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Opinion



Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

Ministers of Interior and Justice ... Thank you very much

THIS is not the first time we have raised our voices to demand a reform of the entire legislative structure. We recall the number of issues that were left unresolved in the past period, largely due to the interference of MPs and influential individuals with narrow interests, who shaped laws based on flawed foundations.

This is also not the first time I have pointed out this issue. However, there has been little reaction, except from a few ministers who understood the huge implications of the political leadership's directives, particularly those outlined by His Highness the Amir, to build a renaissance and sustainable development.

The first ministers to respond were the First Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior, followed by the Minister of Justice. While some ministers have shown timid progress, it remains far from the expected level of support needed for the country's renaissance after its prolonged stagnation.

There are many laws that require amendment and development, while some need to be completely overhauled, as they have caused major flaws in administrative and institutional work.

In addition, several proposed laws were deliberately suppressed by those with narrow interests who sought to control everything, which hindered the state's progress and contributed to its stagnation.

The First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef made commendable progress by reforming the residency law to allow for family visits. However, further openness is still needed. Despite this, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef's actions, compared to the past, are significant and deserve praise, though they have yet to reach the level of the Gulf states, which have laws that effectively stimulate economic activity and investment.

The efforts of Minister of Justice Nasser Yousef Al-Sumait also deserve recognition. He initiated a workshop to amend the laws and judicial procedures of his ministry, addressing the many outdated laws that had long been in need of reform.

All these are individual efforts, but the country still needs much more to break free from the current impasse and rid itself of these restrictive laws. Unfortunately, we have fallen behind. Other ministers, such as the Minister of Commerce and Industry and its affiliated bodies, must also take action, especially the Ministry of Industrial Affairs. It must adopt a more flexible approach and provide greater incentives to industrialists. Everyone is aware that the legislative system of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry contains many obstacles, some of which hinder progress.

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His Highness the Amir



His Highness the Crown Prince

Amir receives Crown Prince, Acting Premier

KUWAIT CITY, March 16, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Sunday His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace.

His Highness the Amir also received Acting Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah.

Also on Sunday, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received Acting Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah.

'Honor killing' excuse axed from Kuwait law

'No to gender-based legal bias'

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: The official gazette 'Kuwait Alyoum' published Decree-Law No. 9/2025, which cancels Article 153 of the Penal Code issued by Law No. 16/1960, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Previously, this article had provided a legal excuse to mitigate the punishment for a man who committed the crime of killing his wife, mother, daughter, or sister if he caught her in the act of adultery. The explanatory note of the decree emphasized that, in accordance with Article 29 of the Constitution, all individuals are equal in human dignity, public rights, and duties. It also prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender, origin, language, or religion.

Article 153 of the Penal Code issued by Law No. 16/1960 provided a legal excuse to mitigate the punishment of a man who committed the crime of killing his wife, mother, daughter, or sister if he caught her in the act of adultery. This excuse applied solely to men and not to women, which constitutes gender discrimination.

The reasoning behind this legal provision was based on the provocation of the man's feelings by the crime, despite the fact that women experience similar emotions.

Furthermore, mitigating the punishment for this crime contributes to its perpetuation and conflicts with Kuwait's obligations under international charters and agreements, particularly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The declaration established a common standard for countries to follow in determining the rights that must be protected, emphasizing that all individuals are equal in rights.

Continued on Page 5

Ramadan Timings

Iftar ..... Monday 17:58
Imsak..... Tuesday 04:35

Kuwait raises legal marriage age to 18

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: In confirmation of the news published by the daily on February 13, 2025, quoting Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait regarding raising the marriage age to 18 years, Decree-law No. 10/2025 amending Article 26 of Law No. 51/1984 concerning Personal Status was published today in the official gazette 'Kuwait Alyoum', reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The decree-law prohibits the documentation or ratification of marriage contracts for individuals under the age of 18 at the time of documentation.

The explanatory memorandum to the law stated that, in accordance with the Constitution of the State of Kuwait, which emphasizes the protection of family, motherhood, and childhood based on Islamic Sharia, and taking into account Kuwait's international obligations, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, both of which guarantee the free and full consent of both spouses and encourage setting a minimum age for marriage, Article 26 of Law No. 51/1984 has

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Pre-Islamic water well unearthed on Failaka



KUNA photo

Aerial view of the discovered water well and the stairs leading to the bottom.

Artifacts found

KUWAIT CITY, March 16, (KUNA): The National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) announced on Sunday the discovery of an ancient water well on Failaka Island dating back to the pre-Islamic and early Islamic era.

In a statement to KUNA, NCCAL's Acting Assistant Secretary General for Antiquities and Museums Mohammad bin Redha, said that the discovery is located in a courtyard of a house dating back to the 7th and 8th centuries AD.

The discovery also included bedrock for a building near the well, evidence of a massive wall surrounding the house, and remains of pottery dating back between 1,300 and 1,400 years, representing the pre-Islamic and early Islamic era.

He explained that the discovery is part of the excavation work being conducted by the Kuwaiti-Slovak archaeological mission, which began in 2019 in the Al-Qusour area, one of the largest archaeological sites in Failaka Island, dating back to multiple periods.

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4 Francophone Diwaniya marks 60 years of Canada-Kuwait ties



8 NBK hosts Gergean celebration at Mohammed Alshaya School



10 KFH General Assembly approves distribution of 12% cash dividends for 2nd tranche of FY2024

National Debtors Campaign raises KD 387,572 on day 1

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

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: The National Debtors Campaign raised KD 387,572 on its first day with a total of 5,948 donors.

Sources privy to the progress of the campaign expect that its launching, in coordination with charitable organizations, will have a strong impact and it will be able to raise a much larger sum compared to the previous campaigns.

Sources revealed that a huge percentage of funds being collected by charitable organizations in mosques will be allocated to the campaign; hence, the proceeds will be very substantial.

It is worth noting that this is the third campaign for the settlement of the debts of Kuwaitis under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Health Ministry deploys clinics in mosques for Ramadan safety

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: The Ministry of Health announced that it is providing field services in mosques and prayer grounds, which witness large numbers of worshippers, as part of its Ramadan plan with the aim of ensuring a safe and comfortable environment for all attendees, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Director of the ministry's Emergency Medical Services Department Dr. Ahmad Al-Shatti explained in a press release that medical teams and paramedics are working around the clock. A total of 23 fully equipped medical clinics, along with ambulances and paramedics, have been deployed to respond to any emergencies. These clinics have been divided into male and female sections to ensure efficient and comfortable medical services for everyone.

Meanwhile, Dr. Al-Shatti emphasized the importance of adhering to health guidelines to ensure the comfort and safety of worshippers.

He advised that drinking water regularly between iftar and suhoor helps prevent dehydration and fatigue during prayers, which sometimes require prolonged standing.

Dr. Al-Shatti also recommended avoiding overeating before prayer, as it can lead to lethargy and digestive issues.

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Kuwait to see rain, fog in coming days

KUWAIT CITY, March 16, (KUNA): Kuwait Meteorological Center said on Sunday that there was chance for rain in the country especially in the southern areas.

Speaking to KUNA, the center's Director Dhirar Al-Ali said that there might be some light fog forming in some areas the early hours of Monday morning.

Weather will be stable in the upcoming days with a gradual increase in temperature, while rain might occur next Thursday and Friday, he added.



People having iftar meals at a long table in Kuwait City on March 15. More than 4,000 iftar meals were distributed on Saturday at the table in the holy month of Ramadan. (Xinhua)

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Prayer Timings

Fajr	04:38	Asr	15:22
Sunrise	05:57	Maghrib	17:57
Zohr	11:57	Isha	19:13

Local

Weather

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Warm with light variable wind to light to moderate southeasterly wind, with speeds of 10-30 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

By Night: Rather cold with light to moderate southeasterly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of 08-28 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	31	20
Kuwait Airport	28	16
Abdaly	31	16
Bubyan	31	17
Jahra	30	19
Failaka Island	33	19
Salmiyah	26	19
Ahmadi	27	16
Jal Aliyah	29	18
Nuwaisib	29	15

TSCK, Expo 965 Team host 3-day Girgae'an to mark month of Ramadan



Baskets of Girgae'an ready for distribution.



A little girl gets her share of Girgae'an as other children wait.

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: The Scientific Center Kuwait (TSCK), in collaboration with the Expo 965 Team, hosted a three-day Girgae'an to celebrate the holy month of Ramadan.

The event showcased traditional Kuwaiti crafts, interactive experiences, live demonstrations, creative workshops, traditional games and the warm hospitality that Kuwait is known for.

Deputy General Manager for Visitor Experience at TSCK Mohammad Al-Sanousi affirmed the center's dedication to bridge the gap between new generations and their heritage, offering engaging and educational content that fosters cultural pride.

Founder and General Coordinator of the Expo 965 Team Mohammad Kamal underscored the importance of involving children in heritage events to help them connect with and understand the traditions of their ancestors.

The event consisted of heritage competitions, 'ghaatawi' (traditional songs), and a captivating mix of past and present, including music and poetry. Approximately 45 members of the Expo 2020 Team -- comprising of historians, researchers and artisans -- participated to bring the event to life.

This is in addition to short introductory sessions led by heritage experts who delved into the rich history of ancient Kuwaiti crafts and Ramadan customs, enhancing the experience for visitors.

The three-day Girgae'an has concluded, offering everyone a unique opportunity to enjoy a cultural celebration that blends the spirit of Ramadan with contemporary and interactive experiences.

MoH issues decision, amends doctors salaries and positions

Minister focuses on job delivery, allowances

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

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi issued ministerial Decision No. 42/2025, amending certain provisions of Civil Service Council Resolution No. 5/2010 concerning the positions and salaries of doctors.

The resolution, which was published in the official gazette 'Kuwait Alyoum', includes the following amendments:

Article One:

The text of article 16, paragraph w of the aforementioned Civil Service Council's Resolution No. 5/2010 shall be replaced with the following:

■ Doctors assigned to work shifts for a minimum of four days per month and a maximum of eight days per month, outside of scheduled working hours, shall be granted a shift allowance in accordance with table No. 1 attached to the resolution.

■ If a doctor does not perform shift work, they shall be paid periodic or other leave in lieu of the days actually worked on shift, with any other allowances deducted.

■ The First General Practitioner (A) and the First General Practitioner (B) are granted, upon reaching the end of their job grade, a shift allowance in the category designated for the next higher position, provided they work on a shift system.

■ The shift allowance category listed in table 1 for physicians at the three medical levels of Consultant, Senior Specialist, and Specialist/Senior General Practitioner A shall be increased by KD 80 per month for Category A and KD 50 per month for Category B in the event of an overnight stay.

■ This allowance may not be combined with shift work. Physicians may also be assigned overtime work outside of official working hours on days other than those on which they are scheduled to work shifts.

Article Two:

The excavator allowance categories listed in table 1 attached to Resolution No. 5/2010 shall be amended as follows:

■ The "non-overnight" duty allowance for the head of the Medical Board, his deputy, Consultant, Senior Specialist, and Specialist/Senior General Practitioner A shall be KD 550.

■ The "overnight" duty allowance shall be as follows:

1. Senior Registrar/Senior General Practitioner B: KD 240 to KD 550
2. Registrar/General Practitioner: KD 160 to KD 390
3. Assistant Registrar: KD 120 to KD 330
4. Resident: KD 280

Article Three:

Resolution No. 143/2022 and its Amendment No. 155/2022 are hereby repealed.

Article Four:

This decision shall be communicated to the concerned parties for implementation. It shall take effect from the date of issuance and be published in the official gazette. Any provisions that conflict with its contents shall be repealed.

Citizenship of 12 persons revoked

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: Based on Cabinet Resolution No. 195/2025, the citizenship of 12 individuals was revoked in accordance with Article 21-bis (a) of the Nationality Law, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

According to the resolution, which was published in the official gazette 'Kuwait Alyoum', citizenship shall be revoked from those who acquired it subsequently.

Article 21-bis (a) states: A Kuwaiti citizenship certificate shall be revoked if it is proven that it was unlawfully granted based on fraud, false statements, or inaccurate testimonies. Citizenship shall be revoked by a Cabinet resolution upon the recommendation of the Minister of Interior. As such, Kuwaiti citizenship will be revoked from anyone who acquired it subsequently.

Other Voices

Kuwait and Gulf in face of regional, global scenarios

By Ahmad alsarraf

EXCEPT for Singapore and Brunei, there is no small, extremely wealthy, sparsely populated country in the world that lacks sufficient military power, as is the case for some countries in the region. Regional security is largely protected or assured by Western influence, primarily represented by the United States and its military bases in the region.



alsarraf

With recent developments on the international scene, the anticipated sharp shift in American policy, at least over the next four years, which could extend to eight years if the current U.S. Vice President wins the upcoming presidential election, and considering America's tendency to withdraw inward and cease playing the role of international police, it is likely that our countries will soon find themselves obligated to pay for their own security protection. Otherwise, they will be left vulnerable.

This situation requires the GCC countries to consider and possibly seek solutions, both conventional and innovative, to ensure their security and the sustainable prosperity of their peoples. But how can this be achieved?

Of course, answering this question is not easy. However, observers and political analysts believe that the GCC countries, at least two of which possess significant human resources and strategic advantages, must intensify their cooperation and develop various strategies to protect themselves from potential pressures or demands from any party. This is necessary to avoid being targeted one by one.

This also requires accelerating the diversification of their international alliances and strengthening relations through the formation of alliances and the signing of MoUs with other global powers such as China, Russia, the European Union, and India, as well as major regional countries like Turkey and even Iran.

Moreover, the GCC needs a new spirit to enhance its basic role, strengthen its unifying vision, and adopt a unified diplomacy, particularly in matters of security and foreign affairs. This would enable the GCC countries to address the world with one voice and make coordinated political and economic decisions. The GCC must also adopt a unified oil policy and work seriously to resolve all current disputes among its member states. The threats facing the GCC countries are far greater than any disputes over land borders or oil wells.

The issue also requires increasing the militarization of society through carefully considered recruitment programs that cover a broader age range, targeting both males and females. It demands substantial and unified investment in local defense industries, as well as the development of high-tech, finance, and tourism sectors. Also, it is vital to utilize experienced diplomatic figures who have previously retired and assign them the task of strengthening relations with major powers and promoting our image as a peace-loving nation with a distinguished record of providing aid to other countries.

It requires working together to form pressure groups in the capitals of major powers. This can be achieved through the efforts of the GCC states' embassies or their extensive interests in those countries . They must also highlight, through their media, the humanitarian role played by the GCC states and the huge amount of aid they have provided, which has reached nearly every corner of the globe.

This must be accompanied by the GCC states' full commitment to all international conventions regarding human rights and human trafficking, the implementation of legislative reforms, the strengthening of security cooperation among GCC states, and the development of plans aimed at enhancing the protection of overseas GCC assets in case they become targets of potential sanctions or legal actions.

The GCC states should also strengthen their presence within international bodies such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank (WB). If the aforementioned tasks are achieved, they will provide additional layers of protection and support to the GCC countries in the face of any potential challenging situations.

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No changes in UK entry visa rules for Kuwaitis: embassy

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: In response to a fresh wave of inquiries, the British Embassy is pleased to confirm that there are no changes - neither recent nor planned - to UK entry requirements for Kuwaiti nationals.

To travel to the UK, Kuwaitis must obtain (if they do not already have one) either an Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA), which covers trips of up to six months' duration, or a valid visa. To check UK immigration requirements ahead of any planned travel, please take a look at the UK Government's official visa checker tool, which can be found on the gov.uk website.



The meeting in progress.

KCCI participates as boost in trade ties discussed at meet

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: The Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) participated in the 38th meeting of the Board of Directors of the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) held in Medinah, Saudi Arabia on Thursday, March 13, 2025.

According to a press release issued by KCCI, various topics were discussed during the meeting, including enhancing trade cooperation between Islamic countries and strengthening the role of the private sector in economic activities, with the goal of increasing trade exchange among the countries of the Islamic world.

The meeting's agenda included reviewing the implementation of decisions issued by the Board of Directors and the General Assembly of the ICCD, approving the report from the 69th meeting of the Finance Committee, and preparing for the elections of the ICCD Board of Directors for the next term (2026-2030).

During the meeting, a presentation was given on the development of the ICCD Academy, alongside another presentation on strengthening the concept of halal within the ICCD's strategy for the years 2023 to 2026. This strategy aims to establish an integrated halal ecosystem and transform it into a global industry.

KCCI also participated in the "Manafea" Forum, themed "Sustainability in Serving the Guests of God," organized by the Madinah Chamber of Commerce and Industry. This was the third edition of the forum, and it was held in partnership with the Makkah Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

6-month condition set

Plan to cancel licenses of 'doors closed' businesses

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry is considering the implementation of a new clause to cancel licenses for businesses that have not been operational for six consecutive months, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Sources indicated that this measure is under review following the discovery of a large number of licenses, which have not been used since their issuance. The proposed clause is in line with the Companies Law and is expected to be enforced more broadly, sources revealed.

According to the relevant article, a license will be revoked if the business activity has not been conducted for six consecutive months without notifying the ministry, if the company expires, is dissolved or liquidated, or if the license holder requests it. A license will be revoked as well if it is not renewed within one year of its expiration date.

This proposed measure coincides with the introduction of the 'Trade"' application and the requirement for the registration of the beneficial owner.

The ministry previously revoked the commercial licenses of companies in the real estate, research and medical sectors that had not been active for six consecutive months.

Several applicants have approached the ministry, stating they had forgotten about their licenses for several years and requested the implementation of this policy to expedite the revocation process. It will apply to all commercial licenses for companies that have failed to notify the ministry, in accordance with Article 11/3 of Law No. 111/2013 concerning commercial establishment licenses. These decisions also follow a review of the Companies Law, its amendments, executive regulations and commercial establishment licenses.

Moreover, the license may be revoked if it is proven that the licensee obtained the license through false information or forged documents; violated the conditions outlined in the executive regulations; breached health standards; sold spoiled, adulterated or harmful products; or lost the right to engage in trade under the law.

32,641 traffic citations issued

By Munif Naif
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: The General Traffic Department at the Ministry of Interior continued its campaigns in all governorates.

Over the past week, the campaigns resulted in the issuance of 32,641 traffic citations, impoundment of 34 vehicles, and the referral of 25 juveniles to the Juvenile Prosecution for driving without a license.

The weekly statistics issued by the department indicated that 28 people were referred to the traffic police station, 21 motorcycles were impounded, one person was arrested for exhibiting abnormal behavior and 21 persons wanted by law were arrested.

Surge in power load as temps rise

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: As temperatures gradually rise, reaching 30 degrees Celsius; the electricity load index has started to move upward, surpassing the steady consumption rate of 7,000 megawatts or slightly more than the past three months, and recently crossing the 8,000-megawatt threshold, reports Al-Rai daily.

Sources from the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy told the daily that the electricity load index is now on an upward trajectory; with record demand anticipated during the peak summer months. They affirmed that the ministry is working at full capacity to complete scheduled maintenance on electricity generation and water distillation units before the summer season.

diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Patchwork now ... one mistake cannot be treated by another

"JUST to remind you, I was the first to call for a 10-year moratorium on naturalization in an article published in the now-defunct Al-Watan daily," journalist **Hassan Ali Karam** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"I was also the first to call for limiting the number of children to three. Some esteemed readers even called me a 'communist' despite the fact that I have a deeply sensitive and repulsive relationship with communism.

"The Minister of Interior recently said in a television interview that the number of Kuwaitis before the invasion was 600,000 and this increased to 1.5 million after the liberation. It seems that the minister's dream is for Kuwaitis to return to the number he believes; or that Kuwaitis have become infertile, have stopped getting married and having children. The minister attributed the unnatural population growth to the wave of naturalizations that swept Kuwait after the liberation and the return of the country to the bosom of its people.



Hassan Ali Karam

"Perhaps, there is some logic in this vision or the minister's statement, but His Excellency forgot or pretended to have forgotten that there are new births, entering the childbearing line. Despite this, we agree with the Minister that the increase is unnatural, and that this sudden surge in the number of citizens should be reviewed . This is the first important point.

"Second, the population statistics or those pertaining to the nationalities of expatriates are inaccurate; rather, they are absurd, manipulated and tainted with many falsehoods, all in favor of certain nationalities for reasons that need not be explained.

"Nevertheless, what is unnatural, and may His Excellency the Minister excuse me, is this phrase, 'mixing things up', meaning withdrawing citizenship from those who were naturalized in accordance with the correct law, such as those who rendered distinguished service, the foreign wives of Kuwaitis or the children of Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaitis. The fault lies not with those who were naturalized in accordance with these articles, but with those who granted them citizenship. Hence, the one who made the mistake must bear the responsibility, instead of blaming the naturalized citizen, for the citizenship was not withdrawn from the ministry's jug.

"I do not want to compare Kuwait to countries that naturalize immigrants, refugees or those who fled from their countries. There is no comparison. That is their business. They know their own decisions and best interests . However, the unnatural decision is to revoke the citizenship of those who have settled and established themselves.

"Currently, the government is trying to rectify the haste (if that is right) in the revocation decision. These citizens still occupy their jobs, not to mention the need to issue them new civil identification cards that are not different in form and information from the previous ones. In other words, they poured milk on them. For example, naturalization could have been suspended for the foreign wives of Kuwaitis and children of Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaitis from that date, not from a previous date, so as not to harm those who were granted citizenship according to the law . The world has turned upside down. Now, they reverted to patchwork!

"Revoking citizenship is not about what is actually happening, but about the consequences of the revocation -- the psychological, occupational and social damages; and the erosion of confidence in citizens, families, children and parents. The citizenship withdrawal should have been limited to those accused of forgery and duplicity. One mistake cannot be remedied with another."

Also:

"The acquittal of Football Association officials strengthens the transparency and integrity of the judiciary, providing crucial support for sports organizations to fulfill their roles confidently. When managed professionally, sports organizations serve as a reflection of the contributions that drive societal advancement," **Eng. Adel Al-Jarallah Al-Kharafi** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Although some errors may have been made in this case, these are in line with the assessments of those responsible. Different perspectives may exist and each has merit, but they are ultimately shaped by the realities and capabilities at hand. Consequently, some may view these as mistakes . Those outside the immediate context may lack access to the finer details, resulting in judgments based on generalities rather than the facts at hand.

"The court, however, meticulously considers the reasons, details, evidence and circumstantial factors before reaching a decision. It has favored acquittal, recognizing that the criminal justice system's foundation is the presumption of innocence, and acquittal is warranted in the absence of criminal intent. This principle of innocence is enshrined in the legal framework, ensuring procedural fairness and safeguarding individuals from unjust control, tyranny and prejudice.

"In this case, the court found the two-month detention of some association officials to be a flaw, reinforcing the principle that the judiciary is self-regulating, free from external interference. This is a core feature of the Kuwaiti judicial system.

"Regarding the Football Association and sports organizations, they are integral to the broader societal movement, and their rights cannot be undermined unless there is clear evidence of corruption or actions that conflict with the principles upon which civil institutions are built. In this context, the court rejected any notion of infringing upon these rights. Justice is a delicate balance, one that cannot be avoided or distorted, and the esteemed court demonstrated this by overturning the ruling in favor of acquittal. I am deeply pleased with this decision, as I was among those who were concerned about the welfare of civil institutions, unions and sports federations.

