The bank has made significant strides in ESG efforts, embedding sustainability as a core pillar across its business models, operations, and corporate culture. This commitment reinforces the transition to a sustainable, low-carbon economy, aligning with Kuwait's strategic agenda and national development plan.

Next Al Danah draw offers KD 1 million prize on July 17

## Gulf Bank deposits KD 2 million into Islam Khattab's account, the AIDanah Millionaire grand prize winner

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: Gulf Bank proudly welcomed Mr. Islam Mohammad Khattab, the grand prize winner of the annual Al Danah Millionaire draw, who received an extraordinary KD 2 million prize. The highly anticipated draw took place on Thursday, February 13, 2025, at Al Khiran Mall, attracting a large audience of customers and visitors. The event was held under the supervision of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Ernst & Young, and was broadcast live across Gulf Bank's social media platforms and 360 FM radio.

Following the official deposit of KD 2 million into his account, the winner shared his immense joy and gratitude, describing the experience as life-changing. He expressed his appreciation to Gulf Bank Gulf Bank for continuously rewarding its customers and encouraging a culture of saving.

Mr. Khattab encouraged others to open an AIDanah Millionaire account, emphasizing that it had been his trusted savings partner for over five years, helping him navigate financial challenges. He shared that his win was met with overwhelming joy, not only in Kuwait but also back home in Egypt, where his family celebrated the exciting news. He expressed his intention to donate a portion of his prize to charitable causes, while carefully investing the remainder to secure his family's future.

Acting General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, Mr. Bader Al-Ali, congratulated the win-

ner on becoming the 23rd AIDanah Millionaire in the draw's history.

He emphasized Gulf Bank's dedication to delivering outstanding banking experiences while recognizing and rewarding savers, fostering a culture of financial responsibility within the community. He also noted that Gulf Bank offers exclusive banking services designed for high-net-worth clients, providing specialized financial solutions and expert investment advisory services.

Gulf Bank continues to provide customers with numerous chances to win through the AIDanah draws. The next major draw will be the semi-annual AIDanah draw on July 17, 2025, with a grand prize of KD 1 million. Customers have until March 31, 2025, to deposit and qualify for this draw. Customers can qualify for the monthly, quarterly, and annual AIDanah draws by maintaining a minimum account balance of KD 200.

Mr. Al-Ali expressed his enthusiasm for continuing to reward customers through the AIDanah Millionaire account, encouraging them to keep saving and increase their chances of winning. He highlighted the program's multiple prize opportunities, including the grand prize of KD 2 million—the largest cash prize tied to a bank account globally.

The semi-annual draw offers a KD 1 million prize, while the quarterly draws, held twice a year, award KD 100,000 to 100 winners in each draw. Additionally, the monthly draws award KD 1,000 to 10 win-

ners each month. Throughout 2025, a total of 282 winners will be selected through the AIDanah draws.

The AIDanah Millionaire account is open to both Kuwaiti nationals and expatriates. Customers can easily open an account by visiting any Gulf Bank branch or using the Bank's mobile app, with a minimum deposit of KD 200. Maintaining this balance ensures automatic entry into all upcoming draws. If the balance drops below KD 200, a monthly fee of KD 2 will be applied until the minimum requirement is met.

Gulf Bank encourages AIDanah account holders to increase their savings and enhance their chances of winning by making additional deposits through the Bank's online and mobile banking services.

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

In alignment with Kuwait Vision 2035, "New Kuwait," and its commitment to fostering collaborative partnerships, Gulf Bank is dedicated to driving robust sustainability initiatives across environmental, social, and governance (ESG) dimensions.

The Bank is committed to implementing strategically selected and diverse sustainability programs both internally and externally.



Bader Al-Ali and Najla Aleisa welcomes new AIDanah Millionaire at the Crystal Branch.

## Zain Kuwait partners with Huawei for BSS digital transformation

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: Zain Kuwait has partnered with global technology solutions provider, Huawei, to implement a Business Support System (BSS) digital transformation project. This milestone marks a significant step in the company's digital transformation journey, aiming to enhance its technological infrastructure with cutting-edge solutions that comprehensively improve operational efficiency and accelerate the growth of new services to enrich customer experiences.

The project was penciled at Zain's headquarters in Shuwaikh, attended by Nawaf Al-Gharabally, CEO of Zain Kuwait; Steven Yi, President of Huawei Regional Joint Chiefs of Staff; Phillip Gan, President of Huawei Middle East and Central Asia, along with senior executives and teams from both companies.

This project, that positions Zain as the first operator in Kuwait to implement a BSS digital upgrade, serves as a key pillar in advancing Zain's '4WARD-Progress with Purpose' strategy and vision as the company continues to lead Kuwait's digital transformation as a technology-driven



Al-Gharabally and Yi with Zain and Huawei executives at the signing ceremony.



Nawaf Al-Gharabally and Steven Yi sign the project.

innovator.

Commenting on the occasion, Nawaf Al-Gharabally stated: "Zain is committed to building smarter and more agile digital networks that enhance the company's transition to a techco innovator, reaffirming our position as a pioneer of ICT technologies in Kuwait."

"This pivotal digital transformation project with our strategic partners Huawei writes a new chapter in Zain's journey of achievements, that will un-

lock unlimited opportunities to enhance operational efficiency, accelerate the growth of new services, simplify processes, and streamline transactions. This enables us to offer more innovative and dynamic experiences to Kuwait's largest customer base of individual, enterprise and government clientele."

"The next-generation BSS will drive a major transformation in our operations across various aspects, including greater service flexibility, enhanced customer experiences, and im-

proved innovation capabilities. This will significantly boost our ability to meet the needs of customers and businesses in smarter and more efficient ways."

The Zain Kuwait CEO concluded: "Today, we take this step under our new '4WARD strategy - Progress with Purpose', which is built on four key forces: Customer Delight, Digital Zain, Purpose and Action, and Collaborative Growth. All these forces are embodied in this project,

and we look forward to seeing its fruitful results as we implement and launch it operationally in the future."

Steven Yi remarked: "Zain has always been at the forefront of industry innovation, driving success in the 5G era, and is moving towards deeper digital transformation. As the core support for Zain service operation, BSS will continue to enable service agility, customer experience optimization, and B2B service expansion in the next

decade."

He continued: "Huawei is honored to remain a long-term strategic partner of Zain to reinforce its leadership. We will fully invest the best resources to ensure high-quality BSS project delivery and support Zain in accelerating Techo transformation, building on the successes we have achieved together over the past decades."

The new-generation BSS system will support personalized marketing strategies, intelligent recommendations, and an omni-channel user experience to improve customer satisfaction. It will accelerate the launch of new services and packages, reduce market response time, and optimize business performance.

Additionally, automation and digitization solutions embedded within the new system will enhance the efficiency of business operations for both consumer and enterprise sectors, drive the growth of SME customers, and improve overall operational efficiency. The system's smart operations will also reduce maintenance costs and ensure service continuity through real-time monitoring and intelligent management of operations and maintenance.

Children transform 18,700 repurposed plastic pieces into art

## Warba sponsors Recycling Art Exhibition by HEI Schools Kuwait at The Avenues

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: In a commitment to empower children with sustainability knowledge, HEI Schools concluded the Recycling Art Exhibition at The Avenues, with Warba Bank as the official sponsor. The sponsorship comes as part of the bank's commitment to social responsibility and supporting impactful educational and environmental programs. The exhibition aimed at encouraging children to adopt eco-friendly habits and engage in artistic activities that creatively reinforce sustainability concepts, fostering environmental awareness and long-term sustainable practices.

Held from February 9 to 15, opposite The Cheesecake Factory restaurant, the exhibition focused on four main objectives. First, it aimed to educate and inspire children by engaging them in hands-on experiences with recycling and artistic expression, fostering their understanding of sustainability principles. Additionally, the exhibition sought to raise environmental awareness by actively involving the community and encouraging collective responsibility in preserving the environment.

By fostering creativity, the exhibition encouraged children to explore innovative ways to express their understanding of sustainability and the protection of natural resources. It also aimed to promote social responsibility by providing companies and institutions with a platform to engage with

sustainability initiatives, both locally and globally, fostering collaboration and unifying efforts toward achieving sustainable development goals.

**A Shared Vision for Environmental Awareness**

Warba Bank's sponsorship reflects its commitment to collaborating with institutions that share its vision of nurturing an empowered, creative, and socially and environmentally responsible generation. Its social responsibility strategy focuses on launching and supporting community initiatives and programs that promote technological innovation, professional creativity, and environmental awareness, all in alignment with its ethical values and Islamic principles.

Warba Bank's social responsibility strategy aligns with the vision of HEI Schools Kuwait, which aims to instill environmental awareness and social responsibility in children. The schools organize educational programs that address global challenges while reinforcing sustainability concepts through interactive and creative methods, reflecting the shared principles of both institutions.

Dr. Mohammed Barakat, Head of Marketing and Corporate Communications at Warba Bank, expressed the bank's pride in its ongoing role in supporting community initiatives, particularly those benefiting children and youth. He stated: "At Warba Bank, we

believe in equipping future generations with the knowledge and skills needed to build a more sustainable world. Our comprehensive approach aligns with global sustainability goals, ensuring that our initiatives contribute meaningfully to society's aspirations."

Dr. Barakat emphasized that adopting the best environmental and social practices is not only in line with the bank's values but also serves as a strategic path for business continuity and long-term growth. He added: "Our sponsorship of the Recycling Art Exhibition reflects our commitment to supporting educational and environmental initiatives that shape the future of our society. We are pleased to collaborate with Hey Schools Kuwait on this initiative, which aligns with our vision, 'We Hear You, Let's Own Tomorrow.' Together, we aim to inspire future generations, drive sustainable growth, and build a promising tomorrow."

**The Avenues Supporting Community Initiatives**

The Avenues management stated that hosting the Recycling Art Exhibition for HEI Schools Kuwait aligns with its commitment to sustainability. The initiative reflects its dedication to raising awareness and promoting long-term sustainable practices that positively impact society and encourage environmentally friendly behaviors.

The management commented: "The Avenues contributed to this exhibition by providing 18,700 pieces of plastic materials repurposed from its daily operations. These materials were creatively transformed by children into artworks showcased at the exhibition. The event focused on several key objectives for children, including educating them on sustainability practices, raising their environmental awareness, and encouraging critical and creative thinking while reinforcing their understanding of social responsibility."

The Avenues is the premier destination for shopping, entertainment, and lifestyle, and serves as the ideal venue to showcase the works of participating students to its diverse visitors, who represent a significant segment of society.

The Avenues management expressed its appreciation for the collaboration with Warba Bank, through its sponsorship of the exhibition, and with the management of HEI Schools Kuwait. This partnership resulted in a significant community initiative, the Art Recycling Exhibition. The management further emphasized The Avenues' commitment to supporting initiatives that enrich society with positive practices and promote community awareness.



HEI Schools concludes recycling art exhibition at The Avenues.

Continued on Page 10



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In a bid to expand its customer base of business owners

## KIB collaborates with PayTabs Kuwait to facilitate digital payment solutions for businesses

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently announced signing a strategic memorandum of understanding (MoU) with PayTabs Kuwait, a member of MENA's award-winning payment orchestration powerhouse PayTabs Group. This partnership aims to enhance the Bank's suite of customized solutions tailored to meet the needs of merchants and business owners through a dedicated referral program.

This partnership also underscores KIB's ongoing commitment to expanding its customer base by equipping businesses across various sectors with advanced payment solutions, thereby supporting Kuwait's economic growth and fostering digital transformation.

Expressing his enthusiasm for the new partnership, Anwar Al-Qenaei, General Manager of PayTabs Kuwait, said: "This collaboration represents a significant milestone for both PayTabs and KIB, as we join forces to provide innovative digital payment solutions that empower businesses to thrive in an increasingly digital world."

Under this strategic partnership, PayTabs Kuwait will refer merchants to KIB, allowing businesses to leverage seamless and efficient payment so-



Anwar Al-Qenaei, General Manager of PayTabs Kuwait, and Mohamed El-Shareef, General Manager of the Digital Innovation and Data Intelligence Department at KIB.

lutions that simplify transactions and settlements. The agreement primarily targets businesses in Kuwait seeking secure payment solutions. These solutions help facilitate financial transactions with ease and efficiency, while also supporting entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Kuwait. The partnership is

designed to empower businesses seeking to adopt innovative digital payment solutions that enhance the efficiency of their financial operations, offering them online presence and thereby driving sustainable growth.

