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## Opinion

**Ahmed Al-Jarallah**

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

### Political leadership's sun shines on Kuwait

THESE days, we are living in a blessed atmosphere ... national par excellence, whether the National Day and its great connotations or the anniversary of liberation; in addition to grand steps that must be completed through the elimination of the negatives left by the stage of national and social anxiety.

However, what gives this year its splendor is the Sun of the political leadership that shines on Kuwait and its people, not to mention its accomplishments over the past year in terms of clear rules to establish the real meaning of reform and return the long awaited leadership, without any prejudice.

Indeed, in the past six decades, Kuwait has experienced a mix of positive and negative events since its liberation. Unfortunately, the negative events have been more frequent until recently.

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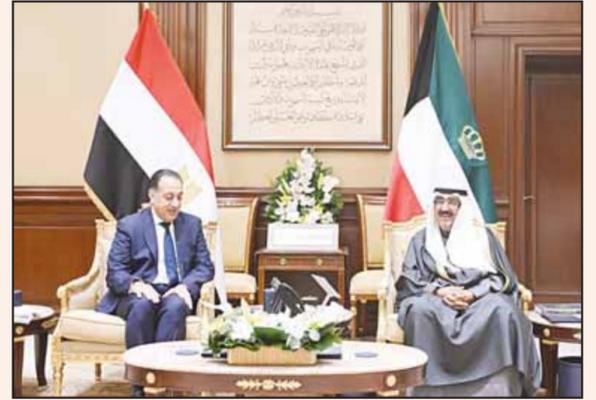
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## Amir receives Crown Prince, PM, foreign delegations



Left: HH the Amir receives Deputy Ruler of Abu Dhabi and UAE National Security Advisor. Right: HH the Amir welcomes Egyptian Prime Minister.

### Amir to attend operetta; new envoy to Malta sworn in

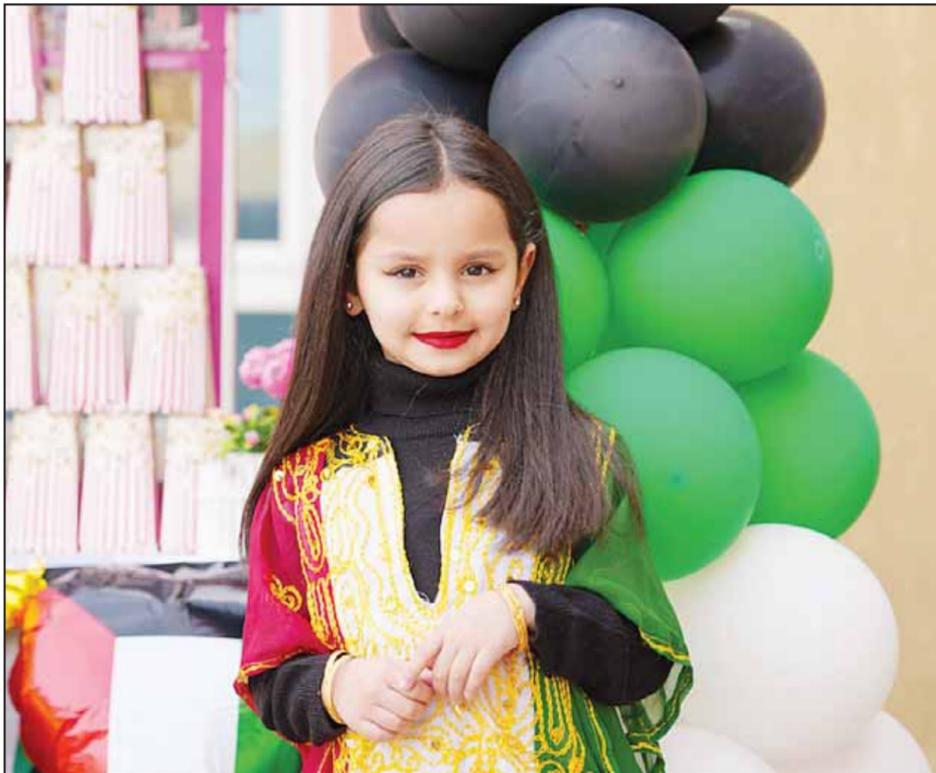
KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received several senior officials and foreign dignitaries at Bayan Palace on Sunday.

His Highness the Amir met with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, followed by His Highness the Prime Minister

Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

His Highness also received Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya, who presented newly-appointed Ambassador to Malta, Meshal Al-Mudhaf, for the constitutional oath.

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KUNA photo

A young student proudly wears a dress in Kuwait's national colors, embodying the spirit of the country's National and Liberation Days.

### Kuwait's schools mark national holidays with festive spirit

Schools across Kuwait celebrated National Day and Liberation Day on Sunday with a series of activities and artistic performances aimed at instilling a deep love for Kuwait in students.

Buildings were adorned with Kuwaiti flags and balloons, while children's favorite characters were dressed in traditional Kuwaiti national attire. (KUNA)

## Don't fall for fake traffic fine discount links: Mol

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The security authorities have warned against dealing with e-links that indicate discounts or reduction of traffic violation fines on the occasion of the National Day and Liberation Day.

According to sources from the security sector, a gang is deceiving the public by sending links or posts allegedly from the Ministry of Interior, stating there are discounts on the fines for traffic violations registered against them; but after clicking the link, the bank account is hacked and money is stolen.

Sources stressed that the General Traffic Department (GTD) does not send links for the payment of traffic violation fines; as

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## Moon Sighting Board to convene Friday evening

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Ministry of Justice announced that the Moon Sighting Board will convene on Friday evening at the Supreme Judicial Council in the Mubarak Al-Abdullah suburb to observe the crescent moon for the holy month of Ramadan, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The board urged anyone who has confirmed sighting the crescent moon to contact them at the phone number 26376934.

The Ministry extends heartfelt congratulations to the political leadership, citizens, residents, and the Arab and Islamic nations on the arrival of the holy month. It prays for a month of goodness and blessings for all, asking God Almighty to accept their fasting and prayers, protect our beloved country from harm, and grant continued security, prosperity, and stability.

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## Gold price nears KD 30 in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23, (KUNA): Gold prices continued their upward trajectory last week, closing at \$2,935 per ounce amid rising geopolitical tensions and shifts in U.S. trade policy, according to a report by Kuwaiti company Dar Al-Sabik released on Sunday.

The report noted that gold recorded its eighth consecutive weekly gain, rising 1.8% from the previous week and surpassing a market value of \$20 trillion.

Prices fluctuated between \$2,930 and \$2,954 per ounce, driven by concerns over inflation, global conflicts, and U.S. President Donald Trump's latest tariff measures.

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Photo by Rezk Tawfik

The Kuwait Liberation Tower glows with vibrant colors of the national flag, a stunning tribute to the nation's pride and spirit on National and Liberation Days.

## Newswatch

**KUWAIT CITY:** Deputy Chief of General Staff of Kuwait Army Major General Pilot Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on Sunday issued a decision to release the military personnel, who were disciplinary detained, on the national holidays and the approaching month of Ramadan.

This decision came based on the directives of Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Sabah. General Staff of Army said in a press statement. (KUNA)

**BEIRUT:** Iran is ready to cooperate with Arab and Islamic countries to rebuild parts of Lebanon damaged by Israeli military actions, Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said on Sunday during a meeting with Lebanese President Joseph Aoun.

Qalibaf, leading a delegation including Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi, reiterated Tehran's support for Lebanon's sovereignty and stability during talks in Beirut, according to a statement from Lebanon's presidency. (Xinhua)



**8** KIPCO Group supports innovation & entrepreneurship through 'The Shark Vision' at AUK



**10** Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait receives J.P. Morgan's Elite Quality Recognition award for 3rd year

## Diplomats celebrate Kuwait's legacy of success on National, Liberation Days

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: A number of ambassadors and diplomats greeted His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the government and the Kuwaiti people on the 64th National Day and 34th Liberation Day; stressing that Kuwait is a beacon of diplomacy, and that it witnessed remarkable achievements in various fields last year under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir.

Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Tajikistan Zubaydzoda Zubaydullo expressed his warmest greetings and wish for blessings for Kuwait, its leadership and its people. "On this special day, I am pleased to share the joy of the Kuwaiti people. We wish Kuwait continuous prosperity, security and great achievements. Tajikistan is working towards strengthening cooperation with Kuwait on the basis of trust, shared values and mutual respect," he added.

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Zubaydullo



Al Neyadi



Al Kharousi



Al Mahmoud



Shaltout



Jianwei



Koistinen



Swaika



Haller



Geltov

## Prayer Timings

Fajr ..... 05:01 Asr ..... 15:17  
 Sunrise .. 06:20 Maghrib .. 17:43  
 Zohr ..... 12:01 Isha ..... 19:00

## Local

## Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

**By Day:** A significant decrease in temperature and partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times northwesterly wind, with speeds of 15-55 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

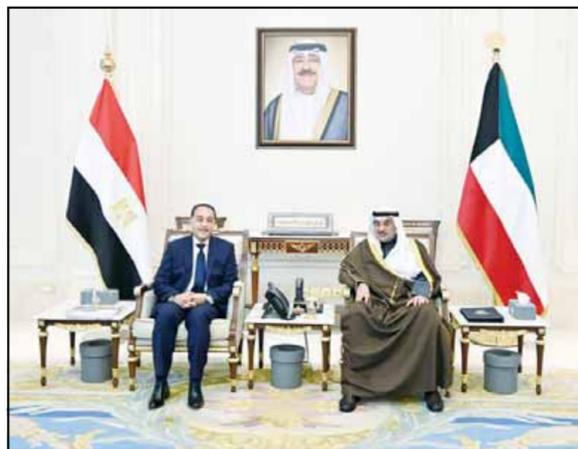
**By Night:** Cold to very cold with

## Weather

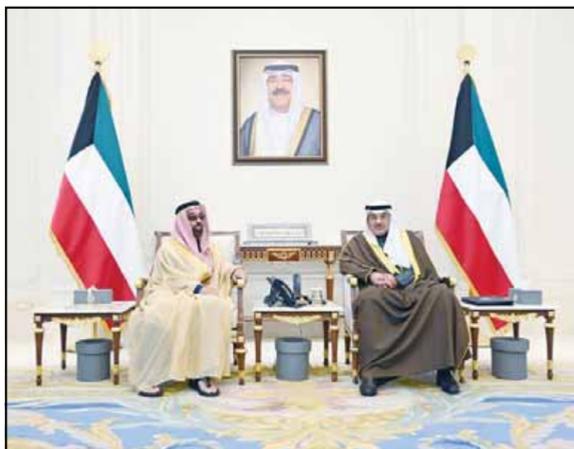
light to moderate freshening at times over coastal areas northwesterly wind, with speeds of 15-55 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	22	11
Kuwait Airport	22	12

Abdaly	23	09
Bubyan	20	11
Jahra	23	11
Failaka Island	22	13
Salmiyah	19	12
Ahmadi	18	08
Jal Aliyah	22	09
Nuwaisib	22	13



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives the Egyptian Prime Minister Dr. Mustafa Madbouly.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives Deputy Ruler of Abu Dhabi and National Security Advisor Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al-Nahayan.



Egyptian Prime Minister Mustafa Madbouly being presented a Guard of Honor on his arrival in Kuwait.

## Crown Prince receives Egyptian PM, Deputy Ruler Abu Dhabi

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23, (KUNA): His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received on Sunday His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the Egyptian Prime Minister Dr. Mustafa Madbouly and his accompanying delegation on his visit to Kuwait.

The meeting featured friendly discussions reflecting the deep-rooted ties between the two countries and their people, exploring ways to enhance mutual interests across several fields, as well as addressing the latest issues of common concerns regionally and internationally.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, Shereeda Al-Mousherji attended the meeting along with, Head of the Prime Minister's Abdulaziz Al-Dakhil and Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs at the Crown Prince's Diwan Mazen Al-Issa.

Earlier, on Sunday, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace, Deputy Ruler of Abu Dhabi and National Security Advisor Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al-Nahayan, and his accompanying delegation on occasion of his official visit to the country.

The meeting was attended by Minister of the Amiri

Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, and Minister of Finance, State Minister for Economic and Investment Affairs Noura Al-Fassam, Director General of the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) Sheikh Dr. Meshal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Also attending the meeting were Managing Director of the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) Sheikh Saud Salem Abdulaziz Al-Sabah attended the meeting, along with Director of His Highness the Crown Prince's office retired Lieutenant General Jamal Al-Thayeb, and Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs at the Crown Prince's Diwan Mazen Al-Issa.



Kuwaiti ministers welcome the visiting Egyptian Prime Minister Mustafa Madbouly and his delegation.

## HH PM receives visiting Egyptian counterpart on his trip to Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23, (KUNA): His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace on Sunday visiting Egyptian Prime Minister Mustafa Madbouly and the accompanying delegation.

An official reception was held where the Egyptian official was greeted by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs as well as head of the honorary delegation Shereeda Al-Maousherji.

Other officials included head of the Prime Minister Diwan Abdulaziz Al-Dakheel, Minister of Foreign Af-

airs Abdullah Al-Yahya, Finance Minister and Minister of State for Economic and Investment Affairs Noura Al-Fassam, Undersecretary for Financial, Administrative, and Communication Affairs at the Diwan of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Khaled Mohammad Al-Sabah, Assistant Foreign Minister for Arab World Affairs Ambassador Ahmad Al-Bakr, senior staff of the army, police, Kuwait National Guard (KNG), and Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) in addition to senior officials of the state and the Prime Minister Diwan.



Main gate leading to the shelter.



Places of worship secured for residents.

## Shelter for male expats opened

Kuwait committed to preserving human dignity: PAM

By Mohammad Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) officially opened its new shelter for male expatriate workers in Hawally on Sunday. Present at the opening ceremony were several ambassadors and diplomats who were briefed on the comprehensive services that the shelter offers -- health, housing and legal assistance among many other services.**

In his opening speech, acting Deputy Director General of the Manpower Protection Sector Dr. Fahad Al-Murad said the shelter adheres to international standards that Kuwait is committed to, and provides essential services to both domestic and private sector workers.

He revealed the shelter can accommodate about 200 to 300 workers and it offers primary legal and health services, coordinates with relevant authorities, and ensures suitable living arrangements.

He added the workers can access the shelter either voluntarily or through government agencies such as the ministries of Interior and Justice, diplomatic missions or civil society organizations.

Regarding procedures upon arrival, Al-Murad explained there will be coordination with the Ministry

of Interior if the worker's identity cannot be verified. "In such cases, the worker undergoes fingerprinting for identification. If there are criminal or absconding reports, we will coordinate with the ministry to ensure that appropriate measures are taken," he elaborated.

Asked about handling disputes between workers and sponsors following an absconding report, Al-Murad pointed out that if no final absconding report is filed, the worker is accommodated at the shelter until the dispute is resolved either amicably or through the judiciary. "The worker can choose whether to return to his home country or pursue the matter legally," he added.

He stated that the shelter accepts any male expatriate worker, even if he is in violation of the Residency and Labor laws, and coordinates with the Ministry of Interior regarding their return home. He confirmed that such workers will stay at the shelter until their legal procedures are completed, particularly in cases involving complaints.

On the possibility of workers leaving the shelter, Al-Murad clarified "we are a civil authority, not a penal institution. If the worker wishes to leave, he may do so by following specific procedures. If legal matters are involved, the Ministry of Interior will handle them."

He further explained that the shelter applies a na-

tional referral system for cases of human trafficking. "During interviews, if there is suspicion of human trafficking, the worker is referred to criminal investigations. If the case is confirmed, it will be processed judicially. If the worker's situation is resolved, the dispute with the employer is addressed, and if necessary, arrangements are made for the worker's return to their home country," he added.

He asserted that the opening of the shelter reflects Kuwait's dedication to ensuring that no individual lacks basic care, even if they have made mistakes. "The State is committed to preserving human dignity and preventing exploitation, ensuring that all workers are treated with respect until their legal issues are resolved," he stressed.

When asked about the possibility of workers with children being accommodated at the shelter, he affirmed that the shelter accepts children of juvenile age by coordinating with the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Supreme Council for the Family in cases where employment conditions do not apply.

He also mentioned that in the coming days, there is a plan to transfer female workers to the shelter in Hawally; while the male workers will remain in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh.

He expressed pride in the establishment of the shelter, which he described as a key element in Kuwait's ongoing efforts to promote human rights, protect vulnerable groups, and combat exploitation. He said the shelter embodies Kuwait's commitment to combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling; utilizing a comprehensive strategy focused on prevention, protection, legal prosecution and international cooperation.



Dr. Al-Murad

## 293 positions vacant: report

## MoE grappling to fill senior, medium leadership posts

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23:** The Ministry of Education is currently grappling with an unprecedented crisis in filling up vacant supervisory and leadership positions, with over 293 vacancies at senior and middle management levels.

Sources disclosed that these vacancies include vital positions like undersecretary, assistant undersecretaries, department directors, supervisors, unit heads and guidance teams; made worse by the ongoing rotation and assignment decisions that lack official appointments, sources added.

These measures have only worsened the administrative challenges and hampered the efficient functioning of the ministry, sources elaborated.

Despite frequent rotation and assignment decisions, the temporary fix-

es have proven ineffective in addressing the administrative gaps within the ministry. The lack of official appointments for leadership and supervisory roles has fostered a climate of instability which, in turn, is undermining administrative performance and the delivery of educational services, sources explained.

Sources emphasized the need for long-term solutions rather than continued reliance on temporary measures. They argued that filling up vacant leadership positions through rotation and assignment – rather than through permanent appointments – fails to pro-

vide a sustainable solution to the vacancy crisis.

Addressing this crisis necessitates the development of a comprehensive strategy to permanently fill the vacant positions, alongside the acceleration of necessary procedures to appoint qualified educational leaders, sources added.

According to the latest statistics, the vacant positions span critical roles such as assistant undersecretary, department director, supervisor, unit head and other leadership positions in various educational sectors and districts.

## 225,500 people to pass through airport during national holidays

By Mohammad Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23:** As the agencies operating at Kuwait International Airport continue to intensify their efforts to manage the movement of arriving and departing passengers; recent

statistics revealed that 225,500 will pass through the airport during the national holidays.

The newspaper obtained a copy of the statistics prepared by agencies operating at the airport; indicating that the total number of expected passengers from Feb 25 to March 1, 2025 is

about 225,500 on board 1,691 flights.

The total number of departures during the same period will reach about 113,300 on board 849 flights; while around 112,200 passengers are expected to arrive on board 842 flights.

In addition, Dubai, Cairo, Jeddah, Doha and Istanbul are the most pre-

ferred destinations during the upcoming holidays.

The statistics show that Terminal One will handle 90,200 passengers on 727 flights, Terminal Four will handle 65,300 passengers on 406 flights, and Terminal Five will handle 69,900 passengers on 558 flights.

## Other Voices

## Happy Ramadan, dean's 'College of Life Sciences'

By Ahmad alsarraf

THE College of Life Sciences, which has an unusual name, was established in 2003. Initially, it was called the University College for Girls.

Since its inception, the college has experienced instability, and its identity has remained unclear.

According to the college's website, its goal is to prepare graduates with the competence and skills needed to "lead and challenge" in order to contribute to a better future for the country.

The college aims to meet the demands of the Kuwaiti labor market by offering vital specializations related to life and society, designed according to the highest scientific standards and international academic accreditation. It focuses on fields such as environmental technology management, food sciences, and more, and develops academic programs that equip graduates with the ability to compete, demonstrate leadership skills, and exhibit creativity - rhetoric that even the most prestigious universities may not claim.

The College of Life Sciences comprises four academic departments:

- Department of Food and Nutrition Sciences: This department offers a Bachelor's degree in Food Science, a Bachelor's degree in Nutrition, and a Master's degree in Food Science and Nutrition.
- Department of Communication Disorders Sciences.
- Department of Environmental Technology Management: This department provides both Bachelor's and Master's degrees.
- Department of Information Sciences: This department offers Bachelor's and Master's degrees.

The college did not start with these departments, rather, departments were added, transferred, or abolished over time. For example, the Department of Family Sciences, which may have been relevant when the college was exclusively

for women, was eventually discontinued.

Education specialists argue that there is no real need for this college, as its departments could easily be integrated into other colleges. However, to avoid causing any controversy, it could be attached to Abdullah Al-Salem University.

The issue discussed in this article is not only related to the "unsettling" situation of the College of Life Sciences but also stems from a circular issued by the acting dean of the college.

The circular prohibits holding exams at the college during the last ten days of the upcoming month of Ramadan, justifying this decision by claiming it would benefit the students and allow them to focus on worship while taking into account the challenges they may face during Ramadan due to fasting and staying up late.

While I am not opposed to such measures when they are implemented by the relevant university authorities at a broader level, I find it concerning that they were issued by the deanship of a specific college. This creates undesirable administrative confusion.

I suspect that this dean, if the circular is indeed true, might not have taken such action had it not been for a professor in the College of Education who previously canceled all exams for the entire semester and granted all students "full marks" in celebration of the "revolutionaries" entering Damascus and overthrowing the regime of dictator Bashar al-Assad.

If this was proven to be true, and had the university taken action at the time by questioning that professor, no one else would have felt empowered to act as they pleased.

I tried to reach the acting dean of the College of Life Sciences, but he did not respond to either my calls or my text messages.

I hope this article reaches the administration of Kuwait University and prompts them to prevent the issuance of such individual decisions with a religious undertone in colleges that are meant to be scientific. Such actions also have a negative impact on the university's future ranking.

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## Gov't holds key to expanded tourism ... will name of game!

"IN one of the local daily newspapers -- very close, very close to the heart of the government, there was a government tourism project mentioned, aimed to attract 100,000 visitors annually that will see the light within three years. The song of the late artist Farid Al-Atrash, 'You and I are alone, they envied us with our love' applies to them, as well as the Egyptian proverb: 'Die, you donkey.'" Hassan Ali Karam wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"This is preliminary talk, but the truth is that three years will be multiplied by 10 ... if the promises are true. It is like Mubarak Port, Shaddadiya University, Jaber Bridge and Abdul Razaq Gate Tunnel. These are very promising government projects, but very few are implemented.



Hassan Ali Karam

"According to the government news, the cost of the project is KD12 million and it will provide employment for about 2,000 nationals, while 25 heritage and historical buildings will be converted into cultural centers, most of which are schools and mosques that are still usable.

"In the global view, 50 or 100 years are not considered historical heritage, except after 200 years, while in other countries it is years later. Some palaces of kings and emperors, churches, mosques and temples were built thousands of years ago, yet they are still standing, while schools that were built 50 years ago are still considered new and in service.

"We are a modern country and we are still virgins. We are lying to ourselves if we talk about historical places. We should not deceive ourselves or others. Nevertheless, we see the reality in which we live.

"By the way, a delegation from UNESCO visited years ago to explore the historical sites that deserve to be registered on the World Heritage List. After a tour of the sites, they only found the Greek ruins in Failaka, which were entered on the Media Heritage List.

"I repeat that we are a young country, if the description is correct. Some countries are similar to us. They are still young and what applies to Kuwait applies to them. Other countries attract tourism -- shopping and recreation, but they do not brag. They do not have historical sites on their agenda. Singapore is one of them. In comparison, how many tourists visit this Asian masterpiece? How many visit its beloved counterpart Kuwait?

"The Gulf Cup that was held in the country was enough for us to see the number of our visitors, and what they want.

"A few days ago, a handsome, educated, impulsive, patriotic, ambitious, dreamy young man appeared and asked the government and its prime minister about the government's program, its development plans and other words that touched the heart.

"This young man is only an example of thousands of young Kuwaiti dreamers who are pushed by universities into the labor market. The Civil Service Commission pushes them into jobs that one is ashamed to mention, not because they are shameful, but because they do not suit their specializations.

"The entry of 100,000 tourists to Kuwait is not a miracle, as Dubai receives millions of visitors per year. Its airports receive dozens of planes and thousands of passengers per day.

"Many are dreaming of visiting Kuwait, but not for tourism -- for work and to accumulate wealth. These 100,000 visitors or tourists do not need to visit old schools or Bayt Dickson, the old museum or Khazal Palace.

"If we assume these tourists and visitors are mostly from the young generation, looking for fun, places of entertainment, singing, dancing and shopping, take the tourism standards in sisterly countries, then measure their tourism and your historical excitement.

"The problem of Kuwait's backwardness compared to others is not an incurable disease, just because it is closed. Its government does not think about the size of the ambition, dreams of its children and their dreamy future."

### Also :

"When Kuwaiti women step forward without any government support or backing, but driven solely by a personal desire to do good and fulfill the needs of individuals in both nearby and distant regions through purely voluntary Kuwaiti efforts, you know you are facing extraordinary women. And when these women neither link their giving or the goals they pursue to their own names, nor expect any personal gain, you know you are dealing with truly exceptional women."

columnist **Iqbal Al-Ahmad** wrote for Al-Qabas daily.