"While it is true that the association president and his deputy may have made mistakes in their handling of the situation -- something that, as explained, is a matter of differing viewpoints and not a criminal offense; I am grateful that the judiciary acted fairly. This decision is particularly important considering that, as we know, the entry of soldiers into stadiums is prohibited. They should remain outside the grounds to ensure the safe regulation of civilian entry and their protection."

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"Every year during Ramadan, my sister and I eagerly wait for the first person in the house to say, "Wow, Ramadan flew by". The truth is that every day of the year seems to fly by, and we are always chasing after it," columnist **Sara Al-Noums** wrote for **Al-Rai** daily.

"With only a few days left until the last ten days of Ramadan, I always wish there would be a special holiday to mark these days. Instead, we find ourselves taking official leave just to make the most of those blessed hours.

"Kuwait is beautiful, and it remains so throughout the year. The people of Kuwait are known for their kindness and generosity, especially during Ramadan. They eagerly organize iftar events, engage in acts of kindness, and share inspiring photos and messages to encourage others to do good during this holy month. Many try to spread goodness in their own way: artists paint, directors create meaningful works, writers write, and parents guide their children to fully embrace the spirit of Ramadan.

"In the past, every Ramadan had just one main TV series, a quiz show, and a Gulf comedy program. Those were the days when family members gathered, enjoyed visits, and socialized with neighbors. But today, screens dominate our time, with TV shows numbering in the hundreds, or even more, as channels and producers compete for higher viewership ratings. As a result, we no longer spend time with the loved ones we cherish, as they are often too busy in front of the TV.

"Ramadan gatherings have consumed much of our time. Every day, there are two to three social events where people meet to exchange greetings and celebrate the occasion. This has become a big expense, particularly for women, who often find themselves needing to buy more than two dresses, with prices being uncomfortably high. Yet, they feel compelled to purchase them in order to look their best in front of others.

"Mid-Ramadan brings the tradition of Girgean, which once involved simple clothes and a bag of Girgean (a traditional treat) or sometimes a cooperative society bag, which sufficed for the occasion. The focus was on enjoying the moment and collecting as many nuts as possible, and if you were lucky, a piece of candy. Today, however, Girgean has turned into an extravagant event, with elaborate photo sessions, and the spending has increased. Parents buy Girgean baskets for their children for school, another for celebrations after Iftar, and similar ones for their other children. Once the Girgean season ends, preparations for Eid al-Fitr begin. These activities are exhausting and add extra costs for the head of the household, all for enjoyment that lasts only a few hours. Meanwhile, the precious hours of Ramadan cannot be replaced by the entire year.



Al-Noums

"The last ten days of Ramadan are the most beautiful days of the month, filled with increased Quran recitation, acts of kindness, Taraweeh prayers, and the vibrant activity in Kuwait's beautiful mosques.

"It is a precious time to make the most of those valuable moments with prayer, supplication, good deeds, and helping others. However, I fear that one day Ramadan will become just another month of shopping and endless events, where delicious meals and never-ending TV series dominate, and the true purpose of this month will be lost.

"Don't blame the television, the people, or the endless events. Blame yourself, because you are the only one who can control how you spend your time during Ramadan. It is up to you to organize your time wisely and avoid getting caught up in distractions that make you forget the acts of worship that should truly define this month."

— Compiled by Mahmoud Attiyeh/ Simi K.Kutty

Coast Guard warns boat, ship owners to follow safety rules

Patrolling intensified to prevent illegal activities

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: As part of its ongoing efforts to uphold maritime security and ensure compliance with regulatory procedures within territorial waters, the General Directorate of Coast Guard launched an extensive inspection campaign in Kuwait Bay, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The campaign was coordinated through the mobile operations room at the Nawaf Al-Ahmad Coast Guard Base.

Director-General of the General Directorate of Coast Guard Brigadier General Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah supervised the campaign on-site, in the presence of several Coast Guard leaders.

The campaign aims to strengthen maritime control and ensure that marine vessels comply with security and safety standards.

It involved inspecting and verifying the functionality of the Automatic Identification System (AIS) and other safety devices to ensure they meet approved regulations.



Sheikh Mubarak

The campaign also focused on monitoring the adherence of boat and ship owners to maritime laws and procedures.

During his field tour, Brigadier General Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah highlighted the importance of intensifying inspection efforts and ensuring the operational readiness of the maritime security system.

He stressed that the Coast Guard will take legal action against violators and will continue its round-the-clock maritime patrols to ensure the safety of seafarers and protect territorial waters from any violations.



Coast Guard intensifies patrolling to prevent illegal maritime activities.

The Ministry of Interior affirmed that this campaign is part of its comprehensive strategy to strengthen maritime security and prevent illegal activities (infiltration) that could endanger the safety of maritime navigation or harm the marine environment.

It urged all seafarers to comply with security guidelines and follow the instructions issued by the relevant authorities.

Municipality removes waste from Al-Wafra desert area



Municipality photo

Municipality workers removing the discarded materials in the desert.

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: A major cleaning campaign has been successfully carried out in the Al-Wafra Agricultural Area, led by the Ahmadi Governorate Cleaning Department with the full support of its inspection teams. The initiative, which was supervised and followed up by Sa'ad Al-Khreinej, the Director of the Cleaning and Road Works Department, aimed to tackle the accumulation of waste in the area.

The department reported that the campaign, which continues, involves various mechanisms and equipment to manage and remove agricultural waste, dead animals, and other debris. In total, 325 tons of agricultural waste were cleared from the area. The operation saw the participation of 50 sanitation workers and 88 machines, all working together to ensure a thorough cleanup.

In addition to the Al-Wafra initiative, the cleaning teams are engaged in extensive waste management operations across the governorate. These include commercial areas, public markets, as well as agricultural and industrial zones, in a broad effort to maintain cleanliness and public health throughout the region.

Court revokes custody of son; mother consuming drugs

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

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: The Court of Appeals revoked a mother's custody of her son for consuming cannabis 10 years ago.

The appellant, the father of the boy, appeared in court where he revealed that his ex-wife has been consuming cannabis since 2015, and that he filmed the drug paraphernalia while they were still married.

However, to avoid exposing her at the time, he decided to keep the videos. When the respondent filed a lawsuit demanding for custody of her only son, the father presented the videos, which clearly demonstrated her lack of trustworthiness.

The appellant's lawyer, Attorney Mustafa Mulla Youssef, also asserted that even though the incident involving drug use happened years ago; it demonstrated the deviant behavior of the mother, so she cannot be trusted with the custody of her son.

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Expat not found guilty: The Criminal Court refrained from imposing punishment on an expatriate accused of deliberately setting fire to a vehicle. The court ordered the accused to submit a pledge of good conduct for one year, pay KD100 bail and to avoid repeating the offense.

The complainant, a compatriot of the accused, filed a complaint; stating that his German-made vehicle was deliberately burned at dawn. He said the accused poured a highly flammable substance on the vehicle while it was parked in his residence.

When the complainant was asked about the perpetrator, he accused someone he knows due to a personal dispute that resulted in his losing a lawsuit the day before the incident.

The defendant's lawyer, Attorney Fahad Hamoud Al-Enezi, argued that the accusation was malicious, and that his client denied the accusation since the beginning of the investigation.

He also pointed out that the investigations are flawed and there was no conclusive evidence.

Al-Enezi requested that the lawsuit be dismissed, because it was filed by someone without the proper authority; indicating the vehicle was registered in the name of someone other than the complainant and there was no evidence of his ownership.



Smoke billows from power transformer.



KFF photos

Fire destroys the mini-bus.

No casualties reported in transformer, bus blazes

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: Firefighters from the Fahaheel and Ahmadi Central fire stations extinguished the fire that broke out in a power transformer plant at the Ahmadi Educational Zone building in Fahaheel recently.

According to a press release issued by Kuwait Fire Force (KFF), no casualties were reported.

Meanwhile, a fire broke out in a minibus in Farwaniya on Saturday evening, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Firefighting teams quickly extinguished the fire, and no casualties have been reported.



Ambassador Mawani highlights Canada's commitment to diversity and equality

Francophone Diwaniya marks 60 years of Canada-Kuwait ties

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: Canadian Ambassador to Kuwait Aliya Mawani has affirmed Canada's commitment to promote Francophonie values and gender equality.

In a speech at the Francophone Diwaniya organized by the Canadian Embassy to celebrate the International Francophonie Day and International Women's Day, Mawani pointed out that the Francophone Diwaniya takes on special significance this time, as it coincides with the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Canada and Kuwait.

"Canada is proud to be a bilingual country, with French and English as its official languages. Linguistic and cultural diversity is an integral part of our national identity, reflecting our aspirations for a more diverse and inclusive society. We are also proud to be part of La Francophonie, a global community of more than 320 million French speakers in five continents," Mawani disclosed.

On the event coinciding with International Women's Day, Mawani emphasized the importance of this occasion in promoting dialogue on gender equality and supporting the empowerment of women.



Canadian Ambassador to Kuwait Aliya Mawani poses for a group photo.

She asserted that investing in women strengthens societies and economies. "Experience has proven that more diverse companies achieve greater success, and that women in leadership and negotiation positions contribute to more sustainable and effective outcomes. When women succeed, society as a whole succeeds, because equality is not just a matter of justice; it is also a fundamental driver of development and prosperity," she added.

She said "gender equality is the pillar of Canada's foreign policy. In the 20 years I spent in diplomatic service, I have witnessed remarkable progress in the empowerment of women in Canada and internationally. Women constitute 50 percent of Canadian ambassadors around the world."

Despite this progress, Mawani believes there is still a long way to go to achieve full equality; citing a World Economic Forum report indicating that achieving full gender parity could take until 2158, a figure she described as "unacceptable."

She also underscored the need to adopt new approaches, and engage the widest possible range of voices and expertise to achieve the desired change. She called for stronger cooperation between women and men to achieve equality, stressing that "women's empowerment is not limited to women, as it is rather a collective responsibility."







Photos by Rezk Taufiq

Photos during the Francophone Diwaniya organized by the Canadian Embassy to celebrate the International Francophonie Day and International Women's Day.

PAHW's housing move faces backlash over media silence

Experts demand clarity on 'real estate developer' model

By Mohammad Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: In an era when media plays a crucial role in the success of major initiatives, the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) has surprised citizens with a bold decision that lacked media coverage.

The announcement of a consultancy services contract for the development of three residential sites in line with law no. 118/2023 is considered a significant step in implementing the 'real estate developer' model.

However, housing experts told the newspaper that while this move is significant, it was introduced without a comprehensive awareness campaign to help citizens understand the new system and its advantages over the traditional model. This oversight may present challenges in terms of public acceptance and societal integration.

Experts argue that more clarity is needed on how the system will operate. For example, how will real estate developers be selected? What guarantees will the State provide to protect citizens' rights? What distinguishes this model from the traditional housing allocation system? These questions demand thorough answers, not just a press conference or a statement.

Chairman of the Voluntary Committee for Mutlaa Residential City Mishaal Al-Hajri asserted that housing projects have always been a focal point of public interest due to their direct impact on the lives of citizens. He argued that introducing a new model like the 'real estate developer' requires more than simply signing a contract or issuing a statement.

Al-Hajri suggested that a proactive media campaign, including dialogue seminars, surveys, detailed digital content and awareness-raising advertisements, should have preceded the announcement. "This approach would have answered citizens' questions and alleviated any concerns about the shift in housing policy," he stated.

While the housing affairs minister affirmed that the new model complements the traditional system, Al-Hajri believes that citizens still need a clearer understanding. He raised several critical questions: How will eligible citizens be selected for housing? What protections will the State offer? What benefits will this model provide compared to the traditional system? "These questions cannot be ignored. They must be addressed through direct and transparent communication with the public to ensure the project's success," he suggested.

He also pointed out that despite the tremendous efforts to launch the project, the lack of media coverage leaves a void which could harm public acceptance. "The absence of media awareness leaves citizens uncertain about the nature and mechanics of the project, creating room for rumors and fears. This could prompt some to reject the project before fully understanding its details," he warned.

He expressed concerns that including additional groups in the project might negatively affect those already on the housing care waiting list. He then hinted that the new model could pave the way for broader changes to the Housing Care Law, making community involvement crucial before such significant decisions are made.

Chairman of the South Abdullah Al-Mubarak Committee Khaled Al-Daihani said the 'real estate developer' model is considered a crucial shift in housing policy in Kuwait. "However, like any major change, it requires clear communication to ensure citizens understand and embrace it," he asserted.

Farwaniya governor hosts Czech envoy, tackles strengthening ties

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah received the Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Kuwait Juraj Khmel in his office this morning.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, Ambassador Khmel congratulated Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan.

He emphasized that such visits are part of efforts to strengthen the friendship between the Czech Republic and the State of Kuwait. Several topics of mutual interest between the two countries were discussed during the meeting.

The governor also affirmed the strong and long-standing relationship between the two friendly countries. He wished the ambassador success in his duties. At the end of the meeting, Ambassador Khmel expressed his gratitude to the Farwaniya Governor for the warm welcome, and conveyed his happiness with the visit.



Farwaniya Governorate photo

Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah receives the Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Kuwait Juraj Khmel.

New Kuwaiti banknotes available at local banks for Eid celebrations

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) has confirmed the distribution of new Kuwaiti banknotes in various denominations to all local banks, ensuring an adequate supply of fresh currency for customers ahead of Eid Al-Fitr holiday, reports Al-Anba daily.

The bank stated that individuals wishing to obtain new banknotes of any denomination should visit their respective bank branches during official working hours.

In addition, Kuwaiti banks will provide information on designated branches offering the 'Ayadi' cashing service, as well as other available options for customers to obtain the new currency.

Jahra tops in religious education

MoE stats reveal enrollment disparity

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: Statistics from the Education Statistical Group at the Ministry of Education revealed that the number of students enrolled in religious education institutes varies from one district to another.

Jahra topped the list with 1,801 students; followed by Hawally with 694 and Ahmadi with 608. The total number of students at various levels in the institutes reached 3,103.

Regarding the teaching staff, the statistics showed that the number of teachers in religious education institutes reached 815 -- 396 Kuwaitis and 419 non-Kuwaitis. This is a manifestation of the diversity of the teaching staff and their role in providing religious education.

The total number of religious education institutes in the country reached nine with a total of 126 classrooms. This confirms the availability of an integrated educational environment for those who want to pursue religious studies.

Jahra has the largest percentage of religious education students, with its institute catering to more than half of the registered students; while Ahmadi has the lowest number of such students, which may indicate disparity in demand for religious education or a difference in the distribution of institutes between districts.

These figures reflect the importance of religious education institutes in the country and their role in providing a specialized educational environment.

Concerned authorities are keen on improving the quality of religious education by providing qualified teaching staff or expanding the educational facilities in order to accommodate the increasing number of students.



Hamad Al-Houli, Head of the Teachers' Association, with several attendees at the association's Ghabqa.

'Partnership key to academic excellence'

KTA reaffirms commitment with MoE

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: Chairman of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Teachers Association (KTA) Hamad Al-Houli has affirmed the association's commitment to complement the efforts of the Ministry of Education.

Al-Houli stated "we work together to overcome obstacles and provide the necessary support to achieve tangible results that fulfill our national goals in the field of education."

He confirmed the shared commitment to create a better educational environment, which contributes to improving students' academic performance and provide teachers with the necessary tools to perform their roles to the fullest.

During the annual Ghabqa organized by the association with a large number of education professionals in attendance, Al-Houli stressed "we are happy on this blessed occasion, which embodies the spirit of brotherhood and love among all of us."

He added "this is a valuable opportunity to communicate, exchange opinions and engage in good conversations in a family atmosphere; as well as to affirm the values of cooperation and solidarity that unite us. The annual Ramadan Ghabqa reflects our ongoing commitment to strengthen ties among members of the teaching community and build a supportive environment that encourages fruitful interaction and effective participation. We believe that future teachers are the foundation of societal development. Through this gathering, we emphasize the importance of our collective role in advancing our educational mission."

On the other hand, former Assistant Undersecretary at the ministry Faisal Al-Maqseed greeted the educational community on the holy month of Ramadan. He believes this is a good opportunity for everyone in the educational field to come together in an educational family gathering. He prayed that "this Ramadan will be a month of goodness and blessings for everyone, and that Allah continues to protect Kuwait and make it a secure and safe home under our wise leadership."



Photos by Samer Shaqair

Photo from the event.

Health minister inspects infectious diseases hospital project, pushes for swift completion

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi recently visited the new Infectious Diseases Hospital project; accompanied by Undersecretary Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, other ministry officials, department directors, and the medical, technical, engineering and administrative teams, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

During the visit, Al-Awadhi underscored the need for the immediate completion of the project, while ensuring it meets the highest standards of quality and operational readiness.

He reiterated the commitment of the ministry to advance its development plans in order to improve the quality of healthcare for both citizens and expatriates, while strengthening the health system's ability to meet future demands.

He also stressed the importance of providing integrated medical services that prioritize patient comfort, efficiency and effective care.

The hospital measures 46,523 square meters; with a total built-up space of 74,000 square meters. It will consist of 224 beds and a variety of specialized departments like emergency care, radiology, laboratories, outpatient clinics, pharmacies, physiotherapy, sterilization, dental clinics and more. It will be equipped with the latest medical technologies as per the international standards of healthcare.



MoH photo

Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi during his visit to the new Infectious Diseases Hospital project.

Ministry apologizes for Central Aid Program system slow performance

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: The Ministry of Social Affairs stated that the heavy load on the Central Aid Program system has led some users to experience slow performance, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement, the ministry apologized for any inconvenience caused by this slowdown and assured that it is actively working to resolve the technical issue to improve system quality and performance.

Ministry shifts to e-books

MoE goes digital, stops printing nine textbooks to reduce costs

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: The Ministry of Education has stopped printing nine textbooks and converted them into electronic versions, as part of its drive towards digital transformation and reducing financial waste.

The ministry confirmed that the publication of hardcopy teacher guides has been suspended for the past 11 years.

The Educational Research and Curriculum Sector in the ministry affirmed its commitment to rationalize spending and protect public funds by taking a series of measures aimed at reducing resource waste and ensuring the provision of textbooks according to the actual need of students, without any increase or decrease.

The sector explained that book printing goes through a delicate process, beginning with contacting the Planning Department in the Facilities Sector to obtain accurate statistics on the number of students in various educational levels. This is followed by a review by the Supplies and Warehouses Department to monitor the stock of textbooks. Based on this, the quantities required for printing are determined within the annual printing plan, with a five percent reserve to avoid shortage.

As part of its rationalization policies, the ministry indicated that the printing of paper teacher guides has been suspended for 11 years, as they are now available in electronic format only.

It stated that these steps are part of the drive toward digital transformation in the educational process, reduce textbook waste, and enhance the use of modern technological tools to keep pace with global developments in the field of education.

Following are the nine books that the ministry has stopped printing:

1. Incorporating the Concepts of Life Skills Booklets into the Curriculum
2. Computer Science for the primary and intermediate levels
3. Home Economics for the intermediate level
4. Practical Studies (Electrical and Electronics for Boys)
5. Practical Studies (Electrical and Electronics for Girls)
6. Practical Studies (Decoration for Boys/Girls)
7. Music and Art Education Booklets for the primary level
8. Activity and Application Booklets for Science
9. Exercise Booklets for Mathematics

‘Lowering exceptional pensions promotes social justice, equity’

Reform aims to eliminate abuse, manage spending

KUWAIT CITY, March 16, (KUNA): The step to lower exceptional pensions aims at achieving social justice and ensuring equity especially for those under article 80 of the social securities law, said the government on Saturday.

In a statement, the cabinet indicated that the step took into consideration all aspects connected with preventing budget waste and also achieve equity in spending specifically for those falling under Article 80.

It also allowed the government to allocate exceptional pensions with large sums of money to specific and limited cases, government added.

Abusing this special article led to high expenditure, which affected the public treasury and led to inconsistency amongst beneficiaries, the government pointed out, adding that this mismanagement needed to be evaluated due to its heavy impact.

The government asserted that canceling article 80 altogether was not a viable option due to its grave impact on social welfare.







KUNA photos

Scenes from the second annual iftar banquet for Kuwaiti students studying in Bahrain, attended by Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the Kuwaiti Ambassador to Manama.

Sheikh Thamer stresses responsibility and success

Kuwaiti Ambassador lauds students’ dedication at annual iftar in Bahrain

MANAMA, March 16, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Ambassador to Bahrain Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah praised, on Saturday, the students’ ability to shoulder responsibility, appreciating their determination and perseverance to continue their educational journey with diligence and hard work to represent their beloved country.

Sheikh Thamer’s remarks came during his attendance at the second annual iftar banquet hosted by the Kuwaiti Cultural Office in Bahrain. During the banquet, Sheikh Thamer congratulated the attendees on the holy month of Ramadan, praying to Allah Almighty to accept their fasting and bring them blessings and lasting peace.

Sheikh Thamer stated that Kuwaitis prove every day that they are capable of shouldering the responsibility placed on their shoulders, stressing the importance of building Kuwait’s present and bright future. He called on the students to invest their time with diligence, hard work, and patience to prove themselves and achieve their potential in their fields of study, keeping Kuwait in mind as they contribute to building its future. He emphasized that serving Kuwait and its people is an incomparable honor.

Sheikh Thamer also noted that Kuwaiti students studying in the sisterly Kingdom of Bahrain, which has strong historical and social ties to the State of Kuwait, enjoy a unique Ramadan and spiritual atmosphere similar to the customs and traditions of the Kuwaiti home. He further praised the academic and educational system in the Kingdom of Bahrain for being distinguished and advanced, providing an environment that encourages study and creativity.

He pointed out that the embassy’s doors are always open to the students, as it is the home of every Kuwaiti, adding, “We are always with you, support you, and are proud of all your achievements. If success has a story, then you are a success story that advances and elevates our dear country.”

He also praised the tireless efforts of the Kuwaiti Cultural Office in Bahrain and its role in providing and arranging all means of comfort for students to facilitate their academic missions. He expressed his thanks and appreciation to the National Bank of Kuwait (Bahrain Branch) for continuing to support various student activities.

For his part, the Head of the Cultural Office, Dr. Mohammed Al-Daghim, said in his speech that this forum aims to activate the social role of the office, complementing its academic role. Additionally, it strengthens acquaintance and harmony among students, fostering a sense of family cohesion during these blessed nights through communication with their embassy and cultural office.

He added that the Kuwaiti Cultural Office is always proud of its students in all their specializations, universities, and places of scholarship for their keenness to present a positive image of the Kuwaiti student and their commitment and respect for all rules and laws, whether on campus or in public life.

He prayed to God Almighty for their continued success and bright academic careers, so they can obtain the academic qualifications for which they were sent to serve our dear country.

The iftar banquet, hosted by the Kuwaiti Cultural Office in Bahrain with the support of the National Bank of Kuwait (Bahrain Branch), was attended by the Ambassador of the State of Kuwait in Manama, the General Manager of the National Bank of Bahrain Branch, Ali Fardan, and his deputy, Mahmoud Al-Ali, along with a large group of students, estimated at 1,100, who are receiving their university education in the Kingdom of Bahrain, along with their families, in an atmosphere of faith and education.