Commenting on the MoU, Mohamed El-Shareef, General Manager of the Digital Innovation and Data Intel-



KIB and PayTabs team in a group photo.

ligence Department at KIB, said: "We are delighted to sign this MoU with PayTabs, which enables us to expand our scope of services and offer comprehensive and safe payment solutions that elevate merchants' experience. This agreement aligns with our dedicated strategy to provide our customers with innovative digital banking

services that rise to their aspirations and fulfill their diverse needs in a constantly evolving business ecosystem. It also reflects our vision to be a domestic market leader and cement our influential role in supporting our national economy and achieving sustainable development."

It is worth noting that this MoU

marks a notable milestone for KIB in its strategy for expanding its digital services and fortifying its capacity for developing advanced digital payment solutions, confirming its commitment to meeting its customers' needs in the commercial sector and offering them an exceptional banking experience.

## Ukraine's steel industry struggles amid war and potential trade war

US steel tariffs could cost Ukraine \$58 million

ZAPORIZHZHIA, Feb 17, (AP): The steel mill in a partially occupied region of Ukraine is a dystopian maze of flames, chutes and tentacled pipes, vast enough to be a small city. Thunderous blazes of sparks flash above the open furnaces where workers smelt iron ore into streams of molten metal day and night.

The Zaporizhstal Iron and Steelworks, one of Ukraine's largest steel plants, lies in the country's industrial east, where Russia's 3-year invasion of its neighbor threatens to throttle production at any moment. Daily battles unfold along a front line 40 kilometers (25 miles) away as the plant churns out materials for military equipment and for foreign manufacturers to use in cars, appliances, and construction.

"Morale is not as high as it was before. We are pretty tired here," plant supervisor Serhii Zhyvotchenko said, reflecting on the hardships. "But there is no way to go back; the only way is forward." Last week, though, a second war came to the doorstep of the hulking factory complex: the possible trade war that U.S. President Donald Trump has provoked since returning to office four weeks ago. Trump imposed tariffs of at least 25% on all imported steel and aluminum, a decision that could hurt an essential sector of Ukraine's battered economy.

Ukrainian government officials and business leaders were shocked by Trump's Feb. 10 executive order, which underscored Ukraine's growing precarity in relation to its most important Western ally. The president maintains that imposing a variety of tariffs will level the playing field in international trade and make U.S. factories more competitive.

The steel industry's share of Ukraine's gross domestic product has dropped by almost half since Russian troops entered the country, and steel exports are substantially below pre-war levels. The Ukrainian Steel Association warned that if the U.S. import duties take effect as planned on March 12, it would cost the weakened industry 2.4 billion hryvnias (\$58 million) in revenue and the government 1 billion hryvnias (\$24 million) in taxes a year.

The tariff order was not the only action by the president or his administration to cause alarm in Kyiv last week. Trump signaled changing winds in U.S. policy by having a direct call with Russian President Vladimir Putin, whom former President Joe Biden and other Western leaders had tried to isolate since Putin sent troops into Ukraine.

Trump also said that he would "probably" meet in person with the Russian leader in the near future, heightening concerns that Kyiv would be left out of or undermined in any ceasefire talks. Comments by both the president and U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth rejecting NATO member-

ship for Ukraine further reinforced the fear that the country no longer had Washington in its corner.

Earlier this month, Trump indicated that he wanted to gain access to Ukraine's rare earth materials as a condition for continued U.S. support in the country's defense against Russia. Ukrainian Economy Minister Yulia Svyrydenko expressed readiness to negotiate with U.S. officials to preserve access to the American steel market.

Ukraine hopes to get an exemption until March 2026 for steel products made in Ukraine, as well as for European Union products made from steel semi-finished Ukrainian steel. The crux of Kyiv's argument is that the total value of steel supplied to the U.S. from Ukraine directly and via processing in the EU amounts to only 0.81% of total U.S. steel imports and cannot reasonably threaten U.S. industry.

"Maintaining the tariff exemption for Ukrainian steel, including products made in the EU from Ukrainian steel, provides essential support to Ukraine as it continues to resist unprovoked military aggression from Russia," the Ukrainian Steel Association said in a statement. "The exemption enables Ukrainian steel exporters to sustain their operations, contribute to the national budget and support the broader Ukrainian economy." At the Zaporizhstal plant in southeast Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region, smelting iron ore is the first step in a process that culminates in millions of tons of cast iron and steel getting shipped abroad.

Zhyvotchenko approaches the colossal mouth of the blast furnace as if it were a dragon's lair. A gust of oxygen raises the heat to nearly 2,000 degrees Celsius (3,632 degrees Fahrenheit). Workers in full protective gear appear like medieval knights, guiding a luminous flow of liquid steel.

For him and other employees, every day since Russia's full-scale invasion has been a test to produce more with less. The Zaporizhstal complex is operating at 75% capacity and with 12% fewer personnel after many workers were drafted into the Ukrainian army or left the country, according to the plant's owner, international mining and metals company Metinvest Group.

Metinvest lost control of two other steel plants when Russian soldiers occupied the city of Mariupol after a months-long siege in 2022. Russian gains recently cost the company an important coal mine in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk region.

Metinvest suspended operations at the Pokrovska mine and evacuated workers as Russian troops advanced last month. Coking coal is another essential ingredient in steel production. To keep the Zaporizhstal mill running, Metinvest must import 1 million metric tons (1.1 U.S. tons) of coal a year from Europe and the U.S., plant general manager Taras Shevchenko said.

The grinding war already has brought other challenges, including soaring energy costs due to relentless attacks on Ukraine's energy grid. Blockades and bombs disrupted trade routes. Complex export logistics required Metinvest to shift its focus from serving Asia and the Middle East to seeking customers in Europe. It was a painful process, Shevchenko said.

### Continued from Page 9

#### Investing in Educating Generations

The founders of HEI Schools Kuwait, Aisha and Hind Al-Sanad, emphasized that the exhibition aims to promote environmental awareness among children by utilizing the arts as an effective educational tool. They explained that the exhibition was not merely a space to showcase children's artwork made from recycled materials but also a platform to integrate sustainability concepts into education in an engaging and interactive manner. They further highlighted that sustainability is a core value at HEI Schools, seamlessly embedded into the educational curriculum to ensure it becomes an integral part of children's daily learning experience.

HEI Schools were built on the renowned Finnish educational model, recognized as one of the world's leading education systems, and known for its emphasis on interactive and creative learning. The schools aim to cultivate a conscious and responsible generation through comprehensive educational programs that cater to the individual needs of children while instilling the principles of innovation, critical thinking and social responsibility. Sustainability is seamlessly integrated into various activities and initiatives, making it an essential part of the learning experience.

Aisha and Hind Al-Sanad expressed their pride in the collaboration and extended their gratitude to Warba Bank for being the main sponsor of the event and for its invaluable support of the initiative. They also thanked The Avenues for hosting the exhibition and for its key role in providing plastic materials that fueled the children's creativity in their artistic works.

Additionally, they conveyed their appreciation to Alarfaj Holding for its significant contribution in supplying plastic materials and actively

participating in the workshops, where the company's team helped educate children about sustainability through an engaging and interactive approach.

Aisha and Hind Al-Sanad also extended their gratitude to the companies and institutions that played a pivotal role in the event's success, including Kuwait Sailing School, Athar Unity, Dr. Ghassan Al-Othman, Lina Hijazi, and the Scientific Center. Each contributed by providing renowned experts and organizing workshops, where these specialists shared their knowledge and experiences with participants. These initiatives aimed to instill sustainability principles in children and deepen younger generations' understanding of environmental preservation.

They emphasized that this fruitful collaboration reflects the shared commitment of all parties to advancing sustainable development goals and building a better future for generations to come.

#### A Firm Commitment to the Community

Warba Bank is one of the leading Islamic banks that has achieved remarkable success in a short period by focusing on innovative digital banking services for individuals and businesses. It is also one of the local banks with the largest number of shareholders, strengthening its close ties with all segments of society.

This success underscores the bank's continuous commitment to building a financial future that aligns with customers' aspirations while balancing tradition with a forward-looking vision. Warba Bank remains dedicated to supporting cultural and educational initiatives that contribute to a brighter tomorrow, reflecting its commitment to social responsibility and its role in enriching the local community through innovation and environmental awareness.

**About The Avenues**  
Since its opening in 2007, The Av-

enues has set the standard for modern architectural design, becoming Kuwait's premier destination for shopping, entertainment, and lifestyle. As the largest retail and leisure complex in Kuwait and the region, The Avenues features 12 distinct areas inspired by both modern and classic architectural styles, including First Avenue, Second Avenue, Prestige, Grand Avenue, Soko, The Mall, The Market, Arcades, Grand Plaza, Electra, The Forum, and The Gardens. Hosting a diverse range of international and local brands, as well as an extensive selection of dining options, The Avenues offers visitors a unique and immersive shopping and entertainment experience.

#### Shared Mission and Goals

HEI Schools believe that education extends beyond the classroom, encompassing the development of social and environmental awareness in children. The schools aim to inspire the next generation to become future leaders within their communities. Through its partnership with Warba Bank, HEI Schools seeks to create a positive and sustainable impact, aligning with Kuwait's vision for sustainable development.

Over the past months, children have taken part in intensive workshops led by sustainability experts and renowned artists. These sessions provided them with the opportunity to repurpose discarded materials into creative artworks that reflect their understanding of sustainability principles.

The exhibition was preceded by a series of in-depth workshops conducted during October and November, where children engaged with sustainability specialists and prominent artists. These unique creations are now showcased as part of the exhibition, emphasizing the importance of integrating art with education to foster environmental awareness and cultivate creative thinking skills among younger generations.

### Credit & prepaid cards unlock 15% off airfare

## Burgan Bank unveils exclusive year-long discount with Turkish Airlines

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: In a new effort to elevate customers' banking experience, Burgan Bank revealed its latest partnership with Turkish Airlines, offering all Burgan credit and prepaid card users a 15% discount on the base fare for all one-way and roundtrip flights from Kuwait to any destination worldwide throughout 2025. This comes as part of the Bank's robust mission to deliver excellent customer experience and its committed strategy for adding value to customers' everyday card purchases, ensuring its cards remain a top-of-wallet choice.

"Everything can be made easier and more exciting with enough understanding of our customers' needs and lifestyles and the right partners, and there's no better way to ground this in action than through our wide range of bank cards," said Mr. Manaf Al-Menaifi, Acting General Manager - Retail Banking at Burgan Bank. "From business trips to family vacations, many Kuwaitis have an affinity to travel. That's why, as a Bank that is 'Driven by You' and as a trusted financial partner, we spare no effort to col-



Burgan Bank partners with Turkish Airlines for 15% flight discount.

laborate with the best service providers in the travel industry to grant our cardholders access to an exclusive world of travel luxury and ease."

Until December 31, 2025, customers can avail this exclusive 15% discount by entering the promo code BURGAN2025 upon checkout - valid for multiple-time use - conditioned that their Turkish Airline flight is purchased using a Burgan credit or prepaid card. It is worth noting that the promo-

tion does not apply to outbound flights on March 26-30, and June 4-7, as well as inbound flights on March 30-April 2, June 7-10, and August 10-25.

In addition to Burgan's latest partnership with Turkish Airlines, the Bank offers avid travelers among its customers numerous opportunities to elevate their banking and travel experiences by using Burgan credit and prepaid cards.

### Winklevoss & Coinbase CEOs take aim at former SEC officials

## Crypto industry pushes for swift legislative action in Washington

WASHINGTON, Feb 17, (AP): When the Trump administration's crypto czar, David Sacks, recently held a news conference to announce a new congressional working group to advance cryptocurrency regulation, many digital asset enthusiasts were unimpressed and underwhelmed.

"There were a lot of people on X who felt like this wasn't, you know, a mind-blowing announcement," Sacks said on a podcast a few days later, referring to the social media outlet formerly known as Twitter. But Sacks said having the White House and key members of Congress committed to passing key crypto legislation in the next year, possibly within six months, was worth celebrating. "We've never had that before, so that is pretty monumental," he said.

Sacks' defensiveness highlights a new reality in Washington: After spending heavily to help elect Trump and other crypto-friendly lawmakers, the industry is emboldened, impatient and eager to cement its influence in politics and mainstream financial systems.

"Time is critical," Ji Hun Kim, president and acting CEO at the Crypto Council for Innovation said at a recent House committee hearing titled: "A Golden Age of Digital Assets: Charting a Path Forward."

The crypto industry has scored some early wins since Trump took office, including the repeal of an accounting rule by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission and an executive order by the president directing a working group to study and propose changes to crypto regulations as well as the possible formation of a strategic government reserve of cryptocurrencies within 180 days.

As the industry calls for more substantive action, some crypto companies are looking to exert their influence by trying to punish old enemies.