"The Kuwaiti Initiative for Giving is an initiative that began by meeting the humanitarian needs in Arab countries. It was a collaboration between men and women from Kuwait for responding to crises or disasters that affected the people of these countries, who had neither the power nor the strength to cope.

"The projects carried out through this initiative, which include the names of virtuous and capable Kuwaiti women, may have preceded government efforts with all its resources. Facilities were built and basic health and educational services that had almost vanished for these people due to various circumstances were provided.

"After I watched a documentary about the projects carried out by this initiative through this group of women, my conviction grew that Kuwaiti women are just as giving and proactive as men. They extend their hands to those in need and to those suffering from extreme poverty. This, of course, is only possible through cooperation with charity organizations that believe in pure, selfless work, as well as external entities that partner with them to transform donations into housing, schools, health centers, and public or even private facilities that simply meet basic humanitarian needs.

"Thank you to the women of this initiative, and thank you to everyone who placed their trust in this initiative, which began in 2013. Your donations and contributions have helped it fulfill its mission.

"It is worth highlighting that this initiative operates under the umbrella of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society and aims to support and restore infrastructure projects in areas suffering from poverty and lack of necessary services.

"We can only tip our hats in salute and appreciation to you, the women of Kuwait, as you truly represent Kuwait, the land of giving and humanity. Thank you!"

□ □ □

"First, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad (May God protect him), His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah, the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef, the ministry's Undersecretary Lieutenant General Sheikh Salem Al-Nawaf, and to my brothers in the Ministry of Interior and the honorable Kuwaiti people, on the occasion of the 64th National Day, the 34th Liberation Day, and the upcoming blessed month of Ramadan. I pray to the Almighty Lord to bless our beloved country with many more such occasions filled with goodness, blessings, and prosperity", columnist **Tareq Hamada** wrote for Al-Anba daily.

"Last Thursday, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Lieutenant General Sheikh Salem Al-Nawaf chaired a security meeting with the assistant undersecretaries to discuss the final preparations for securing the 2025 National Holiday celebrations.

"During the meeting, he affirmed the ministry's commitment to addressing the negative behaviors we have endured for years, such as water spraying, climbing on vehicle roofs, exiting through windows, sitting on vehicle hoods, and obstructing traffic.

"Last year, the ministry demonstrated its determination to enforce the law, and the celebrations were carried out in an organized and refined manner, which reflected clear efforts in planning and preparation. Citizens and residents responded positively to the precise organizational measures, resulting in celebrations that truly reflected responsible and civilized joy, free from the unnecessary disruptions that had previously marred the events.

"Personally, I am confident in the continued discipline, based on the Ministry of Interior's efforts in recent times to tackle issues that were once difficult to imagine overcoming, such as recklessness and negligence.

"Furthermore, the support of security surveillance cameras and increased security presence will further contribute to promoting behavioral discipline.

"I would like to reiterate that the National Day celebrations are a true expression of love and appreciation for our country. They reinforce our deep loyalty and pride, without any disruptive behaviors that could tarnish the events.

"May God protect Kuwait from all harm under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad, and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled (May God bless and protect them).

"In conclusion, I express my heartfelt condolences to the families of the martyrs of duty (May they rest in peace by the will of Allah) - Major Sergeant Ahmad Farhan Harat and Sergeant Musaad Dhahi Saleh - from the Kuwaiti Army ground forces.

"I pray to Allah Almighty to envelop them in His infinite mercy, grant them a place in His vast Paradise among the martyrs, the truthful, and the righteous, and inspire their families with patience and solace. I also pray for the speedy recovery of the injured."

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



KFF Chief Major General Talal Mohammad Al-Roumi salutes the graduates.



A contingent of graduates during the march past. KFF photos

## 'Fire-fighters make great sacrifices to save lives'

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) celebrated the graduation of 506 sergeants and corporals from various specializations recently. According to a press release issued by KFF, the ceremony took place at the KFF Training Department under the patronage and in the presence of the KFF Chief Major General Talal Mohammad Al-Roumi, with the participation of Acting Director

General of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) Dr. Khaled Al-Rashid and a number of senior officials and officers.

During the ceremony, Director of the KFF Training Department Brigadier Hamad Mohammad Abdullah delivered a speech in which he urged the graduates to carry out their duties with honesty, integrity, and a commitment to the high-

est ethical standards.

He reminded them that firefighters make great sacrifices to protect lives and properties in a noble humanitarian service.

At the end of the ceremony, Major General Al-Roumi honored the outstanding graduates.

This was followed by Major General Al-Roumi and Dr. Al-Rashid exchanging medals.

## Courts decide ex-MPs fate

### Kuwaiti acquitted in duds check case

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Court of Cassation has adjourned to April 13 the case filed against former MP Hussein Al-Qallaf, who is accused of encroaching on the powers of His Highness the Amir. The court also dismissed Al-Qallaf's request for release.**

In his defense, Al-Qallaf stated, "I have remained loyal to the ruling family and the regime throughout my parliamentary career, even during difficult times."

I supported the decision to suspend parliament, and stood by the powers and rights of His Highness the Amir. I did not encroach upon His Highness's authority. I neither committed any crime that violates honor and trust, nor steal in order to deserve imprisonment simply for expressing my opinion."

Meanwhile, the court ruled to release former MP Hamad Al-Alyan on bail, and adjourned his case to April 13.

Furthermore, the court adjourned to April 13 the State Security case filed against former MP

Anwar Al-Fikr.

The court also adjourned to the same day the case filed against former MP Saadoun Hamad, who faces charges of vote-buying.

The Court of Cassation also set March 9 for the trial in state security cases filed against former MPs Waleed Al-Tabtabai and Musaed Al-Quraifa.

The First Circuit of the Court of Cassation, presided over by Judge Sultan Bourseli has adjourned to March 16 the first case filed against Al-Arabi Club Chair Abdulaziz Ashour. It suspended the execution of the Court of Appeal's ruling, which sentenced Ashour to six months in prison for insulting a judge, and released him pending the outcome of his appeal.

**Kuwaiti acquitted:** The Misdemeanor Section in the Court of Appeals overturned the ruling of a lower court that sentenced a citizen, in absentia, to two years in prison for issuing a dud check of KD 500,000 leading to his acquittal.

Lawyer for the accused, Attorney Ali Al-Wawan, argued that the check was issued as part of a commercial agreement between the two parties, through which the complainant would import goods from an Asian country and

the defendant would provide payment.

When he cashed the check, the complainant discovered that the funds in the bank account of the citizen were insufficient; so he immediately filed a lawsuit against the citizen for breach of trust and issuance of dud check.

Since the First Instance Court decided to convict the citizen in absentia, Al-Wawan pleaded before the Appeals Court and explained that the check drawn from the bank was in the name of his client; but there was an agreement between the two parties not to withdraw from the bank until the goods were delivered. He said this agreement was made in front of witnesses, but the complainant quickly went to the bank to cash the check and found that the balance was not enough for the amount mentioned in the check.

Al-Wawan continued that his client did not receive the goods and there are no documents confirming receipt of the goods. He added his client admitted that the amount available in the bank was KD350,000 and this was confirmed through the bank statement, meaning he had no intention of committing fraud or deception, and that he asked the complainant for a period of time until the goods arrived in the country, after which he will deposit the remaining amount -- KD150,000.

## Stiff penalties urged for 'psychotropic drugs' peddlers

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Criminal Court has urged Kuwaiti lawmakers to reconsider the current legislation on psychotropic substances, highlighting that these substances have evolved into a serious social issue that demands a comprehensive review of the laws, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The court emphasized the need for stronger punitive measures that align with the severe damage caused by drug dealers and smugglers.

In a landmark ruling, the court, presided over by Counselor Meteb Al-Arabi with judges Sharif Al-Mahi and Omar Al-Otaibi as members, sentenced four individuals to 15

years in prison and others to 10 years for their involvement in drug smuggling and bribery. Several individuals -- employees at the Customs Department -- were dismissed for negligence and accepting bribes in exchange for allowing the smuggling of prohibited substances.

The court's ruling is considered a stark warning, stating that the increasing prevalence of psychotropic substance cases has surpassed the capacity of existing legislative tools -- both punitive and therapeutic. These cases, once isolated, have now become a widespread and dangerous social phenomenon that demands ur-

gent reform. The court pointed out that, while penalties for such substances were initially aligned with the relatively mild impact of these drugs, they have since become more harmful and deadly than narcotics. The misuse of these substances causing significant damage to brain cells, making it critical for the legislature to create new policies and deterrent penalties that reflect the severity of the damage caused by drug traffickers, dealers and smugglers.

The ruling further emphasized the need for stricter penalties for employees whose duties involve controlling or preventing the entry of psychotrop-

ic substances. These employees must face harsh penalties if they intentionally neglect their responsibilities.

Moreover, the court called for a complete overhaul of procedures related to combating these substances, including enhanced tools for detection and prosecution, as well as more advanced penalties and preventive measures suited to modern times. It also stressed the importance of establishing specialized treatment centers for addicts, distinct from psychiatric hospitals, and equipped with trained medical personnel and state-of-the-art treatment methods.



KFF photo

Fire-fighters with their buggy.

Fire on house rooftop

## KFF secures Gulf contest for veterans at stadium

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) participated in securing the Gulf Championship for Veterans (senior players) at Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah Stadium, which kicked off on Saturday evening.

According to a press release issued by KFF, teams from various sectors of Kuwait Fire Force carried out their duties in coordination with the organizing committee, and took all necessary precautions to ensure the safety of fans and delegations throughout the tournament.

A fixed fire point was set up at the stadium and event venues to ensure the safety of all attendees.

□ □ □

**Fire on rooftop:** Fire broke out in a room located on the rooftop of a house. No casualties were reported.

According to a press release issued by Kuwait Fire Force (KFF), firefighters from Bairaq and Qurain fire stations rushed to the location and extinguished the fire after evacuating everyone from the building. Investigations were launched to determine the cause of the fire.

## Illegal exhausts confiscated

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: Confirming the news published by the daily recently, the Ministry of Interior announced that the Salwa and Rumaihiya Investigation Offices of the Hawally Investigation Department uncovered several garages in Shuwaikh Industrial that were involved in the illegal sale and installation of sports exhausts and their accessories, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The ministry explained that the investigation led to the discovery of garages operated by individuals of Egyptian, Syrian, and Bangladeshi nationalities who were selling and installing sports exhausts that violate the law and produce disturbing noise.

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Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan during the meeting with Qatari Minister of Transport Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Thani.



Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mishaan during the meeting with the Palestinian Minister of Transport and Communications Tariq Zaarob.



Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mishaan during the meeting with the Moroccan Minister of Transport and Logistics, Abdel Samad Qayouh.



MPW photos Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mishaan during the meeting with the Egyptian Deputy Minister of Transport, Major General Maged Abdel Hamid.

### Kuwaiti minister hails Morocco's road safety efforts

# Al-Mashaan engages Arab partners on transport cooperation

By Mohammed Ghanem  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan congratulated Morocco on its success in organizing the Global Ministerial Conference

on Road Safety, and affirmed the strong fraternal ties and close cooperation between Kuwait and other Arab countries.

She made this statement during her meetings with Qatari Minister of Transport Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Thani, Moroccan Minister of Transport

Abdel Samad Qayouh, Palestinian Minister of Transport and Communications Tariq Zaarob, and Egyptian Deputy Minister of Transport Major General Maged Abdel Hamid.

These meetings took place on the sidelines of the Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety held in

Marrakech, Morocco.

During the discussions, Dr Al-Mashaan highlighted the need to enhance relations between the countries in the fields of transportation and related infrastructure, and discuss ways to further strengthen and develop these ties.

### New pact expands academic options

## MoHE, KSU ink agreement for Kuwaiti scholars

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: An agreement has been signed by the King Saud University (KSU), in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Ministry of Higher Education, represented by the Cultural Office at the Embassy of Kuwait in Saudi Arabia for the provision of educational services for bachelor's, master's, and PhD degrees.

The agreement aims to strengthen the academic and research partnership between the two brotherly countries. The signing ceremony was held in the presence of the Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Sabah Al-Nasser, and the acting President of King Saud University Dr. Abdullah Al-Salman.

In this regard, Head of the Cultural Office at the Embassy of Kuwait in Saudi Arabia Ahmad Al-Khanfar affirmed the significance of this agreement in supporting Kuwaiti students by offering exceptional educational opportunities at one of Saudi Arabia's most prestigious universities.

He revealed that King Saud University comprises 21 colleges and 15 institutes and research centers,



KUNA photo The Kuwaiti Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research signed an agreement with King Saud University in Riyadh to provide study seats for Kuwaiti students for bachelor's and postgraduate degrees.

as well as research facilities within the colleges, an integrated university city for female students, and an advanced medical city.

Al-Khanfar explained that this partnership will contribute to the exchange of academic and research

expertise, and enhance cooperation in fields that support sustainable development in both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. The agreement will enrich the Ministry of Higher Education's annual scholarship plan by offering additional seats for Kuwaiti students wishing to study in distinguished specializations such as allied medical services, engineering, scientific disciplines, and other fields that are in line with labor market demands. He affirmed that all university specializations will be available to Kuwaiti students who meet the requirements and wish to register at their own expense.

Meanwhile, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education Lamia Al-Malhem said the agreement marks an important step in strengthening educational cooperation with Saudi Arabia, and contributes to enhancing the quality of higher education for Kuwaiti students by allowing them to benefit from the distinguished academic expertise of King Saud University.

She explained that the Ministry of Higher Education is committed to enhancing academic cooperation by directing its cultural offices in various sisterly and friendly countries to establish educational agreements that expand opportunities for Kuwaiti students and further develop scholarship programs.

# Council weighs in on rainwater basin plan

## Key land allocations approved

By Inaas Awadh  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Municipal Council, during its session on Sunday, will review the detailed study submitted by the Kuwait Municipality on the proposal of members Abdullatif Al-Daai and Sherifa Al-Shalfan to explore ways to utilize water collection basins and rainwater drainage channels.

According to the study, which was approved by acting Director General of the Municipality Manal Al-Asfour; a survey was conducted in various residential areas to assess the rainwater collection basins. This survey revealed that there are 96 basins in different areas like Shuaiba, Subiya, Sabriya, Salmi, Abdali, Mutla'a and South and West Abdullah Al-Mubarak.

Regarding the use of open basins around new residential areas to manage flood risks, the Municipality clarified that it had consulted the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation (PART) to share its perspective on the proposal of Al-Daai and Al-Shalfan.

PART, as the supervising and reviewing body responsible for the allocation of these basins, is bound by a special consultative agreement. This agreement covers the study, design, preparation of contractual documents, and supervision of rainwater drainage systems in the northern, southern, and western urban areas, as handled by the Municipality.

However, the Municipality emphasized that the consultative agreement did not ad-

dress the potential utilization of the basins; making this proposal fall outside the scope of work of PART.

In its communication with the Municipality, PART stated that the study, design and implementation of flood protection measures adhere to both local and international standards. These standards should be followed by the entities responsible for city planning and design. The authority recommended that these entities be tasked with incorporating flood protection measures during the design phase to avoid costly remedial measures later on.

The authority also highlighted that solutions for rainwater drainage systems could be more technically and economically viable if they are integrated during the planning stage of urban areas, with coordination for future agricultural projects.

As for the other proposal put forward by members Al-Shalfan and Al-Daai regarding the use of airport water, the authority noted that the implementation of such an idea requires collaboration with the concerned authorities. It expressed no objection to providing support to these authorities.

In conclusion, the Municipality affirmed that the proposal of Al-Daai and Al-Shalfan regarding the utilization of rainwater basins and drainage channels falls outside its jurisdiction. It explained that its role is limited to the allocation of these basins in line with Law No. 33/2016, which governs the Municipality. The responsibility for implementing the proposal lies with other authorities, in accordance with their respective mandates.

Meanwhile, the Municipal Council approved on Sunday, during its last regular session before the holy month of Ramadan and with all members present, the Amiri Diwan's request to allocate an area of 1,161 square meters from Hind Intermediate School for Girls in Jabriya.

The council also granted approval for the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy's request to allocate the site of sub-transformer No. 1 in the same area.

In addition, the council approved the Ministry of Islamic Affairs' request to allocate a site for a temporary mosque and parking lots in the Na'em scrap area.



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## MoJ issues circular 'granting' women revoked of nationality Kuwaiti status

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice Tariq Al-Asfour issued administrative circular No. 9/2025, stipulating that women whose nationalities have been revoked under Article 8 of Amiri Decree No. 15/1959 regarding the Na-

tionality Law and its amendments will be treated as female Kuwaiti citizens, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The circular affirmed the importance of all ministry sectors adhering to its provisions, effective from the date of issuance today.

## PAHW explores investment opportunities for private nurseries in new housing areas

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Investment and Private Sector Projects Sector at the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) held discussions with the Private Nurseries Association regarding the allocation of investment opportunities in new residential areas, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement, Director of the Investment Department at PAHW Ahmed Al-Ansari explained that the meeting was part of PAHW's efforts to offer investment opportunities for private nurseries. This would involve gathering necessary data and conducting a comprehensive study based on mutual exchange of expertise between the two parties. This initiative is part of a plan to support early education projects in Kuwait.

He highlighted PAHW's commitment

to providing integrated services in future housing projects with the aim of enhancing the quality of life by offering advanced educational and social infrastructure that meets the needs of families and children.

Al-Ansari affirmed that these efforts contribute to improving the quality of early education and creating a suitable environment for children's growth, adding that it reflects Kuwait's commitment to achieving sustainable development goals and enhancing the quality of life for its citizens.

In addition, President of the Private Nurseries Association Hanan Al-Mudhahka discussed the procedures for private nursery projects during the meeting.

She highlighted the coordination with relevant authorities and discussed the important challenges faced by investors.

## PAFN reaffirms commitment to nat'l food safety, public health protection

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: Chair of the Board of Directors and Director General of the Public Authority for Food (PAFN) Dr. Reem Al-Fulaij affirmed PAFN's commitment to working in line with a national policy related to food safety and enhancing community nutrition by promoting healthy habits to reduce the spread of nutritional deficiency diseases and protect public health in coordination with the relevant authorities, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement issued on the occasion of the national holidays at its headquarters in Sabah Al-Salem, Dr. Al-Fulaij said the occasion is a reminder of PAFN's dedication to ensuring consumer safety and health.

She highlighted that the celebration represents a renewal of allegiance to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled.

## LOCAL

## HH Amir sends wishes to Guyana on National Day

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent Sunday a cable of congratulations to President of Guyana, Dr. Mohammad Irfaan Ali, on occasion of the national day. His Highness the Amir wished the president good health and the people of Guyana further progress and prosperity.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent Sunday a cable of congratulations to President of Guyana, Dr. Mohammad Irfaan Ali, on occasion of the national day of his country, and wished the President good health.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent Sunday a cable of congratulations to President of Guyana, Dr. Mohammad Irfaan Ali.

## MEW approves 2nd batch of employee transfer requests

By Mohammad Ghanem  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Undersecretary of the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy Dr. Adel Al-Zamil issued a decision on Sunday to approve the second batch of transfer requests for 346 employees, based on their previously submitted applications.

According to informed sources, Dr. Al-Zamil approved the second batch after completing the evaluation process. On February 12, the 323 names from the first batch of transfer requests were approved, bringing the total number of employees whose transfers were approved to 669 out of 2,000 employees who had submitted transfer requests.

## Continued from Page 1

## Political leadership's

The current leadership recognizes the challenges inherited from previous decades and is committed to overcoming them with a clear vision; starting with the corruption that has spread in most institutions and whatever is left of the destruction of the meaning of modern management, until the burial of the national identity under the rubble of private interests.

The political leadership had many accomplishments last year; including legislative amendments, modernizing laws and safeguarding national identity.

They exposed fraudulent activities, addressed institutional damage, and initiated reconstruction efforts. These efforts included the development of roads and revitalizing the vital Mubarak Port.

Kuwait's re-emergence in regional and international affairs, marked by its renewed presence in international forums, coincided with these accomplishments. This openness, a stark contrast to the previous era of exclusivity as if it were the Garden of Eden where access was granted solely at the discretion of certain officials who caused havoc in institutions, is a positive development that cannot be ignored. Such exclusivity shackled Kuwait, as it caused the expulsion of foreign investments and discouraged the spending of local capital to stimulate the national economy.

This openness was first reflected in the 26th Gulf Cup tournament. The event confirmed that Kuwait has returned as an oasis for the Gulf and Arabs who see it as a land of peace, culture, arts and tolerance.

Today, we are witnessing well-studied steps, not a partial reform. These steps are based on the principle that man is the pillar of development and the maker of the future.

Therefore, the interest in man is not just a formality or slogan; as it rather begins with encouraging talents, businesses and projects, so they become good seeds for further discovery of national gems.

A notable accomplishment is the establishment of justice, particularly for those who were previously wronged due to the mistakes of official or as a result of falling victim to corrupt individuals. A committee was formed to review complaints about citizenship revocations, ensuring that their cases are examined fairly and humanely, as promised by the Amir of firmness and determination.

For all of this to be achieved within one year, it means that daily follow up by the wise leadership establishes a lot of discipline in administrative behavior, which must be completely reformed. Kuwait is not weak, but it was under pressure from corrupt and influential people who believe in the theory that "the end justifies the means." This is the reason why we witnessed the bad. We have been waiting for the good for a long time, but it was delayed until the Sun of the current leadership shone.

A historical saying comes to mind at this point - "The first way to evaluate the wisdom of the ruler is to look at the men surrounding him." We are seeing this today in the elite chosen by His Highness the Amir to pursue the realization of his hopes -- the aspirations of the Kuwaiti people.

This choice determines where Kuwait is heading to have a bright future, because it is based on a present where there are many great Amiri efforts and diligent follow up to achieve reforms quickly, but not hastily.

Perhaps, the fruits will ripen next year and Kuwaitis will witness more ambitions that His Highness promised to achieve, such that the 2026 celebrations will mark the end of the six decades of unrealistic reform plans and symbolize the progress made towards a brighter future.

## Amir receives

In addition, His Highness the Amir welcomed Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, Deputy Ruler of Abu Dhabi and UAE National Security Advisor, along with his accompanying delegation. Sheikh Tahnoon conveyed

greetings from UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, who wished His Highness good health and Kuwait continued progress. In response, His Highness the Amir extended his greetings and best wishes for the prosperity of the UAE.

Later in the day, His Highness the Amir received Egyptian Prime Minister Dr. Mustafa Madbouli, who delivered an invitation from Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi to attend the emergency Arab summit in Cairo on March 4. The two leaders discussed bilateral relations, regional affairs, and international developments.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir is set to patronize and attend the Fifth Fence Operetta at Bayan Palace on Monday, February 24, at 10:00 a.m. local time.

Several senior state officials attended the meetings.

## Diplomats celebrate

Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Dr. Matar Al Neyadi affirmed that "the UAE, its government and people share the joy of the State of Kuwait on this occasion that is dear to our hearts. Relations between the UAE and Kuwait are historical, deeply rooted, and they continue to grow and prosper."

Omani Ambassador Saleh Al Kharousi stressed that "relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the State of Kuwait are well-known, becoming more solid and stable over the years, while achieving astonishing development in the past year; crowned with huge economic projects that raised the volume of trade exchange to more than \$5 billion."

Ambassador of the State of Qatar Ali Al Mahmoud said "the State of Qatar, its leadership, government and people share happiness with their brothers in the State of Kuwait on this occasion due to our kinship, fraternity, common values and destiny that bind the two countries and their citizens. We remember the sacrifice of our fathers and grandfathers in building, raising and advancing dear Kuwait, whose loyal sons gave their most precious and valuable things in order to liberate their homeland. We also remember with pride and honor the honorable role of the Qatari forces that participated in the battle to liberate Kuwait, which has remained a symbol of Gulf cohesion."

Egyptian Ambassador Osama Shalout considers the occasion a testament to Kuwait's steadfastness, progress and unity under its wise leadership. He added "Egypt is proud of the strong historical relations between our two countries, based on mutual respect, cooperation and a shared vision for stability and prosperity in the region."

Chinese Ambassador Zhang Jianwei said Kuwait has witnessed remarkable achievements in various fields in the past year under the wise leadership and the decisive role of His Highness the Amir in developing the country and consolidating the reform approach.

European Union (EU) Ambassador Anne Koistinen said the EU and Kuwait enjoy a close friendship based on mutual respect and cooperation, expressing her best wishes to Kuwait for assuming the rotating presidency of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and for being declared the capital of Arab culture and media for the year 2025.

Indian Ambassador Adarsh Swaika confirmed that India and Kuwait have historical, commercial and public ties dating back centuries ago, and that these relations were upgraded to a strategic partnership during the recent visit of the Indian Prime Minister to Kuwait. "I am confident that the people of Kuwait will witness more progress and prosperity under the wise leadership."