Warba Bank announces winners in Al Sunbula draw

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: Warba Bank, recognized as the leading bank in corporate and investment banking in Kuwait, announced the winners in the weekly Al Sunbula draw as part of the account’s 2025 campaign which offers exceptional rewards, giving twenty customers a chance to win KD1,000 each week and a grand prize of KD 250,000 for a winner in each of the six grand draws held throughout the year. This campaign comes as part of the bank’s ongoing efforts to provide innovative, Sharia-compliant banking solutions that align with the aspirations of the local market.

Winners of the Weekly Al Sunbula Draw

The latest weekly draw was conducted in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Warba Bank employees. The 20 winners, each receiving KD 1,000, are:Mr. Abdullah Hamad Abdullah Madouh, Mr. Jassim Mohammed Hammad Al-Saifi, Mr. Ahmad Nayef Musaed Al-Enzi, Mr. Abdulaziz Ali Al-Dakheel, Mr. Abdullatif Ibrahim Al-Qallaf, Ms. Afaf Saleh Abdul Salam Mohammed, Mr. Wael Hassan Mohammed Salem, Mr. Essa Jassim Mohammed Al-Failaikawi, Mr. Mutlaq Hashf Matar Al-Mutairi, Mr. Mohammad Saif Ali Al-Ajmi, Mr. Mohammad Rashid Thuwaini Al-Thaidi, Ms. Hanadi Ali Ismail Buqamaz, Ms. Alia Mohammad Abdullah Al-Shaiba, Ms. Manar Bader Hamad Al-Mas, Ms. Manal Malqat Awad Hajar, Mr. Faisal Thawab Faleh Al-Adwani, Ms. Abeer Ahmad Abdo Al-Shaer, Mr. Mohammed Qassem Qasir, Mr. Nasser Onaizan Nasser Al-Ajmi, Mr. Faleh Shujaa Ayed Al-Ajmi.

Commenting on this year’s Al Sunbula campaign, Mr. Abdulaziz Saud Al-Bakhait, Area Manager of the Retail Banking Group at Warba Bank, stated: “Al Sunbula’s 2025 campaign reaffirms Warba Bank’s commitment to enriching our customers’ banking experience. Given the remarkable success of last year’s campaign, we have further elevated the benefits that this account offers, expanding the number of winners and increasing the total value of prizes. In addition to these rewards, Al Sunbula offers exceptional features, including a seamless savings experience through advanced digital services that simplify daily transactions.”

Al-Bakhait further emphasized that Warba Bank has consistently introduced innovative financial solutions over the years, reflecting its strategic vision for expansion and growth, while placing customers at the core of its priorities. He highlighted that this vision is embodied in the bank’s slogan, ‘We Hear You, Let’s Own Tomorrow,’ which emphasizes proactively understanding and fulfilling customers’ evolving needs through innovative and integrated solutions.

Speaking of Al Sunbula’s 2025 Campaign, Al-Bakhait stated:“This year’s campaign offers customers the unique advantage of saving while having the opportunity to win, effectively doubling the benefits they receive. The campaign is designed to offer a seamless digital experience through the Warba app, where customers can efficiently manage their accounts, track their savings, and participate in draws effortlessly. The account also provides an ATM card and additional rewards that enhance the value of savings. To qualify for the weekly draws, customers must maintain a minimum balance of KD 500 for one month, and for the grand draws, a balance of KD 500 must be maintained for two consecutive months.”

Banking through the Warba App

Warba Bank’s mobile app allows customers to manage their savings and participate in Al Sunbula draws with ease and flexibility. New customers can also open an Al Sunbula account electronically through the Customer On boarding service in just five minutes, without the need to visit a branch. This is made possible by Warba Bank’s advanced automated system, a unique feature in the Kuwaiti banking sector.

Leading in Digital Solutions

Warba Bank’s strategy is focused on expanding digital banking services and developing innovative products that deliver an integrated and advanced banking experience to its customers. The bank’s digital transformation is not limited to AlSunbula account, as it continues to introduce pioneering services, including the “Afaq” unified Gulf transfer service, which facilitates faster, easier, and more secure payments and transfers across the GCC.

A Firm Commitment to the Community

Warba Bank is one of Kuwait’s leading Islamic banks, having achieved remarkable success in a short period by focusing on providing cutting-edge digital banking services for individuals and businesses. Additionally, it is one of the local banks with the largest number of shareholders, making it deeply connected to all segments of society.

This success underscores Warba Bank’s ongoing commitment to shaping a financial future that aligns with customers’ aspirations, preserving heritage with a forward-looking vision.

Continued from Page 1

Ministers of

Despite the importance of the agricultural sector, it continues to suffer from a lack of development. Farmers face great challenges due to their reliance on imports, which has weakened local production. We all recall the difficulties faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the disruption of supply chains.

We must acknowledge that the world is constantly evolving, and the crossroads we stand at cannot afford further hesitation. It requires decisiveness, not haste. People expect leaders who can recognize their capabilities and harness them for the service of the state.

In this context, I recall the words of the late Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad (May God have mercy on him) when he was asked about Kuwait Municipality.

He said, “The corruption of the Kuwait Municipality is too heavy for camels to carry.” The Kuwait Municipality continues to operate under outdated laws that no longer serve the needs of the modern era. These laws often obstruct progress, causing a ripple effect that paralyzes interconnected systems, such as the Public Authority for Industry, the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources, and the Public Authority for Housing Welfare.

Housing sector has seen some development, but it still falls short of correcting the major imbalances that continue to plague this ministry and its affiliated agencies.

These are just a few examples. There are many laws that need to be amended to better support citizens. We hope that the pace of development accelerates, as Kuwait requires huge investment in various sectors. This is the responsibility of the current government to ensure.

Finally, to His Highness the Prime Minister, this is Kuwait’s opportunity to rejuvenate its youth by revamping its laws.

Kuwait raises

been amended to prohibit the documentation of marriages unless both spouses have reached the age of eighteen.

Article 2 of the decree-law stipulates that the Prime Minister and ministers are responsible for its implementation. It shall take effect from the date of its publication in the official gazette.

In addition, a decree-law issued in the same regard adds a new paragraph to Article 15 of the Jaafari Personal Status Law, stating: “It is prohibited to notarize or authenticate a marriage contract for anyone who has not reached the age of eighteen at the time of notarization.”

‘Honor killing’

It stressed that both men and women have the right to enjoy these rights without discrimination based on race, color, or gender, and that they are equal in rights during marriage, throughout the marriage, and upon its dissolution.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women also includes a provision criminalizing such discrimination.

Article 2 obligates states to take all appropriate measures, including the abolition of provisions in national penal codes that discriminate against women. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, this article must be abolished, as it constitutes discrimination against women and is inconsistent with both the Constitution and Kuwait’s international obligations.

In compliance with these international obligations, and following the issuance of the Amiri Order on May 10, 2024, which stipulated that laws be issued by decree-laws under Article 4, a draft decree-law was prepared.

Article 1 of the draft decree-law calls for the abolition of the aforementioned Article 153. Article 2 mandates that all ministers implement the law, publish it in the official gazette, and ensure it takes effect from the date of its publication.

Health Ministry

Furthermore, he stressed the importance of traffic safety when heading to and leaving mosques, particularly during rush hour.

Dr. Al-Shatti urged worshippers to facilitate movement and cooperate when entering and exiting mosques, especially on busy nights, to ensure the safety of everyone, particularly children and the elderly.

In addition, Dr. Al-Shatti emphasized the importance of individuals with chronic illnesses, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease, adhering to their medication schedules and not neglecting to take their medications to prevent any health complications during prayer.

He extended his thanks and appreciation to all the emergency medical teams who are working during the holy month, and praised their tireless efforts in serving worshippers.

Dr. Al-Shatti prayed to God Almighty to accept everyone’s fasting and prayers and to protect the country and its people.

Pre-Islamic

In turn, Professor of Anthropological Archaeology at Kuwait University Dr. Hassan Ashkanani, described this discovery as one of the most prominent archaeological discoveries on Failaka Island.

He also revealed the discovery of more than five kilograms of precious stones, such as rubies and purple amethysts, reflecting the nature of economic activity on the island 1,400 years ago.

For his part, the head of the Slovak mission, Dr. Matej Rutkay, explained that the focus of the 2025 season would be on the northern part of the Al-Qusour settlement, where a courtyard and a house believed to have belonged to a wealthy person of that era had previously been found.

He stated that the site extends over an area of 38 meters in length and 34 meters in width, with the house covering 97 square meters, while the discovered water well measures 4.5 meters in length and 4 meters in width.

It is worth noting that the site of Al-Qusour is considered one of the most important and largest archaeological sites in Failaka.



Destruction from a severe storm is seen on March 15, in Wayne County, Mo. (AP)

Tornadoes, wildfires and blinding dust sweep across US as massive storm leaves 32 dead

PIEDMONT, Mo., March 16, (AP): Violent tornadoes and high winds decimated homes, wiped out schools and toppled semitractor-trailers as a monster storm that killed at least 32 people ripped its way across the central and southern US.

Missouri resident Dakota Henderson said he and others rescuing trapped neighbors found five bodies scattered in the debris Friday night outside what remained of his aunt's house in hard-hit Wayne County. Scattered twisters killed at least a dozen people in the state, authorities said.

"It was a very rough deal last night," Henderson said Saturday not far from the splintered home from which he said they rescued his aunt through a window of the only room left standing. "It's really disturbing for what happened to the people, the casualties last night."

Coroner Jim Akers of nearby Butler County described the "unrecognizable home" where one man was killed as "just a debris field."

"The floor was upside down," he said. "We were walking on walls."

Mississippi Gov Tate Reeves announced six people died in three counties and three more people were missing late Saturday as storms moved further east into Alabama, where damaged homes and impassable roads were reported. Officials confirmed three deaths in Arkansas, where Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders declared a state of emergency.

Georgia Gov Brian Kemp also declared an emergency in anticipation of the storm's shift eastward. Early Sunday morning, the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency used its social media accounts to repost a National Weather Service tornado watch for parts of southeast Georgia.

In response to the watch, which warns of isolated tornadoes and hail and gusts of 50 to 70 mph (80 to 112 kph), Kemp posted a note saying his family was "praying for all those impacted by this storm system and those still in its path."

"We will continue to work closely with state and local officials to respond to damage and assess any needs following this weather event," Kemp wrote.

Dust storms spurred by the system's early high winds claimed almost a dozen lives on Friday. Eight people died in a Kansas highway pileup involving at least 50 vehicles, according to the state highway patrol. Authorities said three people also were killed in car crashes during a dust storm in Amarillo, in the Texas Panhandle.

The extreme weather conditions were forecast to impact an area that is home to more than 100 million people, with winds threatening blizzard conditions in colder northern areas and fanning the wildfire risk in warmer, drier places to the south.

Evacuations were ordered in some Oklahoma communities as more than 130 fires were reported across the state and nearly 300 homes were damaged or destroyed.

Judge blocks US president from using 1798 wartime act for deportations

Trump signs bill funding government for six months, avoiding shutdown

WASHINGTON, March 16, (AP): US President Donald Trump has signed into law legislation funding the government through the end of September, ending the threat of a partial government shutdown and capping off a struggle in Congress that deeply divided Democrats.

Harrison Fields, White House principal deputy press secretary, said in a post on X that Trump signed the continuing resolution Saturday.

The bill largely keeps government funding at levels set during Joe Biden's presidency, though with changes. It trims non-defense spending by about $13 billion from the previous year and increases defense spending by about $6 billion, which are marginal changes when talking about a topline spending level of nearly $1.7 trillion.

The Senate cleared the legislation on Friday in a 54-46 party line vote, with 10 members of the Senate Democratic caucus helping the bill advance to passage despite opposition from within their party - most vocally from colleagues in the House, who exhorted them to reject the bill out of hand.

Senate Democrats argued for days over whether to force a shutdown, livid that Republicans in the House had drafted and passed the spending measure without their input. Democrats said the legislation shortchanges health care, housing and other priorities and gives Trump wide leeway to redirect federal spending even as his administration and the Department of Government Efficiency rapidly dismantle congressionally approved agencies and programs.

In the end, enough of the Democratic senators decided a government shutdown would be even worse than letting the funding bill pass.



US President Donald Trump signs a document in the Oval Office at the White House on Jan 30, in Washington. (AP)

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said a shutdown would have given the Trump administration the ability to deem whole agencies, programs and personnel non-essential, furloughing staff with no promise they would ever be rehired.

Passage of the funding bill through the House earlier in the week was a victory for Trump and House Speaker Mike Johnson, who managed to hold Republicans together and muscle the bill to passage without support from Democrats - something they've rarely been able to achieve in the past.

Also:

WASHINGTON: A federal judge on Saturday barred US President **Donald Trump**'s administration from invoking the wartime Alien Enemies Act of 1798 to deport five Venezuelan nationals from the **United States**, local media reported.

The White House issued a presidential proclamation earlier in the day targeting Venezuelan members of Tren de Aragua gang, saying the country was facing an "invasion" from the "foreign terrorist organization."

Hours later, Judge **James Boasberg** issued a temporary restraining order for 14 days.

Boasberg's decision came in response to a lawsuit filed the same day by the American Civil Liberties Union and Democracy Forward. The organizations charged that the trump administration unlawfully invoked the Alien Enemies Act, local media reported.

'Pyrotechnics caused roof to catch fire'

59 people killed in North Macedonia club fire

KOCANI, North Macedonia, March 16, (AP): A massive fire tore through a club in North Macedonia 's eastern town of Kocani early Sunday, killing 59 people and injuring 155, authorities said.

The blaze broke out around 2:30 am during a concert by a local pop group at Club Pulse, Interior Minister Panche Toshkovski told reporters. He said 39 of the dead had so far been identified.

He said, following an initial assessment, pyrotechnics likely caused the roof to catch fire. Videos showed chaos inside the club, with young people running through the smoke as the musicians urged people to escape as quickly as possible.

As relatives gathered outside hospitals to await news, Kocani resident Dragi Stojanov was informed that his 21-year-old son Tomce had died in the fire.

"He was my only child. I don't need my life anymore," he said. "One hundred and fifty families have been devastated."

Officials said the injured have been taken to hospitals around the country, including the capital, Skopje, many with severe burns. The effort was being assisted by multiple volunteer organizations.

Health Minister Arben Taravari said 118 people have been hospitalized, adding that he had received offers of assistance from neighboring countries, including Albania, Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia.

"All our capabilities have been put to use, in a maximum effort to save as many lives as possible of the young people involved in this tragedy," Taravari told reporters, at times looking visibly shaken.

This is the worst tragedy in recent memory to befall the landlocked nation, whose population is less than 2 million.

President Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova visited burn victims at a hospital in Skopje and spoke to parents waiting outside the building.

"It's terrible ... hard to believe how this happened," she said, her voice halting with emotion. "We must give these young people courage to continue."

In an online post, Prime Minister Hristijan Mickoski wrote: "This is a difficult and very sad day for Macedonia. The loss of so many young lives is irreparable, and the pain of the families, loved ones and friends is immeasurable."

Family members gathered in front of hospitals and city offices in Kocani, some 115 kilometers (72 miles) east of Skopje, begging authorities for more information.



Police officers block a road near a nightclub after a massive fire in the town of Kocani, North Macedonia on March 16. (AP)



People gather on the occasion of a Pro-Europe demonstration asking for more cohesion in the EU on the wake of the recent changes of priorities in international politics, in Rome on March 15. (AP)

European push for rearmament divides country

Tens of thousands join pro-Europe rally in Rome

ROME, March 16, (AP): Tens of thousands of Italians joined a pro-Europe rally in Rome's city center Saturday, waving blue European Union flags in a sign of support and unity as a European push for rearmament divides the country.

The initiative, supported by most of the center-left opposition parties, despite their different positions, was launched by Italian journalist Michele Serra at the end of February, with an editorial in the Italian daily La Repubblica titled: "Let's say something European."

"I wanted to organize a large demonstration of citizens supporting Europe, its unity and its freedom, with no party flags, only European flags," Serra said, launching the slogan: "Here we make Europe, or we die."

The initiative was born in response to US President Donald Trump 's destabilizing policies, which created an unprecedented rift between Europe and the U.S., strained over the war in Ukraine and an ongoing tariff battle.

Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni has reluctantly backed an EU plan to rearm Europe over concerns that the proposal by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen might weigh on Italy's giant debt, diverting much-needed funds to weapons spending.

The EU plan aims to generate around 800 billion euros over the next four years, the bulk of which will come from member states increasing their national spending on defense and security.

Internally, Meloni openly criticized the project, rejecting the term "re-arm" as misleading and encouraged European partners to focus instead on common defense and security.

Organizers said Saturday that the pro-Europe rally, which filled Rome's central Piazza del Popolo with at least 30,000 people, reunited Italians on different sides and voting for opposite parties "in the name of democracy."

"We are here to defend freedom and democracy," said Daniela Condotto, one of the demonstrators. "These are concepts that we got used to over 80 years, but in reality they need to be defended, we cannot take them as a given."

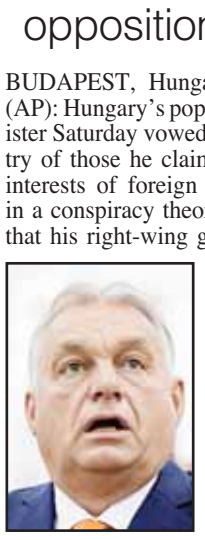
Right-wing government parties snubbed the demonstration, standing behind Meloni, who has been struggling in her attempt to play a mediating role between Trump and the EU.

"There must be support for Europe, but with concrete reforms, not symbolic events," said Antonio Tajani, foreign minister and vice premier ahead of Saturday's rally.

Vice Premier Matteo Salvini, leader of the eurosceptic League's party, was openly critical. "While some people demonstrate with flags, we work to change this Europe, which crushes workers, farmers and entrepreneurs with its absurd rules," he said.

Hungary PM faces opposition surge

BUDAPEST, Hungary, March 16, (AP): Hungary's populist prime minister Saturday vowed to rid his country of those he claims work for the interests of foreign powers, saying in a conspiracy theory-laden speech that his right-wing government will eliminate a global "shadow army" that serves the European Union and a "liberal American empire."



Orban

Meanwhile, tens of thousands gathered in central Budapest in a show of strength against the long-serving prime minister, and in support of a new political force that aims to bring an end to **Viktor Orbán**'s rule and his economic system in elections next year.

The dueling demonstrations, which coincided with a national holiday commemorating Hungary's 1848 revolution against the Habsburg Empire, came as the Central European country struggles with an inflation and cost of living crisis that have helped fuel growing dissatisfaction with Orbán and his autocratic style of governance.

That dissatisfaction has coalesced around Péter Magyar and his upstart Tisza party, which polls show are neck and neck or even several points ahead of Orbán's Fidesz party with around a year to go before elections.

Canada's PM seeks alliances in Europe as he deals with Trump

OTTAWA, Ontario, March 16, (AP): New Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney is heading to Paris and London on Monday to seek alliances as he deals with US President Donald Trump's attacks on Canada's sovereignty and economy.

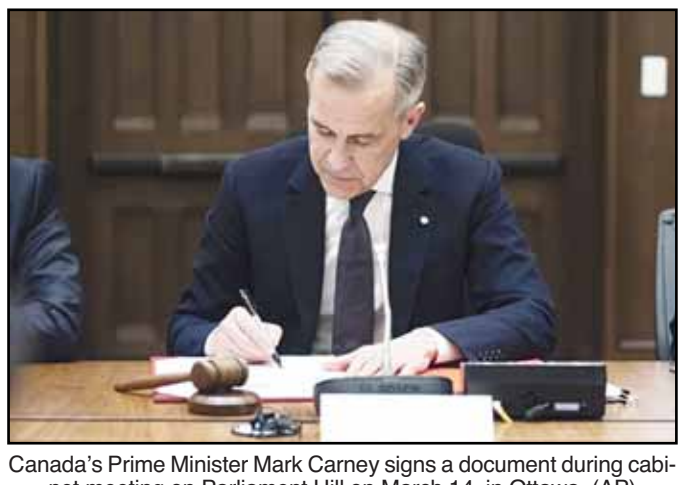
Carney is purposely making his first foreign trip to the capital cities of the two countries that shaped Canada's early existence.

At his swearing-in ceremony on Friday, Carney noted the country was built on the bedrock of three peoples, French, English and Indigenous, and said Canada is fundamentally different from America and will "never, ever, in any way shape or form, be part of the United States."

"The Trump factor is the reason for the trip. The Trump factor towers over everything else Carney must deal with," said Nelson Wiseman, professor emeritus at the University of Toronto.

The 59-year-old former central banker will meet with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris on Monday and later travel to London to sit down with UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer in an effort to diversify trade and perhaps coordinate a response to Trump's tariffs.

He will also meet with King Charles III, the head of state in Canada. The trip to England is a bit a homecoming, as Carney is a former governor of the Bank of England, the first noncitizen to be named to the role in the bank's 300-plus-year history.



Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney signs a document during cabinet meeting on Parliament Hill on March 14, in Ottawa. (AP)

Europe

BEC rejects Sosoaca's bid: Romania's electoral body Saturday rejected the candidacy of a controversial far-right politician in the presidential election rerun in May, but approved George Simion, the leader of the country's most popular far-right party.

The Central Election Bureau, or BEC, rejected Diana Sosoaca's bid, which was filed on Thursday in the capital, Bucharest. She said she will appeal the bureau's decision, which has to be submitted to the Constitutional Court within 24 hours.

The bureau said in its decision that it barred the pro-Russia Sosoaca, a former lawyer and leader of the far-right nationalist S.O.S. Romania party, from entering the race on the same grounds that she was excluded from last year's annulled election.

The CCR argued that her public discourse, including opposition to Romania's European Union and NATO memberships, made her unfit to uphold the constitutional obligations of the presidency. (AP)

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Opp'n protests Tiktok ban: Albania's opposition Saturday protested the left-wing government's decision to shut down TikTok, calling the move censorship ahead of May 11 parliamentary elections.



Berisha

Last week, the Albanian Cabinet decided to shut down TikTok for 12 months, blaming the popular video-sharing platform for inciting violence and bullying, especially among children.

The center-right Democratic Party called on citizens, especially younger ones who are the main users of TikTok, "to protest against a corrupt government that aims to keep under control the information received from the citizens," according to its leader **Sali Berisha** on Friday.

Hundreds of Democrat protesters gathered in front of the main government building in the capital Tirana, shouting "Democracy" and Berisha's name. Many held placards including some that read: "Censorship, corruption, not TikTok."

Only young supporters held speeches, not members of the party's leadership or Berisha himself.

The protesters accuse Socialist Party Prime Minister Edi Rama and his Cabinet of corruption, manipulating elections and usurping the powers of the judiciary. (AP)

UN World Food Program to cut food aid for over 1 mln people in Myanmar

Airstrike in Myanmar kills 27 civilians and injures 30, says opposition group

BANGKOK, March 16, (Agencies): An airstrike by Myanmar's military on a central village under the control of resistance forces has killed at least 27 civilians and injured 30 others, an opposition group and Myanmar's online media said Saturday.

The attack occurred Friday at 3 pm in Let Pan Hla village in Singu township, about 65 kilometers (40 miles) north of Mandalay, the country's second-largest city, a spokesperson for the Mandalay People's Defense Force said.

The military did not comment on Saturday.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the army seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi on Feb. 1, 2021, triggering widespread popular opposition. After peaceful demonstrations were put down with lethal force, many opponents of military rule took up arms, and large parts of the country are now embroiled in conflict.