Tyler Winklevoss, co-founder of the crypto exchange Gemini, said his firm won't hire any MIT graduates as punishment for the school rehiring former SEC Chairman Gary Gensler to teach classes.

"Not even interns for our summer intern program," Winklevoss said on X. The move came after Coinbase's CEO announced his firm wouldn't work with any law firms that hired any of Gensler's former deputies who'd committed "bad deeds" toward the crypto industry. The Gensler SEC was the most aggressive financial regulator in trying to police the crypto industry.

Congress has held several hearings in recent weeks where crypto supporters have aired grievances over how they were treated during the Biden administration, particularly around how regulators allegedly forced banks to cut ties with crypto companies.

And new Republican leadership at the SEC has criticized the agency's past performance under Gensler and promised a new day, while making it clear that day won't be tomorrow.

"It took us a long time to get into this mess," SEC Commissioner Hester Peirce, who is leading a new cryp-

to task force, said in a lengthy statement on the agency's website. "Please be patient."

The SEC recently asked a federal court to pause ongoing litigation against Binance, the world's largest cryptocurrency exchange, because leadership is now rethinking previous enforcement actions.

Sacks and crypto-friendly lawmakers expect two pieces of legislation to become law. One would set regulations and reserve requirements for issuers of stablecoins, a type of crypto that's exploded in popularity and whose value is typically tied to the dollar or other traditional currencies.

The other piece of legislation aims to set clear rules for how crypto exchanges and other companies operate, as well as decide which digital assets are regulated as securities, like stocks, and which should be considered commodities, like gold or oil. Securities generally face stricter regulations.

Similar legislation has stalled in past years but many in the crypto industry expect broad, bipartisan support for passage this time. That's due in part to the heavy political spending by the crypto industry. Fairshake, the crypto super PAC that was one of the biggest spenders in last year's election, said recently it has already amassed a huge war chest for next year's midterms. One of the crypto industry's biggest wins last year was helping knock off former Sen. Sherrod Brown, a Democrat from Ohio and crypto critic who led the Senate's banking committee.

"The Democrats have gotten the message," said crypto investor Anthony Scaramucci, who briefly served as communications director during Trump's first term, "They don't want to be in the 2026 campaign having a crypto army against them."

Just like crypto prices, the industry's popularity and influence are prone to wild upswings and falls. A few years ago, the Super Bowl was packed with celebrities doing commercials for crypto companies and mogul Sam Bankman-Fried had easy access to the top halls of power.

That popularity and influence waned after Bankman-Fried's company collapsed amid massive criminal fraud, a market meltdown and other scandals -- before roaring back with Trump's victory.

But while showing a united front for the election, debates over the crypto legislation and other policy proposals risk exposing fault lines among the industry's many different tribes and strong and eccentric personalities.

The CEO of Ripple, for example, caused waves when he said he'd like to see a U.S. government reserve of crypto include multiple digital assets rather than bitcoin, the world's most popular cryptocurrency. The idea is a nonstarter for many bitcoin diehards.

And a new report from JPMorgan highlighted how some of the proposals in the stablecoin legislation related to how those coins hold reserves could pose a "significant challenge" to Tether, the world's largest stablecoin.

## Marvel's latest hit sets 2025 record

### 'Brave New World' dominates weekend box office

LOS ANGELES, Feb 17, (AP): "Captain America: Brave New World" infused some blockbuster cash into the North American box office, bringing in \$88.5 million in ticket sales over the weekend, according to studio estimates Sunday. The Walt Disney Co. release is by far the biggest opener of 2025 and the company predicts it will hit \$100 million domestically and \$192.4 globally by the end of Monday's Presidents' Day holiday.

It's Marvel's first major release since "Deadpool & Wolverine" broke records last summer and re-energized a Marvel fanbase that some worried was weakening after the poor showing for "The Marvels."

Playing in 4,105 locations in the US and Canada, "Brave New World" is also a major transition for the "Captain America" brand: Anointing Anthony Mackie's Sam Wilson as the new Cap, officially taking over from Chris Evans, who played the character for almost a decade. Harrison Ford co-stars as the US President who transforms into the Red Hulk.

But "Brave New World," directed by Julius Onah, had

a bit of a handicap going into the weekend: Poor reviews, though superhero movies can soar without the stamp of approval from critics. The film is currently sitting at 51% "rotten" on Rotten Tomatoes. It's not the worst in the Marvel Cinematic Universe - "Eternals" has a 47% rating and "Ant-Man and The Wasp: Quantumania" has a 46% - but the latest film is definitely on the very low end of the spectrum.

In his review for The Associated Press, Mark Kennedy wrote that it is, "a highly processed, empty calorie, regrettable candy of a movie."

Audiences were more generous in their opinions. The "verified audience score" from Rotten Tomatoes was 80% and its CinemaScore was a B-. Exit polls showed that men made up 63% of the opening weekend audience.

The bar for biggest opening of the year wasn't terribly high: "Dog Man" held the title for two weeks with its \$36 million launch.

And "Brave New World's" showing is the middle range for an MCU film. Not accounting for inflation, it sits between "Guardians of the Galaxy" and "Thor: The Dark World."

It also cost significantly less than many of the big budget Marvel movies, with a reported production price tag of \$180 million, excluding the millions spent on marketing and promotion.

After only one Marvel movie in 2024, "Brave New World" is the first of three major theatrical releases set for 2025. It is to be followed by "Thunderbolts (asterisk)" in May and "The Fantastic Four: First Steps" in July.

"The superhero genre has taken a hit over the past few years, but audiences still have a huge interest in seeing them on the big screen," said Paul Dergarabedian, the senior media analyst for Comscore.

Second place at this week's box office went to "Paddington in Peru," the third installment in the beloved franchise, which finally opened in North America this weekend. Released by Sony, it earned an estimated \$13 million and should hit \$16 million by Monday. The StudioCanal film opened in the United Kingdom in early November 2024 and went into the weekend with \$104 million from its international run.



Julius Onah, (from left), Anthony Mackie, and Danny Ramirez attend the special screening of 'Captain America: Brave New World' on Thursday, Feb. 13, in New York. (AP)

## Awards

'The Brutalist' takes directing and acting prizes

# 'Conclave' wins best picture at BAFTAs



Michelle Monaghan



Selena Gomez



Saoirse Ronan



Georgina Chapman



Demi Moore poses for photographers upon arrival at the 78th British Academy Film Awards, BAFTA's, in London, Sunday, Feb. 16, 2025. (AP)

LONDON, Feb 17, (AP): Papal thriller "Conclave" won four prizes including best picture on Sunday at the 78th British Academy Film Awards, where genre-bending musical "Emilia Pérez" proved that it's still an awards contender despite a multipronged backlash that looked to have dented its chances.

At a ceremony where no film dominated, "The Brutalist" equaled the awards tally of "Conclave," scooping four trophies, including best director for Brady Corbet and best actor for Adrien Brody. Mikey Madison won the best actress prize for Brooklyn tragicomedy "Anora."

"Conclave," which stars Ralph Fiennes as a cardinal corraling conniving clergy as they elect a new pope, beat "Anora," "The Brutalist," "Emilia Pérez" and Bob Dylan biopic "A Complete Unknown" to the top prize. "Conclave" was also named outstanding British film and took trophies for editing and adapted screenplay.

Supporting performer prizes went to Kieran Culkin for "A Real Pain" and Zoe Saldana for "Emilia Pérez," which also won the award for best film not in the English language.

Karla Sofia Gascón, who stars as the titular transgender ex-cartel boss in "Emilia Pérez," was a best-actress nominee but did not attend the ceremony. Gascón has withdrawn from promoting the film, which has 13 Oscar nominations, amid controversy over her social media posts disparaging Muslims, George Floyd and diversity at the Oscars.

### Speech

The film's director, Jacques Audiard, has condemned those comments, but in an acceptance speech thanked Gascón along with her co-stars Saldana and Selena Gomez.

"I am deeply proud of what we have all achieved together," he said.

Stars including Cynthia Erivo, Hugh Grant, Ariana Grande, Lupita Nyong'o, Timothée Chalamet and Saoirse Ronan walked the red carpet at London's Royal Festival Hall for the awards, known as BAFTAs. The British prizes often provide clues about who will triumph at Hollywood's Academy Awards on March 2, in an unusually hard-to-call awards season.

They also have a distinctly British accent. The ceremony kicked off with its kilt-wearing host, Scottish actor David Tennant, leading the audience in a rousing singalong of The Proclaimers' anthem "I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)."

Madison won the female acting trophy for her powerhouse performance as an exotic dancer entangled with a Russian oligarch's son in "Anora." She beat Gascón, Demi Moore for body-horror film "The Substance," Ronan for "The Outrun," Erivo for "Wicked" and Mairianne Jean-Baptiste for "Hard Truths."

In her acceptance speech, Madison sent a message to the sex worker community.

"You deserve respect and human decency. I will always be a friend and an ally and I implore others to do the same," she said.

Brody beat competition from



Edward Berger poses with the outstanding British film award for 'Conclave' at the 78th British Academy Film Awards, BAFTA's, in London, Sunday, Feb. 16. (AP)



Jesse Eisenberg poses with the best supporting actor award he received on behalf of Kieran Culkin for 'A Real Pain.'

Fiennes, Chalamet, who plays the young Dylan in "A Complete Unknown," Grant for the horror film "Heretic," Colman Domingo for prison drama "Sing Sing" and Sebastian Stan for his portrayal of a young Donald Trump in "The Apprentice."

Brody, who plays an architect in the postwar United States, said "The Brutalist" carried a powerful message for our divided times.

"The Brutalist" also won prizes for its cinematography and musical score.

Saldana won for her role as a lawyer who helps the title character in "Emilia Pérez" transition to a woman and out of a life of crime. She called the film "the creative



Adrien Brody poses with the award for leading actor for 'The Brutalist.' (AP)



Mikey Madison poses with the leading actress award for 'Anora.' (AP)



David Jonsson poses with the EE Rising Star Award. (AP)

challenge of a lifetime."

"A Real Pain," about mismatched cousins on a trip to explore their roots, won the BAFTA for best original screenplay, as well as Culkin's acting award.

"I'd like to share this with my wife, who didn't come because she didn't think I'd win," quipped writer-director Jesse Eisenberg, who also co-starred in the film.

Claymation caper "Wallace and Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl" won awards for best animated feature and best family and children's film.

Sci-fi epic "Dune: Part Two" won prizes for sound and visual ef-



Peter Straughan poses with the adapted screenplay award for 'Conclave.' (AP)



Warwick Davis poses with the BAFTA fellowship award. (AP)

"Star, I don't know," he said. "But rising, I guess."

The prize for best British debut went to Rich Peppiatt, writer-director of Irish-language hip-hop drama "Kneecap."

"Willow" and "Return of the Jedi" actor Warwick Davis received the academy's top honor, the BAFTA Fellowship, for his screen career and work to create a more inclusive film industry.

The 3-foot, 6-inch (1.1-meter) actor founded a talent agency for actors under 5 feet tall, because, he said, "short actors weren't known for their talent, just their height."

"This is the best thing that's ever happened to me - and I've been in 'Star Wars,'" Davis said as he accepted his award.

This awards season has been clouded by last month's devastating Los Angeles wildfires, and BAFTA chairwoman Sara Putt sent a message of strength to everyone affected.

The event was without a dash of royal glamour this year. Neither Prince William, who is honorary president of the British film academy, nor his wife Kate attended the ceremony, which coincided with school holidays for their three children.

William, 42, sent a video message, recorded during a visit to meet students at the London Screen Academy on Wednesday.

During the visit, the heir to the throne discussed his own viewing habits, saying he'd watched World War II drama "Darkest Hour" and had begun postapocalyptic TV drama "The Last of Us." He said he found it "quite full on" and didn't make it to the end.