Ambassador of Mexico Eduardo Patricio Peña Haller said "this day marks the celebration of the rich Kuwaiti heritage, with its great achievements and the unity of its people. Mexico values its strong and growing

friendship with Kuwait, based on mutual respect, cooperation and common aspirations for peace and prosperity."

Russian Ambassador Vladimir Geltov greeted Kuwait, its leadership and people on their National Day and Liberation Day, and the approaching holy month of Ramadan. He stated that "our bilateral relations in various fields are progressing. Russia and Kuwait have common interests and the desire to improve political dialogue and strengthen economic and humanitarian cooperation, while the number of Kuwaiti tourists to Russia is constantly increasing."

French Ambassador Olivier Gauvin disclosed that "France was among the first countries to recognize the State of Kuwait, just two months after its declaration of independence in 1961. Since then, the bonds of friendship between the two countries have never weakened and have been evident at the most important moments -- whether during war to defend the sovereignty of Kuwait or in times of peace."

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## Leave pay

The decisions made by the Civil Service Council during the aforementioned meeting, for which the CSC requested a statement of their financial impact, included three main changes:

1. Reducing the cash allowance due to employees upon the end of their service from 180 days to a maximum equivalent to the unused vacation balance for two years.

2. Granting a mandatory periodic leave of no less than 15 days per year. If the employee does not use their annual vacation voluntarily, it will be deducted from their balance.

3. Reducing the maximum amount of periodic leave that can be carried over from five years to two years, with any excess being forfeited.

In the letter, the Civil Service Commission (CSC) also requested that the ministry study the financial impact of the decision to cancel the disbursement of the cash allowance during service, as stipulated by Decree No. 81/2022.

CSC clarified in its letter to the Ministry of Finance that this request is based on a letter from the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, which included a decision by the Legal Affairs Committee to revisit the issue of amending periodic leaves and the cash allowance. The committee instructed CSC to coordinate with both the Ministry of Finance and the Fatwa and Legislation Department to prepare a comprehensive project in light of the committee's observations. This project will then be submitted to the Ministry of Finance for the preparation of an integrated study on the financial impact resulting from the amendment.

## Gold price

Trade disputes—particularly those affecting automobiles, pharmaceuticals, and semiconductor imports—have fueled economic uncertainty, prompting investors to seek gold as a safe-haven asset.

In the local market, 24-carat gold was priced at KD 29.45 per gram (approximately \$90), while 22-carat gold stood at KD 26.80 per gram (around \$82). Silver prices remained steady at KD 362 per kilogram (\$1,183).

Gold's ongoing rally, the longest since 2000, underscores its status as a key hedge against inflation and economic uncertainty, with investors continuing to strengthen their positions in the metal.

Facilities dedicated to supporting justice, elderly care needs

## MEW expands services with two new offices

By Mohammad Ghanem  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Dr. Mahmoud Bushehri on Sunday inaugurated the offices of the Ministry of Justice and People of Determination and Elderly Services in the main ministry building.

Undersecretary of the ministry Dr. Adel Al-Zamil and several senior ministry officials attended the inauguration ceremony.

In a statement on the sidelines of the opening ceremony, Bushehri stated "in celebration of the national holidays, we officially opened the two offices. The purpose is to streamline the process for visitors to complete their transactions -- debt declaration, power of attorney or other services provided by the Justice Ministry Office. We have also dedicated the People of Determination and Elderly Services Office to ensuring the ease and convenience of completing their transactions."

Al-Zamil expressed his enthusiasm over the opening of both offices, emphasizing their role in improving visitor experience.



Minister Dr. Mahmoud Bushehri and Undersecretary Dr. Adel Al-Zamil pose for a group photo during the inauguration ceremony.

"The Ministry of Justice Office will ensure efficient processing of legal matters, while the People of Determination and Elderly Services Office is equipped with the necessary resources to meet the needs of these individuals; thereby, facilitating smooth service delivery."

On the progress of the independent power plant project, Al-Zamil tackled the timeline for the technical and financial studies

submitted by AP Transco Limited and its strategic partner General Electric. He explained that, in accordance with the memorandum of understanding, the investor has been granted six months to submit the economic feasibility study. "Once the study is reviewed and deemed beneficial to the public, we will begin negotiations to finalize the agreement for the independent power plant project," he

disclosed.

Al-Zamil also shared plans for the upcoming energy projects. "We are working on three significant projects with production capacities ranging from 900 megawatts to 3,600 megawatts. While these projects are expected to take approximately three years to complete, they will not only meet Kuwait's future energy needs, but will also create surplus capacity;

enabling us to engage in energy trade with neighboring countries."

When asked about the ministry's preparedness for potential electricity shortages next summer, Al-Zamil assured "we have strategic reserves in place and are negotiating with other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries through the GCC Interconnection Authority to secure additional electricity supply during the summer months if necessary."

He also highlighted an important project that will benefit Kuwait in the near future. He affirmed "the connection of Wafra station is set to be completed by April or May, after which it will be linked to Sabah Al-Ahmad stations through a high-voltage overhead line, enhancing our energy network."

He stressed the importance of regular maintenance of the entire electricity network --encompassing production units, transmission and distribution infrastructure. "This maintenance season, we have implemented new strategies aimed at increasing the resilience of our production units, which should reduce emergency outages during summer," he explained.

## MoH, MoHE join forces to shape medical workforce

Ministries plan to bridge skills gap

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Nader Al-Jalal and Minister of Health Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadhi recently held a joint meeting with officials from both ministries to assess the needs of medical and support healthcare personnel.

The discussions focused on identifying the specializations needed in the coming years in order to align them with the number of nationals sent abroad for study in basic and support medical fields, while ensuring that the expected graduates meet international standards for healthcare needs.

The meeting was guided by certain criteria; taking into account several factors such as population growth, job turnover rates, the expansion of medical cities and hospitals, and the increase in healthcare beds. These considerations helped shape a strategic approach aimed at balancing the health labor market, optimizing public spending, and directing resources to the most effective uses to achieve the highest benefits for both the country and its citizens.

To address the growing demand for medical professionals, the Ministry of Higher Education will adopt policies that steer students toward basic medical specializations; such as human medicine, dentistry and pharmacy, while prioritizing support medical fields in line with the Ministry of Health's urgent needs. These fields include nursing, medical technicians in anesthesia and catheterization, medical emergencies, therapeutic nutrition, digital health and physical sciences.

This strategic direction will be clearly reflected in the 2025/2026 external mission plan, which will soon be announced. The plan will specify the number of seats available for medical courses in line with the Ministry of Health's priorities. The goal is to ensure the sustainability of health services at the highest standards, encourage students to pursue in-demand courses, and bridge the gap between the needs of the health sector and educational outcomes. This approach will help balance supply and demand in the healthcare sector and improve the quality of services provided to the community.

## Iraqi Embassy warns against 'fake brokers'

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Iraqi Embassy has denied the existence of a mediator or a fixer to process the transactions of Iraqis residing in Kuwait.

In a statement to the newspaper, the embassy addressed its citizens stating that "the Embassy of the Republic of Iraq in Kuwait extends its best regards to the honorable community residing in the State of Kuwait and the rest of its honorable visitors. You must visit the Consular Section at the embassy and refrain from resorting to intermediaries, transaction brokers or law firms for the processing of consular transactions. The embassy has no connection with any entity claiming to provide consular facilities for the processing of transactions in Iraq. You must not deal with such entities to ensure you are not exposed to fraud and deception. We affirm our utmost respect and appreciation for your commitment to the aforementioned instructions to ensure that you avail the consular services with complete transparency and ease."



KUNA photo  
Minister of Higher Education Dr. Nader Al-Jalal and Minister of Health Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadhi during the meeting.

Both ministries emphasized that these updates are in line with demographic changes and evolving health developments, ensuring that the health labor market is supplied with the best talent and expertise. This will contribute to achieving the State's vision of an integrated, efficient, and sustainable educational and healthcare system.

Present at the meeting were key officials including Undersecretary of the Health Ministry Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi; acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education Lamia Al-Malham; Director of Kuwait University Prof. Dina Al-Mailam; Chairman of the Founding Board of Abdullah Al-Salem University Prof. Moudi Al-Hamoud; and Deputy Director of Abdullah Al-Salem University for Academic Affairs and Evaluation Dr. Rashid Al-Azmi.

Other attendees were university and ministry representatives, as well as experts from the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET).

Through this collaborative effort, the ministries of Higher Education and Health aim to strategically align educational programs with the evolving needs of the healthcare sector to ensure that Kuwait's medical workforce is well-equipped to face future challenges.

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## INTERNATIONAL

## Musk gives all federal workers 48 hours to explain what they did last week

NEW YORK, Feb 23, (AP): Hundreds of thousands of federal workers have been given little more than 48 hours to explain what they accomplished over the last week, sparking confusion across key agencies as billionaire Elon Musk expands his crusade to slash the size of federal government.

Musk, who serves as President Donald Trump's cost-cutting chief, tel-

egraphed the extraordinary request on his social media network on Saturday.

"Consistent with President @realDonaldTrump's instructions, all federal employees will shortly receive an email requesting to understand what they got done last week," Musk posted on X, which he owns. "Failure to respond will be taken as a resignation."

Shortly afterward, federal employees - including some judges, court staff and federal prison officials - received a three-line email with this instruction: "Please reply to this email with approx. 5 bullets of what you accomplished last week and cc your manager."

The deadline to reply was listed as Monday at 11:59 p.m., although the email did not include Musk's social media threat about those who fail to respond.

The latest unusual directive from Musk's team injects a new sense of chaos across beleaguered multiple agencies, including the National Weather Service, the State Department and the federal court system, as senior officials worked to verify the message's authenticity Saturday night and in some cases, instructed their employees not to respond.

Thousands of government employees have already been forced out of the federal workforce - either by being fired or offered a buyout - during the first month of Trump's administration as the White House and Musk's so-called Department of Government Efficiency fire both new and career workers, tell agency leaders to plan for "large-scale reductions in force" and freeze trillions of dollars in federal grant funds.



Elon Musk holds up a chainsaw he received from Argentina's President Javier Milei, (right), as they arrive to speak at the Conservative Political Action Conference, CPAC, at the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center on Feb 20, in Oxon Hill, Md. (AP)



Law enforcement respond to the scene of a shooting at UPMC Memorial Hospital in York, Pa., on Feb 22. (AP)

## Officer killed after gunman took hostages at Pennsylvania hospital

A man armed with a pistol and carrying zip ties entered a Pennsylvania hospital's intensive care unit Saturday and took staff members hostage before he was killed by police in a shootout that also left an officer dead, authorities said.

Three workers at UPMC Memorial Hospital, including a doctor, a

nurse and a custodian, and two other officers were shot and wounded in the attack, York County District Attorney Tim Barker said. A fourth staffer was injured in a fall.

Gunfire erupted after officers went to engage the shooter, whom Barker identified as Diogenes Archangel-Ortiz, 49. He said Archangel-Ortiz was holding at gunpoint a

female staff member who had her hands bound with zip ties when police opened fire.

"This is a huge loss to our community," Barker said at a press conference following the shooting. "It is absolutely clear, and beyond any and all doubt, that the officers were justified in taking their action using deadly force." (AP)

'GOP will continue to win and defy history'

## Trump revels in mass federal firings, jeers at Biden before adoring crowd

OXON HILL, Md., Feb 23, (AP): US President Donald Trump said Saturday that "nobody's ever seen anything" like his administration's sweeping effort to fire thousands of federal employees and shrink the size of government, congratulating himself for "dominating" Washington and sending bureaucrats "packing."

Addressing an adoring crowd at the Conservative Political Action Conference just outside the nation's capital, Trump promised, "We're going to forge a new and lasting political majority that will drive American politics for generations to come."

The president argues that voters gave him a mandate to overhaul government while cracking down on the US-Mexico border and extending tax cuts that were the signature policy of his first administration.

Trump clicked easily back into campaign mode during his hour-plus speech, predicting that the GOP will continue to win and defy history, which has shown that a president's party typically struggles during midterm elections. He insisted of Republicans, "I don't think we've been at this level, maybe ever."

"Nobody's ever seen anything like this," Trump said, likening his new ad-

ministration's opening month to being on a roll through the first four holes of a round of golf - which he said gives him confidence for the fifth hole.

Trump has empowered Elon Musk to help carry out the firings, and the billionaire suggested Saturday that more might be coming.

"Consistent with President @realDonaldTrump's instructions, all federal employees will shortly receive an email requesting to understand what they got done last week," Musk posted on X, which he owns. "Failure to respond will be taken as a resignation."

Later, an "HR" email was sent to federal workers across numerous agencies titled "What did you do last week" and asking that recipients "reply with approx. 5 bullets of what you accomplished last week and cc your manager." It cautioned against sending classified information, and gave a deadline of Monday at 11:59 p.m. ET.

Trump also said during the speech that he'd carry out harsher immigration policies. But those efforts have so far largely been overshadowed by his administration's mass federal firings. He announced that one entity with a workforce that had been significantly reduced, the U.S. Agency for Interna-



US President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump arrive at the National Governors Association dinner and reception in the East Room of the White House on Feb 22 in Washington. (AP)

tional Development, would have its Washington office taken over by Customs and Border Protection officials.

"The agency's name has been removed from its former building," he said.

The president also repeated his previous promises to scrutinize the coun-

try's gold depository at Fort Knox.

"Would anybody like to join us?" he asked to cheers from the crowd at the suggestion that administration forces might converge on the complex. "We want to see if the gold is still there."

But Trump also devoted large

chunks of his address to reliving last year's presidential race, jeering at former president Joe Biden and mispronouncing the first name of former vice president Kamala Harris - his Election Day opponent - gleefully proclaiming, "I haven't said that name in a while."

He went on to use an expletive to describe Biden's handling of border security, despite noting that evangelical conservatives have urged him not to use foul language.

Trump had kinder words for Chinese President Xi Jinping, saying "I happen to like" him, while saying, "we've been treated very unfairly by China and many other countries."

On the sidelines of the conference, Trump met with conservative Polish President Andrzej Duda amid rising tensions in Europe over Russia's war in Ukraine. After he took the stage, Trump saluted Duda and another attendee, Argentine President Javier Milei.

Trump called Duda "a fantastic man and a great friend of mine" and said "you must be doing something right, hanging out with Trump." He noted that Milei was "a MAGA guy, too, Make Argentina Great Again."

Poland is a longtime ally of Ukraine. Trump upended recent US policy by

dispatching top foreign policy advisers to Saudi Arabia for direct talks with Russian officials that were aimed at ending fighting in Ukraine.

Those meetings did not include Ukrainian or European officials, which has alarmed US allies. Trump is meeting on Monday at the White House with French President Emmanuel Macron and Thursday with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

Trump also has begun a public tiff with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, whom the US president called a "dictator" while falsely suggesting that Ukraine started the war - though on Friday Trump acknowledged that Russia attacked its neighbor.

Trump told the CPAC crowd, "I'm dealing with President Zelenskyy. I'm dealing with President Putin" and added of fighting in Ukraine, "It affects Europe. It doesn't really affect us."

Zelenskyy has said Trump is living in a Russian-made "disinformation space." For much of the time since Russia invaded in February 2022, the United States, under Biden, pledged that Ukraine would play in any major effort to end the fighting, vowing "nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine."



View of the Reichstag building in Berlin, Germany on Feb 23 during the German national election. (AP)

## Germany votes in election with economy, migration and far-right strength in focus

BERLIN, Feb 23, (AP): German voters are choosing a new government in an election Sunday dominated by worries about the years-long stagnation of Europe's biggest economy, pressure to curb migration and growing uncertainty over the future of Ukraine and Europe's alliance with the United States. The center-right opposition is favored to win, while polls point to the strongest result for a far-right party since World War II.

Germany is the most populous country in the 27-nation European Union and a leading member of NATO. It has been Ukraine's second-biggest weapons supplier, after the US. It will be central to shaping the continent's response to the challenges of the coming years, including the Trump administration's confrontational foreign and trade policy.

The top candidates, conservative front-runner Friedrich Merz and current Chancellor Olaf Scholz of the Social Democrats, voted within minutes of each other in different parts of the country on Sunday morning.

More than 59 million people in the nation of 84 million are eligible to elect the 630 members of the lower house of parliament, the Bundestag, who will take their seats under the glass dome of Berlin's landmark Re-

ichstag building.

Germany's electoral system rarely produces absolute majorities, and no party looks anywhere near one this time. It's expected that two or more parties will form a coalition, following potentially difficult negotiations that will take weeks or even months before the Bundestag elects the next chancellor.

This election is taking place seven months before it was originally planned after center-left Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition collapsed in November, three years into a term that was increasingly marred by infighting. There's widespread discontent and not much enthusiasm for any of the candidates.

Center-right opposition leader Friedrich Merz's Union bloc has consistently led polls, with 28-32% support in the most recent surveys, and Merz is favored to replace Scholz. Scholz's Social Democrats have been polling between 14-16%, which would be their worst postwar result in a national parliamentary election.

The far-right, anti-immigration Alternative for Germany, or AfD, has been running in second place with around 20% of the vote - well above its previous best of 12.6% in a national election, from 2017 - and has

fielded its first candidate for chancellor in Alice Weidel. But other parties say they won't work with it, a stance often known as the "firewall."

The environmentalist Greens also are running for the top job, with outgoing Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck, but have been polling a little below the Bundestag's party.

Merz has pledged "stability instead of chaos" after Scholz's three-party coalition collapsed following long-running internal arguments, including over how to revitalize the economy.

But it's unclear whether the conservative leader, if he wins, will be able to put together a stable government that does much better. Merz hopes for a two-party coalition, but may end up needing a third partner to form a government.

The realistic candidates to join a Merz government are Scholz's Social Democrats, the Greens and the pro-business Free Democrats - who were the smallest partner in Scholz's collapsed government and may not manage to stay in parliament.

The Free Democrats and another small party are hovering at around 5% of the vote, the threshold to qualify for seats in parliament. If they do, there may be no majority for a two-party coalition.

## France, Britain leaders head to Washington to urge Trump not to abandon Ukraine

LONDON, Feb 23, (AP): The leaders of France and Britain are making tag-team visits to Washington this week as Europe attempts to persuade President Donald Trump not to abandon Ukraine in pursuit of a peace deal in the three-year-old war with Russia.

There is an element of good cop, bad cop in efforts by UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron to salvage American support for Kyiv.

Starmer, reluctant to openly confront Trump, speaks of being a bridge between Europe and the US administration. Macron has more strongly criticized Trump's recent statements that echo Russia's narrative and American moves to negotiate with Moscow while sidelining Ukraine.

Both leaders stress Ukraine's voice and sovereignty must be at the center of any peace talks.

The French president warned Trump against appearing "weak in the face of President Putin."

"It's not you, it's not your trademark, it's not in your interest," said Macron, who is due at the White House on Monday, the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Starmer is set to follow on Thursday.

The trips come after Macron called a crisis meeting of European leaders in Paris last week to discuss the continent's next steps - and after Trump on Friday claimed Macron and Starmer "haven't done anything" over the past three years to end the war.



French President Emmanuel Macron, (right), and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer attend ceremonies marking the 106th anniversary of the Armistice, a celebration of their countries' friendship, as nations across the world pay tribute to their fallen soldiers in World War I, on Nov 11, 2024 in Paris. (AP)

The centrist French leader, known for his bold diplomatic moves, says he'll seek to persuade Trump that American and European interests are the same, telling him: "If you let Russia take over Ukraine, it would be unstopable."

Starmer, a cautious center-left politician, has avoided directly contradicting Trump or criticizing his actions. The UK joined the US in refusing to sign a joint declaration at an Artificial Intelligence summit hosted by Macron in Paris this month in what was seen as an attempt to curry favor with Washington.

But the prime minister has reaffirmed Britain's support for Ukraine, rejecting Trump's assertion that Zelenskyy is a "dictator" and the president's suggestion that Kyiv started the war, which erupted when Russia invaded its neighbor on Feb 24, 2022.

Starmer spoke to Zelenskyy on Saturday, expressing "the UK's ironclad support for Ukraine and commitment to securing a just and enduring peace." He said he would stress "safeguarding Ukraine's sovereignty" when he speaks to Trump in Washington.



Calin Georgescu, the winner of Romania's first round of presidential election, annulled by the Constitutional Court, waves to supporters gathered for a protest outside the Romanian parliament in Bucharest, Romania on Feb 22. (AP)

## Thousands rally in Bucharest to support far-right Georgescu

BUCHAREST, Romania, Feb 23, (AP): Thousands of protesters took to the streets of Romania's capital on Saturday in a show of support for Calin Georgescu, the far-right populist who emerged as the front-runner in last year's presidential race that was annulled days before the second-round runoff.

Many of the demonstrators in central Bucharest waved Romania's blue, yellow and red flags, while others brandished placards bearing slogans such as "President Georgescu" and "We want the second round to be resumed." The presidential election is set to be rerun in May, but some have demanded a resumption of the canceled race.

The protest comes after the Constitutional Court made the unprecedented move to annul the election just two days before a Dec. 8 runoff. Georgescu - who was polling in single digits and declared zero campaign spending - shocked many when he won the first round on Nov. 24, after which allegations of electoral violations and Russian interference emerged.

China denies it didn't give timely warning of exercises off Australia

## French aircraft carrier stages combat drills with Filipinos in disputed sea

MANILA, Philippines, Feb 23, (AP): France's nuclear-powered aircraft carrier and accompanying warships were in the Philippines on Sunday after holding combat drills with Filipino forces in the disputed South China Sea in a show of firepower that would likely antagonize China.

The Charles de Gaulle docked on Friday at Subic Bay, a former US Naval base northwest of Manila, for a break after more than two months of deployment in the Indo-Pacific. The French carrier engaged with security allies for contingency readiness and to promote regional security, including with Filipino forces, navy ships and fighter jets. They held anti-submarine warfare drills and aerial combat training on Friday in the South China Sea, Philippine and French officials said.

Last year, the French navy deployed a frigate for the first time to participate in a joint sail with United States and Philippine counterpart forces in and near the disputed waters. It was part of the largest annual combat exercises in years by American and Filipino allied forces. The drills, known as Balikatan (Tagalog for "shoulder-to-shoulder"), involved more than 16,000 military personnel.

China strongly criticized the exercises then, saying the Philippines was "ganging up" with countries from outside Asia in an obvious reference to the U.S. and its security partners, and warned the drills could instigate confrontation and undermine regional stability.

France's recent and ongoing military deployments to the Philippines underscore its "commitment to regional security and the shared goal of strengthening maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," Armed Forces of the Philippines spokesperson Co Xerxes Trinidad said.

The Charles de Gaulle, the only nuclear-powered aircraft carrier in the world other than those of the US Navy, led a strike group that included three destroyer warships and an oil replenishment ship in its first-ever visit to the Philippines, French officials said.

France has been shoring up its military engagements with the Philippines and other Southeast Asian nations at odds with China in the disputed waters, a key global trade and security route although it says those emergency-preparedness



French aircraft carrier The Charles de Gaulle docks at Subic Bay port, a former US Naval base northwest of Manila, Philippines on Feb 23. (AP)

actions were not aimed at any particular country.

China, however, has bristled at any presence of foreign forces, especially the US military and its allies, which carry out war drills or patrols in the South China Sea, which Beijing claims almost in its entirety although it has not publicly released exact coordinates of its claim other than 10 dashed lines to demarcate vaguely what it calls its territory on maps. Beijing's claims overlap with those of the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan in long-unresolved territorial standoffs. Indonesia has also figured in violent confrontations with Chinese coast guard and fishing fleets in the Natuna waters.

Two weeks ago, Australia protested after a Chinese J-16 fighter jet released flares that passed within 30 meters (100 feet) of an Australian P-8 Poseidon

surveillance jet over the South China Sea, according to Australian Defense Minister Richard Marles.

The Australian military plane did not sustain any damage and no crewmember was injured in the Feb. 11 incident. A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson accused the Australian aircraft of "deliberately" intruding into airspace over the disputed Paracel Islands, which China and Vietnam contest.

In late 2023, French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu and Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro signed an accord to boost military cooperation and joint engagements.

France and the Philippines began talks last year on a defense pact that would allow troops from each country to hold exercises in the other's territory. French negotiators have handed a draft of the agreement to their Filipino counterparts to start the negotiations.

### Also:

**BEIJING:** China's Defense Ministry said Sunday that Australia had made "unreasonable accusations" and deliberately hyped the situation after three planes headed to New Zealand changed course in midflight because of live-fire drills by the Chinese navy.

**Wu Qian**, the ministry's top spokesperson, said China had issued safety notices in advance and that the activity was in compliance with international law and did not affect aviation safety.