The military government has stepped up airstrikes against the armed pro-democracy People's Defense Force and ethnic minority guerrilla groups that have been fighting for greater autonomy for decades. The two groups sometimes carry out joint operations against the army. The resistance forces have no defense against air attacks.

The town of Singu was seized by the Mandalay People's Defence Force (MDY-PDF), which supports Myanmar's main opposition, in July last year.

The group's statement released Saturday on its Telegram social media channel said six children were among the 27 killed in the airstrike that targeted crowded market stalls in Let Pan Hla village.

Osmond, the group's spokesperson, told The Associated Press that about 10 houses near the village market were destroyed by bombs.



This handout photo provided by the Mandalay People's Defence Force shows debris of the buildings destroyed by an army airstrike in Let Pan Hla village in Singu township in Mandalay region, Myanmar on March 14. (AP)

"This airstrike was not aimed at a military target, but rather at the market area, where civilians visit daily," Osmond said in a message.

The situation in the village could not be independently confirmed, with access to the internet and cellphone service in the area mostly cut off.

In another development, six people were killed and seven others injured in a car accident in central Myanmar's Mandalay region, an official from a local rescue organization told Xinhua on Sunday.

The accident took place in Sintgaing township of Mandalay region on Saturday, he said.

The cause of the accident was that the car drove on a wrong street, reversed, and rolled over, he added.

Also:

BANGKOK: The United Nations food agency said on Friday that more than 1 million people in the war-torn nation of **Myanmar** will be cut off from food assistance due to critical funding shortfalls.

A statement released by the World Food Program said that most food rations currently distributed in Myanmar will be cut off in April, even as the country faces a desperate humanitarian crisis caused by bitter fighting between the military government and powerful militias opposed to its rule. The WFP said it would need $60 million to continue food assistance in Myanmar and called on its partners to identify additional funding.

It was not immediately clear if the WFP's decision was directly related to the Trump administration's recent moves to stop most foreign aid and dismantle the US Agency for International Development, which have had wide-ranging effects on humanitarian efforts around the globe.

US State Dept imposes sanctions on Thai officials after Uyghur men deported to China

WASHINGTON, March 16, (AP): The US State Department has announced sanctions on an unknown number of current and former Thai officials for their role in deporting at least 40 Uyghur men to China despite worries that they could be jailed or even face death there.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said he was immediately moving to impose visa restrictions on current and former officials responsible for or complicit in the deportations. No Thai official has been named. The visa restrictions were not explained but can entail a denial of entry to the US.

"We are committed to combating China's efforts to pressure governments to forcibly return Uyghurs and other groups to China, where they are subject to torture and enforced disappearances," Rubio said in a statement.

The Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Saturday said it had multiple times clarified with countries that have conveyed their concerns over the safety of the men that China assured that they would be unharmed, and that Thailand would follow up on their well-being.

"Thailand has always upheld a long tradition of humanitarianism, particularly in providing assistance to displaced persons from various countries for more than half a century and will continue to do so," the ministry said in a statement.



This photo provided by Thailand's daily web newspaper Prachatai shows trucks with black tape covering the windows leaving a detention center in Bangkok, Thailand on Feb 27. (AP)

Thailand's ministers of defense and justice said they scheduled a trip to visit the men in China next week. A number of Thai journalists were invited to join them.

The Uyghurs are a Turkic, majority Muslim group native to Xinjiang in China's far west. After decades of conflict with Beijing over discrimination and suppression of their cultural identity, the Chinese government launched a brutal crackdown on the Uyghurs that some Western governments deem a genocide.

Asia

Chinese jet fighter crashes: A Chinese fighter jet crashed during a training mission with the pilot parachuting to safety, state media said.

The brief report by Xinhua News Agency stated Saturday that the crash happened near a town on China's southernmost island province of Hainan, home to numerous air force and naval bases, radar stations and other military infrastructure aimed at shoring-up China's claim to the vast, strategic South China Sea.

The report didn't provide any further details except that the cause of the accident was under investigation.

China's military, the People's Liberation Army, is highly secretive and rarely reports on accidents, despite having the world's largest navy and standing army.

China has not fought in an actual war in 35 years, but is expanding its military footprint along with its push to overcome the West in the latest technology. It has also been transitioning to stealth fighters and other craft with capabilities similar to those used by the US. (AP)

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Tachibana attacked: The leader of a Japanese political group, Takashi Tachibana, has been slashed in an attack while campaigning in central Tokyo, although his injuries were not life-threatening, the Tokyo police said.

At around 5:10 p.m. local time Friday, Tachibana, the 57-year-old head of the NHK Party, was attacked by a man with a machete after giving a stump speech in front of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, according to the Metropolitan Police Department.

The assailant aimed near Tachibana's head, causing bleeding, including from his ear, but he was conscious before he was sent to a hospital and his condition was not life-threatening, police said.

Police arrested 30-year-old Shion Miyanishi on suspicion of attempted murder at the scene while the weapon with a 16-cm blade was found.

Police are investigating the details of the attack. (Xinhua)

❑ ❑ ❑

Jakarta to host meeting: Indonesia will host the 19th high-level parliamentary meeting of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states in May, the state-run news agency Antara reported on Saturday, quoting lawmaker Mardani Ali Sera.

"We must build institutional strength and good governance in each of our countries. Because if good governance is running, the institutions are strong, then we will become a country that does not need to depend on others," said Sera, chairman of the Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation Agency of Indonesia's House of Representatives. (Xinhua)



People visit a botanic garden in Nanjing, east China's Jiangsu Province on March 15. As the spring season is coming, flowers are in full bloom across the country. (Xinhua)



Children play in a park in Kimbirila-Nord, the last village to the Mali border in Ivory Coast on Feb 22. (AP)

Al-Qaeda, other extremist groups approaching

Ivory Coast losing United States aid

KIMBIRILA-NORD, Ivory Coast, March 16, (AP): With its tomato patches and grazing cattle, the Ivory Coast village of Kimbirila-Nord hardly looks like a front line of the global fight against extremism. But after jihadis attacked a nearby community in Mali five years ago and set up a base in a forest straddling the border, the US committed to spending $20 million to counter the spread of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group here and in dozens of other villages.

The Trump administration's sweeping foreign aid cuts mean that support is now gone, even as violence in Mali and other countries in the Sahel region south of the Sahara has reached record levels and sent tens of thousands refugees streaming into northern Ivory Coast.

Locals worry they have been abandoned. Diplomats and aid officials said the termination of aid jeopardizes counterterrorism efforts and weakens US influence in a part of the world where some countries have turned to Russian mercenaries for help.

In Kimbirila-Nord, US funding, among other things, helped young people get job training, built parks for cattle to graze so they are no longer stolen by jihadis on Malian territory, and helped establish an information-sharing system so residents can flag violent encounters to each other and state services.

"What attracts young people to extremists is poverty and hunger," said Yacouba Doumbia, 78-year-old chief of Kimbirila-Nord. "There was a very dangerous moment in 2020. The project came at the right time, and allowed us to protect ourselves."

Over the last decade, West Africa has been shaken by extremist uprisings and military coups. Groups linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group have conquered large areas and killed thousands in the Sahel and have been spreading into wealthier West African coastal states, such as Ivory Coast, Benin and Togo.

In 2019, President Donald Trump signed the Global Fragility Act that led to the initiatives in northern Ivory Coast. The U.S. goal in this area was to "seize a narrowing prevention window," according to this year's congressional report about the implementation of the bipartisan legislation.

Experts say local concerns help drive the popularity of extremist groups: competition for land and resources, exclusion, marginalization and lack of economic opportunities. Across the region, Islamic extremists have recruited among groups marginalized and neglected by central governments.

"Ivory Coast is one of the few countries that still resist the terrorist threat in the Sahel," said a UN official working in the country who was not authorized to speak on the matter publicly. "If we do not continue to support border communities, a minor issue could send them into the arms of extremists."

Guterres visits refugee camps in Bangladesh

UN chief describes aid cuts as 'a crime'

COX'S BAZAR, Bangladesh, March 16, (AP): UN Secretary-General António Guterres on Friday described humanitarian aid cuts by the United States and countries in Europe to Bangladesh, where thousands of Rohingya refugees are located, as "a crime."

Guterres was on a four-day visit to Bangladesh where he is assessing the plight of more than 1 million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar whose future remained uncertain over possible aid cuts soon. Every year, he chooses a Muslim country to visit during the holy month of Ramadan.

He said that Bangladesh's southern coastal district of Cox's Bazar, where most of the Rohingya have been sheltered, is "ground zero for the impact of the budget cuts on people in desperate need."

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya, including more than 700,000 who arrived in 2017, have lived in Bangladesh for decades. About 70,000 others crossed the border from Myanmar in 2024 when, during fighting with the military junta, the opposition force known as the Arakan Army effectively took over the Rakhine state where Rohingya were displaced.

The U.N. will do everything possible to arrange adequate funding for the Rohingya refugees after the recent announcement of dramatic aid cuts by the US and other countries in Europe, Guterres said. The U.N.'s food agency recently said it would have no option but to cut food aid by half for the Rohingya starting next month if they fail to arrange adequate funds to feed them.



UN Secretary-General António Guterres speaks at the Ukhiya camp for Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, in Bangladesh on March 14. (AP)

In a meeting with Bangladesh's interim leader, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus in the capital, Dhaka, Guterres expressed his concern over Western nations' decision to boost defense spending while humanitarian aid is squeezed across the world.

"(Aid) cuts are a crime," the UN chief was quoted as telling Yunus by the state-run Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha agency during Friday's meeting.

Worries surfaced in recent weeks in dozens of camps for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh's southern coastal district of Cox's Bazar and elsewhere over fears of aid cuts following Washington's decision to close operations. A large portion of the millions of dollars needed for supporting Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh had come from the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID.

7 killed in attack on security forces convoy in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, March 16, (Agencies): At least seven people were killed and 21 others injured when unidentified militants attacked a security forces convoy in pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province on Sunday, sources said.

The attack occurred in the Nushki area, where a convoy of paramilitary Frontier Corps troops was traveling along a highway, the sources told Xinhua on condition of anonymity.

"According to the initial investigation, a suicide bomber rammed an explosive-laden vehicle into one of the buses in the convoy, while other attackers opened fire on the other vehicles," the sources said.

The death toll may rise as several of the injured are in critical condition, the sources added.

A heavy contingent of security forces has cordoned off the area, and an investigation into the attack is underway.

The proscribed terrorist outfit, Balochistan Liberation Army, claimed the attack.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's security forces raided two militant hideouts in the country's restive northwest on Saturday, triggering gun battles that left at least two soldiers and nine militants dead, the military said in a statement.

The raids were conducted in the Mohmand and Dera Ismail Khan districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, which borders Afghanistan. According to local police officials, the insurgents were Pakistani Taliban, who are known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP.

The outlawed TTP is a separate group but an ally of the Afghan Taliban, who seized power in neighboring Afghanistan in August 2021 as US and NATO troops were in the final stages of a withdrawal from the country after 20 years of war.

Many TTP leaders and fighters have found sanctuaries and have even been living openly in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover, which also emboldened the Pakistani Taliban.

Trump administration prepares to deport about 300 alleged gang members to El Salvador

WASHINGTON, March 16, (AP): US President Donald Trump's administration will pay El Salvador $6 million to imprison for one year about 300 alleged members of the Venezuelan Tren de Aragua gang, in one of the first instances of the Central American country taking migrants from the United States.

The agreement follows discussions between El Salvador's President, Nayib Bukele, and Secretary of State Marco Rubio about housing migrants in El Salvador's notorious prison. Bukele's government has arrested more than 84,000 people, sometimes without due process, since 2022 as part of his crackdown on gang violence in the small country.

It came as the American Civil Liberties Union and Democracy Forward preemptively sued Trump late Friday in federal court in Washington, DC, saying five Venezuelan men being held at an immigration detention center in Raymondville, Texas, were at "imminent risk of removal" under the Alien Enemies Act.



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, left, meets with President Nayib Bukele at his residence at Lake Coatepeque, El Salvador on Feb 3. (AP)

The agreement may have been put on hold, however.

US District Judge James E. Boasberg on Saturday blocked anyone from being deported under Trump's proclamation for two weeks and scheduled a Friday hearing to consider arguments. ACLU attorney Lee Gelernt said two flights Saturday may have carried people deported under Trump's proclamation, one to El Salvador and one possibly to Honduras. Boasberg said any such flights would have to be returned midair to the United States.

Memos detailing the transfer did not disclose how the Trump administration identified the roughly 300 people as members of Tren de Aragua, a gang Trump repeatedly highlighted in the campaign and declared to be a terrorist organization.

"The Republic of El Salvador confirms it will house these individuals for one (1) year, pending the United States' decision on their long term disposition," wrote El Salvador's ministry of foreign affairs in a memo obtained by The Associated Press.

stc hosts Quran memorization contest in celebration of Ramadan

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced that it has organized a Quran memorization contest for the second year in a row in collaboration with the renowned reciter Bader AL Bashar as part of its annual Ramadan campaign in celebration of the Holy Month. The initiative falls under the Company's "With good, we go further" initiative. The Quran memorization contest is one of several initiatives stc has launched during this Ramadan as part of its ongoing commitment to engage with the community in line with its extensive Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability programs.



First place winner in the 7 to 10 year category.


Company employees participate in the Quran competition.



Second place winner in the 7 to 10 years category.

Held at the Moza Muhammad Salem Mosque in Bayan, the contest aims to encourage young participants to learn and properly recite the Holy Quran, developing a deeper connection with Islam and its teachings. Led by renowned reciter Bader AL Bashar, the competition welcomed more than 80 children across two categories that include participants from 7-10 years old and 11-13 years old. Contestants in the younger category will be tested on their memorization and recitation of Juz Amma, while those in the older category recited from Juz Tabarak and Juz Qad Sami. A total of four winners were selected and honored for their memorization and recitation skills during the competition, with valuable prizes awarded by stc for their exceptional effort.

Through its role in supporting such initiatives, stc aims to nurture future generations by enabling them to build a stronger connection to their faith and heritage while promoting discipline and self-improvement through the memorization of the Quran.

stc emphasized in a statement that the Quran memorization contest has become an annual initiative organized by the Company during the Holy Month, reflecting its dedication to supporting the digital and spiritual growth of the community.

Through its CSR framework, stc aspires to continuously implement programs that bring positive change and instill a sense of togetherness in the community, celebrating faith and the impact of a collective society. Supporting religious and educational activities serve as a crucial aspect of each society, further aligning with stc's mission to empower and uplift the communities it serves in meaningful and lasting ways.

Looking ahead, stc will continue to introduce various initiatives throughout the Holy Month of Ramadan that embody the values of generosity, learning, and social responsibility.

These efforts aim to strengthen bonds with the community while creating opportunities for positive engagement that align with the essence of the Holy Month.

To find out more about stc's events, promotions, and sponsorships, follow stc's official social media platforms, visit one of stc's branches, download mystc mobile application, visit www.stc.com.kw or contact the customer service center by dialing 102 for around the clock assistance.



NBK hosts Gergean celebration at Mohammed Alshaya Elementary School.

'Demonstrating support for Bankee program schools'

NBK hosts Gergean celebration at 'Mohammed Alshaya School'

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) celebrated Gergean with the students of Mohammed Alshaya Elementary School for Boys, in a highly engaging atmosphere bringing together the students and teaching staff.

NBK team distributed Gergean to all students and teachers, in a special event marking the traditional Gergean celebration. The event also witnessed a variety of entertainment activities that enhance the students' belonging to their community, as the distribution of Gergean is a popular tradition that aims to revive the cultural and heritage values of the Kuwaiti community.

This celebration underscores NBK's stead fast dedication to engaging in social and humanitarian activities and delivering its responsibility towards all sectors of society. It also demonstrates the special support extended to the schools and students participating in the "Bankee" program, who expressed their happiness with this event, appreciating NBK's efforts in sponsoring such initiatives and activities.

Commenting on this, Asma Bin Hussain. Specialist - Public Relations and Event Management at National Bank of Kuwait, said, "We are constantly striving to be at the forefront of socially responsible organizations by participation in a wide range of events and activities."

"We are always keen to support schools participating in the Bankee program, which aims to familiarize students with fundamental economic concepts and practices such as earning, spending, saving and financial obligations," she added.

Bin Hussain noted that "Bankee" effectively contributed to raising students' financial awareness, as witnessed by parents and teachers, noting that instillingcore values in students like honesty, integrity, personal development, accountability, cooperation and teamwork are among the program's key objectives, as it aims to raise a generation of Kuwaiti youth capable of contributing to achieving sustainable development and economic welfare for individuals and society.

Bin Hussain:

■ We are constantly striving to be at the forefront of socially responsible organizations by participation in a wide range of events and activities

On their part, the administration of Mohammed AlShaya Elementary School for Boys expressed its appreciation for NBK's efforts in supporting education and cultivating positive concepts in the younger generations. NBK firmly believes that public-private partnerships to provide the young generation with the required knowledge and skills are instrumental to individual as well as social wellbeing and prosperity.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, and Kuwait Anticorruption Authority (Nazaha), "Bankee" is the first program of its kind introduced by NBK for the society, as part of the endeavours to promote financial inclusion among students in schools, to ensure increasing and sustaining financial literacy among the members of society in the future. The program aims to familiarize students with fundamental economic concepts and practices, and to cultivate financial culture in an interactive and engaging manner using the classroom economy model.

It is worth mentioning that NBK was awarded the Bronze Award by Qorus in the Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance (ESG) category for Bankee Program, recognizing its innovative efforts in integrating sustainability and ESG standards into its initiatives.

AUM grows by 7%, reaching $15.9 billion

Faisal Sarkhou named ninth in Forbes Middle East's Top Asset Managers list

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: Kamco Invest, a regional non-banking financial powerhouse with one of the largest AUMs in the region, announced that its Chief Executive Officer, Faisal Mansour Sarkhou, has been named among the Middle East's Top 10 Asset Managers for 2025 by Forbes Middle East.

Sarkhou was ranked ninth in Forbes' list of the Middle East's Top Asset Managers for 2025, published in March,featuring forty of the region's leading asset management executives.This recognition is a testament to the dedication and expertise of Kamco Invest's teams, whose collective efforts have strengthened the firm's position as a leading asset management and investment banking powerhouse in the region.

In its March 2025 edition, the magazine highlighted the company's strategic expansion, innovative investment solutions, and commitment to growth, as well as Sarkhou's remarkable two-decade journey at Kamco Invest, from joining in 2000 to leading the company through transformative milestones.

Under Sarkhou's leadership, Kamco Invest has built a strong track record in asset management, with a diverse range of investment strategies designed to deliver long-term value for clients. The Company's success is driven by the talent and commitment of its investment professionals, who continuously analyze market dynamics, identify opportunities, and implement innovative solutions to meet clients' evolving needs.

The Company has assets under management of USD15.9bn invested in various jurisdictions and asset classes including listed equities, fixed income, private equity, and real estate, amongst others. The year 2024 has witnessed an increase of USD1bn in its assets under management, a growth of 7%.

Sarkhou in his interview with the magazine mentioned that Kamco Invest's clients maintain a long-term investment perspective, and periods of market uncertainty can often present opportunities, particularly for investors with available liquidity. Across the region, sophisticated investors are becoming more knowledgeable and increasingly adopting thematic investing and diversified portfolio strategies. The growing prominence of fixed income as an asset class reflects this shift. As we move into 2025, maintaining a well-balanced portfolio remains key, diversification is essential to navigating market dynamics successfully.


Faisal Sarkhou

Beyond asset management, Forbes Middle East also highlighted the achievements of the investment banking team that has played a pivotal role in executing major capital market transactions across the region. The team has successfully led and advised on 11 high-profile transactions in 2024 valued at USD4.9bn. These transactions comprised nine bond and sukuk issuances for financial institutions and corporates in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, in addition to the largest mandatory tender offer in Kuwait's insurance sector and the Initial Public Offering of an Omani sovereign-owned oil company.

Commenting on this recognition, Sarkhou said, "This recognition is not just a personal achievement but a testament to the collective efforts of the entire Kamco Invest team. I am deeply grateful to our Board of Directors for their unwavering support and strategic guidance, which have been instrumental in shaping the Company's success. I also extend my sincere appreciation to my colleagues across all divisions, their dedication, expertise, and commitment to excellence continue to drive our growth and innovation. This milestone is a reflection of the hard work of everyone who has been part of our journey, and I look forward to achieving even greater success together."

Kamco Invest remains dedicated to expanding its market presence, enhancing its investment offerings, and continuing to serve clients with excellence. It acknowledges this achievement as a shared success, made possible by the expertise, dedication, and teamwork of its professionals.

About Kamco Invest

Kamco Investment Company K.S.C (Public) "Kamco Invest" is a regional non-banking financial powerhouse headquartered in Kuwait with offices in key regional financial markets, established in 1998 and listed on Boursa Kuwait in 2003. It is an Independently managed subsidiary of KIPCO Group adopting highest standards of corporate governance and regulated by the Capital Markets Authority and Central Bank of Kuwait.

Kamco Invest has AUM of over USD15.9bn as of 31 December 2024 allocated to various asset classes and jurisdictions, making it one of the largest asset managers in the MENA region. It has acted as investment banker to deals exceeding USD 41.3 bn from its inception till 31 December 2024 in equity capital markets, debt capital markets and mergers & acquisitions.

ECB warns of economic fallout from escalating trade war

US job openings rise, inflation eases, while trade tensions impact markets

By National Bank of Kuwait

	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month
Currencies	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	Forward
EUR	1.0833	1.0804	1.0947	1.0879	1.0830	1.0950	1.0933
GBP	1.2903	1.2858	1.2987	1.2932	1.2860	1.2985	1.2931
JPY	147.87	146.52	149.19	148.62	148.25	149.20	147.09
CHF	0.8791	0.8756	0.8863	0.8851	0.8800	0.8900	0.8769

Highlights

■ US Jolts Job Openings rise 232,000 in January 2025.
■ US Consumer Price Index at 2.8% in January y/y.
■ US Producer Price Index unchanged in February, missing forecasts of a 0.3% gain.
■ Bank of Canada Cuts Interest Rates to 2.75%.
■ UK GDP contracted 0.1% in January, following a 0.4% growth in December.
■ ECB's Lagarde Warns of Potential Impact of an Escalating Trade War. Noting that it May Disrupt Plans to Lower Interest Rates.

United States & Canada

US Stocks Plunge on Trade Concerns

The U.S. Dollar Index (DXY) remained relatively stable for the week, hovering at around 103 levels, as global trade uncertainty kept investors cautious. U.S. stocks, however, experienced steep declines, with the S&P 500 entering correction territory, the Dow Jones dropping 3.07% for the week, and the Nasdaq Composite losing 2.43%. These declines were largely triggered by President Trump's aggressive tariff policies, including a proposed 200% tariff on European alcohol, which raised concerns over retaliatory measures and economic instability. Treasury yields also fell, reflecting growing investor pessimism despite positive economic reports on inflation and joblessness.

JOLTS Job Openings Surge Despite Uncertainty

U.S. job openings rose by 232,000 to 7.74 million in January 2025, exceeding the expected 7.65 million and up from 7.51 million in December. Key increases were seen in retail trade (+143,000), finance and insurance (+77,000), and health care and social assistance (+58,000), while professional and business services saw a decline (-122,000). Regionally, the largest gains were in the West (+90,000) and Northeast (+82,000). Meanwhile, hires increased by 19,000 to 5.39 million, and total separations rose by 170,000 to 5.25 million.