## Winners of the 2025 BAFTAs

LONDON, Feb 17, (AP): Winners of the 2025 British Academy Film Awards, announced Sunday:

- Film: "Conclave"
- British Film: "Conclave"
- Director: Brady Corbet, "The Brutalist"
- Actor: Adrien Brody, "The Brutalist"
- Actress: Mikey Madison, "Anora"
- Supporting Actor: Kieran Culkin, "A Real Pain"
- Supporting Actress: Zoe Saldana, "Emilia Pérez"
- Rising Star (voted for by the public): David Jonsson
- Outstanding British Debut: "Kneecap" director Rich Peppiatt

- Original Screenplay: Jesse Eisenberg, "A Real Pain"
- Adapted Screenplay: Peter Straughan, "Conclave"
- Film Not in the English Language: "Emilia Pérez"
- Musical Score: Daniel Blumberg, "The Brutalist"
- Cinematography: Lol Crawley, "The Brutalist"
- Editing: "Conclave"
- Production Design: "Wicked"
- Costume Design: "Wicked"
- Sound: "Dune: Part Two"
- Casting: "Anora"
- Visual Effects: "Dune: Part Two"

- Makeup and Hair: "The Substance"
- Animated Film: "Wallace and Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl"
- British Short Film: "Rock, Paper, Scissors"
- British Short Animation: "Wander to Wonder"
- Children's and Family Film: "Wallace and Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl"
- Documentary: "Super/Man: The Christopher Reeve Story"
- Outstanding British contribution to cinema: MediCinema
- BAFTA Fellowship: Warwick Davis

## Iconic R&amp;B group stays true to their sound after 3 decades

## Jagged Edge's new album celebrates love, career longevity

NEW YORK, Feb. 17, (AP) — When Jagged Edge first formed in their teens, they realized the sum of their group would be greater than its individual parts — an understanding that's been the main ingredient of their success for nearly three decades.

One of the most iconic groups of modern R&B, Jagged Edge — Richard Wingo, Kyle Norman, lead singers (and identical twins) Brian and Brandon Casey — is back Friday with their 11th studio album, "All Original Parts: Vol. 1." The title of the 15-track project points to the group's solidarity: They've never broken up or switched original members.

"The love is actually genuinely real. We really care about each other's well-being," Wingo said. "I guess a lot of groups, they really didn't have that. Love will keep you together."

The "Where the Party At" artists say "Vol. 1" is the first of three they plan to release this year. But the men behind classic songs like "Promise" and "He Can't Love You" say while the sonics and even subject matter of R&B have changed since their first hit



Brian Casey, (from left), Kyle Norman, Brandon Casey, Richard Wingo of Jagged Edge pose for a portrait on Friday, Feb. 7, 2025, in New York. (AP)

single in 1997, they're still committed to telling stories about romance and relationships.

"It's almost like love ain't cool no more. Well, I don't believe that. We don't feel like that," said Brian Casey.

"Love is always going to be cool."

Their 1999 song "Let's Get Married," after all, is still nearly impossible to avoid at weddings — the original, a ceremony mainstay, and the remix packing dance floors during recep-

tions.

Launching a tour in March celebrating the 25th anniversary of their double platinum "J.E. Heartbreak" album, the legendary group spoke with The Associated Press about sacrifice, creating timeless hits, and their musical impact. The conversation has been edited for brevity and clarity.

**AP:** Most groups seem to break up at some point. What's allowed you to stay together?

**Brian Casey:** That's the benefit of us being actually four guys who really mess with each other. ... We'll split a couple dollars here and there when we got to, to keep this together. We'll take the hits to keep giving the fans what they said they fell in love with. ... What we're able to do in turn is worth that split. It's worth that sacrifice.

**AP:** R&B has drastically changed since you came on the scene with "I Gotta Be." How have you navigated the changes?

**Brandon Casey:** Number one: staying true to Jagged Edge. That's the first thing because that's the vehicle, right? So, we never want to go too far from

what our fans love us from. But we're actually musicians, so it's hard to just stay in one little place. ... Our sound is as eclectic as it's ever been.

**AP:** When you look over the longevity of your career, your love songs are timeless. What do you remember about first entering the industry?

**Brian Casey:** We came up in an era of "Bump n' Grind," "Freak n' You" and "Freak Me," those are the biggest songs of all time at that time, it seemed like. So, we knew it would be a conscious decision for us to be the age that we were making songs talking about things like getting married. But we've never been afraid of that challenge, number one. So, I think of that. But I also think of how taking that route allowed us to be in the same room with some of our heroes who now looked at us as peers. And that was meeting Luther Vandross, meeting Prince, and them having positive things to say about our music.

**AP:** Do you all feel you get the credit and recognition you deserve?

**Brandon Casey:** We get asked things like that a lot. So, I guess it starts to make us think, "Do we?" It's

been such a layered experience, right? It's so many things to be proud of.

We don't have nothing that we've built without our fans. And for us, that's the most important, most heartwarming, gratifying thing, that it's somebody who loves you for what you do. ... We're one of the few groups who get onstage and them girls scream like we're taking our clothes off, and we never take no clothes off. They scream like we got routines — we don't do none of that, right? We always come in the arena like, "This is just us. This is who we are." And they love us for that. And it's no feeling that is even close.

**AP:** Do you understand the impact your songs have had on fans and music?

**Brian Casey:** I don't know that you can ever understand it while you're still in the middle of it. ... But I will say, when you meet certain people, it's heartwarming and it gives you a sense of what that impact is, you know what I mean? And it's not until you get to talk to people who are looking at it from the outside-in that you realize, "Man, we did an all right job."

## Film



From left: Wen Qi, film director Vivian Qu and Liu Haocun, pose at the photo call for the film 'Girls on Wire' at the International Film Festival, Berlinale, in Berlin, Monday, Feb. 17. (AP)

Rankin blends Iranian New Wave with Winnipeg reality

## 'Universal Language' merges 2 worlds

By Jake Coyle

It's not unusual for a city to double for another metropolis in movies. New Yorkers have long been able to spot when Toronto has been substituted for the Big Apple. Matthew Rankin, though, has gone more than a step, or maybe 85 steps, further.

His "Universal Language" takes place in Winnipeg, Manitoba, but the culture is entirely Iranian. Farsi is the spoken tongue. At Tim Hortons, tea is served from samovars. It's as if we've been knocked over the head and woken up in some snowy, Canadian version of an Abbas Kiarostami film.

And in Rankin's surreal and enchantingly discombobulating film, that's more or less the case. No reason is ever stated for the strange, deadpan fusion of Winnipeg reality and Iranian New Wave cinema. But there's that title. If cinema is a universal language, it's never been more elastically employed, bridging worlds 6,000 miles apart for a singular kind of movie dream, like what Rankin might have spun in his head while drifting off to sleep on a Manitoba winter night while Kiarostami's "Where Is the Friend's House?" played on TV.

It's both an extremely exact homage to the films of Kiarostami, Jafar Panahi and other Iranian masters, and a comic lament for how distant their movies might feel for a Winnipegian director. Rankin has joked that "Universal Language" brings together the rich poetry



This image released by Oscilloscope Laboratories shows Rojina Esmaili in a scene from the film 'Universal Language.' (AP)

of Iranian filmmaking and a Canadian cinema that emerged "out of 50 years of discount furniture commercials."

The gags start immediately, with an opening title logo for "A Presentation of the Winnipeg Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young People" — a twist on the Iranian institute that produced '70s classics, like Kiarostami's "Koker" trilogy.

Like those films, Rankin's is framed with kids. In the first scene, a displeased French teacher (Mani Soleymanlou) chastises his young students for speaking Persian. One child, an aspiring comedian, is dressed as Groucho Marx. Another says a turkey

stole his glasses. Another wants to be a Winnipeg tour guide. The teacher asks them all to read from their book. In unison they read: "We are lost forever in this world."

"Universal Language," scripted by Rankin, Ila Firouzabadi and Pirouz Nemati, lightly juggles a handful of characters we intermittently check in with. That includes an adult tour guide (Pirouz Nemati), whose attractions include the site of "the Great Parallel Parking Incident of 1958."

There are also two girls (Rojina Esmaili and Saba Vahedyousefi) who find a banknote frozen in ice. A character named Matthew Rankin (played

by Rankin) is traveling to Winnipeg by bus to visit his ailing mother after departing his bureaucratic job in Montreal. Oh, and there are turkeys. Lots and lots of turkeys.

Rankin's film, his second following the also surreal "Twentieth Century" (2019), is propelled less by narrative thrust than the abiding oddity of its basic construction, and the movie's slavish devotion to seeing it through without a wink. As the movie moves along in formally composed shots, something wistful takes shape about the possibilities of connection and of insurmountable distances.

I've twice now seen "Universal Language," a prize-winner in Cannes' Directors Fortnight last year that was shortlisted for the best international Oscar, and I still barely believe it exists. Rankin's movie, in melding two worlds, risks taking place in neither, of letting its cinephile concept snuff out anything authentic. But while I'm not, at the moment, begging for a subsequent French New Wave movie set in Saskatchewan, I've not gone long without thinking about "Universal Language." I guess Rankin's movie dream has filtered into those of my own.

"Universal Language," an Oscilloscope Laboratories release, is not rated by the Motion Picture Association. In Farsi and French. Running time: 89 minutes. Three and a half stars out of four. (AP)

examined," said attorney Carl Arnold, who is leading Davis' defense.

On the night of Sept. 7, 1996, Shakur was in a BMW being driven by Death Row Records founder Marion "Suge" Knight. They were waiting at a red light when a white Cadillac pulled up next to them and gunfire erupted.

Davis, an ex-gang leader who is accused of orchestrating Shakur's killing near the Las Vegas Strip, has pleaded not guilty to first-degree murder and has been jailed since his September 2023 arrest.

Long known to investigators as one of four suspects identified early in the investigation, he is the only one to be charged.

Arnold has argued that Davis never should have been charged because of immunity agreements that Davis says he reached years ago with federal and local prosecutors while living in California. (AP)

## Television

## Surprising cameos

## 'SNL' marks 50 years with laughter, music

LOS ANGELES, Feb. 17, (AP) — Paul Simon and Sabrina Carpenter duetted on Simon's "Homeward Bound" to open the show, five-decade "Saturday Night Live" luminary Steve

Martin delivered the monologue, and Paul McCartney gave an epic closing to a 50th anniversary special celebrating the sketch institution that was overflowing with famous former cast members, superstar hosts and legendary guests.

The 83-year-old Simon has been essential to "SNL" since its earliest episodes in 1975, and told the 25-year-old pop sensation of the moment Carpenter that he first performed "Homeward Bound" on "SNL" in 1976.

"I was not born then," Carpenter said, getting a laugh. "And neither were my parents," she added, getting a bigger laugh.

McCartney closed with the rarely performed song cycle from the Beatles' "Abbey Road," "Golden Slumbers/Carry That Weight/The End," with its wistful ending, "the love you take, is equal to the love you make."

Lil Wayne and Miley Cyrus were among the night's other musical guests, though the show's musical legacy also had its own night with a Radio City Music Hall concert on Friday.

"SNL50: The Anniversary Celebration" aired live from New York, of course, on NBC and Peacock. The pop culture juggernaut has launched the careers of generations of comedians including Eddie Murphy, Kristen Wiig and Will Ferrell, who all appeared in early sketches.

And the evening included epic cameos that included Meryl Streep, Jack Nicholson and Keith Richards.

## Monologue

Martin, one of the shows most prolific hosts and guests since the first season in 1975, tried to keep it current in the monologue even on a backward-looking night.

Martin said when the show's creator Lorne Michaels only told him he'd be doing the monologue, "I was actually vacationing on a friend's boat down on the Gulf of Steve Martin."

He was joined by former "SNL" luminaries and frequent hosts Martin Short and John Mulaney, who looked at the star-studded crowd full of former hosts in the same Studio 8H at 30 Rockefeller Plaza that has been the show's longtime home.

"I see some of the most difficult people I have ever met in my entire life," Mulaney said. "Over the course of 50 years, 894 people have hosted 'Saturday Night Live,' and it amazes me that only two of them have committed murder."

Later, on the night's "Weekend Update," anchor Colin Hanks said there are so many former hosts and musical guests that wanted to see the show that many had to be seated in a neighboring studio and some had to watch "from the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn" as a photo of Sean "Diddy" Combs appeared.

Martin took a jab at the always-difficult-to-wrangle Bill Murray in his monologue.

"We wanted to make sure that Bill would be here tonight," Martin said, "so we didn't invite him."

Murray appeared on "Weekend Update" to rank the show's anchors since they began with Chevy Chase. He poked at the whiteness of the group by first ranking its Black anchors, a list of just one, current co-anchor Michael Che.

The extravaganza came after months of celebrations of "Saturday Night Live," which premiered Oct. 11, 1975, with an original cast that included John Belushi, Chase and Gilda Radner.

It's become appointment television over the years as the show has skewered presidents, politics and pop culture.

## Honor

"It is a honor and a thrill to be hosting weekend update for the 50th and if it was up to our president final season of SNL," Jost said.

The show had its typical ending, with all involved looking exhilarated and exhausted on the studio stage. This night it was so crowded with luminaries it looked like it might break. Led by Short, they all applauded in tribute to Michaels, who created the show and has run it for 45 of its 50 years.

Alec Baldwin, the show's most frequent host with 17 stints, appeared to introduce an evening of commercial parodies, seven months after his trial was halted and an involuntary manslaughter charge was dropped in the shooting of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins.