"The relevant remarks from the Australian side are completely inconsistent with the facts," he said in a response posted on the Defense Ministry website.

Three passenger flights from Sydney to Christchurch and Queenstown were in the air Friday when they were first warned by a Chinese warship of a live-fire exercise, Australian media reported.

The flights diverted and no one was put in danger, Australian Defense Minister Richard Marles told Australian Broadcasting Corp. radio. But he also said the Australian navy would typically give 12 to 24 hours' notice of a live-fire exercise to give airlines time to plan around it.

### Asia

#### Sydney police standoff kills 1:

One man was dead and another was in hospital under arrest following a standoff with police north of Sydney in Australia's state of New South Wales (NSW).

Police in NSW said on Sunday that officers were responding to reports of a concern for welfare at a unit in the city of Tamworth, over 300 km north of Sydney, on Saturday afternoon when they found a 47-year-old with critical head injuries and another man armed with a knife.

The armed man, aged 55, locked himself in a bedroom before climbing onto the roof of the building, NSW Police said.

Ambulance paramedics treated the 47-year-old at the scene before taking him to a nearby hospital where he was declared deceased.

Police secured the area around the unit block and tactical officers and negotiators were called to the scene. NSW Police said that officers were speaking with the man when he fell from the roof. He was treated by paramedics for the stab wounds and taken to hospital under police guard in a serious but stable condition.

"Initial inquiries allege the two men were known to each other," a police statement said.

A crime scene has been established at the property and detectives have commenced an investigation into the incident. (Xinhua)

**Ice seized in Myanmar:** Myanmar authorities have seized 50 kg of ice

(methamphetamine) in eastern Myanmar's Shan state, the Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC) reported on Sunday.

Acting on a tip-off, anti-narcotics police conducted a search of a vehicle in Kengtung township of Shan state on Feb. 21, and confiscated the narcotics, it said.

The seized narcotics had a street value of 400 million kyats (about 190,000 U.S. dollars), and a suspect was arrested in connection with the case, it added.

The suspect has been charged under



People in traditional costumes enjoy plum blossoms while riding a bamboo raft at the Xixi National Wetland Park in Hangzhou, east China's Zhejiang Province on Feb 18. The Xixi wetland in Hangzhou has entered the best season for viewing plum blossoms. (Xinhua)

the country's law, and further investigations are ongoing, the CCDAC said. (Xinhua)

**Grenade kills 2 toddlers:** A rocket-propelled grenade believed to be more than 25 years old killed two cousins, a girl and a boy both 2 years old, when it blew up Saturday near their homes in rural northwestern Cambodia, officials said.

The accident happened in Siem Reap province's Svay Leu district, where there had been heavy fighting in the 1980s and 1990s between Cambodian government soldiers and rebel guerrillas from the communist Khmer Rouge. The group had been ousted from power in 1979.

Muo Lisa and her male cousin, Thum Yen, lived in neighboring homes in the remote village of Kranhuong.

Their parents were doing farm work when the two toddlers apparently came across the unexploded ordnance and it detonated. Experts from the Cambodian Mine Action Center determined afterwards from fragments that it was a rocket-propelled grenade.

Old unexploded munitions are especially dangerous because their explosive contents become volatile as they deteriorate.

"Their parents went to settle on land that was a former battlefield, and they were not aware that there were any land mines or unexploded ordnance buried near their homes," CMAC Director-General Heng Ratanas said. "It's a pity because they were too young and they should not have died like this." (AP)

## Japan's emperor marks 65th b'day with call to keep telling tragedy of WWII to young gen

TOKYO, Feb 23, (Agencies): Japan's Emperor Naruhito, marking his 65th birthday Sunday, stressed the importance of telling the tragedy of World War II to younger generations, pledging to contribute to efforts to promote the understanding of history and the determination for peace as the world this year observes the 80th anniversary of the war's end.

"As the memory of the war fades today, it is important that the tragic experiences and history are passed on to the generations who do not know the war," Naruhito told a news conference in a pre-recorded comments released Sunday.

Those who went through the ordeals during and after the war grew have grown older and it is difficult for younger generations to hear their firsthand stories, Naruhito said.

Naruhito, accompanied by his wife, Empress Masako, their daughter Princess Aiko and some of his younger brother's family, waved from the palace balcony at the cheering well-wishers. Later Sunday, he was to celebrate his birthday at a palace banquet.

The war was fought in the name of his grandfather, then-Emperor Hirohito. Naruhito said he and Masako, who were born after the war, have learned from his parents by hearing their stories of wartime experiences and thoughts about peace. His father Akihito, who abdicated in 2019, was known for his devotion to making



In this photo provided by the Imperial Household Agency of Japan, Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako pose for a photo at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, on Feb 13. (AP)

amends for the war, and Naruhito said he will follow his example.

His concern resonates especially with that of many survivors of U.S. atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, 1945, who are worried about the lack of progress in nuclear disarmament and growing support for nuclear deterrence.

### Also:

**TOKYO:** Japan's weather agency on Sunday warned more snow is forecast for areas along the Sea of Japan Coast

through Monday, due to a winter pressure pattern and a strong cold air mass.

As of 6 a.m. local time, 5.08 meters of snow had accumulated in the Sukayu area of Aomori Prefecture, 3.78 meters in Unuma City, Niigata Prefecture, and 3.26 meters in Ohkura Village, Yamagata Prefecture, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA).

Meanwhile in western Japan, 16 centimeters of snow accumulation was recorded in Maibara City, Shiga Prefecture, as well as in Maizuru City, Kyoto Prefecture.

## Mexico's leader Sheinbaum warns of harsh penalties for foreign spies

MEXICO CITY, Feb 23, (Agencies): Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum warned that any foreign national conducting security-related activities without authorization will face severe penalties and immediate imprisonment.

"Any foreigner engaging in activities outside the framework of collabora-

tion, coordination and the National Security Law will receive the harshest possible penalty if detained," Sheinbaum said at a press conference.

"We are protecting Mexico," she said, reiterating that the US designation of Mexican drug cartels as terrorist organizations should not serve as a "pretext for intervention in Mexico."

On Thursday, Sheinbaum introduced two constitutional reform proposals aimed at strengthening national security and sovereignty. The move came after the US government added six Mexican drug cartels to its list of terrorist organizations, expanding its authority to target them.

The proposed reforms, which must be approved by Congress, would amend Articles 19 and 40 of the Constitution to prevent any form of foreign interference in Mexico and to impose the maximum penalty on any foreign national engaging in unlawful activities within the country.

The president emphasized that while US authorities can "name things however they want," Mexico operates on the principle of "collaboration and coordination, never subordination. No intervention, and certainly no invasion."

One of the amendments to Article 40 of the Constitution states that "under no circumstances shall the people of Mexico accept interventions, intrusions, or any foreign act that harms the integrity, independence, or sovereignty of the nation, such as coups, election interference, or territorial violations by land, sea, air, or space."



Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum waves as she arrives for a Housing for Wellbeing event, a government-funded home improvement program, in Mexico City on Feb 1. (AP)

### Violence spreads

## Congo's president to create unity govt

KINSHASA, Congo, Feb 23, (AP): Congo's president says he is going to launch a unity government, as violence spreads across the country's east and pressure mounts over his handling of the crisis. On Saturday, in some of his first statements since Rwandan-backed rebels captured major cities in eastern Congo, President Felix Tshisekedi, told a meeting of the Sacred Union of the Nation ruling coalition not to be distracted by internal quarrels.

"I lost the battle and not the war. I must reach out to everyone including the opposition. There will be a government of national unity," said Tshisekedi. He didn't give more details on what that would entail or when it would happen.

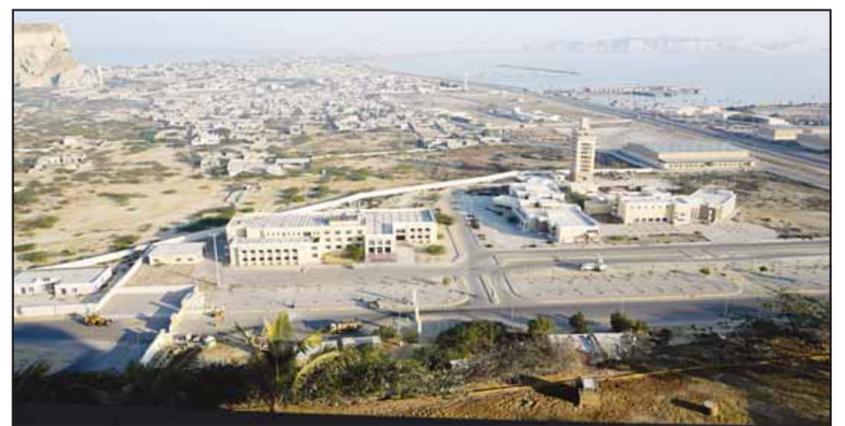
M23 rebels - the most prominent of more than 100 armed groups vying for control and influence in eastern Congo - have swept through the region seizing key cities, killing some 3,000 people. In a lightning three-week offensive, the M23 took control of eastern Congo's main city Goma and seized the second largest city, Bukavu.

The rebels are supported by about 4,000 troops from neighboring Rwanda, according to UN experts, and at times have vowed to march as far as Congo's capital, Kinshasa, over 1,000 miles away. bRwanda has accused Congo of enlisting ethnic Hutu fighters responsible for the 1994 genocide in Rwanda of minority Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

M23 says it's fighting to protect Tutsis and Congolese of Rwandan origin from discrimination and wants to transform Congo from a failed state to a modern one. Analysts have called those pretexts for Rwanda's involvement.



A man does check-out procedure for passengers getting off a ferry at a dock in Goma, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) on Feb 18. (Xinhua)



A view of newly developing area, bottom, and downtown area seen from a hilltop in the coastal city of Gwadar, in the southwest Pakistani province of Balochistan on Jan 14. (AP)

## No passengers, no planes: Pakistan's newest airport bit of a mystery

GWADAR, Pakistan, Feb 23, (AP): With no passengers and no planes, Pakistan's newest and most expensive airport is a bit of a mystery. Entirely financed by China to the tune of \$240 million, it's anyone's guess when New Gwadar International Airport will open for business.

Located in the coastal city of Gwadar and completed in October 2024, the airport is a stark contrast to the impoverished, restive southwestern Balochistan province around it. For the past decade, China has poured money into Balochistan and Gwadar as part of a multibillion dollar project that connects its western Xinjiang province with the Arabian Sea, called the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor or CPEC.

Authorities have hailed it as transformational but there's scant evidence of change in Gwadar. The city isn't connected to the national grid - electricity comes from neighboring Iran or solar panels - and there isn't enough clean water.

An airport with a 400,000 passenger capacity isn't a priority for the city's 90,000 people.

"This airport is not for Pakistan or Gwadar," said Azeem Khalid, an international relations expert who specializes in Pakistan-China ties. "It is for China, so they can have secure access for their citizens to Gwadar and Balochistan."

CPEC has catalyzed a decadeslong insurgency in resource-rich and strategically located Balochistan. Separatists, aggrieved by what they say is state exploitation at the expense of locals, are fighting for independence - targeting both Pakistani troops and Chinese workers in the province and elsewhere.

Members of Pakistan's ethnic Baloch minority say they face discrimination by the government and are denied opportunities available elsewhere in the country, charges the government denies.

Pakistan, keen to protect China's investments, has stepped up its military footprint in Gwadar to combat dissent. The city is a jumble of checkpoints, barbed wire, troops, barricades, and watchtowers. Roads close at any given time, several days a week, to permit the safe passage of Chinese workers and Pakistani VIPs.

### Africa

#### 3 IS members killed in Somalia:

A coordinated airstrike operation between the Federal Government of Somalia and US Forces AFRICOM successfully targeted the so-called Islamic State (IS) militants hiding in the Caal Misheed Mountains of Puntland, said a news source on Sunday. Initial assessments reveal that three IS members were killed, with no reported civilian casualties.

The Federal Government of Somalia, in partnership with AFRICOM, will continue to evaluate the results of this on-



Mohamud

going operation and provide updates to the public as new information becomes available, it added. Somalia's president is Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. (KUNA)

**Nigeria vehicle collision kills 14:** Nigerian police said on Sunday that an investigation has been launched into an incident that left at least 14 people dead and six others injured after a passenger bus and a truck carrying goods collided Saturday in the central state of Niger.

Kumar Tsukwam, a sector commander for Niger State with the Federal Road Safety Corps, the country's traffic police, told Xinhua by telephone that the bus, while trying to overtake another, rammed into the oncoming truck from the opposite direction, causing havoc along the Agaie-Lapai Highway on Saturday afternoon. (Xinhua)



Omar Khalifouh speaking.



KIPCO team with Ahmed Tarek Khalil.

**'Education is the bedrock of entrepreneurship & is crucial for building an impactful business ecosystem in Kuwait'**

**KIPCO Group supports innovation & entrepreneurship through 'The Shark Vision' at AUK**

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: KIPCO – Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) – and its Group companies were the title sponsors of 'The Shark Vision: Empowering Innovation, Inspiring Entrepreneurs, Transforming Investments'. The event was organized by the Center of Continuing Education (CCE) at the American University of Kuwait (AUK) and featured Mr Ahmed Tarek Khalil, the renowned investor and entrepreneur from Shark Tank Egypt.

Alongside KIPCO, the event was supported by Burgan Bank, United Real Estate Company (URC), Kamco Invest, National Petroleum Services Company (NAPESCO), Advanced Technology Company (ATC) and JTC Logistics. The Group's support of the

event stems from its commitment to fostering education and innovation, and the recognition of AUK as a vital contributor to the country's educational landscape.

The day-long event saw the participation of 200 representatives of the private sector. In his keynote speech, Mr Khalil spoke about the importance of entrepreneurship and leadership for societal advancement. This was followed by two panel discussions titled 'Entrepreneurship in a Changing World: Challenges & Opportunities' and 'The Role of Technology and Innovation in Modern Business'. The latter panel saw the participation of Mr Omar Khalifouh, Deputy General Manager of Digital Transformation at Burgan Bank.

Speaking on this occasion, Ms Eman Al Awadhi, KIPCO's Group Senior Vice President, Corporate Communications & Investor Relations, said:

"KIPCO's support of this event reflects its unwavering commitment to enhancing entrepreneurship and driving economic development in line with its vision, which places innovation and sustainability at the core of its strategy. We firmly believe that education is the bedrock of entrepreneurship. By equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge they need, we empower them to turn their ideas into successful ventures. This is crucial for building a more advanced and impactful business ecosystem in Kuwait and the region."

**Airport branch to operate through holidays**

**Warba Bank continues to provide services during National Holidays**

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: As Kuwait celebrates its National Holidays, Warba Bank extends its warmest congratulations to the people of Kuwait, wishing the country continued security, stability and prosperity.



Abdullah Nasser Al-Shuail

In conjunction with the national holidays, Warba Bank will continue to provide its banking services to its customers during the official holiday at its branch at Kuwait International Airport T4, which will operate around the clock to serve customers and travelers, ensuring that their banking needs are met.

Warba will also provide services through its Call Center at 1825555 for local calls, or +965 2228888 for international inquiries, as well as via WhatsApp at +965 51625555. Additionally, all banking services will remain accessible through the website and the bank's mobile application.

Abdullah Nasser Al-Shuail, Senior Director of Branches and Private Banking Group, stated that the national celebrations offer a moment to take pride in Kuwait's rich history and emphasize the values that unite us as one community. It is a time when we collectively celebrate our love for Kuwait, its achievements and its continued journey of development.

He stressed that the bank is committed to providing banking services with high quality and efficiency during the holiday, as part of its strategy that places customers at the heart of its priorities, in line with its slogan: "We hear you, let's own tomorrow".

He added: "Our services remain available to customers wherever they are, whether at our branch at Kuwait International Airport or through our digital channels, which provide a seamless and secure banking experience around the clock."

Al-Shuail called on customers to ensure that their contact information is updated and to keep the necessary banking numbers on hand for quick and smooth communication when needed. He also emphasized the importance of using the Warba Bank application to monitor accounts, make transfers, and complete electronic payments safely and efficiently.

The bank also reminded customers to safeguard their banking information, warning against sharing the One-Time Password (OTP) with any party under any circumstances. Warba Bank affirmed that it never contacts customers to request such information and urged customers to report any suspicious activity immediately.

**A Vision Centered on Customer Service**

Warba Bank actively invests in programs and initiatives that contribute to preserving Kuwait's cultural heritage, fostering national pride, and strengthening community bonds.

This commitment aligns with the bank's broader strategy of offering Sharia-compliant banking solutions that blend innovation with tradition, ensuring services that meet the aspirations of its customers while upholding Kuwait's rich heritage.

It is worth noting that Warba Bank is one of the banks that have achieved great success in a short period, as it has secured a leading position in Islamic digital banking services. Additionally, Warba Bank is one of the local banks with the largest number of shareholders, allowing it to remain closely connected to all segments of society.

This achievement reaffirms Warba's position as a trusted banking partner that combines innovation with social responsibility to deliver the best financial services and products.

**Eurozone composite PMI unchanged at 50.2.**

**Fed flags inflation risks from President Trump's trade and immigration policies**

By National Bank of Kuwait

**United States & Canada President Trump Announces Tariff Plans**

With an official announcement expected as early as April 2, President Trump indicated plans to impose tariffs of approximately 25% on imports of automobiles, semiconductors, and pharmaceuticals, which could potentially increase further over time. This would significantly expand his ongoing trade war. Trump had previously announced 25% tariffs on steel and aluminum, set to take effect in March. He emphasized giving companies time to establish operations in the U.S. to avoid tariffs. The proposed auto tariffs could have a major impact, as nearly half of U.S. vehicle sales in 2023 were imports. It remains unclear whether the tariffs would target specific countries or apply broadly, and whether vehicles from Canada and Mexico under a free trade agreement would be exempt.

**FOMC Meeting Minutes**

The FOMC minutes released on Wednesday revealed that Federal Reserve policymakers remain cautious about adjusting interest rates, emphasizing the need for more evidence of sustained disinflation before considering cuts. While some members acknowledged that policy could be eased if the labor market weakens or inflation returns to 2% faster than expected, many agreed that maintaining a restrictive stance is necessary if inflation remains elevated. The minutes also highlighted upside risks to inflation, including trade and immigration policy shifts, geopolitical disruptions, and strong household spending, reinforcing the Fed's patient approach in keeping rates elevated.

**U.S. PMI**

The U.S. PMI Composite Output Index fell to 50.4 in February from 52.7 in January, marking a 17-month low, according to S&P Global's preliminary report. The services sector contracted for the first time in over two years, with the Services PMI dropping to 49.7. In contrast, manufacturing showed strength, with output reaching an 11-month high of 53.8 and the Manufacturing PMI rising to an eight-month high of 51.6. Businesses cited political uncertainty, federal spending cuts, and tariffs as key factors weighing on demand and optimism. Chris Williamson, chief business economist at S&P Global, noted that the optimistic outlook from earlier in the year has faded. Inflationary pressures also grew in manufacturing due to tariff-related cost increases, while competition in services limited price growth.

**Canada Inflation**

Canada's annual inflation rate rose slightly to 1.9% in January, up from 1.8% in December, driven by higher gasoline and natural gas prices, which offset the impact of a temporary sales tax break. The core consumer price index (CPI) measures, which have been slower to decline, also increased. January's inflation marked the sixth consecutive month at or below the Bank of Canada's 2% target midpoint within its 1%-3% range. However, persistent underlying price pressures have lowered expectations for an interest rate cut in March, with market predictions for no rate cut rising to 66%, up from 56% before the inflation data release. A government sales tax holiday from mid-December to mid-February on items like food, beverages, restaurant meals, and children's clothing helped ease inflation. Food prices fell 0.6%

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month Forward
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	
EUR	1.0487	1.0400	1.0506	1.0458	1.0350	1.0490	1.0508
GBP	1.2582	1.2560	1.2678	1.2630	1.2550	1.2700	1.2627
JPY	152.23	148.90	152.40	149.29	148.00	150.20	147.78
CHF	0.8990	0.8966	0.9054	0.8977	0.8800	0.9050	0.8881

year-over-year, marking the first annual decline since May 2017, driven by a 5.1% drop in restaurant food prices. Without the tax holiday, inflation would have reached 2.7% in January, compared to 2.3% in December without the tax relief.

The USD/CAD currency pair closed the week at 1.4220.

**Eurozone**

Business activity in the euro zone showed minimal growth in February, as demand declined more sharply and a slight expansion in services barely offset the ongoing slump in manufacturing, according to a survey. HCOB's preliminary composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) for the euro zone, compiled by S&P Global, remained at 50.2—unchanged from January and just above the 50 threshold that separates growth from contraction. Analysts had expected a slight increase to 50.5. The services sector PMI fell to 50.7 from 51.3 in January, missing the forecast of 51.5. Meanwhile, the manufacturing PMI, which has remained below 50 for nearly three years, rose to 47.3 from 46.6, surpassing expectations of a smaller rise to 47.0.

The EUR/USD currency pair closed the week at 1.0458.

**United Kingdom**

UK inflation rose 3% year-over-year (YoY) in January, surpassing the 2.8% forecast and accelerating from December's 2.5% increase, while core CPI climbed 3.7%, signaling persistent price pressures. Despite a -0.1% month-over-month (MoM) decline, which was smaller than the expected -0.3%, services inflation surged to 5%, reflecting continued cost increases in the sector. The data complicates the Bank of England's (BoE) rate-cut outlook, as inflation remains well above its 2% target, potentially delaying policy easing. Meanwhile, GBP/USD held steady around 1.2600, as traders assessed the implications of the inflation surprise on future BoE decisions.

**UK PMI**

The UK's S&P Composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) for February edged down slightly to 50.5 from 50.6 in January, remaining just above the 50 mark that signals growth. However, employment saw a significant drop, falling to 43.5 from 45.3, its lowest level since November 2020, or since the 2007-08 financial crisis if excluding the COVID period. Chris Williamson, chief business economist at S&P Global Market Intelligence, noted that one-third of businesses attributing staff cuts linked them directly to policies from last October's budget. While the services sector PMI re-

bounded to 51.1 from 50.8 in January, the manufacturing PMI fell to a 14-month low of 46.4, with global uncertainties adding to concerns about the UK economy.

The GBP/USD currency pair closed the week at 1.2630.

**Asia Pacific**

**RBA Reduces Cash Rate**  
The Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) cut its cash rate by 25 basis points to 4.1% in February, marking the first reduction since 2020 amid slowing inflation. The central bank expressed confidence that inflation is stabilizing within its 2-3% target range but highlighted economic uncertainties, including weak private demand and concerns over household spending sustainability. While aligning with the global easing trend ahead of Australia's mid-May federal election, the RBA remains cautious about further rate cuts, citing geopolitical risks and policy uncertainties.

The AUD/USD currency pair closed the week at 0.6355.

**RBNZ Cuts Benchmark Interest Rate**

The Reserve Bank of New Zealand (RBNZ) reduced its benchmark interest rate by 50 basis points to 3.75% on Wednesday, signaling more cuts ahead as inflation slows and the economy struggles. Governor Adrian Orr indicated that the bank now anticipates a lower terminal rate than previously projected in November, with two additional 25-basis point cuts expected in April and May, depending on economic developments. This updated rate outlook aligns closely with market expectations, emphasizing the RBNZ's dovish stance compared to the more cautious policies in Australia and the U.S.

The NZD/USD currency pair closed the week at 0.5740.

**PBOC Keeps Rates Unchanged**

The People's Bank of China (PBOC) kept its benchmark lending rates unchanged for the fourth consecutive meeting on Thursday, meeting market expectations. The one-year loan prime rate (LPR), which influences corporate and household loans, remained at 3.1%, while the five-year LPR, a key mortgage benchmark, stayed at 3.6%. Both rates are at record lows following cuts in July and October. This decision follows comments from the U.S. Federal Reserve chair, indicating no urgency to lower interest rates.

The USD/CNY currency pair closed the week at 7.2501.

**Kuwait**

**Kuwaiti Dinar**  
USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30870.

**15-year returns show strength of diversified private market portfolios**

**NBK Wealth explores investment strategies in private markets**

The Power of Diversification in Private Markets

**Background: The Age-Old Wisdom of Diversification**  
The idea of not putting all your eggs in one basket has guided risk management for centuries. Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice illustrates this with Antonio [leading character in the play], whose diverse ventures protect him from losses. Farmers planting different crops and rulers forging alliances demonstrate this widespread understanding of diversification as a safety net.

**Introduction: Harry Markowitz and the Birth of Modern Portfolio Theory**

In the mid-20th century, as finance became more complex, Harry Markowitz formalized this concept into Modern Portfolio Theory (MPT). MPT provides a mathematical framework for building diversified portfolios. Like a balanced diet, a diversified portfolio includes various asset types such as stocks, bonds, real estate, and each with different risk and return profiles.