Inflation Eases in February, but Price Pressures Remain in Key Sectors

In February 2025, the U.S. annual inflation rate eased to 2.8% from 3% in January, coming in below the expected 2.9% figure. Energy cost declined with gasoline and fuel oil prices falling, while natural gas prices surged. Inflation slowed in categories such as shelter, used cars and trucks, and transportation, though food inflation slightly accelerated to 2.6%. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose 0.2% month-over-month, down from January's 0.5%, which was the highest since August 2023. Core inflation also cooled, with annual core inflation dropping to 3.1%, the lowest since April 2021, while monthly core inflation fell to 0.2%, both below expectations.

Producer Prices Stagnate, Missing Forecasts

Producer prices in the US remained unchanged in February 2025 from the previous month, following an upwardly revised 0.6% rise in January and missing forecasts of a 0.3% gain. This marks the lowest rate in seven months, driven by a 0.2% decline in service prices, the sharpest drop since July 2024, led by a 1.4% fall in margins for machinery and vehicle wholesaling. Prices also fell in food and alcohol retailing, automobile retailing, apparel, chemicals, and real estate loans. However, goods prices increased by 0.3% for the fifth consecutive month, mainly due to a 53.6% surge in egg prices. Year-over-year, producer prices rose 3.2%, below the 3.7% recorded in January and the 3.3% forecast. While core PPI declined 0.1% month-over-month and 3.4% annually.

The US Dollar index closed the week at 103.72.

Bank of Canada Cuts Rates

The Bank of Canada cut its key interest rate by 25bps to 2.75% in March, marking a total reduction of 225bps since June 2024. While the economy grew more than expected in Q4, growth is expected to slow due to rising trade tensions with the U.S. The bank highlighted that shifting U.S. tariff threats are weakening consumer confidence and investment expectations. Inflation, which has been below 2% for months, is expected to rise toward 2.5% as tax credits expire, though core inflation is projected to slow gradually, driven by easing shelter costs.

The USDCAD pair closed the week at 1.4369.

Europe

Lagarde Warns of Economic Fallout from Trade War

In her recent interview with the BBC, ECB President Christine Lagarde warned that Trump's escalating trade war could severely harm global economic growth and inflation. She stressed that such protectionist measures create uncertainty, dampen business activity, and force the EU to respond, despite preferring dialogue. Lagarde dismissed Trump's claim that the EU was formed to harm the US, highlighting historical cooperation. She also addressed inflation challenges, noting that unpredictable global trade shifts, military spending, and climate disruptions make economic stability harder to maintain. While the ECB is considering interest rate cuts as inflation cools, she cautioned that new shocks could disrupt this plan, prompting the ECB to shift its communication strategy to focus on real-time economic indicators rather than fixed forward guidance.

The EUR/USD currency pair closed the week at 1.0879.

United Kingdom

UK Economy Contracts Amid Manufacturing and Mining Declines

The UK economy contracted by 0.1% month-over-month in January 2025, following a 0.4% growth in December and falling short of market expectations for a 0.1% increase. The decline was driven by a 0.9% drop in the production sector, with manufacturing shrinking 1.1%, most notably in basic metals (-3.3%) and pharmaceuticals (-3.1%), while mining and quarrying fell 3.3% due to a 3.7% contraction in crude petroleum and natural gas extraction. Construction also declined 0.2%. However, the services sector grew by 0.1%, supported by administrative services and retail trade at 1.9% and 0.7% respectively. Despite the monthly contraction, GDP grew 0.2% over the three months leading to January.

UK Retail Sales Slows in February

UK retail sales grew by 0.9% year-on-year in February 2025 as per data from the British Retail Consortium, slowing sharply from January's 2.5% rise and missing the 2.4% forecast, as consumers cut back amid the cost-of-living crisis. Non-food sales stagnated compared to February 2024, while food sales rose 2.3%, down from last year's 5.6% gain. Valentine's Day spending provided a temporary boost, particularly for jewellery, watches, and fragrances, which reversed last year's declines. Online sales, especially in computing and electronics, helped support the sector, while furniture sales also returned to growth.

The GBP/USD currency pair closed the week at 1.2932.

Asia-Pacific

Australia Westpac Consumer Sentiment Rises to its Highest Level in Three Years

Australia's Westpac-Melbourne Institute Consumer Sentiment Index rose 4% in March to 95.9, its highest level in three years, driven by the Reserve Bank of Australia's interest rate cut and easing cost-of-living pressures. Confidence improved broadly, particularly in the labor market, though inflation remains the top concern, followed by budget issues, employment, and interest rates. Despite the gains, lingering worries about global economic conditions persist, with U.S. tariff disputes and geopolitical tensions contributing to uncertainty.

The AUD/USD currency pair closed the week at 0.6323.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti Dinar

USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30805.

Bank upholds Vision 2035 with focus on ESG initiatives

Gulf Bank celebrates Ramadan with employees at annual Ghabga



Waleed Khaled Mandani, Sami Mahfouz, and Salma Al-Hajjaj honor one of the employees.



Najla Aleisa and Nada Razzouqi



Gulf Bank leaders, including Acting CEO Waleed Khaled Mandani.



A group photo of the HR team, with Salma Al-Hajjaj in the middle.



Hani Al Awadhi and Ammar Hajeyah during the Ghabga.



Part of the audience.

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: In a warm and welcoming atmosphere, Gulf Bank hosted its annual Ghabga at the Grand Hyatt 360 Mall, bringing together employees from various departments and branches alongside the Bank's executives and leadership team.

The evening featured a variety of activities designed to embrace the Ramadan spirit and fostering connections among employees. A key highlight of the event was the recognition of the Sawa'ed Al-Khaleej volunteer team for their exceptional dedication to charitable, social, and environmental initiatives throughout the year, especially during the holy month of Ramadan.

Additionally, Gulf Bank celebrated the achievements of its men's and women's padel teams, who proudly secured second place in their respective categories at the Kuwait Banking Association Padel Championship.

Gulf Bank's annual Ghabga provides a meaningful opportunity for employees from various divisions and branches to connect beyond the workplace and engage with executive management in a lively and festive setting. The Bank remains dedicated to nurturing a sense of unity and engagement among employees through diverse and enjoyable activities, celebrating the unique spirit of Ramadan.

Gulf Bank firmly believes that its employees are the foundation of its success and excellence. With this commitment, the Bank strives to empower its workforce by fostering professional growth while cultivating a workplace built on collaboration, inclusivity, and a strong sense of community.

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

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

Boursa closes lower

General index drops 0.35%

KUWAIT CITY, March 16, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait closed its trading session on Sunday with the general index falling by 27.67 points, or 0.35%, to settle at 7880.30 points. A total of 304.5 million shares were traded through 17,518 transactions, with a value of 77 million Kuwaiti dinars (approximately 237.16 million US dollars).

The main market index saw an increase of 54.86 points, or 0.76%, reaching 7253.86 points, driven by the trading of 189.7 million shares across 10,194 transactions, worth 30.4 million dinars (about 93.6 million US dollars).

Meanwhile, the Premier Market Index dropped by 49.89 points, or 0.59%, closing at 8425.98 points, with 114.8 million shares traded through 7,324 transactions, valued at 46.6 million dinars (about 143.5 million US dollars).

On the other hand, the Major 50 index rose by 78.57 points, or 1.13%, reaching 7061.66 points, with 176.9 million shares traded through 9,231 transactions, worth 28.5 million dinars (approximately 87.7 million US dollars).

'Remittances still highest globally'

GCC workers' remittances total $131.5 billion in 2023

MUSCAT, March 16, (KUNA): The total remittances of workers in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to foreign destinations amounted to USD 131.5 billion by the end of 2023, according to the latest data released by the GCC Statistical Centre.

The center's report indicated that this marked a decrease by approximately USD 0.5 billion compared to 2022, a 0.4 percent decline.

This comes after significant increases recorded in 2021 and 2022, which saw growth rates of 9.2 percent and 3.8 percent, respectively.

The volume of workers' remittances from GCC countries is the highest globally, followed by remittances from the United States.

Additionally, the share of these remittances as a percentage of the GCC's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), at current prices, declined from 8.1 percent in 2020 to six percent in 2022, before experiencing a slight increase in 2023, settling at 6.2 percent.

The Statistical Centre, with its headquarters in Oman, was established in 2011 to provide a common official pool of statistics and data for GCC member states.



Zain's team with government personnel at Failaka Island.

Sharing Holy Month's blessings with personnel from six government entities

Zain hosts iftar banquet at Failaka Island

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: As part of its annual Zain Al-Shuhoor campaign and its ongoing community visits program, Zain organized a Ramadan iftar banquet in honor of personnel from six government entities stationed on Failaka Island. The initiative was a gesture of appreciation for their efforts and an opportunity to share the blessings of the Holy Month.

Zain's team visited Failaka Island and joined the iftar gathering with members of the Ministry of Interior, the Kuwait Fire Force, Emergency Medical Services, the Kuwait Army, the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy, and the Ministry of Information. During the visit, the team expressed their deep gratitude and appreciation for the significant efforts these individuals dedicate to protecting Kuwait and its people.

Such community visits are a core element of Zain's annual Ramadan program, where the company's team and volunteers engage in numerous visits to various organizations, fostering stronger community ties and collaboration. As part of these efforts, Zain also recently hosted an iftar banquet at Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Base, located along the Northern Island of Jaber Al-Ahmad Bridge, honoring members of the Coast Guard.

The Zain Al-Shuhoor campaign continues to evolve and expand its programs and initiatives each year. Through this campaign, the company collaborates with various entities across the country to embody the spirit of generosity that defines the Holy Month, reflecting the deeply rooted values of Kuwait's people in supporting others and promoting love and peace.

Average per capita of Arab GDP rose by 1.2% to $7,557 in 2024

Arab GDP to grow 4% in 2025, reaching $3.6 trillion, says Dhaman

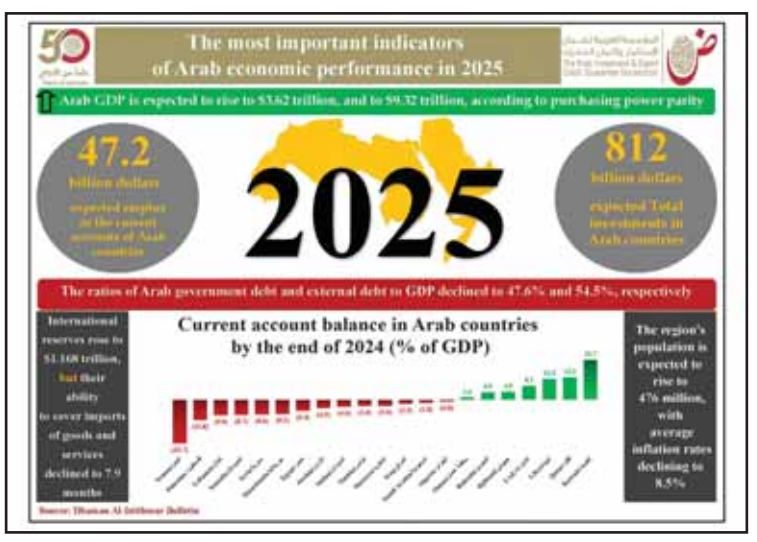
KUWAIT CITY, March 16: The Arab Investment & Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (Dhaman) revealed that the Arab GDP grew by 1.8%, to exceed $3.6 trillion in 2024 in spite of the regional challenges and events. Its geographical concentration continued in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Iraq and Algeria, with a share of more than 72% of the region's total.

In a press release on the occasion of the issuance of the fourth quarterly for 2024, the Corporation elaborated that the overall Arab economic performance expectations were positive for 2025, with a projected growth rate of 4.1%, driven by the likely growth in 14 Arab countries, including 9 oil economies that alone contribute over 78% of the Arab GDP. This comes in light of cautious optimism about the reduction of turmoil and conflicts in the region, and the improvement of oil and gas export revenues and goods and services produced by the region.

The Corporation explained that International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates indicate varyingArab economic indicators' performance during 2024 due to a drop by roughly 4% in crude oil output and by 1% in its global prices, the spillover of the war on the Gaza Strip to other countries, including Lebanon, Yemen, Syria and Iraq, the continued armed conflict in Sudan, not to mention climate change and rising foreign debt. The following is a summary of the most important indicators:

■ Average per capita of the Arab GDP improved by 1.2% to $7,557 in 2024 and is likely to go up by 1% to $7,602 on average in 2025, while, according to purchasing power parity, it increased by 2% to around $19,000 in 2024, with the great disparity continuing among the region's countries.

■ The Arab population grew by 2% to exceed 467 million people in 2024. The Arab region's average unemployment rate increased to roughly 9.7% during the same year.



Dhaman forecasts 4% growth for Arab GDP in 2025.

■ The Arab region's average consumer prices rose to roughly 12% in 2024 but are likely to fall to 8.5% in 2025.

■ The combined hypothetical surplus of Arab budgets of around $15 billion during 2023 turned into a deficit of $58 billion in 2024, and is likely to rise to $68 billion in 2025, making up around 2% of the Arab GDP.

■ Arab debt indicators varied during 2024, as the ratio of government debt to the GDP plummeted to 48.3% amid an expected drop to 47.6% by the end of 2025. Comparatively, the external debt ratio increased to about 56% of Arab GDP during 2024 and is likely to fall to 54.5% in 2025.

■ Arab foreign trade in goods and services went up by 3.6% to exceed $3.3 trillion in 2024, based on a hike in exports by roughly 1% and imports by more than 7%, thus reducing the trade balance surplus by 33% to $177 billion during the same year.

■ The current account surplus of Arab countries dipped by 51% to $89 billion in 2024, or 2.5% of Arab GDP, and is likely to drop to $47 billion, or 1.3% of Arab GDP in 2025.

■ Arab foreign exchange reserves edged up by 3.7% to about $1.2 trillion, which is enough to cover Arab imports of goods and services for more than eight months, these reserves are expected to witness a slight increase of 1.2% in 2025, while their coverage of total Arab imports will decline to less than 8 months.

Based in Kuwait, the Arab Investment & Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (Dhaman) was established in 1974 as a multilateral institution that comprises all Arab countries and four joint Arab financial institutions. It provides specialized insurance services against credit and political risks with a view to facilitating the inflow of foreign direct investments into Arab countries and promoting Arab exports and imports.

79.684% quorum of attendance achieved

KFH General Assembly approves distribution of 12% cash dividends for 2nd tranche of FY2024

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) held its Ordinary and Extraordinary General Assembly meetings, with a nearly 79.684% quorum, and approved distributing the second tranche of cash dividends for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2024, of 12% of the nominal share value (12 fils per share). The 2024 semi-annual cash dividend of 10 fils per share was distributed previously. The AGM approved the distribution of 8% bonus shares to shareholders. Additionally, all items on the agenda for both the Ordinary and Extraordinary General Assembly meetings for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2024, were also approved.

Chairman of Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Hamad Abdulmohsen Al Marzouq said: "On behalf of myself and my fellow members of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Finance House (KFH), I would like to present the 2024 KFH Group Annual Report including major achievements, consolidated financial statements, and other reports.

In 2024, KFH succeeded in executing its strategic vision and key objectives by continuously improving business quality, adopting innovation, technological advancement, sound governance, prudent risk management, digitalization, sustainability, and essential means to achieve the best growth rates. This also included maintaining robust financial performance, compliance with regulatory controls and instructions as well as providing the best services, products, and initiatives to maintain KFH's leadership and improving the markets where the Group operates. which drives towards achieving KFH Group's goal of assuming its position among the world's largest 100 banks within the next ten years.

KFH successfully completed the merger by amalgamation with the Ahli United Bank – Kuwait (AUBK), the largest-ever merger project in the Kuwaiti banking sector. This step was a subsequent phase to the acquisition of the (formerly) Ahli United Bank – Bahrain, one of the largest deals in the region. This move led to the integration of KFH and the (formerly) Ahli United Bank as one entity. Additionally, the operational integration and the migration of systems and customers were successfully completed. The completion of this phase turned KFH into a giant global banking group that enjoys solvency, competitive performance, and a wide geographic spread with 615branches spanning 12countries, most prominent of which are Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye, Egypt, United Kingdom, and Germany. With the aim of unifying our business environment, we completed in a record time the conversion of the (formerly) Ahli United Bank in Bahrain, UK, and Egypt to comply with Shari'a principles.

KFH strategy outlined the process of creating a giant financial entity among the world's largest 100 banks. It also drafted ambitious objectives that are an added value to the local and global economy and align with Kuwait's 2035 vision. Theseobjectivesare reflected positively in most performance indicators. KFH's market cap is the largest in the Kuwaiti market, ranking high at the Middle East level. Moreover, the harmony in the Group's performance and its fruitful presence in different regions, i.e. Middle East, Asia, and Europe contributed to achieving KFH's strategic objectives.

The Group succeeded in achieving a significant leap toward digital transformation in risk management, adopting the latest advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and advanced analytics to enhance risk measurement, monitoring,and early detection capabilities. This was accomplished in accordance with the bestglobal practices, allowing the Group to build effective and developable measuresto face unforeseen challenges.

KFH extended its efforts to the recently joined subsidiary banks, resulting ina smooth completion of integration initiatives. These efforts werecommendedby Moody's and Fitch. The successful implementation of the Capital Management Program led to a capital adequacy ratio of 19.89% exceeding regulatory requirements.

Reaffirmingour commitment to operational excellence and innovation, the Group achieved significant milestones including the successful integration of the Ahli United Bank –Kuwaitthanks to the efforts of a dedicated Command Center which ensured operational continuity. Furthermore, several digital improvements were implemented to streamline regulatory processes and renewal of contracts. TheRobotic Process Automation (RPA) initiatives in key operations contributed to reducing time and costs, achieving synergies, improving inventory management and usage of the Self-Service Centers for instant card issuance.

The merger was one of the challenges during which the Group Human Resources and Transformation made many influential contributions. The department facilitated a smooth transition for (formerly) Ahli United Bank - Kuwait employees, integrating them into KFH's payroll system and unifying security systems across (formerly) AUBK's locations.

By strengthening its capacity to attract top talent, the acquisition and merger enabled KFH to better support the growth of its Kuwaiti cadre,generating new job opportunities for national talents in the local market, and heightening the demand for the national workforce across the Group. As a result, KFH hired (149) employees, with women's representation accounting for (23%) and a (98%) Kuwaitization rate.

In line with KFH's commitment toward developing its employees, we offered more than 115,000 training hours for 4,000 employees. Additionally, 26 managers across the Group participated in the Building Leadership Excellence program. KFH accepted 19 employees in its scholarship program, and 39 employees graduated from Forssah program for recent graduates. In recognition of these efforts, KFH received 13 prestigious global awards in Human Resources, the highest number regionally and globally, from the renowned Brandon Hall Group.

The most important financial statements and indicators for 2024 are as follows:

KFH, by the grace of Allah, reported a net profit for its shareholders of KD 601.8 million up to the end of 2024, an increase of 3.0% compared to last year. Earnings per share reached 36.37 Fils; an increaseof 3.0%, compared to last year.

Net financing income increased to KD 1,147.0 million; an increase of 18.7% compared to last year. Net operating income increased to KD 1,030.7 million; an increase of 9.0% compared to last year. Total assets reached KD 36.7 billion.Depositors' accounts reached 19.2 billion, while the capital adequacy ratio recorded a rate of 19.89% , which is above the minimum requirement, compared with 18.18% as of December 31, 2023. This demonstrates KFH`s strong capital base.

The Board of Directors considered the distribution of cash dividends to shareholders of 22% (including 10% in H1 2024). The Board of Directors also considered the distribution of bonus shares of 8% after the approval of the General Assembly and the competent authorities. considering the distributed returns on investment deposits and saving accounts as shown in the following table:

Account Type	2023	2024
"AlKhomasiyah" Investment Deposit	5.000	4.650
"Continuous" Investment Deposit	4.500	4.200
"Al Sidra" Investment Deposit	3.850	3.350
"Al Dima" Investment Deposit (12 months)	4.250	4.000
"Al Dima" Investment Deposit (6 months)	4.125	3.825
Long-term investment plans	3.950	3.700
Investment Saving Accounts	0.250	0.250

KFH continued its endeavors by financing companies, assisting them in the success of their business, in addition to financing mega projects at the local and regional levels. In this respect, KFH participated in financing deals totaling about KD 325 million in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Egypt. The Bank also participated in syndicated financing deal, funding KD 79 million to an Irish company.



Hamad Al-Marzouq



Khaled Al-Shamlan

Domestically, KFH played a pivotal role in the local economy by financing large scale projects across various sectors, most notable of which are real estate projects worth KD 313 million. Furthermore, KFH contributed to developing the local infrastructure by offering additional financing, amounting to KD 85 million for the telecommunication industry. KFH also provided another financing worth KD 31 million to strengthen the logistics services sector, including financing the first fiber optic cable manufacturing company in Kuwait (Taihan Factory).

KFH is enhancing its standing in the Kuwaiti banking sector as a strategic partner in the development of micro, small, and medium enterprises, ranking first in this area. In addition to the significant growth in the financing portfolio of this sector, KFH has always been active in improving its customer base. Many SMEs started their successful journey through KFH financing support.

With the aim of diversifying its financing sources and expanding the support of infrastructure projects and economic productive sectors in Kuwait, KFH issued a 5-year Senior Unsecured Sukuk of $1 billion, the first issue under KFH $4 bn Sukuk Program.

KFH continued investing in supporting systems to enhance customer service and experience. Its fruitful efforts resulted in the expansion of our online corporate banking through (eCorp). This included trade finance applications, Tawarruqdrawdowns in addition to multiple mobile e-Banking services. KFH's achievements in the field of corporate banking were appreciated and recognized by prominent global institutions. Global Finance Magazine awarded KFH with the Best SME Bank in Kuwait, Best Islamic Corporate Bank – Global, and Best Islamic Project Finance Provider – Global awards.

The Group enhanced its pioneering role in Sukuk issuance. KFH Capital successfully led and arranged the issuance of $118 billion Sukuk for sovereigns and corporates. The Company also successfully marketed five investment funds: two Ijarah funds, two real estate funds, and a USD money market fund. 2024 was a pivotal year for the digital transformation,marked by the development ofan Assets Management System (AMS) and the launch of two other digital initiatives for employees and customers.

As part of its ongoing efforts to offer distinctive products and services, KFH launched several services including Al-Hassad account, and Baitak Concierge service. Moreover, KFH- Turkiye service center has helped over 12 thousand customers. In addition, KFH deployed 13 employees to Turkiyeas part of an initiative to promote its customer service for the third consecutive year. KFH also launched its new branches in Jabriya, Rumaithiya and Jaber Al-Ahmad in addition to its first digital bank in the Avenues.

Continuing our leadership in the banking cards market, we launched numerous rewards and bonus points campaigns throughout the year to promote card usage. KFH was awarded two prestigious Mastercard awards: the Highest Penetration of Tokenized Transactions in Kuwait award, and the Highest Volume Growth in Mastercard World Portfolio award.