Aubrey Plaza made one of her first public appearances since the January death of her husband when she introduced Cyrus and Howard's performance.

The 87-year-old Nicholson was once a constant in the front rows of the Oscars and Los Angeles Laker games, but is rarely seen out anymore. He introduced his "Anger Management" co-star Adam Sandler, who sang in his signature style about the show's history. He gave a roll-call of cast members, giving special attention to several who have died, including his friends Chris Farley and MacDonald along with Radner, Jan Hooks and Phil Hartman.

He ended with, "six years of our boy Farley, five of our buddy Norm." The show didn't have a formal "in memoriam" section, though it pretended to when 10-time host Tom Hanks came out somberly to mourn "SNL characters and sketches that have aged horribly."



The SNL50 logo is seen outside the Nasdaq Marketplace in New York's Times Square, Friday, Feb. 14. (AP)

## Variety

**LIMA:** Colombian superstar Shakira canceled her Sunday concert in Lima after being hospitalized with an abdominal condition, the singer said.

Shakira shared a statement on her Instagram and X accounts Sunday afternoon, saying she is currently hospitalized and that doctors informed her she was not in condition to perform.

"I am very sad that I will not be able to take the stage today. I have been deeply emotional and excited about reuniting with my beloved Peruvian audience," she said.

The singer arrived in Peru Friday evening, where she was scheduled to perform Sunday and Monday. The country is the second stop on her Latin American tour, Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran, following two nights in Brazil



Shakira

In her statement, Shakira said she hopes to recover soon. "My plan is to perform this show as soon as possible. My team and the promoter are already working on a new date," she said. (AP)

**LAS VEGAS:** Attorneys for the man suspected of killing rap icon Tupac Shakur want to delay next month's

## KSrelief's program aids over 109,000 people with free prosthetics

# Saudi prosthetic limbs center brings new hope to Ukrainian child

RIYADH, Feb 17, (KUNA): After weeks of evaluation and rehabilitation, the day Matilda had been eagerly anticipating, yet also dreading, finally arrived.

With the assistance of the team, she stood for the first time with both prosthetic limbs in place.

Step by step, she began the journey of regaining her balance, learning to walk again, and reclaiming the life she thought she had lost.

Support extended beyond the physical realm. The specialized team provided crucial psychological support, helping Matilda accept her new body and build her self-confidence.

They diligently trained her on how to use her prosthetic limbs in everyday activities, from walking and running to playing games.

Matilda underwent regular follow-up sessions to ensure a smooth transition and adaptation to her new life with the prosthetics. Gradually, she regained her independence, no longer reliant on others for assistance.

Ukrainian eight-year-old Matilda, confined to a wheel-

chair, entered the prosthetic limbs center affiliated with the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSrelief) in Poland.

The prosthetic limbs and rehabilitation center reflects Saudi Arabia's pioneering role in international humanitarian work.

Recognizing the critical importance of alleviating human suffering and enabling individuals to live dignified lives, the Kingdom, through KSrelief, implements and expands humanitarian and relief projects.

The center prioritizes localizing and improving prosthetic limb services and rehabilitation programs, while also building the capacities of local health institutions to ensure the sustainability of these vital services.

KSrelief adopts a meticulous approach to selecting and classifying beneficiaries for the prosthetic limbs and rehabilitation program.

The selection process relies on lists of amputation patients provided by the Ministry of Health in the respective countries where the project is implemented.

Priority is given to amputation patients resulting from direct war injuries, mines, or the remnants of war, encompassing all age groups, children under the age of 18 suffering from motor disabilities due to amputation or congenital deformities, and other categories, such as individuals injured in traffic accidents or those affected by various diseases.

The program empowers target groups by providing them with the opportunity to reintegrate into society and engage in various activities independently. This enhances their economic, social, and psychological well-being.

Through its four centers, the program offers free, high-quality services to beneficiaries in countries in critical need, including Yemen, Syria, those affected by the earthquake in Türkiye, and those impacted by the Ukrainian war in the Republic of Poland.

The prosthetics and rehabilitation program impacted the lives of not only Matilda but thousands of injured individuals. Since its inception in 2020 through 2024, the

program has provided services to over 109,000 beneficiaries, delivering 298,999 free, high-quality services.

Moreover, 10,851 modern prosthetic and orthotic limbs were manufactured and fitted, 98,612 beneficiaries received rehabilitation services.

According to program statistics, female beneficiaries constituted 33 percent, while males comprised 67 percent. Approximately 24 percent of cases stemmed from pathological injuries, while a significant 76 percent resulted from war injuries, including those caused by mines, war remnants, and unexploded ordnance.

Today, Matilda is no longer the little girl who entered the center confined to a wheelchair. She has transformed into a confident young girl walking independently, her eyes filled with hope as she embraces the future.

Matilda's story is one among countless others that exemplify KSrelief's commitment to embodying the Kingdom's message of support for people in need, wherever they may be.

## NGOs worry about rising infections

# Trump's foreign aid freeze deepens HIV crisis in South Africa, threatening lives

UMZIMKHULU, South Africa, Feb 17, (AP): At a rural village in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province, unemployed 19-year-old Nozuko Majola is trying to figure out if she has enough money for the one-hour ride to collect her much-needed HIV medication, usually delivered to her home that can't be easily reached due to rough, untarred roads.

Majola is one of millions of patients in South Africa affected by US President Donald Trump's global foreign aid freeze, raising worries about HIV patients defaulting on treatment, infection rates going up and eventually a rise in deaths.

In 2024, think tank Human Sciences Research Council released figures showing that Majola's province recorded the second-highest HIV prevalence in the country, at 16%, with at least 1,300 young people estimated to contract the disease every week.

KwaZulu-Natal also had the highest number of people living with HIV in South Africa in 2022, about 1.9 million. The country counts more than 7.5 million people infected with the virus that causes AIDS - more than any other nation.

There are 5.5 million South Africans receiving antiretroviral treatment, whose funding is now in question after Trump suspended the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR. It contributes more than \$400 million a year to South Africa's HIV programs and nongovernmental organizations, about 17% of the total funding, according to the Health Ministry.

Globally, PEPFAR is credited with saving at least 26 million lives since its inception in 2003, according to the UN AIDS agency.

Last week, a federal judge ordered



Unemployed 19-year-old South African Nozuko Majola, sitting in her Umzimkhulu home Tuesday, Nov. 11, 2025, is one of millions of patients in South Africa affected by US President Donald Trump's global foreign aid freeze, raising worries about HIV patients defaulting on treatment. (AP)

the Trump administration to temporarily lift the funding freeze, while the US Embassy in South Africa said PEPFAR projects would resume under a limited waiver. However, aid groups dealing with HIV have already shuttered with closure notices hanging at the entrances and PEPFAR-branded vehicles standing idle, with patients diverted to struggling health facilities.

Most of the PEPFAR funding is channeled through non-governmental organizations, which run programs that complement health care services provided by the government.

For Majola and other HIV patients in the Umzimkhulu region, where unemployment is rife and most people rely on subsistence farming and government welfare grants, the aid freeze

has disrupted their lives.

"Things will be tough around here, and a lot of people will default on their treatment because we really struggle with transport," she said. "The mobile clinics hardly come here."

The freeze has hurt various groups that can no longer provide treatment, causing an influx of patients to already overstretched public facilities. Along with the medication, these programs also allowed health personnel to test HIV patients in far-flung villages, which has been a lifeline for many, especially those afraid to visit public facilities due to the social stigma attached to HIV.

In addition, nearly 15,000 health workers whose salaries are funded through PEPFAR are left wondering if they have lost their livelihoods.

## Food safety, medical devices staff affected

# Trump admin cuts reach FDA employees

WASHINGTON, Feb 17, (AP): The Trump administration's effort to slash the size of the federal workforce reached the Food and Drug Administration this weekend, as recently hired employees who review the safety of food ingredients, medical devices and other products were fired.

Probationary employees across the FDA received notices Saturday evening that their jobs were being eliminated, according to three FDA staffers who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

The total number of positions eliminated was not clear Sunday, but the firings appeared to focus on employees in

the agency's centers for food, medical devices and tobacco products - which includes oversight of electronic cigarettes. It was not clear whether FDA employees who review drugs were exempted.

On Friday, some officials expected the US Department of Health and Human Services to fire 5,200 probationary employees across its agencies, according to an audio recording of a National Institutes of Health department meeting. HHS oversees NIH, FDA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, among other things.

People who spoke with the AP on condition of anonymity on Friday said the number of probationary employees to be laid off at the CDC would total nearly

1,300. But as of early Sunday afternoon, about 700 people had received notices, according to three people who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly. They said none of the CDC layoffs affected the young doctors and researchers who track diseases in what's known as the Epidemic Intelligence Service.

The FDA is headquartered in the Maryland suburbs outside Washington and employs nearly 20,000 people. It's long been a target of newly sworn-in health secretary Robert Kennedy Jr., who last year accused the agency of waging a "war on public health" for not approving unproven treatments such as psychedelics, stem cells and chelation therapy.

## China innovation

### AI pediatrician begins service

BEIJING, Feb 17, (Xinhua): The first case of an artificial intelligence (AI) pediatrician received at Beijing Children's Hospital was an eight-year-old boy who for three weeks had been experiencing persistent tics, which are habitual spasmodic muscle contractions.

A skull base mass was discovered two weeks earlier, presenting a complex medical condition for which diagnostic results across multiple hospitals had proved inconsistent.

Ni Xin, head of the hospital, along with 13 renowned experts from different departments, conducted an in-depth discussion regarding this boy's condition. They concluded that further MRI evaluation was necessary and recommended expediting the completion of the required examinations.

Meanwhile, the AI pediatrician was also hard at work. After engineers input the patient's chief complaints and medical records into the model, the AI pediatrician provided recommendations that closely aligned with those of the expert panel.

This AI pediatrician, believed to be first of its kind in China, has been participating in multidisciplinary consultations for complex cases, pioneering a dual-doctor parallel model that combines an AI pediatrician with multidisciplinary human experts - achieving transformation of the diagnosis and treatment of challenging pediatric conditions.

According to Ni, the AI pediatrician was developed by the hospital in collaboration with multiple technology companies, leveraging the hospital's pediatric medical big model, its health medical innovation applications key laboratory, and its validation platform for this pediatric innovative medical device concept.

This AI system integrates the clinical expertise of over 300 renowned pediatric specialists of the hospital, along with decades of high-quality medical records data from these experts. Through structured clinical reasoning paradigm training, it has established a comprehensive knowledge system covering both common and complex pediatric diseases.

Ni said after its launch on Jan. 18 this year, the AI pediatrician underwent nearly a month of internal testing at the hospital, earning recognition from experts. It officially entered clinical application on Feb. 13.

## Global recognition

### Kuwait's surgical innovation aids ovarian cancer recovery

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17, (KUNA): Kuwait Health Ministry announced, Sunday, a medical breakthrough by specialist in gynecologic and urology surgeon at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital, Dr. Noura Al-Ibrahim, who developed a safer surgical technique for treating advanced ovarian cancer.

A ministry statement said the innovation received a scientific recognition after being published in Gynecologic Oncology Reports; the journal of The Society of Gynecologic Oncology (SGO) in Chicago, Illinois of the United States.

Dr. Al-Ibrahim noted that

ovarian cancer is among the most challenging cancers to treat, often diagnosed in late stages, with surgery being the main part of treatment.

The innovative technique offers a safer approach for managing advanced cases, mainly when the cancer spreads to the intestines, she added.

Getting published in an international medical journal makes this technique accessible to oncology surgeons worldwide, contributing to the advancement in ovarian cancer treatment and offering patients better outcomes, noted Dr. Al-Ibrahim.

## Medical milestone

# Bahrain achieves 1st CRISPR-based sickle cell treatment outside the US

MANAMA, Feb. 17, (Xinhua): Bahrain has achieved a medical milestone by successfully treating a patient with sickle cell disease (SCD) using CRISPR-based gene-editing therapy, Casgevy, the Bahrain Oncology Center said on Sunday.

It marks the first successful treatment of its kind outside the United States, according to the institution.

Casgevy, developed by Vertex Pharmaceuticals and CRISPR Therapeutics, is the world's first licensed therapy to use CRISPR-Cas9 gene-editing technology, for which its discoverers were awarded the 2020 Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

The therapy offers a potential functional cure for SCD and transfusion-dependent beta-thalassemia (TDT)-inherited blood disorders that significantly impact health and life expectancy.

"This milestone exemplifies Bahrain's commitment to integrating global medical innovations into the national healthcare strategy," said Health Minister Jaleela bint Al Sayed Jawad Hasan.