Markowitz recognized that an investment's relationship to others in a portfolio is key. Combining uncorrelated or negatively correlated assets reduces overall portfolio risk without necessarily lowering returns. This is the basis of MPT, aiming for the best return for a given risk level.

**Private Market Performance Analysis: A Diversified Approach**

This analysis examines annualized returns of various private market investment strategies from 2010 to 2024, alongside 15-year annualized returns. Private markets include investments in assets that are not publicly traded, such as Buyouts, Venture Capital, Direct Lending, Real Estate, and

Strategy	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024 <sup>(1)</sup>	15-Year Horizon
Buyout	17.5%	7.9%	14.8%	18.2%	13.2%	13.0%	12.4%	20.5%	10.3%	16.5%	26.8%	37.5%	-0.6%	10.8%	5.0%	15.4%
Venture capital	11.9%	11.2%	7.2%	21.3%	20.3%	12.0%	-0.1%	9.4%	18.3%	17.0%	40.8%	53.5%	-16.8%	-4.7%	0.8%	12.4%
Mezzanine	28.6%	5.6%	14.9%	9.1%	31.4%	11.9%	10.8%	11.1%	-8.2%	7.3%	6.5%	18.0%	4.3%	26.5%	1.8%	12.9%
Funds of funds	6.2%	8.2%	7.1%	10.8%	12.6%	11.9%	8.0%	12.6%	16.4%	11.0%	26.7%	45.2%	-5.6%	1.5%	3.4%	11.5%
Secondaries	20.6%	14.3%	14.3%	10.6%	13.1%	11.4%	5.1%	16.4%	16.0%	10.8%	10.1%	43.0%	5.4%	5.5%	3.1%	13.0%
Growth/expansion	20.7%	9.7%	13.3%	17.6%	12.1%	12.5%	9.1%	16.8%	17.5%	17.8%	33.8%	50.5%	-6.7%	6.3%	7.4%	15.8%
Infrastructure	8.5%	5.8%	7.1%	4.1%	12.6%	9.1%	9.1%	8.0%	11.0%	7.0%	7.3%	15.8%	9.6%	10.8%	4.0%	9.0%
Real estate	11.8%	8.5%	11.2%	18.8%	13.3%	12.1%	9.1%	12.4%	7.0%	8.5%	4.2%	26.2%	7.5%	-4.3%	-0.4%	9.3%
Direct lending	10.6%	6.7%	17.1%	-2.8%	12.2%	5.3%	0.3%	11.5%	7.0%	8.0%	4.5%	11.0%	6.0%	12.4%	4.6%	7.9%
<b>Diversified Portfolio</b>	<b>16.0%</b>	<b>8.0%</b>	<b>12.4%</b>	<b>15.9%</b>	<b>12.9%</b>	<b>9.8%</b>	<b>10.0%</b>	<b>15.2%</b>	<b>10.5%</b>	<b>11.8%</b>	<b>18.5%</b>	<b>34.2%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>	<b>6.9%</b>	<b>4.3%</b>	<b>12.8%</b>

(1) Date source: PitchBook; All private asset returns are net of fees and carry. (2) Data as of June 30, 2024.

Infrastructure. The "Diversified Portfolio", an equally weighted allocation across all listed strategies, provides a comprehensive view of private market performance, mitigating volatility inherent in individual strategies.

**Diversification: Risk Mitigation & Stability**

Individual strategy returns fluctuate significantly. For instance, Venture Capital rose in 2020/21, then contracted in

2022. Real Estate also saw appreciation and decline, notably in 2022/23. This volatility is typical of sector-specific performance.

The "Diversified Portfolio" shows more consistent positive returns, without extreme highs or lows. Diversification across private market strategies minimizes the impact of any single area's underperformance. Gains in one strategy can offset losses elsewhere, creating a more balanced return.

**Long-Term Value & Compounding**

Investment success depends on sustained growth, not short-term speculation. The "15-Year Horizon" shows the diversified portfolio's compelling 12.8% annualized return, competitive with individual strategies but less volatile.

This highlights the advantage of a long-term private market horizon. While individual years may be unpredictable, diversification aims for consistent, robust long-term returns, capitalizing on the private market illiquidity premium.

**Key Considerations**

Diversification smooths returns and mitigates risk, but doesn't eliminate it. Past performance is not indicative of future results. Private market investors must consider illiquidity and longer time horizons.

These factors, while potentially contributing to the illiquidity premium and long-term returns, require careful consideration and alignment with individual investor liquidity needs, risk profile, and objectives. Diversification, while beneficial, must be viewed within these considerations.

**Key Takeaways**

- Consistent Returns: Diversification smooths returns by reducing reliance on any single strategy.
- Lower Volatility: Spreading investments mitigates market fluctuations.
- Downside Protection: Losses in one area can be offset by gains in others.
- Balanced Approach: An equally weighted [in our example], diversified portfolio illustrates these benefits.
- Benefit Focus: Ideal for portfolios seeking stable returns and volatility management.

Board of Directors recommends a cash dividend distribution of 3.5 cents per share and a 5% bonus share issuance

# Egypt Kuwait Holding achieves \$163 million in net profit in 2024

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: Today, Egypt Kuwait Holding Company (EKH) announced its consolidated financial results for the fiscal year ended 31 December 2024, prepared in accordance with Egyptian Accounting Standards. EKH reported total revenues of USD 642 million, supported by a gross profit margin of 40% and an EBITDA margin of 39%. The company recorded a net profit of USD 185 million, with a 2 percentage point expansion in net profit margin, reaching 29%. Meanwhile, net profit attributable to EKH shareholders stood at USD 163 million during the same period, the Board of Directors has recommended a cash dividend distribution of 3.5 cents per share and a 5% bonus share issuance.

During 4Q 2024, EKH recorded revenues of USD 167 million, reflecting a 9% quarter-on-quarter growth, driven by strong revenue performance across the company's various business segments, reflecting improving market conditions. The company successfully maintained profitability margins despite economic challenges, with gross profit and EBITDA margins reaching 41% and 42%, respectively during the period. Net profit for 4Q 2024 stood at USD 46 million, accompanied by a 5 percentage point expansion in net profit margin to 28%. Net profit grew by 20% quarter-on-quarter, while net profit attributable to EKH shareholders reached USD 39 million for the same period.

Commenting on the Group's Performance in 2024, Loay Jassim Al-Kharafi, Chairman of Egypt Kuwait Holding (EKH), expressed his satisfaction with the strong performance achieved by the Group in the fourth quarter of 2024, highlighting its ability to sustain robust profitability levels across all operational sectors.

Al-Kharafi further emphasized that EKH successfully navigated operational and economic challenges throughout 2024, attributing this resilience to the Group's well-defined strategy and flexible business model. These factors have enhanced EKH's ability to achieve sustainable growth and drive long-term success. The positive financial results reflect a notable recovery in prices and an increase in sales volumes of core products, reinforcing confidence in the strength and sustainability of the Group's business portfolio and paving the way for ambitious expansion plans in 2025.

Al-Kharafi affirmed that the Group's top priorities include boosting foreign currency revenues, expanding exports, and strengthening its financial position, while continuing to contribute to regional economic development. He also noted that EKH's first investment in Saudi Arabia is expected to commence commercial operations in the coming months. Additionally, the Group is advancing its ambitious investment strategy, which includes its first strategic investment beyond the Middle East and North Africa region during the current year, expanding its global operational footprint. This reflects EKH's commitment to managing foreign exchange risk, expanding into high-growth markets, and diversifying its investment portfolio across sectors and geographies.

Al-Kharafi reiterated that maximizing sustainable shareholder value remains a fundamental pillar of EKH's strategy. The Board of Directors has recommended a distribution of both cash and stock dividends, underscoring the Group's efforts to strike a balance between rewarding shareholders and reinvesting for future growth.

He concluded by affirming that 2025 will see the company continue optimizing capital allocation strategies and focusing on high-value projects that generate maximum returns for all stakeholders.

Commenting on the Group's Performance, Jon Rokk, Managing Director of Egypt Kuwait Holding (EKH), expressed his pride in the strong results delivered by the Group in 2024,



Loay Jassim Al-Kharafi

### Loay Jassim Al-Kharafi

- The outstanding results reinforce confidence in the strength and sustainability of the group's operations and pave the way for ambitious expansion plans in 2025.
- The group prioritizes increasing foreign currency revenue, expanding exports, strengthening its financial position, and maximizing sustainable value for shareholders.



Jon Rokk

### Jon Rokk

- We are entering a new era of growth, reflecting the group's ambitions and expansion plans, while reaffirming our commitment to building a more dynamic and future-focused organization.
- We will continue to build on the group's strong achievements and results to further enhance our investment diversification and drive regional and global expansion.

despite the significant economic challenges that shaped the year. He emphasized that EKH successfully navigated these challenges and achieved strong growth rates, thanks to its resilient business model and adaptability to evolving market conditions. Rokk highlighted that these achievements are a testament to the dedication and commitment of EKH's entire team, as each individual's contribution has strengthened the company's ability to overcome obstacles, seize opportunities, and sustain growth.

He further stated that EKH maintained its strong momentum in the fourth quarter of 2024, reflected in a quarter-on-quarter revenue and net profit growth of 9% and 20%, respectively. He affirmed that EKH is entering a new phase of development that mirrors its ambitions and future growth plans, while reinforcing its commitment to building a more dynamic and future-focused organization.

Rokk also noted that the Group will continue to build upon these achievements, with future projects set to serve as a cornerstone for regional and international expansion. Additionally, these efforts will further enhance growth and drive investment diversification.

He then reviewed the performance of EKH's key subsidiaries in 2024, as follows:

#### Fertilizers | AlexFert

AlexFert recorded revenues of USD 59 million in 4Q 2024, reflecting a 26% quarter-on-quarter growth, driven by the notable improvement in global urea prices and government efforts to ensure stable natural gas supplies for production operations. This stability enabled the company to operate its plants at full capacity starting December 2024. Additionally, gross profit and EBITDA margins expanded by 1 and 2 percentage points year-on-year, respectively, during the fourth quarter, reflecting the company's ongoing cost-reduction initiatives and improved operational efficiency. Net profit stood at USD 29 million, with the net profit margin expanding by 5 percentage points to 49% year-on-year in 4Q 2024.

For FY 2024, AlexFert reported total revenues of USD 213 million, supported by the availability of natural gas

supplies. The company maintained strong profitability, with gross profit and EBITDA margins reaching 36% and 44%, respectively, alongside a 2 percentage point year-on-year expansion in net profit margin.

Looking ahead, the company expects to sustain its strong performance, benefiting from stable natural gas supplies supported by government measures and the continued recovery in global urea prices. Urea prices increased by 8% quarter-on-quarter in 4Q 2024 to reach USD 364 per ton, while the average global urea price stood at USD 387 per ton in January 2025.

#### Oil & Gas | North Sinai Concession

The North Sinai Offshore Concession recorded revenues of USD 19 million in 4Q 2024, reflecting a 32% year-on-year increase and 25% quarter-on-quarter growth. This strong performance was driven by the successful commissioning of new wells, leading to increased production volumes. Net profit for the quarter stood at USD 9 million, with a net profit margin of 47%, marking a 6 percentage point expansion year-on-year.

For FY 2024, the North Sinai Offshore Concession reported total revenues of USD 62 million, reflecting a 7% year-on-year increase. Meanwhile, net profit amounted to USD 31 million, with a net profit margin of 50%.

The company continues to deliver strong operational results, supported by its expansion initiatives. The commencement of production at the Aton-1 and KSE2 wells is expected to sustain stable gas production levels at approximately 55 million cubic feet per day (MMSCFD) until the end of 2026. Additionally, the North Sinai Offshore Concession will benefit from the recent 10-year extension of its Concession Agreement, approved by the Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation (EGPC) during the year, further enhancing the long-term sustainability of its operations.

#### Petrochemicals | Sprea Misr

Sprea Misr reported revenues of EGP 1.54 billion in 4Q 2024, reflecting a 50% year-on-year increase and 16% quarter-on-quarter growth. This strong performance was driven by higher sales volumes and an increase in the average prices

of key products. Gross profit margin remained stable at 32%, while EBITDA margin expanded to 31%.

Net profit surged 92% year-on-year to EGP 546 million in 4Q 2024, with net profit margin expanding by 8 percentage points year-on-year to 36%.

For FY 2024, Sprea Misr recorded total revenues of EGP 5.84 billion, marking a 19% year-on-year growth. Meanwhile, net profit stood at EGP 2.64 billion, with a 2 percentage point expansion in net profit margin to 45%, supported by foreign exchange gains and higher interest income.

Looking ahead, the company aims to maximize benefits from the gradual price recovery, alongside the growing demand for Sulfonated Naphthalene Formaldehyde (SNF). Additionally, the anticipated acceleration of construction and infrastructure projects in Egypt is expected to further support growth.

#### Utilities & Energy-Related Activities | NatEnergy

NatEnergy reported revenues of EGP 1.6 billion in 4Q 2024, reflecting a 46% year-on-year increase. This growth was driven by the strong performance of Kahraba, the Group's electricity distribution subsidiary, as well as progress made by Fayum Gas on one of its ongoing infrastructure projects. During the fourth quarter, gross profit and EBITDA margins expanded by 6 percentage points quarter-on-quarter, reaching 30%, while net profit increased 49% year-on-year to EGP 505 million.

For FY 2024, NatEnergy recorded total revenues of EGP 5.3 billion, marking a 30% year-on-year increase, while net profit grew 21% to EGP 1.8 billion.

Looking ahead, the company aims to capitalize on the recent electricity tariff increases and continue focusing on attracting high-margin customers to enhance overall profitability. Additionally, Kahraba is expanding its investment strategy with the construction of a new power substation in the 10th of Ramadan area, aimed at meeting the rising electricity demand in the industrial zone.

#### Non-Banking Financial Services & Other Diversified Sectors

The diversified segment recorded total revenues of USD 25 million in 4Q 2024, with gross profit margin reaching 59%, marking a 6 percentage point increase year-on-year and 10 percentage point increase quarter-on-quarter. This growth was primarily driven by the reassessment of insured asset values, higher insurance premium collections, and improved investment returns amid rising interest rates.

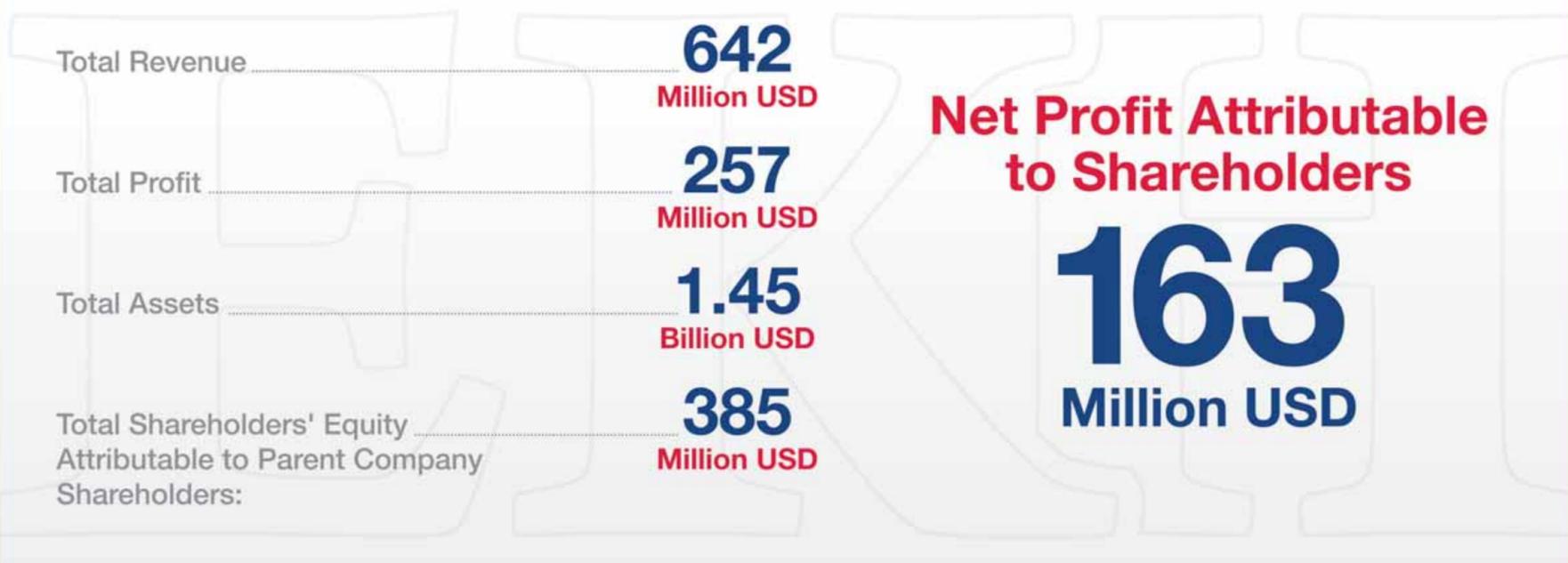
Both Delta Insurance and Mohandes Insurance achieved strong growth, with net profit increasing by 72% and 27% year-on-year, respectively, in EGP terms during FY 2024.

Looking ahead, management expects the insurance sector to maintain its positive trajectory, supported by continued upward revaluation of insured assets, stable premium growth, and a favorable macroeconomic environment. Additionally, NileWood is making significant progress toward the commercial launch of its MDF board production line, with operations set to commence in the first half of 2025.

Egypt Kuwait Holding (EKH), established in 1997 with an issued and paid-in capital of USD 282 million, is listed on both Boursa Kuwait and the Egyptian Exchange. The company is one of the Middle East's leading and fastest-growing investment entities, with a diversified investment portfolio spanning five key sectors: fertilizers and petrochemicals, gas distribution, power generation and distribution, insurance, and non-banking financial services.



## Financial Results For the Year Ended December 2024



Earnings per Share  
**12 Cents**

Bonus Share Distribution  
**5%**

Cash Dividend per Share  
**3.5 Cents**

The Board of Directors recommended for the financial year ended December 31, 2024: A cash dividend distribution of 3.5 cents per share totaling 39 million USD, in addition to granting 5% bonus shares

Board proposes 82 fils dividend per share

## Boursa Kuwait increases its net profit by 15.08% to reach KD 18.18 million for 2024

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: In a meeting of its Board of Directors on Sunday, February 23, 2025, Boursa Kuwait announced that it has recorded a net profit of KD 18.18 million for the financial year ended December 31, 2024, a 15.08% increase from its 2023 total of KD 15.80 million. The company also recorded an operating revenue of KD 36.31 million over the same period, an increase of 18.36% over its KD 30.68 million total in 2023.

Meanwhile, operating profit for the 2024 financial year came in at KD 22.40 million, or an increase of 22.59% over the total of KD 18.27 million recorded in 2023, while the company's earnings per share increased 15.08% from 78.68 fils in 2023 to 90.55 fils for the financial year ended December 31, 2024.

Additionally, the Group's total assets came in at approximately KD 126.15 million as of December 31, 2024, which is a 6.11% increase versus the 2023 total of KD 118.89 million, while shareholders' equity attributable to equity holders of the parent company increased from KD 64.23 million as of December 31, 2023, to KD 67.55 million as of December 31, 2024, an increase of approximately 5.17%.

As a result, Boursa Kuwait's Board of Directors proposed the distribution of cash dividends of 82 fils per share for the financial year ended December 31, 2024, which is approximately 90.56% of the company's profit. The proposed cash dividend distribution is subject to approval by the Annual General Assembly.

Commenting on the results, Boursa Kuwait's Chairman Mr. Hamad Mishari Al-Humaidhi said: "Despite the geopolitical tensions and economic challenges of 2024, Boursa Kuwait remained resilient and adaptable, delivering a strong recovery that highlights its financial strength and the effectiveness of its strategy. The company recorded a net profit of KD 18.18 million for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2024, an increase of 15.08% from the 2023 net profit of KD 15.80 million and its highest on record. Guided by a clear vision and an ambitious strategy, Boursa Kuwait continues to strengthen its position as a leading regional exchange by enhancing market attractiveness for local and international investors, developing a robust infrastructure, and fostering a business environment aligned with global best practices."

Al-Humaidhi added, "This year marked a pivotal milestone in Boursa Kuwait's journey, as the company celebrated its tenth anniversary—a decade of transformative growth and remarkable achievements that have strengthened Kuwait's fi-



Hamad Mishari Al-Humaidhi



Mohammad Saud Al-Osaimi

ancial market as a cornerstone of the national economy. Since its inception, Boursa Kuwait has been steadfast in its commitment to transparency, efficiency, and sustainability, fostering a dynamic and attractive investment environment that meets the highest global standards. This first decade stands as a testament to our dedication to developing the capital markets sector and reinforcing its role as a key driver of economic growth."

The Chairman of Boursa Kuwait concluded his statement by expressing his profound gratitude to His Highness the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, for his steadfast efforts in ensuring the stability and prosperity of Kuwait and its national economy.

He also extended his appreciation to his fellow Board members and the Executive Management team for their invaluable contributions in advancing the company's strategy, mission, and vision and recognized the dedication and hard work of Boursa Kuwait's employees, whose commitment has been instrumental in achieving the company's goals. Their collective efforts have strengthened the financial market and enhanced its liquidity and transparency while fostering an environment where issuers and investors can connect for promising investment opportunities and sustainable

returns, positioning Kuwait's capital market as a regional leader.

In 2024, the Kuwaiti capital market demonstrated remarkable growth, with the volume of shares traded surging by approximately 73.08%, from 39.57 billion shares in 2023 to 68.48 billion shares, and the value traded rising by 42.85%, from KD 10.38 billion to KD 14.83 billion. Additionally, market capitalization reached KD 43.58 billion, marking an 8.24% increase from the 2023 total of KD 40.26 billion.

The "Premier" Market was a key driver of market activity, with approximately 29.31 billion shares traded, valued at KD 9.78 billion across 1.96 million transactions. It accounted for 65.93% of the total value traded and 42.79% of the total volume traded on Boursa Kuwait, while the "Main" Market played a significant role in enhancing overall market liquidity, with a market capitalization of KD 8.25 billion and 109 listed companies. It traded over 39.13 billion shares, valued at approximately KD 5.05 billion, across 1.95 million transactions. This accounted for 34.05% of the total value traded and 57.14% of the total volume traded in the Kuwaiti capital market, highlighting its crucial role in expanding investment opportunities and strengthening market depth.

Boursa Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Mohammad Saud Al-Osaimi, also commented on the company's results for the year, saying: "In 2024, the Kuwaiti capital market emerged as a standout performer, with key indices delivering strong returns, driven by robust trading momentum and rising market capitalization. The market was also able to secure a leading position among its counterparts in the Gulf Cooperation Council in terms of index growth and percentage increase in value traded, benefiting from a favorable macroeconomic environment thanks to the Central Bank of Kuwait's adoption of the monetary easing policy pursued by the United States Federal Reserve, leading the Central Bank to lower discount rates, which provided a stable fiscal backdrop and spurred increased market participation."

Throughout 2024, Boursa Kuwait continued its collaboration with Kuwait Clearing Company to enhance market infrastructure, building on the stress tests initiated during the previous year to ensure compliance with the Central Counterparty (CCP) system. As part of these efforts, the company worked to verify brokerage firms' ability to manage settlement operations in coordination with the Central Bank of Kuwait and the local banks, paving the way for their qualification under the CCP. Additionally, Boursa Kuwait plans to introduce exchange-traded funds (ETFs) and a corporate fixed-income trading platform—including bonds and sukuk—in alignment with the CCP framework.

Al-Osaimi added, "Boursa Kuwait was able to strengthen the Kuwaiti capital market's reputation as a trusted hub for global investment and foster a dynamic market ecosystem driven by innovation and sustainability by implementing a proactive strategy and maintaining an operational model aligned with internationally recognized best practices. Boursa Kuwait remains committed to developing the market and enhancing its infrastructure as part of its progressive vision of creating a more competitive and sustainable financial market that supports Kuwait's economic growth and reinforces long-term confidence among local and international investors."

Al-Osaimi concluded his statement by assuring Boursa Kuwait's stakeholders that the company is committed to expanding its product offerings, enhancing market efficiency, and improving accessibility, with a steadfast focus on transparency, governance, and liquidity. These core pillars are at the heart of the company's strategy, aimed at strengthening investor confidence, highlighting leading listed companies, and positioning Kuwait's capital market as a hub for innovation, sustainable growth, and regional leadership.



Mohammed Al Bloushi with the ABK team receiving the JP Morgan's award.

## Bank achieves 98.78% STP rate in USD transfers

## Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait receives J.P. Morgan's Elite Quality Recognition award for 3rd year

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: J.P. Morgan recently honored Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) with the esteemed Elite Quality Recognition award for its exceptional performance in processing customer and financial institution transfers in US Dollars (USD) throughout 2024 for the third year consecutively.