Technological solutions and digital innovations were the highlight and major accomplishment of the Group. This success is demonstrated in the remarkable role and high performance of the Information Technology (IT) sector, particularly in fulfilling the merger requirements and contributing to the success of Operational Day One (OD1). The IT team migrated the accounts and products of over 280 thousand formerly AUBK customers, and unified more than 80 systems across the Bank, merging all services and products with their different requirements. In cooperation with a cohesive team, more than 250 phases and 2000 tasks were completed.

The IT sector implemented numerous projects, developed the technological infrastructure and cybersecurity defenses, and adopted AI technologies. An array of other projects was executed, including instant payment service (WAMD), integration of the corporate system (eCorp) with the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) and enabling face ID authentication for eCorp users, integrating T360 system with eCorp system, introduction of the final digital solutions of the CreditLense program, and conducting several system recovery simulation exercises with remarkable success.

KFH also rolled out various innovative digital services and products for the first time in Kuwait. These encompassed instant credit and prepaid card printing service, (D-POS) mobile device for account opening, and the development of more than 500 ATMs. The pioneering digital services also included adding online banking services, most prominently transfers via Western Union network, push notifications, AFAQ transfer service, and KFH Pay money transfer.

To reduce uncertainty in the global economy and enhance our over USD 125 billion assets portfolio, Group Treasury expanded both our financial derivatives portfolio and our financing portfolio across all currencies. We achieved synergies in financing costs and consolidated AUB's portfolio. These objectives exceeded the target by over 12%.

The Group Treasury continued its investment activities in the primary and secondary capital markets, exceeding $13 billion in transactions. The Group Treasury also expanded its transactions in the short-term IILM Sukuk market. It maintained its top 3 positions in the IILM sukuk primary dealer list, in addition to its ranking as the first in the IILM secondary market dealer for the 4th consecutive year. The KFH Group Retail Client activity amounted to $267 million. The Group Treasury transactions exceeded $45 billion. We have doubled our ESG Sukuk share to $653.2 million in 2024 compared to $249 million in 2023; an annual increase of 162.3%.

During 2024, KFH Group bagged 47 accolades from worldwide reputable organizations specialized in monitoring and evaluating prominent banks. In this regard, Tam Digital Bank was recognized with 6 industry-leading awards during its inaugural year. Along with high creditworthiness that has been confirmed by global credit rating agencies, the year 2024 was marked by the inclusion of KFH in key global ratings including ESG indices such "FTSE4Good" Index and "A" rating by MSCI ESG Index. KFH was ranked first in the Kuwaiti banking sector in terms of growth and return on risk for 2024 Top 100 Arab Banks Rankings from The Banker. Additionally, Forbes ranked KFH as the leading listed Kuwaiti company and tenth in the Middle East in terms of market value and profitability. The Bank also secured the top spot on MEED magazine's list of the top 100 listed companies in the Middle East and North Africa in terms of market capitalization.

We firmly believe that sustaining our operations and ensuring business continuity necessitates expanding the social role of KFH through numerous contributions to community development and sustainability. In this regard, KFH has initiated environmental efforts in partnership with various governmental and private entities. The Bank has also sponsored national initiatives such as the Al-Mubarakiya reconstruction project, assisted defaulted citizens, and supported the Kuwait Food Bank, among other endeavors.

We remain committed to enhancing supervision and monitoring mechanisms, while expediting decision-making processes to keep pace with our aspirations. This ensures a well-studied approach to leveraging new opportunities for growth, balancing risks and returns, and maintaining sufficient levels of capital adequacy, liquidity, high-quality assets, operating income, and net profits.We also strive to uphold our leading position and brand reputation with unparalleled value and excellence.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah safeguard him, His Highness the Crown Prince, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah. Our thanks and appreciation are also extended to the Central Bank of Kuwait and all the regulatory authorities for their constant support to the banking sector in the State of Kuwait.

The Board of Directors would also like to express its sincere gratitude to the esteemed shareholders, customers, KFH Executive Management, and all employees for their efforts and cooperation throughout the year."

KFH Group Chief Executive Officer, Khaled Yousef AlShamlan,

Meanwhile, KFH Group Chief Executive Officer, Khaled Yousef AlShamlan, said "Throughout 2024, we worked diligently to expand and develop the integrated financial services and products offered by Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Group, incorporating digitization, innovation, and sustainability into our business model and various operations. We ensured that the operating model aligned with the needs and aspirations of our retail and corporate customers across all markets where the Group operates. This alignment was tailored to the unique characteristics, capabilities, and opportunities available in each market.

Merger Success

KFH's successful completion of all merger steps with (formerly) Ahli United Bank - Kuwait (AUBK) was a highlight of 2024. KFH achieved the operational integration of the two banks with high efficiency and in record time, marking a new chapter of success, achievement, and leadership for the bank.

I am proud of the successful, smooth integration and seamless transition for shareholders, customers, and employees. This success benefits customers by leveraging our wide geographic reach in strategically important regional and global markets. In turn, shareholders benefit from enhanced profitability and improved financial performance.

It is noteworthy that the merger - coupled with the conversion of Ahli United Bank operations in Bahrain, the UK, and Egypt into Islamic banking - positions KFH to offer exceptional value to all stakeholders. The merger also leverages emerging opportunities to contribute to the growth of the Kuwaiti banking sector and expand the reach of the Islamic finance industry locally, regionally, and globally.

Despite the challenges, a large team from various sectors and departments successfully completed more than 250 phases, encompassing over 2000 tasks. Accounts and products for more than 280,000 (formerly) AUBK customers were migrated. Moreover, over 80 systems were unified across all sectors of the Bank, streamlining services and products.

Strategy

Our strategic plans during 2024 focused on expanding our role in the Islamic finance industry, emphasizing ambitious objectives that maximize our strengths. These efforts have been directed towards enhancing innovation and digital transformation, which further solidifies the position of KFH within the financial sector both domestically and globally. Through establishing strategic global partnerships and alliances, KFH has effectively financed mega developmental projects, contributing to the promotion of sustainable economic growth in alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aiming to extend Takaful insurance to 100 million farmers worldwide. In addition, KFH outlined a sustainability strategy and plans to establish a green financing platform that links Islamic finance with sustainable development projects.

During the year, KFH focused on crafting strategic goals that address current challenges. Measurable indicators were established to track progress towards achieving these goals. This approach yielded tangible results, with numerous indicators demonstrating positive outcomes at the Group level, including its geographical expansion. The strategic plan enabled KFH to achieve significant milestones within a record six months, ensuring the seamless integration of operations between KFH and AUBK. This success marked one of the shortest timelines accomplished in recent years for any of the five large-scale merger banking projects within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. Furthermore, these goals facilitated the conversion of subsidiaries in the United Kingdom and Egypt into operations compliant with Islamic Shari'a, opening doors to new opportunities for Islamic banking in the markets of Egypt and UK, which are considered promising avenues for Islamic financial activities.

Human Resources

Group Human Resources and Transformation Department played a significant role in the successful completion of the KFH-AUBK merger, the largest in Kuwaiti banking history. The department facilitated a smooth transition for (formerly) Ahli United Bank - Kuwait employees, integrating them into KFH's payroll system and unifying security systems across (formerly) AUBK`s locations.

The merger contributed to an increase in the national employment rate and the creation of quality job opportunities, particularly given that the merged entity is headquartered in Kuwait. Larger entities generally require a greater workforce, thus increasing the demand for national employment. The new workforce can also contribute to the Group's success in the markets where it operates. The acquisition enhanced KFH's capacity to recruit top talent and support the development of the national workforce. Indeed,KFH hired [149] employees, with women's representation at [%23] and a Kuwaitization rate of [98%]. These achievements were realized by the grace of Allah and the dedication of our human capital.

Globally, KFH received 13 HR international awards for 2024 from the renowned Brandon Hall Group, a leading organization in evaluating and assessing the performance of institutions worldwide. This marks the highest number of awards received by any organization locally and regionally.Furthermore, KFH maintained a strong commitment to significantly investing in the professional and educational growth of its human capital. In this regard, the Group Human Resources and Transformation department effectively delivered over 115,934 training hours to 3,997 employees.

As part of KFH's leadership development initiative, 26 managers participated in the Building Leadership Excellence program this year at the group level. Also, 19 employees were accepted under full sponsorship from KFH in the scholarship program, and 39 employees graduated from Forssah program designed to attract and develop high-achieving Kuwaiti graduates. The Bank also offered online digital transformation courses and continued converting the products-related training into e-learning courses.

To streamline processes and efficiently address employee needs, the HR Help Desk platform has been developed. This platform organizes the process of receiving and fulfilling employee requests, with over 2,500 requests already processed. As for employees' wellbeing, health insurance coverage benefits for employees and their families have been enhanced. Additionally, the KFH Happiness Team has organized over 18 sports, social, and recreational activities for employees. In recognition of its distinguished employees, KFH honored 180 individuals in H1-2024 through Qadha program, a globally recognized initiative by Brandon Hall.

In line with the Group Human Resources and Transformation focus on families of employees, KFH honored the outstanding high school students of KFH employees for the fourth consecutive year. Additionally, the Arabic language initiative - now in its second year - was organized for the children of employees, with approximately 140 participants.

As part of its social commitment, KFH launched its fourth edition of a tailored training program designed for students with special needs to develop their skills and enhance their expertise in collaboration with the Kuwait Society for the Handicapped. Workshops, seminars, and sessions were also organized at universities and colleges to offer career guidance and advice to students. Additionally, the Bank opened its smart branch in Abu Fatira, the ninth among KFH smart branch series, facilitating banking services and keeping pace with the latest technology.

KFH's keenness in nurturing employees' health, professional and family needs, promoting social responsibility and developing its services stems from its goal of becoming one of the world's top 100 banks within the next decade.

KFH also paid close attention to upskilling professionals by launching its Real Estate Appraisal Program, for individuals interested in the real estate sector. The program is a fruitful result of a collaboration with the Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST). This is the first program of its kind in Kuwait tailored to cover the latest technical and professional trends in the real estate industry.

Group Treasury

The Group Treasury successfully navigated numerous significant internal and external challenges in 2024, particularly following the acquisition of Ahli United Bank Group. On the global front, the forecasted shift in global and local interest rates, driven by the declining inflation rate, increased the focus on the decisions of the U.S. Federal Reserve and the Central Bank of Kuwait. To reduce uncertainty and enhance our assets portfolio which exceeds $125 billion, we placed a Group-wide prudent precautionary strategy to maintain a consistent solid performance. We increased our financial derivatives portfolio, in terms of size and products. Additionally, unifying the financial transactions and activities, making them a central component at the Group level, strengthened our presence in the market and reinforced the standing of KFH as a leader in the Islamic banking.

Following the acquisition, the Group Treasury was assigned to improve the Group's financing portfolio across all currencies. Leveraging KFH's expertise in the market, the Group projected to achieve synergies in the cost of financing at the Group level and consolidate AUB's entire portfolio within two years. This estimation was achieved in 8 months, exceeding the target by over 12%.

The Group Treasury continued its investments and market making activities in the Primary and Secondary Capital markets. While being one of the most active Sukuk market players, Group Treasury executed Sukuk transactions worth more than $13 billion during the year and increased its secondary market activities in the International Islamic Liquidity Management Corporation (the IILM)'s short term issuances. KFH Group Treasury maintained its top 3 position in the IILM Sukuk primary dealer list since the program's inception and continues to be the first ranked IILM secondary market dealer for the 4th consecutive year amongst several international and regional banks, thus affirming KFH's position as a core player in the short-term IILM Sukuk market.

The Group Treasury increased its network of capital market counterparties to further improve access to better pricing, diversification, competitive rates, and enhanced trade opportunities in the Sukuk market. The Group's retail client activity amounted to $267 million in 2024. This increase is due to the growing retail demand as well as the expanded retail base resulting from the acquisition of AUB. As part of the Bank's ESG initiative, the Group Treasury expanded its ESG Sukuk exposure to reach $653.2 million in 2024 compared to $249 million in 2023; an increase of 162.3%. These efforts reflect Group Treasury dedication to sustainable investment practices through its continued investments in ESG-compliant Sukuk.

Throughout the year, the Group Treasury achieved over $45 billion volume in FX transactions during the year and onboarded several new reputable corporate clients who has shown keen interest in FX Spot and Islamic derivatives hedging instruments and solutions. To further enhance the FX activities, the Group Treasury established a leading Market Maker for GCC currencies market with its global and local counterparts. KFH maintained its pioneering position in the Kuwaiti banking sector in all Shari'a-compliant treasury products and services.

Sukuk

The Group continued its leadership in issuing international Sukuk. KFH Capital, the investment arm of the Group, successfully led and arranged approximately $17.8 billion in Sukuk Issuance for sovereigns and corporates across various sectors and geographies in 2024. Furthermore, KFH Capital has emerged as a leader in Sukuk issuance, acting as a lead manager and bookrunner in the $1 billion Sukuk for Al Rajhi Bank. In addition, the Company successfully arranged Sukuk issuance for Dubai Islamic Bank worth $1 billion, and Sukuk issuance worth $800 million for First Abu Dhabi Bank (FAB). KFH Capital also played the role of a global coordinator for the issuance of $1 billionSukuk for KFH.

KFH Capital demonstrated its leadership in the Sukuk industry, acting as a joint lead manager and bookrunner for two Sukuk issuances worth $3.5 billion for the Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF). The Company also led and arranged the issuance of a $3 billion international Sukuk for the Saudi giant, Aramco. Additionally, Turkiye Wealth Fund (TWF), in its first international Islamic finance transaction, assigned KFH Capital to act as a joint bookrunner, allowing TWF to raise $750 million with competitive prices.

Investment Funds

In line with the Bank's ambitious growth plans, KFH Capital successfully marketed two Ijarah funds, two real estate funds, and a USD money market fund. These funds are designed to provide Private Banking clients with targeted returns. The objective of these investment funds is to achieve attractive rates of return by investing primarily in Ijarah-based assets. Meanwhile, the $55.5 million real estate fund seeks to generate stable income through investments in a diversified portfolio of residential land in major urban areas within the United States. In addition, the company is marketing a GBP 77 million UK real estate fund whose portfolio consists of two student housing properties in London.

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Hamad Al Marzouq, Khaled Al Shamlan, Shadi Zahran, Dr. Sayed Mohammed Al Tabtabaei, and Badr Al Wazzan

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These initiatives signify the continued expansion of KFH Capital's international investment portfolio and reflect the company's growing presence in the real estate markets of North America and the United Kingdom. This growth stems from KFH Capital's strong relationship with well-established real estate firms and asset managers, aiming to diversify the assets and provide long-term value for investors.

KFH Capital

The Asset Management Sector at KFH Capital remained committed to delivering innovative services and value-adding solutions to its clients, with a particular focus on enhancing trading services last year. This year, we are proud of the company's comprehensive approach in assets management, which emphasizes strategic portfolio diversification, robust risk management, and a balanced approach to both. Our expert team works closely with clients to understand their financial goals, ensuring that our investment strategies are aligned with their aspirations and plans. We will continue to strive to strengthen our relationships with clients and achieve sustainable growth by providing innovative investment solutions and products.

The company maintained its prestigious position during 2024, winning distinguished global awards, including: Hybrid Deal of the Year Award from the Islamic Finance News (IFN), Kuwait`s Best Investment Bank from Global Finance, Islamic Finance Deal of the Year Award for its role in the Republic of Turkiye's $2.5 billion Sukuk, and Best for Fixed Income in Kuwait from Euromoney.

In addition, 2024 marked a pivotal year for KFH Capital's digital transformation. The company's Asset Management System (AMS) went through a breakthrough, acting as a centralized platform for funds and assets management and contributing significantly to the automation of the current processes. The company has also launched two impactful initiatives. First, an integrated investment management portal that connects with internal systems, empowering employees to complete tasks that previously necessitated physical intervention and client presence. Second, a dedicated mobile application (KFH Wealth App), was meticulously designed to provide customers with a holistic view of their investments and streamline the subscription process for any public funds offered by KFH Capital.

Corporate Banking

KFH continued its role in providing necessary financing for companies and major projects at the local and regional levels. This included a syndicated financing deal involving several GCC banks to fund KD 232 million to the Saudi Electricity Company.

KFH also participated in a syndicated financing deal of KD 63 million to Ras Laffan Petrochemical Company for development and operation of the Ras Laffan Petrochemical Project in Qatar. It also participated in a syndicated financing deal providing KD 79 million to Macquarie Aviation Finance in Ireland, as well as a tranche of KD 31 million within the KD 184 million syndicated financing to the Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation.

KFH also played a pivotal role in the local economy by financing large scale complex projects across various sectors. These included the financing of real estate projects worth KD 313 million.

KFH strengthened local infrastructure development by financing KD 85 million for the telecommunication industry. KFH also provided a finance of KD 31 million to strengthen the logistics services sector. KFH also played a pioneering role in financing the first fiber optic cable manufacturing company in Kuwait (Taihan Factory).

KFH acts as a strategic partner in the development of small, medium and micro-enterprises. This is reflected in the solid growth achieved in its financing portfolio pertaining to small and medium enterprises. Further, KFH improved its customer base. Many small and medium enterprises began their success story through this financing facility.

On the operational and customer service level, KFH continued investing in supporting systems to enhance customer experience. These efforts resulted in expanding online corporate banking through (eCorp) to include trade finance applications, Tawarruq drawdowns in addition to multiple mobile e-Banking services (eCorp). KFH's achievements in the field of corporate service was appreciated and recognized by Euromoney Magazine, which designated the Bank as the Market Leader – Kuwait in the corporate banking category.

Group Operations

The year 2024 was a transformative year for KFH Group Operations teams. We have achieved a number of milestones at all levels. Our main areas of focus were ensuring operational excellence, boosting digital innovation and executing strategic initiatives that align with the Bank's general business goals.

One of 2024 highlights was the successful acquisition and merger of the (formerly) Ahli United Bank – Kuwait. The operations team played a pivotal role in executing a seamless transition for such a complex task on Operational Day 1(OD1). The team formed and ran the Central Command Center to supervise the operational aspects of the merger. Since Legal Day 1 and up to the first day of migrating customers and operations, all activities were managed with precision, leading to seamless integration and full continuation of business. Undoubtedly, the team's ability to manage such transition without business interruption reflects its level of expertise and excellent planning skills.



Prof. Dr. Sayed Mohammed Al-Tabtabaei



Shady Zahran

We also made progress in terms of facilitating customer service and internal operations. One of the major initiatives was introducing new features on the Public Authority for Industry (PAI)'s portal. The new features allowed customers to manage new transactions and renew contracts more easily. These initiatives are an indicative of our ongoing commitment to enhancing customer experience through digital solutions. Moreover, the new trade e-financing service made it easier to authenticate the trade financing transactions for customers, improving the service and internal efficiency. We also pioneered the shift to digital printing in our divisions. This further streamlined our core processes and enhanced our efforts to reduce manual work and turnaround times.

In terms of cards, we achieved significant progress in raising the efficiency of our operations and enhancing customer satisfaction. Another highlight in 2024 was the major shift in using the instant card printing devices (kiosks) located in a number of branches, minimizing customers' visits to the designated central locations. This shift led to an annual saving of KD 24 thousand. This promoted customer experience significantly by offering a quicker service and instant issuance of cards when necessary. Besides, this advancement in service allowed customers to manage their payments more effectively and reduced collection process turnaround.

Despite the extensive participation in the procurement activities during the transitional merger phase with the (formerly) AUBK, we succeeded in achieving remarkable progress by improving the procurement strategies and issuing more efficient inventory reports. The team also achieved substantial synergies in costs, a decrease of KD 53,247. This reflects our core focus on maximizing value and improving operational expenses in general.

On top of that, the Group Operations team played a critical role in pushing the operational excellence forward by focusing on automating and improving processes. In this regard, the team implemented various successful initiatives to previous manual tasks with the aim of accelerating them and cutting their costs. Major operations such as migrating the operations files and clearing the Ministry of Justice's emails are now being fully automated.

In general, 2024 was a year marked by advancement, innovation and achievements for the Group Operations. These accomplishments were characterized by strategic priorities such as process automation, digital transformation, cost management, operational capacity enhancement and customer experience improvement. Without doubt, these milestones motivate us for continued growth and success in the coming years. As we move forward, we will stay committed to operational excellence and offering value to our customers and stakeholders.

Information Technology

KFH continued its innovative streak, developing digital financial solutions tailored to the needs and aspirations of its customers. In this regard, the IT sector at KFH implemented numerous projects across banking and financing services, products, and practices along with enhancing the technological infrastructure, bolstering cybersecurity defenses, and promoting AI technology adoption.

KFH IT team successfully completed the merger activities with (formerly) Ahli United Bank, ensuring a smooth and successful transition with regards to systems operations and reports, including the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK)'s reports. The team successfully integrated the accounts and products of over 280,000 (formerly) AUBK customers and unified more than 80 systems as well as services and products across all bank departments.

With the efforts of the IT sector, KFH spearheaded the introduction of numerous digital services in Kuwait, notably:

• Instant payment service to another account (WAMD), this covers balance transfer, refund, managing username and payment request.

• The integration of the corporate system (eCorp) with the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI), facilitating KFH's system to register companies and adding new corporate users seamlessly. Currently, the integration with PACI ensures essential verification processes, guaranteeing that customer profiles remain consistently up to date.

• Enabling face ID authentication for eCorp users, enabling seamless and secure access to the eCorp mobile application.

• Conducting several system recovery simulation exercises on different systems according to the crisis recovery plans.

• Integrating T360 system with eCorp system, allowing customer to have a live market rate, minimizing physical communication with the account agent and ensuring quick transactions.

• The introduction of the final digital solutions of the CreditLense program in which Moody's company consolidated all the digital solutions, making them accessible on CreditLense platform tailored for KFH. The array of digital solutions includes virtual ESG form, new virtual form for the High-Net-Worth Individuals (HNWIs) category, new virtual form for projects category, updating customer's date-entry fields, updating external rating maps and Early Warning Signs (EWS) reports. The components of the solutions package are now active for use by the business and risk teams, except for ESG form for evaluating KFH customers, awaiting instructions from the CBK.

Banking services

On 8August 2024, KFH launched Al-Hassad Account as part of its ceaseless endeavors to offer distinguished products that cater to the aspirations of customers, reinforcing its standing locally and globally and highlighting its excellence in offering products and services according to the highest quality standards. Al-Hassad offers customers, wanting to save, weekly, monthly, and quarterly draws, with a total of more than 400 prizes throughout the year. Customers can open Al-Hassad account in the Kuwaiti Dinar currency through KFH branches or the available e-channels. A minimum balance of KD 100 or more is required to be eligible for the draw. The draw offers KD 1000 weekly, for 10 winners, KD 100,000 monthly for one winner in addition to KD 250,000 quarterly for one winner.

To promote customer loyalty, we extended the campaign launched for new customers, offering cash gifts up to KD 400 upon their salary transfer. We also launched the new Baitak Concierge service for AlTamayouz customers, in addition to launching summer and back to school campaigns and special offers.

Moreover, KFH successfully completed its expertise exchange initiative with KFH-Turkiye for the third consecutive year, leading to enhanced customer relationships and increased their satisfaction. 13 employees were deployed to Turkiye for two months during the summer to assist customers and visitors of KFH-Turkiye across 13 different branches spread in 7 cities. Meanwhile, KFH-Turkiye service center continued to support customers throughout the year, allowing them to conduct selected banking transactions with KFH-Turkiye without needing to travel. Over 12 thousand customers benefited from the services of the center.