"By fostering partnerships across institutions, we are delivering on our mandate to provide access to life-changing therapies

for all beneficiaries and positioning Bahrain as a hub for innovative medical care," noted the minister.

In 2023, Bahrain became the second country globally, following Britain, and the first in the Middle East to approve Casgevy for treating SCD and TDT.

The treatment involves a multi-stage process including stimulating the patient's bone marrow to produce large quantities of stem cells, editing the cells to produce red blood cells carrying functional hemoglobin, and transplanting the edited cells back into the patient's bloodstream after safety testing.

"This provides renewed hope for patients with complex blood disorders and reinforces the kingdom's growing focus on healthcare innovation," said Commander of Royal Medical Services Shaikh Fahad bin Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa.

Edward Rowland, CEO of the Bahrain Oncology Center, described the development as a reflection of the institution's focus on advanced technology and global partnerships, adding that the clinical team is honored to bring CRISPR-based therapy to patients in Bahrain and beyond.

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## No Marmoush, no problem, Frankfurt beats Kiel 3-1 to consolidate 3rd place in Bundesliga

# Racist chants briefly interrupted Spanish league match

MADRID, Feb. 17, (AP) — Athletic Bilbao's game at Espanyol was briefly interrupted on Sunday because of fans' racist chants.

The referee activated the anti-racism protocol and stopped the Spanish league match in Barcelona about 20 minutes into the first half.

Athletic forward Inaki Williams denounced the chants afterward, saying they were targeted at his teammate Maroan Sannadi. Williams has previously been subjected to racist chants at Espanyol. "People should come to soccer matches to have a good time," Williams said. "These types of things can't be happening."

The interruption lasted about three minutes and a message was broadcast to fans reminding them about punishment under the law for such chants.

The game ended 1-1, with Oihan Sancet scoring the equalizer in the 77th after Roberto Fernández put the hosts ahead in the 62nd. The Spanish league is expected to investigate the chants, with Espanyol facing a possible punishment.

The result kept Athletic four points ahead of Villarreal and in the fourth and final Champions League spot. Villarreal was held at home by Valencia on Saturday.

Real Sociedad had Igor Zubeldia sent off in the 20th minute and Seraldo Becker ejected in the 75th in a 3-0 loss at Real Betis.

It was the team's first loss after a three-game winning streak in all competitions. The result left the Basque Country club in 11th place.

Marc Roca scored twice for Betis, which moved to eighth place.

Sevilla snapped a three-game winless streak by routing last-placed Valladolid 4-0 with a brace for Juanlu Sánchez. Isaac Romero and Dodi Lukebakio also scored for the visitors, who moved to 12th place.

It was the fifth consecutive loss for Valladolid, whose fans protested against the owner - former Brazil great Ronaldo. Some fans held "Ronaldo Go Home" signs.

Striker Vedat Muriqi scored twice in the first half-hour to lead Mallorca to a comfortable 3-1 home win over Las Palmas.

It was Mallorca's first win after six matches. It lost five in a row in all competitions before a draw against Osasuna in the previous Spanish league round. It sits



Mainz's Jonathan Burkardt, front left, scores the opening goal during the German Bundesliga soccer match between 1. FC Heidenheim and 1. FSV Mainz 05 in Heidenheim, Germany, Sunday, Feb. 16, 2025. (AP)

in seventh place, near the European qualifying places.

Las Palmas, in 17th place, hasn't won in seven matches in all competitions with six losses and a draw.

In Berlin, Eintracht Frankfurt snapped its run of three draws and consolidated

third place in the Bundesliga with a 3-1 win over relegation-threatened Holstein Kiel on Sunday. Hugo Ekitiké saw a penalty saved and had a late goal ruled out for offside, but others stepped up to score the goals that showed Frankfurt can live without Egypt forward Omar Marmoush.

Marmoush, Frankfurt's top-scorer with 15 league goals this season, joined Manchester City for a reported 70 million euros (\$73 million) during the winter transfer period and scored a hat trick for his new team on Saturday.

"We sent an extremely young team onto the field, one that played with confidence, composure and maturity," Frankfurt coach Dino Toppmöller said.

"We've finally won again and now gone seven league games in a row without defeat," he said. "The table looks nice, but there are still many games to play. We have to stay confident."

Toppmöller's team moved five points clear of fourth-placed Leipzig, which occupies the last place for Champions League qualification after 22 of 34 rounds.

Hugo Larsson broke the deadlock with his knee in the 18th minute, and Brazilian defender Tuta was left free at the back post to score Frankfurt's second in the 37th after Kiel failed to deal with a corner.

Ekitiké had the chance to make it 3-0 before the break but Thomas Dähne dived the right way to push away the French forward's penalty.

Frankfurt was later gifted the third goal anyway. Can Uzun gratefully took David Zec's botched backpass to score his fourth goal of the season in the 59th.

Kiel's Finn Porath scored at the third attempt in the 73rd after Kevin Trapp saved his first two efforts but it wasn't enough to stop Kiel dropping to last place after this round of games. Bochum climbed off the bottom by defeating Borussia Dortmund 2-0 on Saturday.

Kiel could take some solace from Heidenheim's 2-0 loss at home to Mainz in Sunday's late game. Heidenheim stayed on 14 points, ahead of Bochum on goal difference, and just a point above Kiel.

Hoffenheim came from behind to win 3-1 at Werder Bremen in the early game.



William Byron celebrates after winning the NASCAR Daytona 500 auto race at Daytona International Speedway, Sunday, Feb. 16, 2025, in Daytona Beach, Fla. (AP)

## Byron avoids wrecks, wins 2nd straight Daytona 500

Hendrick Motorsports sets new record

DAYTONA BEACH, Florida, Feb. 17, (AP) — William Byron fortuitously missed the ferocious wrecks down the stretch at the Daytona 500 that knocked out contenders racing for the checkered flag and left him with a repeat victory in sight.

Still, sitting ninth with one lap left in an overtime finish, the odds seemed against the driver of the No. 24 Chevrolet to escape the rest of the race unscathed, or even have enough time to pull off the comeback win.

Thanks to one more crash, Byron used a clean ride on his final lap to escape the chaos and race to his second straight Daytona 500 victory. He dodged a string of late-race wrecks that knocked out a chunk of contenders and sent the Hendrick Motorsports driver into victory lane Sunday night at Daytona International Speedway.

"It's not all luck to win twice in a row," Byron said. "Maybe not. But Byron certainly was in the right place by racing near the outside wall in overtime to become the first back-to-back winner since Denny Hamlin in 2019-20."

Byron took advantage of another major mess on the final lap - NASCAR did not drop the caution and let the field race to the finish - and took another, familiar burnout in Daytona International Speedway.

"It's obviously really special," Byron said. "It's an amazing race, and obviously a lot of crazy racing out there tonight and just a lot of pushing and shoving."

The 27-year-old Byron held on to win after two weather delays totaling more than 3 1/2 hours, and with President Donald Trump set to watch the rest of the race in Florida, after he earlier led drivers on two laps around the track in his heavily armored presidential limousine known in Washington as "The Beast."

Hendrick Motorsports won its 10th Daytona 500 to break a tie with Petty Enterprises for the record.

"Just obviously fortunate it worked out in our favor," Byron said. "Crazy? Yeah. I can't honestly believe that but we're here."

Byron became the youngest driver to win multiple Daytona 500s, breaking the record held by Jeff Gordon, also in the No. 24. Gordon, a Hall of Famer and four-time NASCAR champion, is now Byron's boss as vice chairman of Hendrick Motorsports.

Gordon flashed a thumbs up when told Byron broke his record for youngest two-time winner by four months.

Austin Cindric held the lead headed to the white flag when he was wiped out in crash that took out a slew of drivers that included Chase Briscoe, Denny Hamlin and Alex Bowman. It was overtime time in the last eight Daytona 500s the race spilled into overtime, setting up Byron to become the fifth driver to win it in consecutive years.

Goldin, Wolf lead Michigan over Ohio State 86-83

## St. John's extend lead with win over Creighton

NEW YORK, Feb. 17, (AP) — RJ Luis Jr. had 23 points and 14 rebounds to help No. 9 St. John's strengthen its grip on first place in the Big East with a 79-73 victory over No. 24 Creighton on Sunday.

The Red Storm (22-4, 13-2) lead the Bluejays (18-8, 11-4) by two games. A Creighton win would have given it the head-to-head tiebreaker over St. John's, which is seeking its first regular-season title since 1986.

Luis made 6 of 17 shots in his eighth double-double this season. He sank six free throws in the final two minutes and made 10 of 13 overall to help St. John's secure its 10th win in 11 games.

Kadary Richmond had 17 points and 10 rebounds for the Red Storm. Zuby Ejiyor added 18 points and nine boards.

Steven Ashworth scored 23 points for Creighton, which dropped its second straight after winning nine in a row. Jamiya Neal added 19. Ryan Kalkbrenner was held to 12 points and appeared to have limited mobility in his right foot after getting helped to the locker room with 9:45 left.

Michigan 86, Ohio State 83

In Columbus, Ohio, Vladislav Goldin had a critical putback basket with 52 seconds left as part of a 20-point, 10-rebound performance as No. 20 Michigan held off Ohio State 86-83.

Danny Wolf had 17 points and 11 rebounds for Michigan (20-5, 12-2), which held a one-game lead over Michigan State in the Big Ten Conference standings. Nimari Burnett added 11 points as the Wolverines won their sixth straight game.

Devin Royal had 26 points and five rebounds for Ohio State (15-11, 7-8). Bruce Thornton added 17 points for the Buckeyes but missed a chance to tie the game on a shot in the lane in the final three seconds. John Mobley Jr. added 16 points.

Maryland 101, Iowa 75

In College Park, Md., Ja'Kobi Gillespie scored 26 points, and No. 25 Maryland scored its most points in a Big Ten game since entering the league a decade ago, routing Iowa 101-75.

The Hawkeyes (14-11, 5-9 Big Ten) actually led 51-47 at halftime, but they missed all 13 of their 3-point attempts after the break and could do little to slow a rampant Maryland team.

The Terrapins (20-6, 10-5) have won seven of their last eight games. Maryland's previous high score in a Big Ten game came in a 100-65 win over Ohio State in 2016.



St. John's forward Zuby Ejiyor (24) reacts after making a 3-point shot against Creighton during the first half of an NCAA college basketball game, Sunday, Feb. 16, 2025, in New York. (AP)



Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry holds the Most Valuable Player trophy after the NBA All-Star basketball game Sunday, Feb. 16, 2025, in San Francisco. (AP)

No clock, just hoops and a show

## Curry claims All-Star Game MVP at home, leads Shaq's OGs to victory

SAN FRANCISCO, Feb. 17, (AP) —

The final pregame introduction belonged to none other than Stephen Curry. The big MVP trophy at the end, Curry heaved that up into the air, too, in a fitting finish to his All-Star Game at home.

His arena. His fans. His shining moment - the latest one on the list, that is.

Curry earned all this well-deserved fanfare in what has been a remarkable run from Oakland to San Francisco for the Golden State Warriors star.

"This is just a special weekend all the way around," Curry said. "This is very symbolic of the entire journey. I hope we have a lot to accomplish on the court, not ending the journey any time soon. But again for me and from my vantage point having played here for 16 years and this is the only place that I've played, it's just a great celebration of basketball in this area."

Curry scored the first points of the final on a 3-pointer and later connected from half-court, running down the other way to chest-bump rapper Mistah Fab along one baseline. He helped Shaq's OGs beat Chuck's Global Stars 41-25 on Sunday, scoring 12

points on four 3s.

Fans at Chase Center chanted "MVP! MVP!" as he received the trophy.

An Olympic gold medal in August, then an All-Star victory back in the Bay Area six months later. Next month, he will celebrate his 37th birthday.

Curry took a moment during a break midgame, grabbed the mic and shared how "blessed" he felt having the All-Star Game on his court at 5-year-old Chase Center - something the Warriors had long envisioned.

Curry kicked a ball to Anthony Edwards before beginning his pregame shooting routine - minus his regular passing man, Warriors assistant coach Bruce Fraser.

Shaquille O'Neal drafted Curry and his teammates for the All-Star competition, and they faced Candace's Rising Stars in the first game of the new format for the NBA's midseason classic.

No quarters, no clock, first one to 40 points.

This was a fitting finish for Curry after a jam-packed weekend of parties, practice and community out-

reach.

"The hosting experience was unbelievable. I'm not going to complain about the entire exhaustiveness, it's an honor and a blessing to be able to celebrate and share this beautiful Bay Area that's been a part of my life for the last 16 years and the basketball history and culture that's here, the amazing fans that are here," Curry said, "the impact that the game being here has had on both cities, it was awesome from start to finish."