Straight-Through Processing (STP) is a bank method for accelerating transactions without manual intervention. This achievement therefore underscores ABK's continuous pursuit of service and operational enhancement.

This award highlights ABK's excellent operational efficiency in financial transfers. ABK has achieved an outstanding 98.78% USD Clearing MT103 STP rate, placing it among the few top-performing banks in the Middle East to achieve, as recognized in J.P. Morgan's evaluation.

Introduced in 1997, J.P. Morgan's MT103 award category focuses on debit transactions over USD 10,000. The quality recognition is granted to banks with an outstanding rate between 90 to 98.9%, acknowledging their excellence in USD clearing operations and successful STP achievement through SWIFT transaction measurements.

The Bank's impressive percentage reflects its ongoing enhancement of services aligning with international standards, driven by the continuous

progress in its digital transformation plan implementation.

A J.P. Morgan delegate visited ABK's headquarters to present the award in the presence of Mohammed Al Bloushi, General Manager of Operations at the Bank, and to explore future collaboration enhancing advanced customer services.

On this occasion, Al Bloushi emphasized that winning J.P. Morgan's award signifies the substantial global trust in ABK. He highlighted, "Achieving top rates in the region for USD clearing customer transactions showcases the Bank's excellence in customer service, reflecting efforts to enhance customer experience with smooth transactions."

He credited this success to the Bank's ongoing investment in advanced banking technologies and enhancing customer solutions. Al Bloushi stated ABK's focus on developing electronic money transfers following international accuracy and security standards. He highlighted upcoming innovative banking solutions and services aimed at surpassing customer expectations and maintain-

ing their trust.

Al Bloushi explained that the Bank's success stems from the training, high skills, and expertise of its staff, along with staying updated on banking developments locally, regionally, and globally. He emphasized that this recognition validates the team's unwavering dedication to consistently strive for operational excellence and deliver exceptional services."

Nadia Qambar, Vice President, Payments Unit from J.P. Morgan congratulated the Bank on winning the Elite Quality Recognition award stating, "We commend ABK's dedication to enhancing its performance in processing SWIFT system remittances for the third consecutive year. This has resulted in its recognition as one of the highest-rated institutions in the Middle East for USD transfers. This underscores ABK's leadership and capability in delivering seamless banking services to a wide range of customers."

Al Bloushi confirmed that ABK remains committed to enhancing its systems to meet customer demands, boost the Bank's reliability and efficiency, and reinforce its leading position in the local banking sector.

At the end of his statement, he pledged, "We endeavor to continue to strengthen partnerships with stakeholders to deliver outstanding services and enhance competitiveness in the banking industry."



Al Bloushi

## AlShamlan applauds employees' role in record profits

## KFH honors 230 employees in Qadha program

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) demonstrated its dedication to employee appreciation by celebrating 230 outstanding staff members at the 2024 Qadha program ceremony. Held at the Four Seasons Hotel, the event was attended by KFH executives, including Group CEO, Khaled Yousef AlShamlan, and other senior leaders.

KFH's groundbreaking Qadha program, launched in 2021, is the first of its kind in Kuwaiti banking. This innovative employee recognition program, which also encompasses all other KFH recognition and support initiatives, recently earned global recognition with a Gold Medal from the prestigious Brandon Hall Group for Best Advance in Employee Recognition Program.

KFH Group CEO, Khaled Yousef AlShamlan recognized the top performers of 2024 in his speech at the awards ceremony. "We commend your exceptional efforts, which have positively impacted KFH's continued achievements and successes. You are KFH's true wealth, core assets, and key to our continued leadership and excellence," he said.

He added: "Today's gathering takes on added importance, as it occurs shortly after we reported record-breaking financial performance and remarkable growth in all key financial areas. KFH reported a net profit of approximately KD 602 million, the highest in Kuwait's banking sector. Net financing income increased by around 18.7%, reaching about KD 1.15 billion, while operating income rose by 11.6% exceeding KD 1.6 billion. Net operating income surpassed KD 1 billion, reflecting a 9% growth rate. KFH also led all banks and companies listed on Boursa Kuwait with a market capitalization of approximately KD 13.6 billion. Additionally, KFH was ranked among the top five MEA banks by market capitalization in the latest S&P rankings."

Al-Shamlan further explained: "This event follows closely upon our celebration of the launch of our new visual identity, under the slogan "Beyond Horizons". This new identity represents our commitment to advancing Islamic banking as we continue our leadership and positive contributions to the industry. We then launched a new phase in Islamic banking by unveiling the visual identity for KFH - Egypt and KFH - UK."

He attributed these achievements to KFH's dedicated workforce and its strategic plan to become a top 100 global bank within the next ten years.

AlShamlan concluded: "Today's honorees were chosen by their managers in recognition of their exceptional dedication and contributions. This well-deserved recognition highlights your vital role in the success of this esteemed institution. Your efforts are key to KFH's continued leadership and expansion. It is your commitment that enables us to maintain excellence in banking



Khaled Yousef AlShamlan along with KFH team honoring the employees.

services, fulfilling the aspirations of our shareholders and, most importantly, our customers."

**Qadha program criteria**  
The Qadha program is highly selective, rigorously evaluating employees' professional and technical skills through regular assessments. Aligned with glob-

al best practices, it's designed to reward, motivate, and recognize top performers. In addition to employee recognition, Qadha aims to create a competitive environment to drive improvement, enhances customer service and meet their aspirations at KFH, the world's leading Islamic financial institution.





Photos from the event.

## Retail giant celebrates National Days with 'My Kuwait, My Pride' promotion

# LuLu Hypermarket brings unmissable deals to Hala February

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: LuLu Hypermarket is delivering an unforgettable shopping and cultural experience this Hala February, celebrating Kuwait's National and Liberation Days with its grand 'My Kuwait, My Pride' promotion that runs across all LuLu Hypermarket outlets in Kuwait.

The event was inaugurated by the Governor of Mubarak Al Kabeer Governorate, H.E. Sheikh Sabah Badr Sabah Al Salem Al Sabah along with senior management of LuLu Kuwait on 23 February at the Al-Qurain outlet of the hypermarket.

This year's promotion is unlike anything seen before, offering massive discounts across every shopping category. Customers can enjoy exclusive deals and unbeatable savings on groceries, health and beauty products, fresh and frozen food, household essentials, and a wide range of electronic items. Fashion lovers also have plenty to look forward to, with incredible deals on clothing, footwear, and accessories.

To commemorate Kuwait's 64 years of independence, the retailer has introduced 64 exclusive offers, ensuring that shoppers can get exceptional value on their favourite products. Adding even more excitement to the celebrations, from 25 February to 1 March, 600 shoppers stand the chance of winning all the items in their trolley for free. On top of that, shoppers can expect even greater discounts during this special period, making it the perfect time to stock up on essentials and grab incredible deals.

LuLu Hypermarket has lined up several special promotional deals and offers to make this shopping festival truly extraordinary. The 'Brand of the Week' promotion features exclusive deals on top brands, while the 'Deal of the Day' offers unbeatable price drops on selected products every day. Tech enthusiasts can take advantage of the Hala Digital Shopping Festival, with discounts on mobiles, consumer electronics, IT accessories, and wearables. Fashion shoppers

are in for a treat as well, with a flat 50 percent discount on garments and up to 50 percent off on top footwear brands such as Adidas, Puma, Skechers, and Hobbiebar.

As part of its commitment to supporting local businesses, LuLu Hypermarket is also running a 'Proudly from Kuwait' campaign, offering special discounts on fresh local produce and Kuwaiti brand products.

Besides the amazing line of deals and delights, the retailer has turned its stores into a celebration of Kuwaiti culture with a series of special events and performances. One of the major highlights is a large sticky wall of Kuwait's flag, creating a striking visual centerpiece for the festivities. Outlets of the hypermarket are also bedecked with large cut-outs of Kuwait's famous landmarks, adding to the patriotic atmosphere.

'My Kuwait, My Pride' promotion also features several cultural performances that highlight Kuwait's cultural heritage, including the traditional Kuwaiti Sword Dance, live

drama and entertainment shows. Children will also take centre stage with special Hala Kuwait performances, bringing lively energy to the celebrations. Adding an extra dose of fun, LuLu Hypermarket will feature Kuwait flag-themed mascots.

Food lovers are going to love the spectacular Arabic Food Festival, one of the major highlights of the celebration, where they can explore authentic Arabic cuisine at dedicated food stalls and even enjoy a taste of various foods at the free sampling counters, making it a delicious addition to the shopping experience.

This year's Hala February promotion at LuLu Hypermarket promises to be the biggest and most exciting event ever, and everyone is invited to join in the celebrations and take advantage of the amazing one-time shopping deals and fantastic cultural festivities lined up for the 'My Kuwait, My Pride' promotion.



IDAKians get-together to celebrate 'Chauthvin Ka Chand' in Subiya desert.

## Magical 'Chauthvin Ka Chand'

# IDAKians gather under the moonlight in Subiya desert

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The third edition of the IDAK Activity Club's much-anticipated event, "Chauthvin Ka Chand", unfolded under clear skies and a glowing full moon, offering a memorable evening for the participants, on Valentine's day.

Held at the picturesque Yalla Karavan in Subiya Desert, the event promised – and delivered – a perfect blend of relaxation, camaraderie, and celestial wonders. Attendees arrived by 4:00 PM, with the scenic desert venue offering amenities such as spacious tents, dedicated photo spots, volleyball ground, swings for kids, a cozy fireplace, and a barbecue grill station.

The program kicked off with kite flying sessions, hot tea and snacks followed by watching the stunning sunset. As darkness fell, the moonrise, the planetary parade and stargazing session became the highlight of the evening, with attendees capturing breathtaking views through telescopes and DSLR cameras brought by enthusiasts.

A live grill station offering hot bites and bonfire complemented the cool desert air. The night was further enlivened by musical performances, led by IDAK General Secretary Dr Jijan Sam Thomas along with others expertly handling musical instruments and showcasing their talents, adding a soulful rhythm to the serene desert atmosphere.

The evening concluded around 10:00 PM leaving participants with warm memories of friendship, music, and nature's beauty. Attendees praised the event's relaxed vibe, open social interactions, and the rare opportunity to connect under the shimmering night sky.

Led by two dynamic women leaders of IDAK – Dr. Roshila Mathew, Vice President of IDAK and Dr. Tiny Elsa Thomas, Chair of Membership Committee – the event was ably supported by members from the Council, Membership, Events, and Cultural teams.

IDAK President Dr. George P Alex said clear weather, laughter, and experiences closer to nature helped the members to unwind from their busy schedule and "Chauthvin Ka Chand" proved to be another shining success for the IDAK Activity Clubs.

## KPBD's latest campaign draws over 260 donors in Kuwait

# Pakistan association marks milestone with 26th blood donation drive

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Kuwait Pakistan Blood Donors Association (KPBD) proudly commemorated its 26th Blood Donation Drive at the Kuwait Central Blood Bank - Jabriya, marking a significant achievement in its ongoing humanitarian efforts. The event saw the participation of distinguished guests, including Hamza Touqir, Community Welfare Attaché at the Embassy of Pakistan in Kuwait. Prominent figures from the Pakistani community and digital media correspondents were also present, further motivating donors and organizers alike.

KPBD Chairman Hafiz Muhammad Shabbir and President Malik Sajid Ali extended a warm welcome to the es-

teemed guests, underscoring the unwavering dedication of the Pakistani community in Kuwait to the noble cause of blood donation. The dignitaries commended KPBD's relentless efforts, acknowledging the profound impact these initiatives have on saving lives. The event garnered extensive media coverage, including reports by KTV2, local digital outlets, and Pakistani media representatives.

Since its inception in 2013, KPBD has been at the forefront of blood donation advocacy, successfully organizing numerous drives and facilitating thousands of pints of life-saving blood. Beyond these scheduled events, KPBD remains actively responsive to urgent blood donation appeals via social

media, ensuring timely support for patients in need.

The event witnessed an impressive turnout from the Pakistani community, with 400+ individuals participating between 1:30 PM and 6:00 PM. A total of 260 successful blood donation registrations were recorded. The drive also received overwhelming support from individuals of diverse nationalities, including Indian, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, and Filipino donors, demonstrating the spirit of unity and humanitarian service.

KPBD extends its deepest gratitude to all blood donors and representatives from Pakistani community organizations in Kuwait for their steadfast support. Special appre-

ciation is also conveyed to the Pakistani electronic, digital, and social media platforms for their comprehensive coverage, amplifying the positive contributions of the community.

The success of the event was made possible through the generous sponsorship of Al-Hafiz Group, HUAWAI, Al-Bahr Company, Alfaisal Bakery, and the provision of juices and water by KPBD team member Zakir Khan. The drive concluded with a heartfelt note of appreciation from the Chairman and organizing committee, celebrating the invaluable contributions of donors and volunteers who played a pivotal role in making the initiative a resounding success.



Photos from the Kuwait Pakistan Blood Donors Association celebrating the milestone.

## Brazilian dystopian drama takes Silver Bear prize

# Norwegian drama wins top prize at Berlin Festival

BERLIN, Feb 23, (AP) — A Norwegian film about love, desire and self-discovery won top honors at the 75th Berlin International Film Festival on Saturday.

A jury headed by American director Todd Haynes awarded the Golden Bear trophy to "Dreams ..." by director Dag Johan Haugerud.

Haynes called it a "meditation on love" that "cuts you to the quick with its keen intelligence."

The film focuses on a teenager played by Ella Overbyer, infatuated with her female French teacher, and the reactions of her mother and grandmother when they discover her private writings. It's the third part of a trilogy Haugerud has completed in the past year. "Sex" premiered at Ber-

lin in 2024, and "Love" was screened at the 2024 Venice Film Festival.

The runner-up Silver Bear prize went to Brazilian director Gabriel Mascaro's dystopian drama "The Blue Trail." Argentine director Ivan Fund's rural saga "The Message" won the third-place Jury Prize.

The best director prize went to Huo Meng for "Living the Land," set in fast-changing 1990s China.

Rose Byrne was named best performer for her role as an overwhelmed mother in the Mary Bronstein-directed "If I had Legs, I'd Kick You." Andrew Scott won the supporting performer trophy for playing composer Richard Rodgers in Richard

Linklater's "Blue Moon."

The climax of the festival known as the Berlinale came on the eve of Germany's parliamentary elections after a campaign dominated by migration and the economy.

The national election is being held seven months early, after Chancellor Olaf Scholz's governing coalition collapsed in a dispute about how to revitalize the country's economy.

Efforts to curb migration have emerged as a central issue in the campaign - along with the question of how to handle the challenge from the far-right Alternative for Germany, which appears to be on course for its strongest national election result yet.



Hege Hauff Hvattum, winner of the Golden Bear for best film for 'Dreams ...', poses for photographers at the winners photo call during the International Film Festival, Berlinale, in Berlin, Saturday, Feb. 22. (AP)

## Awards

'No Other Land' wins documentary prize

# 'Anora' dominates at Spirit Awards



Former Vice President Kamala Harris accepts the chairman's award during the 56th NAACP Image Awards on Saturday, Feb. 22, in Pasadena, Calif. (AP)



Chaunté Wayans, (from left), Kim Wayans, Marlon Wayans, Damon Wayans Sr., and Damien Dante Wayans are given the NAACP Hall of Fame award during the 56th NAACP Image Awards on Saturday, Feb. 22, in Pasadena, Calif. (AP)

SANTA MONICA, Calif., Feb 23, (AP) — Sean Baker's "Anora" won best film, best director and best actor for Mikey Madison at the Independent Spirit Awards on Saturday in what could be a preview of next Sunday's Oscars: The film about a Brooklyn 'escort' worker and her whirlwind affair with a Russian oligarch's son has emerged in recent weeks as an awards season front-runner.

The Spirit Awards, held in a beachside tent in Santa Monica, California, is the shaggier, more irreverent sister to the Academy Awards, celebrating the best in independent film and television.

Host Aidy Bryant called it "Hollywood's third or fourth biggest night."

In accepting the directing prize, Baker spoke passionately about the difficulty of making independent films in an industry that is no longer able to fund riskier films. He said indies are in danger of becoming calling card films - movies made only as a means to get hired for bigger projects.

"The system has to change because this is simply unsustainable," Baker said to enthusiastic applause. "We shouldn't be barely getting by."

### Competition

"Anora's" best film competition included Jane Schoenbrun's psychological horror "I Saw the TV Glow," RaMell Ross' adaptation of Colson Whitehead's "Nickel Boys," Greg Kwedar's incarceration drama "Sing Sing" and Coralie Fargeat's body horror "The Substance."

This year had several other possible Oscar winners celebrating. Kieran Culkin, considered an Oscar favorite, won the supporting performance award for "A Real Pain." His director, co-star and writer Jesse Eisenberg won best screenplay for the film about two cousins embarking on a Holocaust tour in Poland.

Culkin was not there to accept - he also missed his BAFTA win last weekend to tend to a family member - but other Oscar nominees like Madison and Demi Moore were.

Madison won the top acting prize over Moore at the BAFTAs last weekend, as well, and stopped Saturday to pet Moore's dog Pifaf on the way to the stage. Acting categories for the Spirit Awards are gender neutral and include 10 spots each, meaning Madison and Moore were up against Oscar nominees like Colman Domingo ("Sing Sing") and Sebastian Stan ("The Apprentice").

The documentary prize went to "No



Samantha Quan, (center), accepts the award for best feature for 'Anora' during the Film Independent Spirit Awards on Saturday, Feb. 22, in Santa Monica, Calif. Appearing with her are from left presenter Michelle Yeoh, Alex Coco, Sean Baker, Karren Karagulian, Vache Tovmasyan, Mikey Madison, Mark Eydelshteyn and Yura Borisov. (AP)



Mikey Madison accepts the award for best lead performance for 'Anora.' (AP)



Richard Gadd accepts the award for best lead performance for 'Baby Reindeer.' (AP)



Natasha Rothwell accepts the award for best ensemble cast for 'How to Die Alone.' (AP)

Other Land," the lauded film by a Palestinian-Israeli collective about the destruction of a village in the West Bank which doesn't have distribution. It's also a strong Oscar contender in a competitive category. The filmmakers were not in attendance to accept the award.

"Flow," the wordless animated Latvian cat film, won best international film. At the Oscars, it's competing in the international film category and animation.

While the Spirit Award winners don't always sync up with the academy, they can often reflect a growing consensus as in the "Everything Everywhere All At Once" year. The awards limit eligibility to productions with budgets of \$30 million or less, meaning more expensive Oscar nominees like "Wicked" and "Dune: Part Two" were not in the running.

Sean Wang accepted best first feature and best first screenplay prizes for "Didi." He said it was special to be sharing the stage with one of his stars, Joan Chen, who was also nominated for the same award 25 years ago for "Xiu Xiu: The Sent Down Girl."

The Netflix phenomenon "Baby Reindeer" also picked up several prizes,

es, for actors Richard Gadd, Jessica Gunning and Nava Mau.

Mau, who is trans, spoke about the importance of actors sticking together "as we move into this next chapter."

"We don't know what is going to happen, but we do know our power," Mau said. "We are the people and our labor is everything."

Other television winners included "Shgun," for best new scripted series, and "How to Die Alone," for best ensemble.

### Emotional

"How to Die Alone" creator and star Natasha Rothwell was emotional while accepting the ensemble prize. The show was recently canceled after its first season.

Rothwell said it was "a show about the need to feel seen, to be valued just as you are."

"For Black stories, visibility isn't a privilege: It is a necessity," Rothwell said. "We deserve to take up space, to be complex, to be hilarious and to be fully human."

The generally lighthearted show took a moment to acknowledge the impact of the wildfires on Los Angeles.

## Wayans family shines

# Harris delivers powerful message at NAACP event

LOS ANGELES, Feb 23, (AP) — Former Vice President Kamala Harris stepped on the NAACP Image Awards stage Saturday night with a sobering message, calling the civil rights organization a pillar of the Black community and urging people to stay resilient and hold onto their faith during the tenure of President Donald Trump.

"While we have no illusions about what we are up against in this chapter in our American story, this chapter will be written not simply by whoever occupies the oval office nor by the wealthiest among us," Harris said after receiving the NAACP's Chairman's Award. "The American story will be written by you. Written by us. By the people."

The 56th annual Image Awards was held at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium in the Los Angeles area.

Harris, defeated by Trump in last year's presidential election, was the first woman and the first person of color to serve as vice president. She had previously been a US senator from California and the state's attorney general.

In her first major public appearance since leaving office, Harris did not reference her election loss or Trump's actions since entering the Oval Office, although Trump mocked her earlier in the day at the Conservative Political Action Conference.

### Vigilance

Harris spoke about eternal vigilance, the price of liberty, staying alert, seeking the truth and America's future.

"Some see the flames on our horizons, the rising waters in our cities, the shadows gathering over our democracy and ask 'What do we do now?'" Harris said. "But we know exactly what to do, because we have done it before. And we will do it again. We use our power. We organize, mobilize. We educate. We advocate. Our power has never come from having an easy path."

Other winners of the Chairman's prize have included former President Barack Obama, the late Rep. John Lewis and the late actor Ruby Dee.

Harris was honored during the ceremony along with the Wayans family. The family was inducted into the NAACP Image Awards Hall of Fame in recognition of pioneering contributions to film, TV, sketch and stand-up comedy that have shaped Hollywood for decades.

Keenen Ivory Wayans, Damon Wayans Sr., Marlon Wayans, Shawn Wayans, Kim Wayans and Damon Wayans Jr. each were recognized.

Marlon Wayans, whose guest

appearance on Peacock's "Bel-Air" was up for an NAACP award, shared how Keenen Ivory Wayans sparked the family's rise.

"He raised us all like Jedis," he said. "We wouldn't be here if it wasn't for our big brother."

Marlon Wayans joked that when his brother told their mom he was leaving college for comedy, she said, "Boy, I've known you your whole life, and you ain't never said nothing funny. That's the funniest thing you've said."

The crowd erupted in laughter, a fitting tribute to a family that has kept audiences laughing for more than three decades.

### Credits

The family has a long list of credits. Keenen Ivory Wayans created the sketch comedy series "In Living Color" in 1990 and directed the 2000 slasher spoof "Scary Movie," which was written by Marlon Wayans and Shawn Wayans, who also wrote and starred in "White Chicks" in 2004. Damon Wayans had a starring role in the 1995 comedy "Major Payne," and currently co-stars with son Damon Wayans Jr. in the CBS sitcom "Poppa's House," which was nominated for an NAACP Award. The pair also were nominated for their acting on the show.

Damon Wayans Jr. has acted in two of the most critically acclaimed comedies in recent years: "Happy Endings" and "New Girl." Kim Wayans, a comedian, actor and director, also received praise for her work in the 2011 drama "Pariah."

Keke Palmer expressed her surprise after her name was called as winner of the coveted entertainment of the year.

"Oh my gosh. Guys, I didn't think I was going to win," said Palmer, who paid homage to fellow nominee Cynthia Erivo's Oscar-nominated performance in "Wicked."

Palmer starred in the buddy comedy "One of Them Days," which debuted No. 1 at the box office last month. She also won an Emmy for her hosting efforts on NBC's "Password."

"It's such an amazing category to be in with all these people," Palmer said. "It's a beautiful night. It's Black History Month, y'all. It's so important we all come here together and celebrate one another with one another."

Other nominees included Kendrick Lamar, Kevin Hart and Shannon Sharpe.

Image Awards host Deon Cole honored residents of the nearby Altadena neighborhood who were affected by January's devastating Los Angeles-area wildfires.



Sean Wang accepts the award for best first screenplay for 'Didi' during the Film Independent Spirit Awards. (AP)

## Variety

**KABUL, Afghanistan:** An Afghan women's radio station will resume broadcasts after the Taliban lifted their suspension over alleged cooperation with an overseas TV channel.

Radio Begum launched on International Women's Day in March 2021, five months before the Taliban seized power amid the chaotic withdrawal of US and NATO troops.

The station's content is produced entirely by Afghan women. Its sister satellite channel, Begum TV, operates from France and broadcasts programs that cover the Afghan school curriculum from seventh to 12th grade. The Taliban have banned education for women and girls in the country beyond grade six.

In a statement issued Saturday night, the Taliban Information and Culture Ministry said Radio Begum had "repeatedly requested" to restart operations and that the suspension was lifted after the station made commitments to authorities.

The station pledged to conduct broadcasts "in accordance with the principles of journalism and the regulations of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, and to avoid any violations in the future," it added.

The ministry did not elaborate what those principles and regulations were. Radio Begum confirmed the ministry had granted permission to resume broadcasting. It did not give further details. (AP)

**LOS ANGELES:** The 31st Screen Actors Guild Awards on Sunday night should offer the final clue in an unusually unpredictable Oscar race.