To remain closer to our customers, we have opened new branches in Jabriya, Rumaithiya and Jaber Al-Ahmad, in addition to KFH's first digital branch in the Avenues, solidifying its position at the forefront of technology adoption and customer satisfaction.

Cards

During the completion of the merger process, we succeeded in issuing and acquiring cards without significant customer issues. We also launched a new rewards-structured campaign for Visa Signature and Infinite credit cards, which helped in accelerating card sales and spending. Additionally, various campaigns were executed throughout the year to drive customer engagement in collaboration with VISA/ Mastercard, as well as local and international popular brands to enhance their loyalty. The campaigns increased the cards active usage rate significantly compared to last year.

Moreover, KFH launched many Baitak Rewards campaigns such as new salary transfer bonus points, redeeming points for Winter Wonderland free tickets and wallet recharge etc. Also, new features were introduced such as buy points. The campaigns and new features have helped to increase Baitak Rewards app rating in app stores and improve customer experience.

In addition to the foregoing, we successfully executed two mega campaigns to increase spending and raise customers interaction. In collaboration with Mastercard, we launched "With KFH Mastercard You Choose the Car" campaign for Mastercard holders, granting eight winners the opportunity to win a car of their choice. As for Visa cardholders, we launched the "Your Train is Waiting' campaign, granting twelve winners the opportunity to embark on a luxurious seven-star trip aboard the Belmond Train.

In recognition of these efforts, Mastercard awarded KFH two awards: the Highest Penetration of Tokenized Transactions in Kuwait in 2024 award and the Highest Volume Growth in Mastercard World Portfolio award.

Tam Bank

Ttam is proud to be Kuwait's only fully Shari'a-compliant digital bank, offering a unique and modern banking experience tailored to the customers' needs. Tam goes beyond traditional banking by incorporating social-media-like features, helping customers feel more connected and engaged. Tam's rewards system allows customers to earn points both for transactions and engagement, creating a complete reward experience that keeps users coming back. The rewards program also offers a full 100% cashback benefit, making Tam a top choice for value-seeking customers.

Tam's success has been recognized by several industry-leading awards, highlighting its commitment to innovation and customer experience, the most prominent of which are Transformation Award-MEA, Best Visual Identity in Financial Services (Gold winner), Best New Brand Development (Silver winner), Best Naming Strategy (Silver Winner), Best Use of Technology in a Program (Incentive Awards 2024), and Euromoney's Best Digital Bank in Kuwait award.

Innovative products

To strengthen our extensive banking expertise and reaffirm our commitment to providing the best banking experience in the Kuwaiti market, and building on our banking service excellence, KFH sought to offer a wide range of banking products, services, and solutions tailored to meet the evolving needs of retail and corporate customers, ensuring maximum convenience and security.

KFH introduced an array of banking services through KFHOnline. These include the following:

Transfers via Western Union, e-mail update, Civil ID update through Kuwait Mobile ID application, enhancing cards and funds transfer services, customer push-notifications service, transfer service through AFAQ network, WAMD service for instant money transfer and KFH Pay service. These services are supported by the largest and most widespread ATM network in Kuwait, comprising over 500 machines.

Outstanding solutions

KFH rolled out numerous innovative banking services and products confirming the unprecedented success in its digital transformation strategy. KFH continued its excellence in delivering innovation in the financial and funding aspects tailored to meet the needs and aspirations of our customers. Retail Banking and IT sector launched a number of pioneering services for the first time in Kuwait. The prominent services include the first-of-its-kind instant credit and prepaid card printing service, expanding the services offered through D-POS device that enabled direct account opening at all KFH branches and through direct sales employees.



Khaled Al-Nusf, Mohammed Al-Fawzan, and Ahmed Al-Fares



Fahad Al-Ghanim, Ahmed Al-Omar, Moaz Al-Asimi and Salah Al-Marikhi

A spiritual bridge to the past

Kashmir's Sufi music lovers sticking with the audio cassette

SRINAGAR, India, March 16, (AP): Farooq Ahmad Shaksaaz presses a button on his 1970 Sharp cassette player, and with a hefty clack the machine whirrs to life. As the Kashmiri tailor stitches, the machine crackles for a moment before Ghulam Ahmad Sofi's otherworldly voice fills his shop with verses about divine love and the pain of separation from the beloved creator of the universe.

Shaksaaz, a tailor in the Kashmiri city of Srinagar, inherited his passion for local Sufi music from his grandfather along with a meticulously preserved collection of audio cassette tapes from the 1970s, which he often listens to as he works.

He's part of a small, dedicated community that believes cassette tapes are the best way to listen to and archive the Sufi music of Indian-controlled Kashmir, where music inspired by local and central Asian Muslim saints has long been a deep expression of spirituality and emotion. Many people turn to the music for spiritual guidance, or seeking an escape from the region's long periods of street battles, shutdowns and security clampdowns.

For decades, cassette players have carried the soul-stirring poetry of Sufi saints and the mystical melodies of Kashmiri instruments like the sarangi and santoor, and it's long been a local ritual for families to gather around the warm hum of a tape player. Even today, the region's traditional Sufi music gatherings are often recorded only on the disappearing audio format, which was widely used from the 1970s to the 1990s.

While the music is increasingly available on digital formats, many Kashmiris say that it's best heard on cassette tapes.

"There is something unique about this machine that for me plays recordings of spiritual guides," said Abdul Ahad, a carpet weaver. "It is a sacred ritual in itself to press the play button of a cassette player to listen to a song on spiritual moorings."



Photographs of Sufi saint Mohammad Rajab Shaksaaz, (left), and the late Sufi singer Ghulam Ahmad Sofi, (center), along with a collection of his cassettes with his songs, are displayed inside a tailor shop owned by Farooq Ahmad Shaksaaz on the outskirts of Srinagar, Indian-controlled Kashmir, Feb. 14, 2025. (AP)

Many of the most beloved albums were released by local record labels during the heyday of the audio cassette, but dedicated devotees of the genre are still bringing tape recorders to gatherings. Digital recorders are often unwelcome at these nightly music sessions, as Sufi music lovers say they blur together the distinct sounds of the different instruments.

"It is a different experience to listen to music on a tape recorder," said Abdul Hamid Khan. "Tapes are smooth and you can feel the sound of every instrument, you don't get that feel in these new players."

Still, as tapes wear out and more music moves to digital streaming platforms and smartphones, the tactile and deeply personal listening experience of cassettes is becoming harder to keep going.

Many families have been forced to part with their players due to mechanical failures, while others struggle to preserve their cherished cassette collections, some of which hold rare and irreplaceable recordings passed down through generations. Some collectors have turned to digitizing their old recordings to safeguard them for future generations.

Only a few shops in Srinagar, the region's main city, sell tape recorders or blank tapes, and the availability of spare parts and skilled repair technicians has drastically dwindled.

A handful of mechanics in the Kashmir Valley still cater to a dedicated population of Sufi music lovers, painstakingly restoring machines made by beloved Japanese brands like Sharp and Kenwood in the last century.

Shaksaaz, a lifelong Sufi music devotee, called it a "personal mission" to preserve the legacy of cassette tapes.

"It is a bridge to the past, a way to remain connected to our spiritual and cultural roots in this ever modernizing and digital world," he said.

Variety

WARSAW, Poland: Poland's prime minister has made a tongue-in-cheek offer to US actor and director **Jesse Eisenberg**, who recently gained Polish citizenship, to give him military training that would land him "the new James Bond role."

Poland's president earlier this month conferred the country's citizenship on Eisenberg, who has Polish heritage. On Saturday, Prime Minister Donald Tusk posted a video on social network X that showed him watching a clip of an appearance by Eisenberg on NBC's The Tonight Show.



Eisenberg

In that appearance, Eisenberg said, to laughter, that a day after he received citizenship he looked at the news "and the top story was 'Poland now requires all males to participate in military training.'"

In his video, Tusk said: "Dear Jesse, there's really nothing to be afraid of!" He noted that military training is voluntary.

"So come over to Poland! And we'll give you such a training that, the new James Bond role? It's yours!"

Tusk said on March 7 that his government was working on a plan to prepare large-scale military training for every adult male in response to the changing security situation in Europe. He said that there's a need for an army of 500,000 soldiers, more than double the current number, which would include reservists. (AP)

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ATLANTA: Maggie Baird, mother of chart-topping musicians Billie Eilish and Finneas, received the Superhero for Earth award Saturday from the Captain Planet Foundation at a gala event.

Baird is the founder of the nonprofit Support + Feed, which works on food insecurity and environmental issues. Her group has an anchor presence in 11 US cities and expanded partnerships in Europe, the United Kingdom and Australia.

Baird told The Associated Press that she has been working on these issues for years, though her message is now amplified with the additional voices of her Grammy-winning children.

"People need food. People need food every day and our climate is really in trouble and we've got to address our food systems," Baird said. "As we work on our larger goals, we have these beautiful daily wins where we get to support people in just their struggle to just survive." (AP)

❑ ❑ ❑

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.: An examination of the dog found dead along with actor Gene Hackman and his wife in their Santa Fe home shows dehydration and starvation were likely what led to the animal's demise.

A report obtained by The Associated Press from the state Department of Agriculture's veterinary lab details partial mummification and noted that while the severe decomposition could have obscured changes in the organs, there was no evidence of infectious disease, trauma or poisoning that could have resulted in death.

The report noted that the dog's stomach was mostly empty except for small amounts of hair and bile.

The kelpie mix named Zinna was one of the couple's three dogs. It was found dead in a crate in a bathroom closet near Betsy Arakawa's body, while two other dogs survived.

Authorities confirmed last week that Hackman died of heart disease with complications from Alzheimer's disease about a week after a rare, rodent-borne disease - hantavirus pulmonary syndrome - took the life of his wife. Hackman, in the advanced stages of Alzheimer's, apparently was unaware that his wife was dead. (AP)

Film



This image released by Paramount Pictures shows Jack Quaid in a scene from 'Novocaine.' (AP)

Film's hero feels no pain – but the audience does

Quaid leads gory action-comedy in 'Novocaine'

By Lindsey Bahr

Nathan Caine may not be able to feel pain, as the tagline for the new action-comedy "Novocaine" reads, but the same does not apply to audiences.

Although he doesn't scream when his leg is impaled with an arrow or when he sticks his hand in a vat of frying oil, you might. I certainly did. Out loud. In a theater. With other people. There may have been some phrases uttered entirely involuntarily too. Were other people reacting in the same way, I wonder? I couldn't hear them over my own groans. Hooray for the communal experience, I guess?

This is, in some ways, a film for people who thought John Wick wasn't stabby enough. It delights in the relentless mutilation of its hero, a regular guy (played by Jack Quaid) with a rare condition that has rendered him immune from feeling any sort of discomfort to bodily harm.

Unlike such high concept premises as "Crank," congenital insensitivity to pain analgesia (or CIPA) is actually real. But it's not exactly a superpower, Nate explains. He can still die; it just might be because he hasn't emptied his bladder in many hours.

Or because he's accidentally bitten his tongue off eating a sandwich. These are real concerns of his.

His entire existence is devoted to preventing these kinds of crises, mostly through tried-and-true baby proofing techniques like using tennis balls on sharp corners. Like Kelly Ripa before a show, he only consumes "non-chewing food."

Work is stable and dull as an assistant manager at a bank. And dating is out of the question; He spends most of his free time playing online video games. Quaid, even with his two movie star parents, is somehow believable as this cautious introvert, though everything is played with a light touch and a wink.

The movie, written by Lars Jacobson and directed by Dan Berk and Robert Olsen, even begins with the mournful R.E.M. anthem "Everybody Hurts."

Then Nate's life is changed one day when a pretty teller at the bank, Sherry (Amber Midthunder), asks him out to lunch, then to drinks and even spends the night. The next morning, things get even crazier: Sherry is taken hostage after a violent robbery at the bank.

These guys are capital B bad (led by fellow nepo spawn Ray Nicholson) killing both the bank manager the cops outside. So what does Nate do? He steals a cop car and attempts to save her himself.

"Don't do it," pleads an injured cop as Nate hesitates before apprehending the car. It's hard to argue with the cop: Why not just let the professionals handle it, understaffed though they may be over the Christmas holiday?

It would be a rather short and pointless movie if he did just leave it to the cops, but the impetus for this quest is a stretch to say the least. The conceit is missing some extra justification of why he felt like he was the only one who could do it, especially once he actually talks to said cops (Betty Gabriel and Matt Walsh).

Like many things in "Novocaine," it simply exists to open more avenues for his torture. This involves a fight in a restaurant kitchen, a visit to a tattoo parlor to get more information on one of the robbers, and a stop by a booby-trapped house. The script is self-aware enough to throw in a "Home Alone" reference, though not before you've made one in your head.

On the heels of some bad action comedies like "Love Hurts," "Novocaine" is pretty enjoyable. It might have been born in the same elevator pitch incubator (what if non-stop violence!), but it's executed with some style and understanding of comedic timing. In one clever sequence, Nate persuades his psychotic captor to torture him as slowly as possible, buying time until his friend gets there as he pretends to feel the pain. "Novocaine" also kind of overstays its welcome, stretching on too long with too many endings. Still, it's an easy, if not entirely painless, watch.

"Novocaine," a Paramount Pictures released in theaters Friday, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for "strong, bloody violence, language throughout, grisly images). Running time: 110 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four. (AP)

Cultural storytelling and cutting-edge tech

Chinese animation gains popularity among young audiences

BEIJING, March 16, (Xinhua): Once deemed overshadowed by Japanese anime and US animation, Chinese animation is now experiencing a surge in popularity, especially among younger audiences.

With improved storytelling, advanced visual effects, and a seamless integration of traditional Chinese culture, the industry is rapidly gaining recognition at home and abroad.

A recent survey conducted by China Youth Daily among 7,232 university students revealed that 40.64 percent actively follow popular domestic animation films and series, while 30.35 percent check for new releases on a weekly basis.

This growing interest is reflected in the success of major box office hits, including "Ne Zha 2," which grossed over 15.08 billion yuan (about 2.1 billion U.S. dollars) in box office revenue and stormed into the global box office top 5, cementing Chinese animation's place in the global animation industry.

Most respondents attribute this rise to the ability of Chinese animated works to blend traditional cultural elements with modern cinematic techniques, which 81.1 percent of surveyed students identified as a key factor in their interest. Nearly 45 percent believed that the technology used in Chinese animation is on par with international standards.

Recalling the release of "Chang An" and "Deep Sea," both widely acclaimed Chinese animated films, Huang Ziyi, a student at Wuhan University, felt as if the poems from her textbooks had come to life. "The adaptations based on history were well-executed and felt authentic, bringing the audience closer to the stories."

In recent years, driven by both technological advancements and a focus on Chinese cultural storytelling, the quality of Chinese animation has improved significantly. According to the survey, 67.78 percent of university students shared this view.

"For instance, the movie 'Chang An' used AI to recreate the texture of Tang Dynasty architecture, providing a visual representation of poetic imagination. Meanwhile, 'Ne Zha 2' reinterpreted a classic myth through the lens of modern family dynamics, proving that technology should ultimately serve cultural expression," said Chen Yanyu, a Jiangxi University of Technology student.

"I believe Chinese animation can carve out its own space in the industry," Huang remarked. She noted that while Japanese anime often focuses on youthful romance and American animation emphasizes individual heroism, China has a vast pool of untapped storytelling potential.

"Whether it's history or modern times, mythology or reality, Chinese culture offers an abundance of material. These elements naturally resonate with Chinese audiences worldwide, providing both creative inspiration and a ready market," Huang said.

Heavy-ion therapy could transform cancer care: study

Scientists develop AI tool to predict liver cancer recurrence

HEFEI, March 16, (Xinhua): A Chinese research team has developed an AI tool that predicts liver cancer recurrence risk with 82.2 percent accuracy, according to a study recently published in the journal Nature.

Liver cancer, the third leading cause of cancer-related deaths worldwide, has a postoperative recurrence rate as high as 70 percent. Accurately predicting recurrence was a critical challenge.

Researchers from the University of Science and Technology of China, led by Sun Cheng, have developed a scoring system named TIMES, which quantifies spatial distribution patterns of immune cells within the tumor microenvironment to assess relapse likelihood. The system is the world's first liver cancer recurrence prediction tool integrating spatial immune data.

The study demonstrated that immune cell spatial organization, not just their quantity, determines clinical outcomes. By combining spatial transcriptomics, proteomics, multispectral immunohistochemistry, and AI-driven spatial analysis, the team established a novel method for tumor microenvironment assessment. The system was trained using liver cancer tissue samples from 61 patients.

The researchers opened a free online version of TIMES, allowing global users to upload pathological staining images for instant risk evaluation.

The team aims to provide a revolutionary decision-making tool to help doctors optimize personalized treatments, especially in resource-limited settings, Sun said, adding that they are actively collaborating with industry partners to standardize clinical applications.

Meanwhile, a recent study has made significant progress in uncovering the microscopic mechanism behind heavy-ion cancer therapy, which is expected to optimize cancer treatment strategies and promote the development of new radiotherapy technologies.

The findings, led by researchers from the Institute of Modern Physics (IMP) of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and their collaborators, were recently published as a highlighted paper in the journal Physical Review X.

Heavy-ion therapy, a cutting-edge radiotherapy technique, uses heavy-ion beams to destroy cancer cells. Since the concept was proposed in 1946, over 50,000 patients worldwide have undergone heavy-ion treatment.

"Under the same radiation dose, heavy ions exhibit two to three times greater cancer-cell-killing efficiency than traditional X-ray radiotherapy," said Xu Shenyue, a researcher with the IMP. Heavy ions can more efficiently cause DNA double-strand breaks in tumor cells, resulting in stronger biological effects. But the specific microscopic mechanism underlying these effects had long been unclear, Xu said.

Researchers conducted experiments at the heavy-ion research facilities in Lanzhou, northwest China's Gansu Province, to address this question. For the first time, they observed an intermolecular energy and proton transfer cascade mechanism triggered by heavy-ion irradiation in biomolecular clusters.

"The observed mechanism sheds light on the molecular mechanisms of radiation damage, and may play an essential role in optimizing radiotherapy techniques in the future," said Ma Xinwen, another researcher with the IMP.

The study was conducted by scientists from the IMP, in collaboration with researchers from Russia's Irkutsk State University, Germany's Heidelberg University, the University of Science and Technology of China, Xi'an Jiaotong University and Lanzhou University.

Tech Tip

Therapy can address anxiety, stress, and more

Struggling with smartphone addiction? Try these tips and tricks to limit usage

By Kelvin Chan

If you've got a smartphone, you probably spend too much time on it - checking Instagram, watching silly TikTok videos, messaging on WhatsApp or doomscrolling on X.

It can be hard to curb excessive use of smartphones and social media, which are addictive by design. Reducing your screen time is often more than just a matter of willpower, especially for younger people whose brains and impulse control are still developing.

If you're a phone addict who wants to cut down on the hours a day spent looking at your device, here are some techniques you can try to free up more IRL time:

Delete apps

An easy first step is getting rid of any apps you've been wasting time on.

Over the past year, I've deleted Facebook, Instagram and Twitter from my phone because I wanted to use them less. Now and then I'll have to go the app store and reinstall one because I need to do something like post a photo I took on my phone. (Sometimes I'll transfer the photo to my laptop and then post it to the web from there, but usually, it's too much hassle.)

The danger with this approach is that if you do reinstall the app, you won't bother deleting it again.

Use built-in controls

Both iPhones and Android devices have onboard controls to help regulate screen time. They can also be used by parents to regulate children's phone usage.

Apple's Screen Time controls are found in the iPhone's settings menu. Users can set overall Downtime, which shuts off all phone activity during a set period. If you want a phone-free evening, then you could set it to kick in from, say, 7 p.m. until 7 a.m.

The controls also let users put a blanket restriction on certain categories of apps, such as social, games or entertainment or zero in on a specific app, by limiting the time that can be spent on it. Too distracted by Instagram? Then set it so that you can only use it for a daily total of 20 minutes.

The downside is that the limits aren't hard to get around. It's more of a nudge than a red line that you can't cross. If you try to open an app with a limit, you'll get a screen menu offering one more minute, a reminder after 15 minutes, or to completely ignore it.

Android users can use turn to their Digital Wellbeing settings, which include widgets to remind users how much screen time they've had. There's also the option to create separate work and personal profiles, so you can hide your social media apps and their notifications when you're at the office.

Don't be distracted

There are other little tricks to make your phone less distracting. I use the Focus mode on my iPhone to silence notifications. For example, If I'm in a meeting somewhere, I mute it until I leave that location. Android also has a Focus mode to pause distracting apps.

Change your phone display to grayscale from color so that it doesn't look so exciting. On iPhones, adjust the color filter in your settings. For Android, turn on Bedtime Mode, or tweak the color correction setting.

Android phones can also nag users not to look at their phones while walking, by activating the Heads Up feature in Digital Wellbeing.

Block those apps

If the built-in controls aren't enough, there are many third-party apps, like Jomo, Opal, Forest, Roots and LockMeOut that are designed to cut down screen time.

Many of these apps have both free and premium versions with more features, and strongly push you toward signing up for a subscription by minimizing the option to "skip for now" on the payment screen. I tested out a few on my iPhone for this story.

To try out Opal, I reinstalled Facebook so I could block it. Whenever I tapped the Facebook icon, Opal intervened to give me various inspirational messages, like "Gain Wisdom, Lose Facebook," and tallied how many times I tried to open it. To get around the block, I had to open Opal and wait through a six-second timeout before requesting up to 15 minutes to look at Facebook. There's an option to up the difficulty by increasing the delay before you can look again.

Jomo, which I used to restrict my phone's Reddit app, worked in a similar way: tap the Unlock button, which took me to the Jomo app, where I had to wait 20 seconds before I could tap the button to unlock Reddit for up to 10 minutes.

The OneSec app takes a different approach by reminding users to first take a pause. The installation, which involves setting up an automation on the iPhone's Shortcuts, can be confusing. When I eventually installed it for my Bluesky app, it gave me a prompt to run a shortcut that wiped my screen with a soothing purple-blue and reminded me to take a deep breath before letting me choose to open the app - but in practice it was too easy to just skip the prompt.

The Android-only LockMeOut can freeze you out of designated apps based on criteria like your location, how many times you've opened an app, or how long you've used it.

The obvious way to defeat these apps is simply to delete them, although some advise users to follow the proper uninstall procedure or else apps could remain blocked.

Use external hardware

Digital blockers might not be for everyone. Some startups, figuring that people might prefer a tangible barrier, offer hardware solutions that introduce physical friction between you and an app.

Unpluq is a yellow tag that you have to hold up to your phone in order to access blocked apps. Brick and Blok are two different products that work along the same lines - they're squarish pieces of plastic that you have to tap or scan with your phone to unlock an app.

The makers of these devices say that software solutions are too easy to bypass, but a physical object that you can put somewhere out of reach or leave behind if you're going somewhere is a more effective way to get rid of distractions.

What about stashing the phone away entirely? There are various phone lockboxes and cases available, some of them designed so parents can lock up their teenagers' phones when they're supposed to be sleeping. Yondr, which makes portable phone locking pouches used at concerts or in schools, also sells a home phone box.