It was Curry's 11th All-Star selection and 10th appearance overall.

This basketball focus in the Bay Area clearly meant so much to Curry. He appeared emotional during the Canadian and U.S. national anthems and then quickly turned his attention to the next task.

It was about much more than just the game this weekend.

"It brought a lot of my people together that have helped me along the way or have been a part of the journey and I got to kind of reflect a little bit," Curry said. "And I'm excited to get back to work next week. I'll definitely get away and take a little catch up on some sleep."

## Europe's top rugby league under probe

SALFORD, England, Feb. 17, (AP) — The most one-sided result in the history of Europe's top division in rugby league is subject to an investigation over whether the sport was brought "into disrepute".

Salford was thrashed 82-0 by St. Helens on Saturday in the opening round of the Super League, which currently contains teams from England and France.

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## Brazil's Fonseca secures historic first ATP title at Argentina Open

BUENOS AIRES, Feb. 17, (Xinhua) — Brazilian teenager Joao Fonseca secured his first ATP tour title on Sunday by beating local favorite Francisco Cerundolo 6-4, 7-6 (1) in the Argentina Open final.

The 18-year-old showed composure beyond his years, winning 73% of his first-serve points to prevail in an hour and 45 minutes on the outdoor clay of the Buenos Aires Lawn Tennis Club.

"Unbelievable week, even in Argentina there are some Brazilians cheering for me," said an emotional Fonseca.

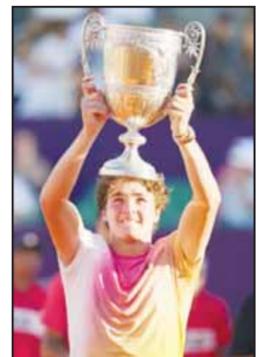
"It's just amazing. Every Brazilian, everyone from their country wants this support from your own country. For me, this [moment] that I'm living is just unbelievable."

Fonseca became the 10th youngest title winner and the youngest South American champion since the ATP tour began in 1990.

Taking part in his first four-level final, Fonseca twice served for the match - at 5-4 and 6-5 - only to see 28th-ranked Cerundolo force a tie-break.

The Rio de Janeiro-born right-hander then found another gear, clinching four of his seven points in the tie-break with clean winners, including a superb forehand down the line on match point.

"I want to thank my family, my



Brazil's Joao Fonseca poses with the trophy after defeating Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo during a men's singles final match at the Argentina Open ATP tennis tournament at Guillermo Vilas Stadium in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Sunday, Feb. 16, 2025. (AP)

friends and my sponsors for just helping me achieve my dream, which is to play tennis," he said. "Of course I want to be No. 1, of course I want to win slams, titles, but my dream is just to play tennis, and I'm living it."

Fonseca, who beat four Argentines en route to the ATP 250 title, is expected to see his world ranking rise to 68 from 99 on Monday.

## SPORTS

Kazma stays on top

## Kuwait Club cruises past Al-Tadamon 3-0

By Khaled Al-Anzi  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: The first volleyball team of Kuwait Club easily defeated their counterpart, Al-Tadamon, with a 3-0 victory (25-14, 25-13, 25-20) in their match held the day before yesterday as part of the 11th round of the general league at the Volleyball Union Hall at Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex. In the same round, Al-Sulaibikhat won against Al-Yarmouk 3-1 (15-25, 25-20, 25-21, 29-27).

With these results, the general league standings after round 11 are as follows: Kazma leads with 15 points, followed by Berrkan, Al-Shabab, and Al-Nasr, each with nine points, while Kuwait, Al-Qadsia, Al-Arabi, and Al-Sulaibikhat each have six points. Al-Yarmouk has two points, Al-Sahil has one point, and Al-Tadamon has no points.

The match for Al-Omayed's team is their second since returning from their recent participation in the Arab Championship, while Kazma, the leader, has played five matches.

## Nice reclaims third spot

## Lyon's attack looks sharp under new coach Fonseca

PARIS, Feb 17, (AP): After 10 goals in three games, new coach Paulo Fonseca's pledge to bring attacking soccer back to Lyon is holding firm.

Sunday's 4-1 win at Montpellier in Ligue 1 saw four different Lyon players on target for the second straight game.

After being involved in all four Lyon goals against Reims last weekend, Rayan Cherki took only three minutes to set up Georgia's Georges Mikautadze for the opener.

Forward Tanguy Coulibaly equalized for last-placed Montpellier shortly before halftime, but Lyon pulled away early in the second half. Ernest Nkuamah scored and three minutes later set up rejuvenated midfielder Corentin Tolisso, who has netted in every game under Fonseca.

Under previous coach Pierre Sage, the team was looking laborious and had scored only five goals in six games without a win before he was fired.

Veteran striker Alexandre Lacazette completed the rout in the 73rd minute for Lyon, which stayed in sixth place because Lille won 2-0 at Rennes in Sunday's late game to retain fifth spot.

The race for third place promises to be intense, with Nice reclaiming it from Riviera rival Monaco on goal difference after winning 3-1 at lowly Le Havre.

Both Nice and Monaco have 40 points and trail second-place Marseille by six points.

Striker Gaëtan Laborde sent Nice ahead in the 16th minute and an own-goal from Étienne Youté two minutes later put Nice in control. Yassine Kechta pulled a goal back soon after but Sofiane Diop made it 3-1 in stoppage time.

Coach Liam Rosenior's Strasbourg won 2-0 at Lens to leapfrog the north-

MILAN, Feb 17, (AP): Defending champion Inter Milan missed its chance to move top of Serie A on Sunday after losing 1-0 to Juventus, which boosted its hopes of a top-four finish.

Francisco Conceição scored the only goal in the 74th minute of a high-tempo Derby d'Italia, or Italy's derby as matches between the two fierce rivals have come to be known.

Inter wasted a number of chances and remained two points behind league leader Napoli, which was held to a 2-2 draw at Lazio on Saturday. Juventus is fourth.

"There's certainly great regret and disappointment - clearly we should have been better at finishing and scoring goals," Inter coach Simone Inzaghi said. "Because after a first half like that we should have gone in at the break ahead."

"Then we didn't approach the second half like the first... we need to work even harder because what we're doing isn't enough for what we want to achieve."

Inter visits Napoli in a potential title-deciding match in two weeks.

"We'll try to do our best, or at least better than tonight," Inzaghi said.

Inter had the better of the chances in the first half, with Lautaro Martinez uncharacteristically blazing over the bar from close range when completely unmarked. However, visiting goalkeeper Yann Sommer had to make the most important saves.

Nerazzurri defender Denzel Dumfries also hit the post twice.

But it was Juventus which broke the deadlock

## Roma prevails at Parma, Udinese sweeps Empoli

## Inter misses chance to top Serie A after Juve loss



Inter Milan's Benjamin Pavard, left, and Juventus' Weston McKennie, right, challenge for the ball during the Italian Serie A soccer match between Juventus and Inter Milan at the Juventus Stadium in Turin, Italy, Sunday, Feb. 16, 2025. (AP)

with a fantastic assist from new signing Randal Kolo Muani.

The France forward, who had scored five goals in three league matches for Juventus, gathered the ball on the edge of the area and made his way through a crowd of players before tripping. The ball came to Conceição, who drove it into the

bottom left corner.

Juventus almost doubled its lead two minutes later but Dumfries did brilliantly to clear Teun Koopmeiners' effort off the line.

The match had also been dubbed "the Thuram derby" with Marcus Thuram playing for Inter and younger brother Khéphren for Juventus.

However, Marcus was recovering from an ankle problem and was only brought on in the 62nd minute, 15 minutes before Khéphren was substituted off.

Their dad, Lilian Thuram - who starred as a defender for Juventus and won the World Cup with France in 1998 - was watching from the stands.

Teenager Assane Diao could very well prove to be Como's savior.

The 19-year-old scored again on Sunday to set relegation-threatened Como on its way to a 2-0 win at Fiorentina.

It was Diao's fourth goal in his seven matches since joining from Real Betis last month and the win lifted Cesc Fàbregas' team five points above the drop zone.

Fiorentina was four points below Juventus.

Como broke the deadlock four minutes before halftime with a rapid counterattack. A Fiorentina free kick was headed out of the area when Diao gathered the ball deep inside his own half and raced forward to beat home goalkeeper David De Gea one-on-one.

Nico Paz doubled Como's lead in the 66th with a shot that took a slight deflection to curl in off the top of the left post.

Roma was without injured star forward Paulo Dybala but managed to win 1-0 at 10-man Parma.

The match changed in the 29th minute when teenage Parma defender Giovanni Leoni fouled Roma's Matías Soulé. The referee initially awarded a penalty to the visitors and showed Leoni a yellow card.

## Aberg rallies down at Torrey Pines, captures Genesis Invitational title

Swedish golfer earns second PGA Tour win

SAN DIEGO, Feb 17, (AP): Ludvig Aberg never felt worse leaving a golf course than three weeks ago at Torrey Pines when he shared the 36-hole lead only to get violently ill from a stomach ailment and stagger to the finish with a 79.

That's what made Sunday - same course, different tournament - feel so sweet.

Aberg was three shots behind and running out of holes when he hit three shots to near perfection for birdies and capped off his late rally with a 7-foot birdie putt on the par-5 18th for a 6-under 66 and a one-shot victory over Maverick McNealy in the Genesis Invitational.

The tournament had to relocate to Torrey from Riviera because of the wildfires in Los Angeles, and Aberg made good on another chance at one of his favorite courses. It was somewhere toward the end that he turned to caddie Joe Skovron and said, "This Sunday is a lot more fun than the last one we had."

"Was nice to come here starting to feel like myself again and physically getting there," he said. "It means a lot. This is the best feeling in golf, and to be able to do what I did today is definitely going to help me going forward in the future."

He met Tiger Woods, the tournament host, for the first time a few weeks ago at the indoor TGL in Florida. This was better - Woods presenting him the trophy, the second PGA Tour title for the 25-year-old Swede and his third worldwide that takes him to No. 4 in the world.

"It's very reassuring to know that I can go from where I was a couple weeks ago to winning a tournament in sort of a quick turnaround," he said.



Ludvig Aberg of Sweden poses with the trophy after winning the Genesis Invitational golf tournament on Feb. 16, 2025, in San Diego, California. (AP)

It was a close call for McNealy, who three months ago won for the first time on tour. He looked like a winner at Torrey Pines when he opened with eight birdies in 11 holes - not to mention a 40-foot par putt on the first hole - and stretched his lead to three.

But he had to scramble for par on the 17th after a drive that caromed off a pole and into an impossible lie in the rough, and then he failed to convert a birdie on the 18th. He still shot 64, but still on the course was the Swede regarded as one of golf's rising stars.

"It's more than I could have asked for at the start of the day," said McNealy, who started five shots behind.

"Ludvig played awesome. I knew with that leaderboard it was going to take some great golf to get it done."

Woods watched a lot of unfold from the broadcast booth. Woods withdrew from the tournament on Monday as he coped with the death of his mother, Kultima, last week. Players wore a red button that had the Thai symbol of love to honor her.

Aberg's strong rally started with a 6-foot sliding par putt on the 12th. He two-putted from 50 feet for birdie on the 13th, attacked a daunting back pin on the 14th to 5 feet for birdie and rolled in a 25-foot birdie putt on the 15th to tied for the lead.

From the middle of the fairway on

the par-5 18th, he hit 7-wood long, some 70 feet away, rolled that down to just under 7 feet and calmly holed the putt.

"It was a great fight," Aberg said. "I'm really proud of the way I finished. It was really cool."

Aberg, who finished at 12-under 276, won \$4 million for his third victory worldwide since turning pro in June 2023 as the top-ranked college player out of Texas Tech.

Scottie Scheffler was 10 shots better than the third round with a 66 and tied for third with Patrick Rodgers (71).

Scheffler fell five shots behind with a 76 on Saturday, his highest score in nearly three years. That didn't stop him from making a brief run. He went out in 31 with five birdies, including a chip-in on the fifth hole, and got to within one shot.

But he couldn't afford many mistakes, and he made two of them. He left a delicate, downhill chip in the rough on the par-3 11th and made bogey, and after holing a bunker shot for birdie on the 15th to stay in the game, failed to save par from a bunker on the 16th.

He closed with a 66 and finished alone in third.

Scheffler played with Rory McIlroy and put five shots between them on the front nine. McIlroy couldn't buy a putt and could only laugh at one point during the round. He finished with a bogey from the water on the 18th for a 72.

Rodgers and Denny McCarthy, playing in the final group, also took their turns in the lead during the final round until the tough back nine on the South course caught up with them.