The other major awards - including the BAFTAs, the Producers Guild Awards, the Directors Guild Awards and the Golden Globes - have all had their say. But actors make up the largest piece of the film academy pie, so their picks often correspond strongly with Academy Award winners.

After wins from the PGA and the DGA - and last night, the Independent

Spirit Awards - Sean Baker's "Anora" is seen as the favorite to win best picture in a week's time at the Oscars. But Edward Berger's "Conclave" won last weekend at the BAFTAs, the latest wrench in an award season full of them.

That's included the unlikely rise and precipitous fall of another top contender, "Emilia Pérez."

So there are plenty of questions heading into the SAG Awards, hosted by Kristen Bell from the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. Can "Wicked" make a late push and win the guild's top award, best ensemble? Can Adrien Brody hold off Timothée Chalamet for best actor? Can Mikey Madison keep the momentum and win best actress over Demi Moore?



Bell

The 31st SAG Awards will be streamed live by Netflix beginning at 8 p.m. Eastern. An official pre-show will start an hour earlier, also on Netflix. Last year's show, the first to air on the streaming platform, drew an audience of 1.8 million, roughly on par with earlier SAG ceremonies broadcast by TNT and TBS.

"Wicked" comes in the leading film nominee, with five nods, while "Shgun" heads the TV categories.

Jon M. Chu's hit musical hasn't yet had a major awards win, but the Screen Actors Guild has often favored populist contenders. Also up for best ensemble are "Anora," "The Brutalist," "Conclave" and "A Complete Unknown."

The best actor and best actress categories should be nail biters. While Brody ("The Brutalist") has won a string of awards, Chalamet ("A Complete Unknown") and Ralph Fiennes ("Conclave") could easily pull off the upset. Best actress could go to either Moore ("The Substance") or Madison ("Anora"). (AP)

## Chinese scientists find target for delaying Parkinson's disease

## Novel drug found to halt Parkinson's progression: study

SHANGHAI, Feb 23, (Xinhua): Chinese scientists have discovered a novel therapeutic target for Parkinson's disease, a neurodegenerative condition with high disability and mortality rates, and have successfully identified a potentially effective small molecule drug.

The breakthrough, achieved by a team from Huashan Hospital affiliated with Fudan University in Shanghai, holds promise for early intervention in Parkinson's disease, offering patients renewed hope for delaying its progression. The research was published in the prestigious academic journal Science on Friday (Beijing time).

The battle against Parkinson's disease, the second most common neurodegenerative disorder after Alzheimer's, has been ongoing for years. There are approximately 3 million Parkinson's patients in China, roughly half of the global total. People diagnosed with Parkinson's disease may initially

experience a reduced sense of smell and sleep disorders, eventually developing more severe movement-related symptoms. As the disease progresses, the effectiveness of medications often declines, leading to a significant deterioration in quality of life.

Unfortunately, previous drugs and surgical therapies have only addressed the symptoms of Parkinson's disease, failing to prevent its progression. As a result, further in-depth research into the disease's pathophysiology and targeted treatments is crucial, according to the scientists.

After five years of persistent efforts, the team identified FAMI171A2 as a key risk gene for neurodegeneration. Using artificial intelligence, they screened over 7,000 approved compounds and pinpointed bementinib, an anti-cancer agent currently in clinical trials, as a promising lead candidate.

The small molecule drug has been shown to effectively

block the binding between FAMI171A2 and the pathogenic protein, according to the research team.

Yu Jintai, leader of the team, said that, based on an international patent, they will focus on the pre-clinical research and development of small-molecule drugs, antibodies and gene therapies for Parkinson's disease in the coming years, with the aim of advancing clinical trials and applications to develop an innovative therapeutic system.

People over the age of 60 are more susceptible to Parkinson's disease. As China's population continues to age, this new medical breakthrough has sparked hope within both the academic and medical communities, as well as among patients, with the expectation that the research will have practical applications in the near future.

"The experimental results have helped us accurately figure out the pathophysiological mechanisms of Parkinson's

disease, creating a real chance of overcoming a battle that has long seemed insurmountable," said Wang Jian, director of the neurology department at Huashan Hospital, which is also a national medical center for neurological diseases.

A referee for Science praised the discovery as a "holy grail" in Parkinson's research, highlighting its potential to lead to therapies that can block the spread of pathology and, consequently, the disease itself.

Neurological diseases, particularly those affecting the brain, such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, have become a major global public health and social challenge.

Chinese experts have called for greater efforts in brain science research, noting that it will be crucial for developing new treatment methods, enhancing early diagnosis, detection and intervention, and ultimately improving the quality of life for patients.

'Still in critical condition'

## Pope Francis is conscious, receiving oxygen following respiratory crisis

ROME, Feb 23, (AP): Pope Francis was conscious but still receiving high flows of supplemental oxygen Sunday following a respiratory crisis and blood transfusions, as he remains in critical condition with a complex lung infection, the Vatican said.

The brief statement early Sunday didn't mention if Francis was out of bed or eating breakfast, which it had on previous days. "The night passed quietly, the pope rested," it said.

The Vatican later said Francis was conscious, continuing to receive supplemental oxygen and that further clinical tests were being conducted. A more detailed medical update was expected later Sunday.

On Saturday, doctors said the 88-year-old pope, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, was in critical condition after suffering a prolonged asthmatic respiratory crisis while being treated for pneumonia and a complex lung infection.

The pope received "high flows" of oxygen to help him breathe through a nasal tube. He also received blood transfusions after tests showed low counts of platelets, which are needed for clotting, the Vatican said in a late update.

The Saturday statement also said that the pontiff "continues to be alert and spent the day in an armchair although in more discomfort than yesterday." Doctors said the prognosis was "reserved."

Doctors have said Francis' condition is touch-and-go, given his age, fragility and pre-existing lung disease. His condition has revived speculation about what might happen if he becomes unconscious or otherwise incapacitated, and whether he might resign.

Francis was supposed to have cele-



A woman lays a rosary near candles adorned with pictures of Pope Francis outside the Agostino Gemelli Polyclinic where Pope Francis is battling pneumonia, in Rome, Saturday, Feb. 22. (AP)

brated Mass on Sunday morning in St. Peter's Basilica and ordained deacons as part of the Vatican's yearlong Holy Year commemoration.

The organizer of the Holy Year, Archbishop Rino Fisichella, celebrated the Mass in his place and offered a special prayer for Francis from the altar before delivering the homily the pope had prepared.

"Even though he is in a hospital bed, we feel Pope Francis close to us, we feel him present among us," Fisichella told the hundreds of white-robed deacons. "And this compels us to make even stronger and more intense our prayer that the Lord will assist him in his time of trial and illness."

A pre-written message that Francis had prepared for his Sunday noon prayer but did not deliver said he was "confidently continuing my hospitalization at the Gemelli Hospital, carrying on with the necessary treatment; and rest is also part of the therapy!" The message noted the upcoming anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, "a painful and shameful oc-

casation for the whole of humanity."

Doctors have warned that the main threat facing Francis would be the onset of sepsis, a serious infection of the blood that can occur as a complication of pneumonia. As of Friday, there was no evidence of any sepsis, and Francis was responding to the various drugs he is taking, the pope's medical team said in their first in-depth update on the pope's condition.

Saturday's blood tests showed that he had developed a low platelet count, a condition called plateletopenia or thrombocytopenia. Platelets are cell-like fragments that circulate in the blood that help form blood clots to stop bleeding or help wounds heal. Low platelet counts can be caused by a number of things, including side effects from medicines or infections, according to the U.S. National Institutes of Health.

Francis, who has chronic lung disease and is prone to bronchitis in winter, was admitted to Gemelli hospital on Feb. 14 after a weeklong bout of bronchitis worsened.

Doctors first diagnosed the complex viral, bacterial and fungal respiratory tract infection and then the onset of pneumonia in both lungs. They prescribed "absolute rest" and a combination of cortisone and antibiotics, along with supplemental oxygen when he needs it.

Meanwhile, the Vatican hierarchy went on the defensive to tamp down rumors and speculation that Francis might decide to resign. There is no provision in canon law for what to do if a pope becomes incapacitated. Francis has said that he has written a letter of resignation that would be invoked if he were medically incapable of making such a decision.



A Long March-3B carrier rocket carrying the satellite Zhongxing-10R blasts off from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in southwest China's Sichuan Province, Feb. 22. (Xinhua)

## China launches satellite

## Elon Musk calls for deorbiting International Space Station

WASHINGTON, Feb 23, (Agencies): US Administrator of the Government Efficiency Elon Musk called on Friday for speeding up the preparations for deorbiting the International Space Station.

"It is time to begin preparations for deorbiting the Space Station. It has served its purpose. There is very little incremental utility," Musk, who is also SpaceX founder and CEO, wrote on X.

Instead, he called for focusing on sending missions to Mars.

"Let's go to Mars," he said. He clarified that the decision is up to the President, "but my recommendation is as soon as possible."

NASA awarded SpaceX a contract last year to deorbit the International Space Station no earlier than 2030 that is worth USD 830 million.

SpaceX has announced its intentions to conduct uncrewed missions to Mars by 2026 and begin crewed missions to Mars by 2028.

China sent a new satellite into space on Saturday from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in the southwestern province of Sichuan.

The satellite Zhongxing-10R was launched at 8:11 p.m. (Beijing Time) by a Long March-3B carrier rocket, and entered the preset orbit successfully.

Meanwhile, Chinese astronomers have identified a runaway star that was ejected from the M15 globular cluster, providing strong evidence for the existence of intermediate-mass black holes (IMBHs), a long-missing link in our understanding of black hole evolution.

The discovery was led by researchers from the Chinese Academy of Sciences' National Astronomical Observatories (NAO) in collaboration with multiple institutions, and was published as a cover story in the National Science Review journal.

Black holes with masses between those of stellar-mass black holes, which are formed from the collapse of massive stars, and those of super-massive black holes, which reside at the centers of large galaxies, are known as IMBHs, said Huang Yang, an associate professor at NAO and the University of the Chinese Academy of Sciences who co-led the study.

IMBHs are often considered a crucial missing link in our understanding of the evolution of seed black holes into supermassive black holes. To date, only a few controversial candidates have been found, leaving the existence of IMBHs an open question in astrophysics.

The high-velocity runaway star, J0731+3717, was ejected from M15 approximately 20 million years ago at a staggering speed of nearly 550 kilometers per second, according to the study.

An analysis of data from the European Space Agency's Gaia spacecraft and China's Large Sky Area Multi-Object Fiber Spectroscopic Telescope (LAMOST), as well as data from other large-scale spectroscopic surveys, has also revealed that the star has a near-identical chemical composition and age to M15, said Liu Jifeng, director of NAO and co-lead author of the study.

Prior observations hinted that M15's center might host an IMBH weighing 1,700 to 3,200 solar masses. However, uncertainties persisted as the gravitational signals observed could also stem from dense clusters of neutron stars.

The extreme velocity of J0731+3717 resolves this debate.

"Such a high-speed ejection requires a tight binary star to pass within 1 astronomical unit of an IMBH," Huang said. "The black hole's tidal forces would rip the binary apart, capturing one star and hurling the other outward."

'Over 1,300 sick'

## Cholera kills 58 in south Sudan

CAIRO, Feb 23, (AP): A cholera outbreak in a southern Sudanese city killed nearly 60 people and sickened about 1,300 others over the last three days, health authorities said Saturday.

The outbreak in the southern city of Kosti was blamed mainly on contaminated drinking water after the city's water supply facility was knocked out during an attack by a notorious paramilitary group, the health ministry said. The group has been fighting the country's military for about two years.

The ministry said in a statement the disease killed 58 people and sickened 1,293 others between Thursday and Saturday in Kosti, 420 kilometers (261 miles) south of the capital, Khartoum.

The ministry said it has taken a series of measures to fight the outbreak, including launching a vaccination campaign against cholera in the city, which lies on the west bank of the White Nile River, opposite Rabak, the capital of White Nile province.

The ministry said it also expanded the capacity of an isolation center in cooperation with the United Nations and other international medical groups.

Doctors without Borders said its cholera treatment center in the Kosti hospital has been overwhelmed, prompting health authorities to use adult and pediatric emergency rooms to provide additional space to treat stricken patients.

"The situation is really alarming and is about to get out of control," said Dr. Francis Layoo Ocan, the group's medical coordinator in Kosti. "We've run out of space, and we are now admitting patients in an open area and treating them on the floor because there are not enough beds."

The group said the White Nile River is the most likely source of infection in the city, as many families have been bringing water from it using donkey carts following a major power outage in the area.

Local authorities banned residents from collecting water from the river and reinforced chlorination in the water distribution system, said MSF, the abbreviation for the French name of the group, Medecins Sans Frontieres.

The disease killed more than 600 and sickened over 21,000 others in Sudan between July and October last year, mostly in the country's eastern areas where millions of people displaced by the conflict were located. Another major outbreak in 2017 left at least 700 dead and sickened about 22,000 in less than two months.

## Mysterious disease kills 2,500 chickens in India

## Pakistan reports third polio case in 2025

ISLAMABAD, Feb 23, (Xinhua): Pakistan reported a new case of polio in the country's southern Sindh province, bringing the total number of the disease-infected children to three since the beginning of this year, officials from the health ministry said on Sunday.

The officials from the Regional Reference Laboratory for Polio Eradication at the National Institute of Health (NIH) under the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination confirmed the detection of type 1 wild poliovirus in a child from Larkana district of the province.

This is the second polio case reported from Sindh this year, bringing the total number of cases to two in Sindh and one in the country's northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Earlier this month, the first nationwide polio campaign of 2025 concluded, with 99 percent of the targets achieved across the country, said the health ministry, adding that during this campaign, more than 45 million children were administered the polio vaccine from Feb. 3 to Feb. 9.

The ministry said that a second round of the big catch-up activity is currently underway in the country to vaccinate children up to 5 years old under the expanded program on immunization.

Moreover, a vaccination activity targeting over 100 union councils bordering Afghanistan is scheduled from Feb. 24 to Feb. 28, it said, adding that a total of 0.66 million children will be targeted for vaccination during this activity.

Meanwhile, a mysterious poultry disease has killed at least 2,500 chickens in three days in the southern Indian state of Telangana, officials said Friday.

The outbreak has been reported in Konnur and Madanapuram mandal of Wanaparthy district, about 154 km southwest of Hyderabad, the capital city of Telangana.

The deaths have caused significant concerns among poultry farmers and local authorities.

Officials have launched a probe into the sudden deaths to ascertain the cause behind the fatalities.

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## SPORTS

## Charlotte spoils Morris' record-setting night

## NYCFC holds Messi's Miami in opener

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla., Feb 23, (AP): Telasco Segovia scored the tying goal on an assist by Lionel Messi in the 10th minute of stoppage time, and Inter Miami played New York City FC to a 2-2 draw in their MLS opener Saturday night.

On his second assist of the night, Messi hit a through ball to Segovia, who in his MLS debut finished with a nice shot from the right side of the box to the bottom left corner.

Inter Miami had played much of the second half down a goal. New York's Alonso Martínez got an easy one past Oscar Ustari after Inter Miami's Jordi Alba mistakenly made a pass directly to Martínez to put New York up 2-1 in the 55th minute.

But Messi, last season's MLS MVP, helped his team salvage a tie, showing no signs of fatigue in his second match in three days.

Seattle's Jordan Morris scored two goals to tie a franchise record before an own goal in stoppage time helped FC Charlotte play the Sounders to a 2-2 tie in the season opener for both teams at a rain-soaked Lumen Field.

After two errant touches by the Sounders, Idan Toklohati played a low entry from the right side that deflected at the near post by Seattle's Yéimar Gómez Andrade and darted between goalkeeper Stefan Frei's legs into the net in the third minute of

stoppage time.

Osman Bukari scored late in the second half and Brad Stuver made it stand up in his 81st consecutive start in goal to lead Austin FC to a 1-0 victory over Sporting Kansas City in a season opener.

Austin earns a victory in its first match under Nico Estévez, who was head coach for FC Dallas the past three seasons.

Bukari, who had one goal and two assists in eight starts and nine appearances as a rookie last season, used an assist from 20-year-old midfielder Owen Wolff to find the net in the 76th minute. Wolff has nine career assists in 87 appearances over five seasons with the club - notching a career-high four last season.

Aljaz Ivacic saved three shots for New England, Joe Willis stopped the only shot he faced, and Nashville and the Revolution played to a scoreless draw in a season opener.

Ivacic earns his first clean sheet of the season for the Revolution after notching four in 25 starts last season - his first

Jamar Ricketts scored his first career goal, Cristian Espinoza had three assists and San Jose beat Real Salt Lake 4-0 in a season opener, making a winner of five-time MLS Cup champion Bruce Arena in his coaching debut with the Earthquakes.

Jamar Ricketts scored his first career goal, Cristian

Espinoza had three assists and San Jose beat Real Salt Lake 4-0 in a season opener, making a winner of five-time MLS Cup champion Bruce Arena in his coaching debut with the Earthquakes.

The Earthquakes grabbed a 1-0 lead in the 28th minute when 23-year-old rookie defender Ricketts used assists from 21-year-old rookie midfielder Beau Leroux in his league debut and the veteran Espinoza to score in his second career appearance. Ricketts subbed in and played 34 minutes last season in his only other outing. Espinoza has played in 110 consecutive matches - the longest current stretch in the league.

San Jose added some insurance in the 70th minute on a goal by Antônio Josenildo Rodrigues de Oliveira. Ousseni Bouda made it 3-0 in the 75th minute. Espinoza had assists on both scores. Bouda's goal was the third of his career - covering three starts and 37 appearances dating to 2022.

Defender Vítor Costa scored the finale in the 84th minute with an assist from Mark-Anthony Kaye. Costa had two goals and three assists last season - his first in the league.

Daniel De Sousa Brito finished with eight saves in his 35th start over the past three seasons for San Jose. He had the only save of the first half before finishing off his seventh clean sheet.



Inter Miami forward Lionel Messi, left, and New York City FC defender Birk Risa (5) vie for the ball during the first half of an MLS soccer match in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. (AP)

## Shiffrin gets historic 100th World Cup race win



Switzerland's Marco Odermatt speeds down the course during an alpine ski, men's World Cup super G, in Crans Montana, Switzerland. (AP)

## Odermatt edges Monney

SESTRIERE, Italy, Feb 23, (AP): Mikaela Shiffrin is 100% the best in skiing's World Cup history book.

Shiffrin's record-extending 100th career World Cup race win Sunday fulfilled a quest put on hold by a serious crash in November.

Back to racing in her favored slalom event, Shiffrin kept and added to her first-run lead to finish 0.61 seconds ahead of Zrinka Ljutic. Shiffrin's U.S. teammate Paula Moltzan was third.

Shiffrin also tied an all-time World Cup record for men and women, as her 155th career top-3 finish on the podium matched Swedish great Ingemar Stenmark.

Shiffrin crossed the finish line and took a long look at the scoreboard showing her victory. She then looked again over her left shoulder with an expression of amazement.

She lay down on the snow with her right hand to her helmet, and was helped to her feet by Moltzan who hugged her.

Shiffrin cried at first when she was asked in a post-race interview what it meant after all she had been through in the past few months.

"Everyone had been so nice and so supportive. I am so grateful, thank you," she said.

Shiffrin's 99th win was earned exactly three months ago in a slalom at Gurgl, Austria.

No. 100 had been within clear sight one week later when Shiffrin crashed out of a giant slalom at Killington, Vermont, while racing fast as the first-run leader.

Shiffrin and Stenmark are the two greatest record setters in the World Cup's 58-year history.

His record of 86 World Cup wins was broken by Shiffrin in March 2023, almost 34 years after his last win. Stenmark's 86th win - a giant slalom at Aspen, Colorado in February 1989 - also was his 155th and last podium result.

It was just a 1-2 result for the stellar Swiss men's ski team instead of a full podium sweep.

Marco Odermatt edged Alexis Monney by 0.28 seconds to thrill the noisy home fans and win a World Cup super-G one day after they were second and third, respectively,

behind their teammate Franjo von Allmen in a downhill.

Von Allmen placed seventh Sunday, leaving the lower step of the podium to Dominik Paris of Italy, who trailed 0.39 behind yet another masterful run by Odermatt.

Odermatt, the gold medalist in super-G at the world championships this month, extended his lead in the World Cup overall and super-G standings.

The 27-year-old Swiss star's 100 race points padded what already looks an unbeatable lead in the overall standings with one month left in the season that ends with races at Sun Valley, Idaho. The three-time defending champion is 500 ahead of Henrik Kristoffersen, who does not race downhill or super-G, and 605 clear of Swiss teammate Loïc Meillard.

Odermatt's 45th career World Cup win - already sixth on the all-time men's list topped by Ingemar Stenmark's 86 - was his 15th in super-G. It came on the Nationale slope at Crans-Montana that will stage the next world championships in 2027.

He started wearing bib No. 15 and his winning run was the fifth change of lead in a compelling race. It might have been the sixth change but the No. 11 starter, Norwegian prospect Fredrik Moeller, skied out when unbalanced after landing the big jump near the finish of a fast run.



The winner United States' Mikaela Shiffrin celebrates after an alpine ski, women's World Cup slalom, in Sestriere, Italy. (AP)

## Local favorite prevents American sweep of podium

## South Korean skater Kim wins Four Continents

SEOUL, South Korea, Feb 23, (AP): Local favorite Kim Chae-yeon of South Korea won the Four Continents figure skating competition with a near-flawless free skate on Sunday to prevent an American sweep of the podium.

Kim, who led after the short program, produced a season's best score of 148.36 in the free skate to finish with a total of 222.38 points.

Bradie Tennell of the United States also had a season-best free skate with 137.80 points and was second with a score of 204.38.

American Sarah Everhardt was third with 200.03 points, edging out compatriot Alysa Lu who was fourth with 198.55.

Skating to "Whisperers from the Heart" and "Love Dance," Kim was the last skater to take to the ice. She started her routine with a double axel and then added six clean triple jumps to bring the hometown crowd to its feet.

"I was a little nervous because I wanted to show my best for the home crowd and I am glad I was able to do that," Kim said.



Gold medalist Kim Chae-yeon of South Korea, left, silver medalist Bradie Tennell of the U.S., center, and bronze medalist Sarah Everhardt of the U.S. celebrate after the medal ceremony for the women's single competition of the ISU Four Continents Figure Skating Championships at the Mok-dong ice rink in Seoul, South Korea. (AP)

She becomes only the third South Korean skater to win the Four Continents title following Lee Hae-in in 2023 and Yuna Kim in 2009.

Defending champion Mone Chiba,

who was second after the short program, struggled with her free skate and dropped down to sixth place with a total of 195.08.

The 19-year-old Japanese skater

started off well with a triple flip, triple toe loop combination but fell on her triple salchow and on the triple flip.

Skating to "Nessun Dorma," Tennell, who is coming off an ankle injury, opened with a triple lutz, triple toe loop combination and then added five more triple jumps.

"I was really happy with my performance today because it's been a long time since I've given a performance like that," said two-time US champion Tennell who moved up from fifth place.

"With all the struggles of the last few years it was a very satisfying moment to finish a program and feel such joy after skating," Tennell said. "There's been a lot of frustration and tears this season and the past few seasons."

Everhardt's free skate featured seven triple jumps including her opening triple lutz.

"It's my first ISU Championship," said the 18-year-old Everhardt. "It's a fun experience being in a big event, learning from the event and learning how things work. And I'm glad I was able to fight and show a good performance here."

## Chinese aerial skiers dominate at FIS Freestyle Skiing World Cup

CHANGCHUN, China, Feb 23, (Xinhua): Chinese aerial skiers dominated the FIS Freestyle Skiing World Cup at Beidahu Ski Resort on Sunday, securing 1-2 finishes in both the men's and women's events.

In the women's competition, Olympic champion Xu Mengtao overcame a last-place qualification for the superfinal to claim vic-

tory with a back full-full-full, scoring 114.19 points. Teammate Chen Meiting secured second place with 109.04 points, while Australia's Danielle Scott finished third with 89.18 points.

"That was better than my Olympic jump. The twists, I was very straight, and I had a good landing," Xu said, describing her final jump.

"This is my lucky place. I did a very good job here the last time a World Cup was held here too," she added.

In the men's event, China's Li Tianma secured his first World Cup victory, delivering a back double full-double full-full to score 130.56 points. Reigning Olympic champion Qi Guangpu took second place with

119.00 points, while Christopher Lillis of the United States finished third with 115.93 points.

"I felt very good today. I just made a little bit of adjustments in my jumps. This is my first time getting a win at the World Cup. Everyone performed very well here," Li said.

The World Cup continues on Monday with the team aerials event.

three final scores.

Bivol turned the rematch in his favor in the middle rounds, showing off his punching precision and elusiveness. He stayed away from Beterbiev's power, which threatened to decide the bout early on, and scored with counterpunches while Beterbiev's energy flagged.