Rodgers fell back with bogeys on the 11th and 12th holes and never caught up. McCarthy had the lead when he made eagle on the par-5 sixth and didn't make another birdie until the final hole for a 71 to tie for fifth.

## German bobsled star claims 7th four-man and 8th overall crown

## Friedrich secures two more World Cup titles

LILLEHAMMER, Norway, Feb 17, (AP): Francesco Friedrich won two more World Cup bobsled overall titles on Sunday, the 21st and 22nd of the German star's career.

Friedrich drove to a second-place finish in the World Cup four-man race, good enough to clinch his seventh consecutive season title in that sled and his eighth combined World Cup crown. He clinched the season title - his seventh - in two-man on Saturday.

His career numbers only get more absurd: 147 World Cup race medals, four Olympic gold medals and 14 gold medals in world championship races - a figure he'll look to improve when bobsled holds its world title races for 2025 over the first two weeks of March in Lake Placid, New York.

"The whole season was very good," Friedrich said. "We stand on the podium, we did a great job on the start. Sometimes I don't even get the best line, but yes, we were good the whole season."

Johannes Lochner of Germany drove to the four-man win on Sunday, wrapping up his second-place finish in the season standings. Friedrich was second and Brad Hall of Britain was third - the same spot he ended up in the



Francesco Friedrich, Matthias Sommer, Alexander Schueller and Felix Straub, of Germany, finish their second run in the 4-man bobsleigh at the Bobsleigh World Cup in Innsbruck, Austria, Sunday, Jan. 19, 2025. (AP)

four-man seasonlong chase.

"It's such a fantastic and beautiful sport," Friedrich said. "With the guys, it's so fun every week. We did our best every week."

In the two-woman race on Sunday, Laura Nolte of Germany drove to the win - her fifth of the season - to clinch the overall title in that event. Lisa Buckwitz of

Germany was second and Melissa Lotholz of Canada was third.

Germany and Austria swept all nine medals awarded Sunday on the final day of a World Cup in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

In women's singles, Lisa Schulte of Austria prevailed over Merle Fraebel of Germany and Hannah Prock of Austria.

In mixed singles, Schulte paired with Wolfgang Kindl to win, with Max Langenhan and Fraebel placing second and the German team of Felix Loch and Julia Taubitz finishing third.

And in mixed doubles, Germany 1 - Toni Eggert and Florian Mueller for the men, Jessica Degenhardt and Cheyenne Rosenthal for the women - got the win. Austria was second, with Kindl and Thomas Steu on the men's sled and Selina Egle and Lara Kipp on the women's sled.

Germany 2 was third: Tobias Wendt and Tobias Arlt for the men and Dajana Eitberger and Magdalena Matschina for the women.

The U.S. had three sixth-place finishes: Zach Di Gregorio, Sean Hollander, Cheyenne Forgan and Sophia Kirkby in mixed doubles, Tucker West and Ashley Farquharson in mixed singles, and Farquharson in the women's singles race.

Luge - World Cup men's doubles, women's doubles and women at Yanqing, China, on Saturday; World Cup men's singles and team relay at Yanqing on Sunday.

Skeleton - Day 1 of men's and women's world championships at Lake Placid on March 6.

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Maverick McNealy hits off the second tee of the South Course at Torrey Pines during the final round of the Genesis Invitational golf tournament on Feb. 16, 2025, in San Diego. (AP)

# Sports

Teams arrive as preparations wrap up for February 22-26 event

## Kuwait welcomes Gulf veterans for historic football tournament

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: The Gulf teams have started arriving in Kuwait to participate in the first Gulf Cup for veteran players, which the country will host from February 22 to 26.

The Yemeni delegation was the first to arrive, coming on the evening of the day before yesterday, with the Saudi delegation expected to arrive today and the Iraqi delegation tomorrow. The other teams are set to follow over the next two days.

Dr. Saleh Al-Majroob, Secretary-General of the Kuwaiti Football Association and Tournament Director, confirmed that all preparations for hosting the tournament have been completed.

In a statement to the press, Al-Majroob said, "We have finished preparing the hotels where the teams will stay, in addition to the Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah Stadium at Al-Sulaibikhat Club, which will host the competition, as well as the training fields that were allocated earlier. All logistical arrangements for the event have also been completed, including communication and transportation ser-



Dr. Saleh Al-Majroob, Secretary-General of the Kuwaiti Football Association and Tournament Director.

vices."

Al-Majroob pointed out that the initiative for this tournament came from His Excellency, the Minister of Information, Culture, and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, during the "Gulf 26" tournament hosted by Kuwait from Decem-

ber 21 to January 4, which was a huge success and earned widespread praise. This initiative led to the establishment of a competitive tournament for veteran players who have previously participated in Gulf competitions, coinciding with Kuwait's national celebrations.

He added that such tournaments aim to strengthen bonds among the Gulf nations, solidify relationships, and encourage attendance from fans of all teams in the spirit of friendship and peace.

He continued: "There is also an ongoing initiative within the Arab Gulf Cup Football Federation to host this tournament alongside future tournaments, starting with 'Gulf 27,' which will be hosted by Saudi Arabia."

Al-Majroob emphasized that the Kuwaiti Football Association's President, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousuf, and board members have consistently supported the tournament to ensure its success and to showcase Kuwait's ability to host football tournaments and other sports events.



The Yemeni delegation.

At the end of his statement, Al-Majroob wished success to all participat-

ing teams and hoped for a pleasant stay and experience for all delegations and

fans, welcoming everyone to their second home, Kuwait.

## Kuwait's Al-Daihani bags 3rd place at Amir of Qatar Grand Prix for Shotgun

Qatari Al-Athba claims 1st place, Georgian Startsav 2nd

DOHA, Feb 17, (KUNA): Kuwaiti shooter Mohammad Al-Daihani secured third place in the skeet competition at the second edition of the Amir of Qatar Grand Prix for Shotgun, known as the "HH the Amir Award," held at the Lusail Shooting Complex in Doha on Sunday.

Al-Daihani told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that he managed to secure third place in the men's category by successfully hitting 122 out of 125 targets in the championship, which was attended by many competitors from around the world.

He expressed his happiness at securing third place, behind Qatari shooter Rashid Al-Athba, who took first place, and Georgian Yaroslav Startsav, who came second. He also noted that the three-day competition was strong and challenging.

Al-Daihani thanked and appreciated the State of Qatar for its excellent organization and hospitality, as well as all his assistants who played a role in his success.

The skeet competitions of the second edition of the Amir of Qatar Grand Prix for Shotgun began last Friday.



Shooter Mohammed Al-Daihani during the tournament.

KUNA photo

## China ends Milan Speed Skating World Tour with 1 gold, 1 bronze

ROME, Feb 17, (Xinhua): China bagged one gold and one bronze but failed to add to its medal tally on the final competition day of the ISU Short Track Speed Skating World Tour Milan on Sunday.

In the men's 5,000m relay final, China's quartet of Sun Long, Liu Shaolin, Liu Shaoang and Liu Guanyi stayed within the top three for the first half of the race. However, a late-race fall by Liu Guanyi dashed China's hopes of securing a medal. Host nation Italy surged ahead in the final stretch, overtaking Canada to clinch the gold. Canada settled for the silver, while Kazakhstan took the bronze.

Earlier in the day, Liu Shaoang and Sun Long came in fourth and fifth respectively in the men's 1,000m final. Canada's William Dandjinou led from the start and maintained his

advantage to take the gold. Italy's Pietro Sighel finished second while South Korea's Jang Sung-woo came in third.

In the women's 1,500m final, Belgium's Hanne Desmet and Arianna Fontana of Italy overtook two American skaters in the latter half of the race. Desmet clinched the gold, with silver and bronze medals going to Kristen Santos of the United States and Fontana. China's Yang Jingru finished seventh.

As a key test event for the 2026 Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics, the competition was highly valued by all participating teams. Aside from Lin Xiaojun, who was absent due to injury, China fielded nearly all of its top skaters. The previous day, Sun Long had won the gold in the men's 500m, while China's women secured the bronze in the 3,000m relay.



China's Sun Long (front center) and Liu Shaolin compete during the men's 5000m relay final A at the ISU Short Track World Tour 2024/2025 in Milan, Italy, Feb. 16, 2025. (Xinhua)

## Kuwait tops Saudi in basketball friendly

By Khaled Al-Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: Kuwait's national basketball team defeated its Saudi counterpart 79-75 in the first friendly match held two days ago at the Kuwait Basketball Federation Hall in Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex. The game is part of the preparations for both teams ahead of upcoming tournaments.

The two teams are set to face each other again in a second friendly match at 6:30 PM today at the same venue.

The Saudi team arrived in Kuwait last week to play these matches as part of the cooperation between the Kuwaiti and Saudi basketball federations, aiming to prepare both teams for upcoming championships and maintain players' readiness.

The game was intense and spirited, with the

visiting Saudi team dominating the first quarter entirely, finishing with a 20-point lead, 33-13. However, the Kuwaiti team gradually regained its form and reduced the deficit to 14 points in the second quarter, ending 33-47.

The team's performance continued to improve under the leadership of standout player Hamad Adnan, the top scorer for Kuwait with 21 points. By the end of the third quarter, the gap had shrunk to just 5 points in favor of the Saudi team, 60-65.

In the final quarter, Kuwait asserted its dominance, with strong performances from both starters and substitutes, sealing a well-earned victory, 79-75.

In addition to Hamad Adnan's impressive performance, his teammates also stood out: Abdulaziz Al-Humaidi scored 17 points, Ahmed Al-Bloushi 12 points, Omran Jawhar 10 points, and Abdulmohsen Al-Mousawi 9 points.

## Al-Jahra and Borkan battle for second place

## Salmiya shifts Zain First Division League standings

By Hassan Mousa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: Salmiya sparked the Zain First Division League after defeating their guest, Al-Shabab, 2-1 in a match held two days ago at Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadium, as part of the eighth round of the competition. The two goals for Salmiya were scored by Brazilians Bruno and Silva, while Al-Shabab's goal was scored by Ali Al-Doukhi. Salmiya stopped Al-Shabab's progress, which had been leading the league with 11 points, while Salmiya raised their tally to 8 points, securing fourth place.

In another match, Al-Jahra drew 2-2 with Borkan at Ali Sabah Al-Salem Stadium in the same round. The goals for Al-Jahra were scored by Stephen Kwame and Obaid Rafee, while Borkan's goals came from Nigerian Alex Christian and Romanian Vlad Matrok via a penalty kick. Al-Jahra now has 9 points, placing them in second, while Borkan's points increased to 8, putting them in third. Al-Sahil (7 points) was absent from this round.



Players battle for possession of the ball during one of the matches.

## Final year of glory

### Cycling icon Thomas calls time on career

LONDON, Feb 17, (AP): Geraint Thomas, the former Tour de France champion who also won gold medals in track cycling for Great Britain at the Olympic Games in 2008 and '12, announced Monday that this will be his final year as a professional.

Thomas, a loyal teammate with a tremendous appetite for victory who transformed into a leader in his own right over his almost two-decade career, said he will focus on the Tour this summer with Ineos Grenadiers.

Aged 38, Thomas told the BBC that he will ride in support of the team's ambitions and "maybe try to win a stage but just enjoy the race" that he won in 2018.

"Since I was a kid I dreamt of riding the Tour and being part of the Olympics and winning was obviously a dream as well, but to achieve that was just nuts," he told BBC Breakfast.

"I think now the decision is official, you do start to reflect because when you're in it, it's just one thing after the next, year after year, so you don't really appreciate it. I guess at the time you enjoy it but I don't think you sit back and reflect and think, so there will be a bit of that this year."

For a long time, Thomas had a reputation as a party boy, always up for a few pints of beer while watching a rugby match. But his longevity at the highest level speaks volumes about his dedication and balanced lifestyle.

"He is a true fighter," said Dave Brailsford, the man who masterminded Britain's successes at the Olympics and Tour de France.

Growing up on the outskirts of Cardiff, Wales, Thomas started bike racing at 10, and his exceptional qualities did not remain unnoticed for long.

"I first saw him when he was about 13 or 14 and he joined me at 17," recalled Rod Ellingworth, the performance director at Team Sky when Thomas won the Tour, who also trained him as a British team coach.

"You could see straightaway he was just flying round the track, he was pretty good. As he joined the junior program, you just knew he was going to be pretty talented."

Thomas's first successes came on the track. In 2006, he was the youngest member of the British pursuit team that competed at the world championships.



Britain's Geraint Thomas, wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey reacts as he crosses the finish line during the twentieth stage of the Tour de France cycling race, an individual time trial over 31 kilometers (19.3 miles) with start in Saint-Pee-sur-Nivelle and finish in Espelette, France, on July 28, 2018. (AP)