Although Beterbiev stunned Bivol with a right hand that opened a cut above Bivol's left eye in the 12th, Bivol hung on for the victory.

The main event in Riyadh was a rematch of the light heavyweights' entertaining first title bout last Oct. 12 at Kingdom Arena. Beterbiev won that narrow majority decision while going the distance for the first time in his career.

Bivol's supporters decried the verdict that made Beterbiev the first undisputed light heavyweight champion in the four-belt era, and several statistical measures backed up their anger. A quick rematch was natural,

and the Saudi promoters made it happen atop a title fight-studded card.

Bivol faded in the final three rounds of their first fight, throwing hundreds fewer punches than he managed in his career-defining upset of Canelo Alvarez.

Bivol came out slugging with Beterbiev in the rematch, but Beterbiev upped his aggression and effectiveness starting in the third, closing the distance on Bivol and punishing the challenger with body shots.

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## Bivol becomes undisputed light heavyweight champ

## SPORTS



Left-right: A combo photos of participating teams.

Venad Warriors clinch Championship in thrilling final

## Keralite Engineers' Association organizes Kuwait Football League 2025

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Kuwait Football League (KFL) 2025, organized by the Keralite Engineers' Association (KEA) for the players under the various alumni players of Kuwait Engineers' Forum (KEF) was held on February 14th at the Duraar Complex Ground in Riggae, Kuwait, was a day filled with intense competition, thrilling football, and an electrifying atmosphere. The event brought together players and spectators from across the KEF community for a day of unforgettable action.

The tournament kicked off at 8 AM with high-energy matches showcasing the skills of seasoned players and rising stars. The crowd was treated to stunning goals, powerful shots, acrobatic scissor kicks, and bicycle kicks, all while the referees ensured smooth and fair play throughout the day.

The final match saw Venad Warriors emerge as Champions with a 1-0 victory over Thiruvalla Reds. Both teams fought hard, and the match kept the crowd on edge until the final whistle, culminating in a thrilling conclusion to a highly competitive tournament.

Event Commissioner Mr. Pramod Kumar played a pivotal role in overseeing the successful execution of the event and contributed significantly to the event's seamless organization.

The six participating teams – BLUE PULIS, MARK RANGERS, NOVA ROYALS, THIRUVALLA REDS, VENAD WARRIORS, and WHITE MISCHIEF – demonstrated excellent cooperation and teamwork, making the event a memorable success. The players gave their all on the field, and the staff behind the scenes worked tirelessly to ensure everything ran smoothly.

A standout moment of the day was the presence of the esteemed Ex-International Indian cricketer, Mr. Venkatapathy Raju, who attended as the Chief Guest for the finals between Venad Warriors and Thiruvalla Reds. He was warmly welcomed by KEA General Secretary Mr. Renju Abraham and later felicitated by KEA President Mr. Ebeey Samuel. His inspiring words added an extra layer of prestige to the event, making it even more memorable for all attendees.

The day also featured an exciting Flash Mob performance by KEA children, which added a lively and energetic atmosphere to the event.

The Prize Distribution Ceremony recognized the outstanding performances of players throughout the tournament. KEF GC Mrs. Hanna Shan, along with all the Alumni Presidents, presented the awards to the deserving winners in various categories as follows:

MATCH 1 – PLAYER OF THE MATCH - SARATH VASUDEV

MATCH 2 – PLAYER OF THE MATCH - NITHIN K THOMAS  
 MATCH 3 – PLAYER OF THE MATCH - STEEPHEN P  
 MATCH 4 – PLAYER OF THE MATCH - BASITH BIN HAMEED  
 MATCH 5 – PLAYER OF THE MATCH - STEEPHEN P  
 MATCH 6 – PLAYER OF THE MATCH - NIKHIL VARUGHESE  
 SEMI-FINAL 1 – PLAYER OF THE MATCH - JAVED AKTHAR  
 SEMI-FINAL 2 – PLAYER OF THE MATCH - SARATH VASUDEV  
 FINALS – PLAYER OF THE MATCH - JITHIN JACOB  
 BEST GOALKEEPER - STEEPHEN P (Team: Nova Royals)  
 BEST DEFENDER - JAVAAD NALAKATH (Team: Thiruvalla Reds)  
 BEST MID-FIELDER - BASITH BIN HAMEED (Team: Mark Rangers)  
 BEST FORWARD - JITHIN JACOB (Team: Venad Warriors)  
 PLAYER OF THE TOURNAMENT - SARATH VASUDEV (Team: Venad Warriors)

KFL 2025 successfully highlighted the exceptional talent within the KEF community and the dedication and teamwork of KEA, EC-27, and the KEF Families that made the event a success. The enthusiasm from both players and supporters has set the stage for even more exciting seasons of KFL in the future.

## Lakers snap Nuggets winning streak behind Doncic's best game yet for LA



Chicago Bulls guard Tre Jones (30), left, guards Phoenix Suns guard Devin Booker (1) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Chicago. (AP)

### Trail Blazers romp to largest blowout victory in team history

**DENVER, Feb 23, (AP): Luka Doncic scored 32 points in his best game by far with the Lakers, leading Los Angeles to a 123-100 runaway win at Denver on Saturday night that snapped the Nuggets' nine-game winning streak.**

LeBron James added 25 points, Austin Reaves scored 23 and Rui Hachimura had 21 when he left holding his left side with 10 minutes remaining - the Lakers didn't miss him, going on a 12-2 run to stretch their lead to 19.

The Lakers never trailed in winning in Denver for the first time since April 10, 2022. They had lost 13 of their previous 14 against the Nuggets.

Doncic averaged 14.7 points in his first three games with the Lakers. He surpassed that less than 10 minutes in and had 19 points by halftime with the Lakers up 63-54.

Aaron Gordon scored 24 points and Jamal Murray 19 for Denver, which lost for the first time this month. Nikola Jokic posted his 26th triple-double of the season, but he was just 2 of 7 from the floor with six turnovers.

The Nuggets have never won 10 in a row during coach Michael Malone's decade in Denver.

### Trail Blazers 141, Hornets 88

In Portland, Anfernee Simons hit five 3-pointers and scored 25 points in the largest blowout victory in Portland Trail Blazers history, a romp over the Charlotte Hornets.

The 53-point margin topped the franchise record of 50 set in a 129-79 home victory over Cleveland on Nov. 21, 1982.

Toumani Camara added 20 points, 10 rebounds, six assists, a steal and two blocks for the Trail Blazers. Shaedon Sharpe had 20 points off the bench, and Jabari Walker had 20 points and 14 rebounds.

Miles Bridges led the Hornets with 17 points. Nick Smith Jr. had 14 points. Jusuf Nurkic added 11 points, eight rebounds and five assists off the bench.

### Jazz 124, Rockets 115

In Salt Lake City, Keyonte George scored 30 points and Lauri Markkanen

added 23 points and 10 rebounds to rally the Utah Jazz to a victory over the Houston Rockets.

Walker Kessler had 11 points and 17 rebounds, and Isaiah Collier added 12 points and 10 assists to help Utah snap a two-game skid.

Alperen Sengun led Houston with 27 points and 12 rebounds. Jalen Green added 25 points and 10 assists, and Amen Thompson had 23 points.

Aaron Holiday and Thompson made back-to-back 3-pointers to put the Rockets up 96-89. But the Jazz surged ahead for good behind a 21-5 run. Three straight baskets, capped by Cody Williams' layup, gave Utah a 110-101 lead with 5:59 left.

Sengun and Dillion Brooks each scored a pair of baskets to key an early 13-2 spurt that gave Houston a 45-40 lead midway through the second quarter.

Utah chipped away at the deficit, but did not retake a lead again until the third quarter when Markkanen bookended a string of four straight baskets that powered a 13-5 run. Kessler's alley-oop dunk three possessions later punctuated that run and put the Jazz up 77-76.

### Suns 121, Bulls 117

In Chicago, Devin Booker had 29 points and eight assists, Kevin Durant scored 27 points and Bradley Beal had 25 in his return to the starting lineup to help the Phoenix Suns beat the Chicago Bulls to end a four-game losing streak.

Playing the third of five straight road games, the Suns overcame an early deficit and held off the Bulls. They won for the first time since Jan. 31 with the Big Three of Booker, Durant and Beal in the lineup together.

Josh Giddey led Chicago with 24 points and had 10 assists and eight rebounds. The Bulls have lost six straight.

The Suns missed their first seven attempts and shot 29.2% in the first quarter. Chicago jumped out to a 10-point lead on a buzzer-beating floater from Tre Jones. Phoenix was 16 of 21 from the field in the second quarter and led by two at the half.

Phoenix built a 12-point lead in the third, but Chicago pulled within three entering the final quarter. Chicago evened it up in the final minutes, only for Booker, Beal and Durant to close it out.



Los Angeles Lakers forward Rui Hachimura, left, drives to the basket as Denver Nuggets guard Russell Westbrook defends in the second half of an NBA basketball game in Denver. (AP)

## Marseille president's corruption rant sparks backlash

PARIS, Feb 23, (AP): The French soccer federation president is joining forces with the country's referees after Marseille president Pablo Longoria accused them of being corrupt in a bitter rant that followed his team's 3-0 loss at Auxerre in the French league.

This is not the first time that Marseille officials have questioned refereeing decisions this season but the club had never gone that far in its accusations.

Longoria was deeply frustrated after Marseille's fifth league loss that left it lagging 10 points behind Paris Saint-Germain, the runaway leader. He spoke about "true corruption" and suggested that Marseille

was the victim of an organized plot.

"I condemn in the strongest possible terms the remarks made by the president and officials of Olympique de Marseille against French refereeing in general and the referee of yesterday's match, Jérémy Stinat, in particular, to whom I offer my full support," Philippe Diallo, the soccer federation president, said in a statement.

"Calling into question the integrity of our referees is defamatory, unacceptable and reprehensible," he added. "Such comments seriously damage the image of our league."

The referee's union, SAFE, was infuriated by

Longoria's comments and announced it would ask the federation's ethics committee to look into the matter, and take legal action.

"Lawsuits will be filed for defamation. And against all those behind the hate messages and death threats received since last night," the union said.

Longoria could not accept the second-half dismissal of Derek Cornelius for a second yellow card. Marseille was trailing 1-0 at the time and conceded two more goals in the last 15 minutes of the game. Brazilian defender Jubal scored both, including one from the spot, as Auxerre ended a streak of three straight league wins for second-place Marseille.

### World No. 1 Lin ousted

## Sun romps into Asian Cup final

SHENZHEN, Feb 23, (Xinhua): World No. 1 Lin Shidong of China suffered a seven-game upset in the men's singles semifinals, while Sun Yingsha cruised into the women's final at the Asian Cup table tennis tournament on Sunday.

The 19-year-old Lin, widely regarded as a potential successor to Chinese Olympic champions Ma Long and Fan Zhendong, squandered a two-game lead, falling in a five-game thriller to 28-year-old teammate Liang Jingkun 5-11, 7-11, 11-9, 11-9, 4-11, 11-9, 11-8.

Liang, who had staged multiple comeback victories in this tournament, said he fought for every point despite the odds.

Liang will face two-time Olympic gold medalist Wang Chuqin in an all-Chinese final on Sunday evening. Wang secured his spot with a six-game

victory over Chinese Taipei's Lin Yun-ju 9-11, 11-9, 11-6, 11-3, 8-11, 11-5.

"I made quite a few unforced mistakes in the first game, but I fought on to the last point," Wang said.

Meanwhile, Sun Yingsha, who received overwhelming crowd support, dominated her semifinal match against teammate Chen Xingtong, winning 11-7, 11-7, 11-5, 14-12.

In the final, Sun will face her arch-rival Wang Manyu, who defeated Kuai Man 11-7, 11-4, 15-13, 7-11, 12-10 in the semifinals.

The highly anticipated Sun-Wang showdown is expected to be one of the loudest finals of the Asian Cup, as their matchups regularly split spectators into two rival fan bases.

"I will present the best of myself in the final," Wang said.

### Alabama bounces back after 2 losses

## Flagg scores 16 pts in MSG debut as Duke hands Illinois worst loss ever

NEW YORK, Feb 23, (AP): Cooper Flagg had 16 points in his Madison Square Garden debut and seven players scored in double figures for No. 3 Duke in a 110-67 blowout Saturday night that marked the most lopsided loss in Illinois history.

Isaiah Evans paced the Blue Devils (24-3) with 17 points in 18 minutes off the bench, and Kon Knueppel added 15. Duke built a 23-point lead in the first half and scored its most points since a 113-49 win over Stetson in December 2018.

Flagg, the freshman star expected to be the top pick in this year's NBA draft, added seven rebounds and five assists in 23 1/2 minutes. But the Blue Devils didn't even need his best while rolling to their largest victory at MSG.

The White had 16 points for Illinois (17-11) in a nonconference matchup between programs that reached the Elite Eight last year. Kasparas Jakucionis scored 14.

Mark Sears scored 30 points and No. 4 Alabama came from behind for a 96-83 win over No. 17 Kentucky.

Alabama (22-5, 11-3 Southeastern Conference), which had lost its previous two games, got 19 points from Aden Holloway, who made five 3-pointers. Chris Youngblood had 14 points and Clifford Omoruyi had 11.

Koby Brea led Kentucky (18-9, 7-7 SEC) with 20 points while Andrew Carr and Amari Williams each scored 17. Travis Perry added 12 points.

Rueben Chinyelu had a career-high 19 points to go with 13 rebounds and No. 2 Florida roared back from an eight-point second-half deficit to beat LSU 79-65.

Thomas Haugh scored 16 points, Aljiah Martin added 14 and Walter Clayton Jr. 13 for Florida (24-3, 11-3 SEC), which won its sixth straight.

LSU freshman Robert Miller III scored a career-high 19 points to go with 10 rebounds and was the big reason the Tigers (14-13, 3-11) looked poised to challenge Florida well into the second half.

Florida raced to a 29-15 lead during the opening 13 minutes. But LSU suddenly found its footing when Curtis Givens III hit a 3, sparking a stunning 22-2 run during the final 6:41 of the half.

Florida surged into the lead for good with a 15-2 run that gave the Gators a 53-48 lead. Chinyelu scored seven points during that spurt, including a put-back as he was fouled.

Florida played its third game without starting forward Alex Condon and backup Sam Alexis.

Florida: The Gators shot 7 of 22 from 3-point range, marking the first time in six games they did not hit as many as 10 3s. But they showed the ability to adjust and use their size advantage to dominate the paint, where they outscored LSU 44-24.

Maxime Raynaud scored 20 points and grabbed eight rebounds and Stanford held off California for a 66-61 victory on.

Stanford led for most of the game and by as many as 17 points about midway through the second half before Cal rallied to tie the score at 61 with 42 seconds left. Raynaud shot 3 of 4 from the free-throw line and Ozyiah Sellers added two more to seal it.

Raynaud, who collected his 20th double-double of the season against N.C. State on Feb. 8, remains tied with Adam Keefe (1991-92) for the Stanford single-season record. Raynaud shot 5 of 16 from the floor and 8 of 10 from the foul line against the Bears.

Sellers was 3-of-13 shooting but made all seven of his free throws and finished with 14 points for Stanford (17-10, 9-7 Atlantic Coast Conference).

Jeremiah Wilkinson scored 13 of his 19 points in the second half to lead Cal (12-15, 5-11). Andrej Stojakovic added 16 points and 10 rebounds.

The Cardinal led 47-30 with 11:24 remaining. About two minutes later Cal started a 14-0 run to pull to 52-50 with 5:56 remaining. Raynaud scored the next six points but Cal answered with an 11-3 surge that tied it late.

Stanford honored former head coach Mike Montgomery, who was 393-167 in his 18 seasons and is the Cardinal's all-time winningest coach. Montgomery led the Cardinal to 16 postseason appearances that included the 1998 NCAA Final Four.

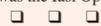
### Best of the Rest

**Andreeva wins title in Dubai:** Russian teenager Mirra Andreeva beat Clara Tauson 7-6 (1), 6-1 in the Dubai Championships on Saturday to earn the biggest title of her career.

The victory will earn Andreeva her debut in the top 10 of the rankings next week - the first 17-year-old to achieve that since Nicole Pietrangola in 2007.

It caps quite a week for Andreeva, who also had wins over 2023 Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova, five-time major champion Iga Swiatek and 2022 Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina to become the youngest player to defeat three major champions at a single event since Maria Sharapova at the 2004 WTA Finals. She also became the youngest player to reach the final of a WTA 1000 event.

Andreeva's only other title was the Iasi Open in Romania last year. (AP)



**Boca closes in on leader:** Miguel Merentiel struck late as Boca Juniors edged to a 2-1 home victory over Aldosivi in Argentina's Primera Division Apertura tournament on Saturday.

Luis Advincula gave the host the lead with a 49th-minute strike but Tiago Serrago equalized by rifling a long-range effort into the top-right corner.

Merentiel then bundled home from close range after combining with Milton Gimenez as the Buenos Aires giant secured its fourth win of the campaign.

The result at La Bombonera leaves Boca third in the 15-team Group A standings with 14 points from seven outings, a point behind leader Estudiantes. Aldosivi is last with just one point so far. (Xinhua)



Fans watch the ICC Champions Trophy cricket match between India and Pakistan at Dubai International Cricket Stadium, United Arab Emirates. (AP)

# Sports

Three goalless draws in opener

## Abdullah praises spectacular opening of Gulf Cup for Veterans in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Director General of the Public Authority for Sports, Bashar Abdullah, commended the opening ceremony of the Gulf Cup for Veterans, which kicked off in Kuwait.

In a press statement, Bashar described the ceremony as "exceptionally beautiful," highlighting the captivating drone and laser displays that engaged the audience. He emphasized that this tournament follows the successful model of "Gulf 26," recently hosted by Kuwait, which earned widespread praise.

Bashar Abdullah reaffirmed Kuwait's ability to organize major sporting events, crediting its experienced sports management teams.

He also praised the initiative of the Minister of Information and Culture, Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, for structuring the tournament competitively and scheduling it alongside Kuwait's national holidays, ensuring strong attendance—especially during the opening match between Kuwait and Oman.

Regarding the competition, Bashar noted that while all teams are eager to win, it remains too early to predict a frontrunner for the championship title, as all teams have an equal opportunity.

Despite his enthusiasm for the event, Bashar expressed regret that his administrative responsibilities prevented him from participating in the tournament with the "Blue Veterans."

The tournament's first round saw three goalless draws in Kuwait vs. Oman, Qatar vs. UAE, and Saudi Arabia vs. Bahrain, while Iraq secured a 1-0 victory



Fans wave the national flag during the opening ceremony of the Gulf Cup for Veterans in Kuwait.

over Yemen, thanks to a goal from striker Karar Jassim.

Oman coach Younis Aman hailed the opening ceremony as "dazzling," praising the vibrant laser and drone displays that captivated the audience. He noted that both players and fans are relishing the tournament, which reunites former Gulf football stars and rekindles nostalgic memories of past matches.

Reflecting on his team's goalless draw against Kuwait, Aman stated: "The Blues managed the game well with their touches and

skills. Although we had the upper hand, we couldn't convert our chances into goals."

Qatar veteran Mubarak Mustafa also lauded the tournament's organization and expressed appreciation for Kuwait's role in hosting the inaugural edition of this prestigious Gulf event.

Kuwait's Nahir Al-Shammari, shared his joy in reuniting with Gulf football legends in this championship, describing it as an opportunity to relive cherished memories of past competitions. He extended his gratitude to the

event organizers for the outstanding opening ceremony.

Former Oman national team goalkeeper Ali Al-Habsi echoed these sentiments, expressing his appreciation for the tournament's organizers. He reminisced about his football journey, saying: "My career began in Kuwait during the Gulf tournaments, and I am honored to return here for the first-ever Gulf Veterans Cup."

The Gulf Cup for Veterans continues to foster a spirit of camaraderie and sportsmanship while celebrating the rich history of Gulf football.



Al-Mutairi with Sheikh Ahmed Al-Youssef during the opening ceremony.

## Kuwait's Zaid and Abdulaziz clinch gold

ROME, Feb 23, (KUNA): Kuwaiti athletes Zaid Al-Sulaitin and Abdulaziz Al-Sulaitin secured gold medals in their respective categories at the World Jiu-Jitsu Grand Slam Championship, which concluded the day before yesterday in Rome, Italy.

Zaid Al-Sulaitin triumphed in the under-14 category, defeating the reigning world and European champion from Ukraine to claim the top spot. Meanwhile, Abdulaziz Al-Sulaitin earned gold in the under-12 category, adding to Kuwait's success on the international stage.

The World Jiu-Jitsu Grand Slam Championship is regarded as the second-largest and most prestigious tournament for professional Jiu-Jitsu athletes, boasting a six-star classification. Held annually across various countries, it attracts elite competitors from around the globe.



Zaid Al-Sulaitin and Abdulaziz Al-Sulaitin pose with their medals.

## Curtain falls on handball championship as Kuwait Club faces Al-Arabi in the final

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

MUSCAT, Feb 23: The 41st edition of the Gulf Handball Championship for Cup Winners' Clubs reaches its climax today with the final showdown between Kuwait Club and Qatar's Al-Arabi at 5:30 PM at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat, Oman. Earlier, at 3:00 PM, Qatari side Al-Rayyan will face Saudi Arabia's Al-Noor in the third-place decider.

Kuwait Club's journey in the tournament began in Group B, where it suffered an opening defeat to Al-Arabi before bouncing back with victories over the UAE's Dibba Al-Hisn and the host team, Oman.

This secured a spot in the semi-finals as group runner-up behind Al-Arabi. In a hard-fought semi-final clash, Kuwait Club edged



Kuwait Club player is blocked as he goes for a shot.

past Al-Rayyan 28-27 to book its place in the final.

Meanwhile, Al-Arabi's path

to the final saw it dominate the group stage, claiming victories over Kuwait Club and Oman. In the semi-finals, it overcame Saudi Arabia's Al-Noor with an identical 28-27 scoreline, setting up a rematch with Kuwait Club in the championship decider.

Heading into the final, Kuwait Club aims to achieve two key objectives: securing its second Gulf title in club history – following its maiden triumph in March 2023 against Bahrain's Al-Najma – and avenging its narrow 33-34 loss to Al-Arabi in the tournament opener.

Kuwait Club's medical team is working tirelessly to prepare key players for the final, including Egyptian Shadi Khalil (knee injury), Mishaal Abbas (ankle), and Frankis Carol Marzo (knee), hoping they can recover in time to contribute to the team's title aspirations.

## Kohli's 100 Powers India to 6-wicket win over Pakistan

Host at risk of early exit from Champions Trophy

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates, Feb 23, (AP): Virat Kohli's 100 not out led India to a six-wicket win over arch rival Pakistan in their Group A clash at the Champions Trophy on Sunday, putting the cricket tournament hosts at risk of a potential early exit.

Kohli reached 14,000 runs in ODIs on his way to a record-extending 51st hundred as India finished with 244-4 in 42.3 overs. Shreyas Iyer scored 56 off 67 balls as he and Kohli put on 114 runs off 128 balls for the third wicket.

Earlier, Kuldeep Yadav took 3-40 and Pakistan was bowled out for 241 in 49.4 overs after winning the toss and opting to bat.

Saud Shakeel top-scored with 62 off 76 and shared a 104-run stand with skipper Mohammad Rizwan (46).

The rivals met at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium despite Pakistan hosting the tournament, as India is playing its league games – and potential knockout matches – in the United Arab Emirates.

Josh Inglis marshaled two-time champion Australia's record-breaking run chase at the Champions Trophy with a 77-ball century to hand England a five-wicket defeat.

Inglis finished with an unbeaten 120 off 86 balls for a maiden ODI hundred that included eight fours and six sixes as Australia cruised to 356-5 in 47.3 overs. It was the highest-ever successful run chase in all ICC ODI tournaments.

Inglis' terrific power-hitting eclipsed Ben Duckett's 165, which was the highest-ever individual knock in the history of Champions Trophy and had anchored England to a score of 351-8 in their Group B opener.

Australia's chase got off to a rocky start as Jofra Archer and Mark Wood removed Travis Head (6) and captain Steven Smith (5) in successive overs before the Australian middle-order batters countercharged the fast bowlers.

Matthew Short (63) and Marnus Labuschagne (47) combined in a 95-run stand with fast bowler Brydon Carse going for well over nine runs anover in his four-over spell before England put in spinners in the middle overs.

Adil Rashid denied Labuschagne a half century when Jos Buttler held on to a sharp catch at short covers and then Liam Livingstone took a smart low return catch to dismiss Short as Australia slipped to 136-4.



India's Shreyas Iyer plays a shot during the ICC Champions Trophy cricket match between India and Pakistan at Dubai International Cricket Stadium, United Arab Emirates. (AP)