See a therapist

Perhaps there are deeper reasons for your smartphone compulsion. Maybe it's a symptom of underlying problems like anxiety, stress, loneliness, depression or low self-esteem. If you think that's the case, it could be worth exploring therapy that is becoming more widely available.

One London hospital treats "technology addiction" with a plan that includes dealing with "discomfort in face-to-face time" with other people, and exploring your relationship with technology. (AP)



This image made from video by NASA shows astronauts greeting each other after a SpaceX capsule docked with the International Space Station, Sunday, March 16, 2025. Top row from left: Nick Hague, Alexander Gorbunov, Suni Williams, Alexei Ovchinin and Ivan Vagner. Bottom row from left: Butch Wilmore, Takuya Onishi, Anne McClain, Kirill Peskov, Nichole Ayers and Don Pettit. (AP)

Astronauts prepare to return

NASA's stuck astronauts welcome their replacements to the station

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla., March 16, (AP): Just over a day after blasting off, a SpaceX crew capsule arrived at the International Space Station on Sunday, delivering the replacements for NASA's two stuck astronauts.

The four newcomers - representing the US, Japan and Russia - will spend the next few days learning the station's ins and outs from Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams.

Then the two will strap into their own SpaceX capsule later this week, one that has been up there since last year, to close out an unexpected extended mission that began last June.

Wilmore and Williams expected to be gone just a week when they launched on Boeing's first astronaut flight. They hit the nine-month mark earlier this month.

The Boeing Starliner capsule encountered so many problems that NASA insisted it come back empty, leaving its test pilots behind to wait for a SpaceX lift. Wilmore swung open the space station's hatch and then rang the ship's bell as the new arrivals floated in one by one and were greeted with hugs and handshakes. "It was a wonderful day. Great to see our friends arrive," Williams told Mission Control.

Wilmore's and Williams' ride arrived back in late September with a downsized crew of two and two empty seats reserved for the leg back. But more delays resulted when their replacements' brand new capsule needed extensive battery repairs. An older capsule took its place, pushing up their return by a couple weeks to mid-March.

Galactic evolution study

Astronomers unveil 3D map of Milky Way interstellar dust

BEIJING, March 16, (Xinhua): Chinese and foreign astronomers have unveiled the first three-dimensional (3D) map of the properties of interstellar dust in the Milky Way. This breakthrough will provide critical support for precise astronomical observation, and for studies in the areas of astrochemistry and galactic evolution.

The research was led by Zhang Xiangyu, a Chinese doctoral student at Germany's Max Planck Institute for Astronomy, in collaboration with his advisor, Dr. Gregory Green. It was based on data from China's Large Sky Area Multi-Object Fiber Spectroscopic Telescope (LAMOST) and the European Space Agency's Gaia space observatory, and its findings have been published as the cover story of the latest issue of the Science academic journal.

The interstellar medium -- the matter and radiation in the space between stars -- is crucial for the Milky Way's material cycle and star formation. Most elements heavier than hydrogen and helium in the interstellar medium exist as solid dust particles. Dust absorbs and scatters starlight, making distant stars appear dimmer and redder in a phenomenon known as "extinction." Most astronomical observations require extinction correction, Zhang said.

Early detection

Andrews, AZ push for cancer checks

WILMINGTON, Del., March 16, (Agencies): AstraZeneca and Erin Andrews have teamed up as part of a national public health campaign to educate and empower people to Get Body Checked Against Cancer. Erin is a passionate entrepreneur, national sports broadcaster, podcast host, hockey fan and wife — and cancer survivor.

The Get Body Checked Against Cancer campaign encourages people to take control of their health by talking with their doctors about their cancer risk factors and whether cancer screenings are right for them. The campaign supports Hockey Fights Cancer, a joint initiative of the National Hockey League (NHL) and the National Hockey League Players' Association (NHLPA) powered by the V Foundation for Cancer Research.

A passionate advocate for cancer screenings, Andrews has inspired people nationwide to overcome the fear of diagnosis by sharing her own experience and motivating others to take control of their health. She joins a powerhouse roster of NHL players, coaches, staff and fans committed to encouraging the hockey community to talk to their doctors about their own risk factors, when they should get screened and supporting their loved ones to do the same.

Mohit Manrao, Senior Vice President, Head of US Oncology, AstraZeneca, said: "At AstraZeneca, we recognize that no individual or organization can fight cancer alone – it takes a team to achieve our ambition of one day eliminating cancer as a cause of death. Erin is an inspiration, and her unwavering dedication to raising awareness about routine screenings and empowering others to take charge of their health makes her the perfect teammate."

As part of this partnership, AstraZeneca and Andrews are releasing Screen – a limited-edition t-shirt under the umbrella of her popular WEAR by EA brand. The exclusive item will feature the Screen logo and is designed to inspire people to get body checked against cancer. Screen apparel will be available on NHLshop.com and in the NHL Flagship Store in NYC while supplies last. Proceeds from the sales of Screen will go to the V Foundation for Cancer Research's Hockey Fights Cancer Fund to support game-changing cancer research projects.

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HPV: The Chinese capital plans to administer free human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines to seventh-grade girls starting in September this year, joining several provincial-level regions and cities that have announced similar initiatives since 2021.

The vaccination campaign will utilize the domestically produced 2-valent vaccine with an aim to effectively reduce the risk of cervical cancer among women, according to a plan jointly released by the Beijing Center for Disease Prevention and Control and other relevant authorities, on Thursday.

By the end of March, girls currently in grade six are expected to be assessed for willingness to receive the vaccine, and by Oct. 31, the first dose of the vaccine will be administered to the target group, per the plan.

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John's beats Creighton for 1st Big East Tournament crown in 25 years

Alabama State wins first SWAC tournament title since 2011

COLLEGE PARK, Ga., March 16, (AP): CJ Hines scored 20 points and No. 5 seed Alabama State pulled away late to beat No. 2 seed Jackson State 60-56 on Saturday night in the Southwestern Athletic Conference Tournament championship and clinched its first NCAA Tournament berth since 2011.

Dorian McMillian's jumper gave Jackson State its last lead at 52-51 with 1:48 remaining. Micah Octave made a layup, TJ Madlock added a jumper, and Shawn Fulcher made a pair of free throws and Alabama State led 58-53 with 13 seconds left. McMillian hit another 3 before Micah Simpson sealed it at the free-throw line.

Hines was 8-of-15 shooting from the floor and 4 of 6 from long range. Madlock grabbed 12 rebounds and had three assists, three steals and two blocks to go with seven points for Alabama State (19-15).

Shannon Grant scored 20 points, grabbed nine rebounds and blocked three shots to lead Jackson State (16-18). McMillian finished with nine points, seven rebounds and two blocks.

Regular-season champs. A tournament title. Pride in the program fully restored.



UC San Diego celebrates after an NCAA college basketball game against UC Irvine in the championship of the Big West Conference tournament in Henderson, Nev. (AP)

The pied piper of college basketball rebuilds, Rick Pitino has St. John's back atop the Big East.

And this time, the nets were coming down.

RJ Luis Jr. scored all but two of his 29 points after halftime and No. 6 St. John's made 14 straight shots from the field in the second half to beat Creighton 82-66 on Saturday night for its first Big East Tournament title in 25 years.

"Wow, this is incredible just to come from last year to this year and to see the transformation," Luis said. "Coach P is the mastermind behind all of this. I mean, it's truly special."

Zuby Ejiofor added 20 points and Kadary Richmond had 12 points and 12 rebounds for the top-seeded Red Storm (30-4), who reached 30 wins for the third time in program history before a roaring hometown crowd at sold-out Madison Square Garden.

Hayden Gray knocked down six of his seven 3-point attempts and UC San Diego pulled away late to beat UC Irvine, 75-61 to earn its first Big West Conference Tournament championship and its first NCAA Tournament berth.

The Tritons moved up from Division II to join the conference in 2020 and won the regular season championship with 18 wins in 20 conference games. They have now won 15 straight and take a 30-4 record into the Big Dance in their first full year of Division I eligibility.

Kaden Metheny scored 21 points and Taelon Peter added 20, and top-seeded Liberty pulled away early in the second half to beat No. 2 seed Jacksonville State 79-67 for its first Conference USA Tournament title.

Liberty, in its second season as a member of CUSA, clinched its sixth NCAA Tournament berth in program history and its first since the Flames won the ASUN Conference Tournament in 2021.

Jacksonville State trailed 39-35 one minute into the second half before the Flames pulled away on a 26-10 run for its largest lead, 65-45, with 7:24 remaining. Metheny scored eight points and Peter scored seven during the stretch. Peter's dunk capped the Flames scoring with about a minute left.

Wizards stun Nuggets in Denver



Washington Wizards guard Jaylen Nowell, left, pursues the ball with Denver Nuggets forward Michael Porter Jr., right, in the second half of an NBA basketball game in Denver. (AP)

Kerr becomes Warriors' regular-season victory leader

DENVER, March 16, (AP): Jordan Poole hit a 3-pointer with 2.1 seconds left to give the Washington Wizards a 126-123 victory over the Denver Nuggets on Saturday night.

Poole finished with 19 points. Alex Sarr led the Wizards with a career-high 34 points, six rebounds and five assists.

Nikola Jokic led the Nuggets with 40 points and 13 rebounds.

Poole's jumper with 44.1 seconds left gave the Wizards a 120-119 lead. After Russell Westbrook's layup for Denver, Kyshawn George made a 3-pointer to again put the Wizards in front.

Warriors 97, Knicks 94

In San Francisco, Stephen Curry had 28 points, seven rebounds and five assists two days after becoming the first player in NBA history with 4,000 3-pointers and a day after turning 37, leading the Golden State Warriors past the New York Knicks.

Steve Kerr became the Warriors' regular-season victory leader, passing late Hall of Famer Al Attles with his 558th victory in his 11th season. He was recognized on the scoreboard after the final buzzer followed by congratulations from some of his coaching colleagues.

Thunder 113, Pistons 107

In Detroit, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 48 points and the Oklahoma City Thunder beat the Detroit Pistons.

Gilgeous-Alexander shot 17 of 26 from the floor, including 4 of 6 from 3-point range, and added six assists and three steals for Oklahoma City, which won for the ninth time in 10 games.



Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry (30) shoots during the second half of an NBA basketball game against the New York Knicks, Saturday, March 15, 2025, in San Francisco. (AP)

Cason Wallace added 20 points for Thunder, and Isaiah Hartenstein had 12 points and 10 rebounds.

Detroit's Cade Cunningham matched a season low with 11 points on 5-of-18 shooting before being ejected for arguing calls late in the third quarter.

Celtics 115 , Nets 113

In New York, Kristaps Porzingis scored 24 points in his return from an eight-game absence with an illness, getting 14 in the fourth quarter to help the Boston Celtics hold off the Brooklyn Nets.

Payton Pritchard added 22 points and Jayson Tatum had 20 points, eight rebounds and eight assists for the Celtics, who seemed headed for an easy night after a 25-7 run to open the second quarter gave them a 21-point lead. The Nets cut it to two in the fourth quarter before Porzingis made some clutch plays in his first game since Feb. 26.

Grizzlies 125, Heat 91

In Memphis, Jaren Jackson Jr. had 31 points, Desmond Bane added 22 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists as the Memphis Grizzlies led from start to finish in a victory over the Miami Heat.

Jackson shot 13 of 18 from the field as the Grizzlies won for the fifth time in their last six games. Zach Edey and Brandon Clarke added 12 each for Memphis.

Kel'el Ware led the Heat with 19 points and 11 rebounds, while Bam Adebayo added 18 points. Kyle Anderson and Jaime Jaquez Jr. had 13 points each as the Heat lost their seventh straight.

Bucks 126, Pacers 119

In Milwaukee, Giannis Antetokounmpo had 34 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists before fouling out and the Milwaukee Bucks defeated the Indiana Pacers.

After trailing 105-84 with 11 minutes left, Indiana made a frantic comeback and cut Milwaukee's lead to 122-119 on Andrew Nembhard's 3-pointer with 12.5 seconds remaining. The Bucks had led 117-106 when Antetokounmpo fouled out with 2:46 left.

Bucks (38-28) took a one-game lead over Indiana in the race for fourth place in the Eastern Conference standings and home-court advantage in the first round of the playoffs.

Spurs 119, Pelicans 115

San Antonio, Devin Vassell scored 22 points and the San Antonio Spurs held on to beat the New Orleans Pelicans 119-115 on Saturday night.

Keldon Johnson and Harrison Barnes each had 19 points for San Antonio and Stephon Castle added 17.

C.J. McCollum had 26 points, nine assists and seven rebounds for the Pelicans, who were without Zion Williamson. The team said the star power forward sat out because of personal reasons.

McCollum shot 5 for 12 on 3-pointers, including 4 for 5 while scoring 14 points in the second quarter. Trey Murphy III scored 20 points.

Liu pockets bronze

Canada bags 3 golds on Day 2 of ISU World Short Track Championships

BEIJING, March 16, (Xinhua): Canadian skaters delivered a dominant performance at the ISU World Short Track Championships, securing three out of four gold medals on offer.

William Dandjinou of Canada, who clinched the ISU Crystal Globe this season, finished first in the men's 1,500m with a time of 2 minutes and 15.064 seconds, followed by Stijn Desmet of Belgium in second place, while China's Liu Shaoang took bronze.

"This is a great day overall for me and also for our team. I think we got the job done, and we are excited for what's to come," said the 23-year-old Dandjinou after the race. "We really appreciated the moment with good energy. It is our fortune to be so good as a team, and it helps to build momentum throughout the season." Liu celebrated his 27th birthday ahead of the World Championships on Thursday. After winning the bronze, he said, "I had clean and smooth skating today. I performed well overall and can accumulate experience from each competition." However, Team China noted that Liu's right leg was cut by an ice blade during the men's 5,000m relay semifinals later on Saturday, and his condition is under further evaluation.

In the men's 500m, Canada's Steven Dubois claimed gold in 40.008 seconds, while Denis Nikisha of Kazakhstan and Jens van 't Wout of the Netherlands took silver and bronze, respectively.

The Canadian quartet of Courtney Sarault, Rikki Doak, Florence Brunelle, and Kim Boutin triumphed in the women's 3,000m relay with a time of 4 minutes and 9.254 seconds, finishing ahead of runner-up Poland, while the Netherlands secured third place.

Belgium's Hanne Desmet clocked 1 minute and 28.641 seconds to top the podium in the women's 1,000m, followed by silver medalist Sarault and bronze winner Xandra Velzeboer of the Netherlands.

The three-day World Short Track Championships will conclude on Sunday, with the final five titles to be decided.



William Dandjinou of Canada competes during the men's 1500m final A at the ISU World Short Track Speed Skating Championships 2025 in Beijing, China. (Xinhua)

Shi reaches badminton final

LONDON, March 16, (Xinhua): China's Shi Yuqi is one victory away from his second Badminton All England title as the top seed defeated teammate Li Shifeng 21-9, 20-22 and 21-19.

Shi, 29, suffered a bitter loss to Li in both the All England and Asian Games finals in 2023. Since then, he has outplayed the 25-year-old in all of their three meetings.

Shi took the opening game easily, but met strong challenges from the sixth seed in the following two games.

"The last two games were balanced. We both played at a high level and were extremely tired in the end," said Shi, who reached the final for the fourth time in Birmingham.

The 2018 champion will face Lee Chia-hao from Chinese Taipei in the final as Lee edged out French hopeful Alex Lanier 19-21, 21-14, 21-17.

The women's final will be played between top seed An Se-young of South Korea and China's second seed Wang Zhiyi.

In the semifinals, Paris Olympic champion An beat Japanese third seed Akane Yamaguchi 21-12, 21-17, while Wang saw off fourth-seeded teammate Han Yue 21-10, 21-19.

Wang said she looked forward to playing against An, who has clinched three titles in a row this year.

"I know she is unbeaten since the beginning of this year, but I feel I'm also in good form," said 24-year-old Wang.

Meanwhile, Guo Xinwa Chen Fanghui and Feng Yanzhe Wei Yaxin have secured the mixed doubles gold medal for China. Nami Matsuyama Chiharu Shida and their Japanese teammates Yuki Fukushima Mayu Matsumoto will lock horns in the women's doubles final. Indonesian pair Leo Rolly Carnando Bagas Maulana will fight for the men's doubles title against Seo Seungjae Kim Won-ho of South Korea.



He Jiting/Ren Xiangyu (front) compete during the men's doubles semifinal between He Jiting/Ren Xiangyu of China and Kim Won Ho/Seo Seung Jae of South Korea at the All England Open Badminton Championships 2025 in Birmingham, Britain. (Xinhua)

Monaco beats Angers to move into third place in Ligue 1

PARIS, March 16, (AP): Prolific striker Mika Biereth scored again as Monaco won 2-0 at Angers to move into third place in Ligue 1.

Biereth controlled Caio Henrique's pass on his chest and guided the ball home in the 77th minute for his 11th league goal in 11 games since joining from Austrian side Sturm Graz in January.

Midfielder Maghnes Akliouche struck with a late penalty for Monaco, which overtook fourth-placed Nice on goal difference with eight rounds left after this weekend's games.

The Riviera rivals meet in the next round on March 29, with the top four earning a place in the Champions League next season.

After being eliminated from the last 16 of the Champions League in midweek, fifth-placed Lille lost 1-0 at Nantes despite having an extra player for the closing stages. VThe defeat could prove costly in the race for a Champions League spot, as Lille would drop to sixth if Lyon beats struggling Le Havre at home on Sunday.

Nantes hit the crossbar three times before having defender Jean-Charles Castelletto sent off in the 74th for fouling forward Chuba Akpom. Persistence paid off when Mostafa Mohamed headed in Moses Simon's cross in the 83rd.

The win saw Antoine Kombouaré's Nantes side move clear of the relegation zone and into 13th place.

Wesley Saïd scored the only goal of the game as Lens beat Rennes 1-0 to consolidate its hold on eighth place. Saïd started his career at Rennes, coming through the reserves and playing four seasons with the first team before leaving in 2017.

France wins Six Nations with record flourish

England condemns Wales to record loss

PARIS, March 16, (AP): France saw off a resilient Scotland 35-16 and clinched the Six Nations title with a tournament-try record.

Coach Fabien Galthié's side needed only a victory at chilly Stade de France to ensure a first title since 2022. The bonus-point win helped Les Tricolores finish one point above England, which hammered Wales 68-14 with 10 tries.

France scored four tries to set a tournament record with 30, one more than England in 2001.

The final score was far more comfortable than the first half.

French indiscipline led to two sin-bins - one of which could have been a red for a lunging headbutt - and almost cost a try on the buzzer.

Scotland started the second half only 16-13 down and with an extra player for a few minutes, but managed just one penalty from flyhalf Finn Russell in the entire period.

The match turned following careless play from Russell, who tried a no-look pass from the back of his hand, resulting in a counterattack try in the 43rd minute.

Galloping flyhalf Romain Ntamack sent Louis Bielle-Biarrey into the left corner for his eighth try of the tournament. He equalled the record of England's Cyril Lowe in 1914 and Scotland's Ian Smith in 1925 when the tournament was the Five Nations.

England consigned ailing rival Wales to a 17th straight loss with a record 10-try 68-14 drubbing to finish the Six Nations.

England ended up second, its highest finish since it was the 2020 champion. The English were a point behind France - which beat Scotland 35-16 in the finale in Paris - and a point ahead of defending two-time champion Ireland.

England exited the tournament on a high with four wins from five - including over France - and its status as a leading rugby power restored after some tough narrow losses for coach Steve Borthwick last year.

Wales' biggest ever loss in Cardiff began with a third-minute score for Itoje, one of five tries in the first half for the visitors as Tom Roebuck, Tommy Freeman, replacement Chandler Cunningham-South and Will Stuart also went over.

Freeman scored a try in each game in this Six Nations, a first for an English player.

Tries by Alex Mitchell, replacements Henry Pollock (twice) and Joe Heyes, and then Cunningham-South again completed the rout and a record margin of victory by England over Wales. Pollock's tries came on his debut.



The French team players including Antoine Dupont, center, celebrate with the trophy after the Six Nations rugby union match between France and Scotland at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, outside Paris. (AP)

Ireland overcame Italy by a scrappy 22-17 at the Stadio Olimpico and finished the last day of the Six Nations where it started, in third place.

Ireland had slim hopes of an historic third consecutive title, and the unconvincing bonus-point win in Rome was overtaken as expected within hours by England, which finished second, and France, the new champion.

A week after Ireland was hammered by France in Dublin and lost control of its destiny, it briefly regained the tournament lead with a fourth win in five matches. But the Triple Crown holder suffered a French hangover trying to force too much against an Italy determined to show its best side after conceding 18 tries to France and England.

The Irish scored four tries to two and enjoyed 30-plus minutes with a man advantage but a clunky, deflated performance gave Italy hope of an upset.

Italy frequently found holes in the Irish defense but three yellow cards - one of them turning into a 20-minute red - undid all of its impressive work.

The highlight of Ireland's display was hooker Dan Sheehan's first test hat trick of tries, extending his men's Six Nations record for a forward to 13. Fullback Hugo Keenan could have had a hat trick, too, but one was ruled out and another wasn't given.

Monza draws against fellow struggler Parma

Pulisic scores again, AC Milan earns another comeback victory in Serie A

MILAN, March 16, (AP): Christian Pulisic scored again on Saturday to help AC Milan earn another comeback victory in Serie A with a 2-1 home win over Como.

Tijjani Reijnders set up Pulisic's second-half equalizer before netting the winner himself in the 75th minute.

It was Pulisic's third goal in two matches, taking the United States international to nine goals in Serie A and 15 in all competitions this campaign - equaling his tally from his first season at Milan.

Milan moved up to seventh, five points below fourth-placed Juventus. Como remained seven points above the relegation zone.

Pulisic's two goals last weekend helped Milan fight back to win 3-2 at Lecce and end a three-match losing streak.

It again went behind, when Lucas Da Cunha drilled into the bottom left corner from the edge of the area in the 33rd minute.

The Milan fans jeered loudly at halftime and it almost got worse for them four minutes after the restart but Da Cunha's second goal of the night was ruled out for offside.



Como's Lucas Da Cunha, right, is challenged by AC Milan's Santiago Gimenez during the Italian Serie A soccer match between AC Milan and Como at the San Siro Stadium in Milan, Italy. (AP)

Instead it was Milan which leveled four minute later. Rafael Leão and Álex Jiménez combined on the left before picking out Reijnders, who delicately dinked the ball over the top for Pulisic to sweep into the far bottom corner from a tight angle.

Reijnders also clipped the top of the crossbar before scoring the winner in the 75th minute, slotting home after being sent through on goal by a backheeled pass by Tammy Abraham.

Como substitute Dele Alli's return to soccer lasted just nine minutes as he was shown a straight red card late on for a foul on Ruben Loftus-Cheek, shortly after coming off the bench for his first appearance in two years.

Monza captain Armando Izzo scored his first goal in more than two years but it wasn't enough to secure a win as the last-place team drew 1-1 against fellow struggler Parma.

Izzo netted in the 60th minute but Parma substitute Ange-Yoan Bonny leveled six minutes from time with a solo effort.

Monza remained 10 points from safety while 17th-placed Parma inched three points clear of the relegation zone.

Hellas Verona moved seven points above the drop after a free kick by Ondrej Duda handed it a 1-0 win at Udinese, ending the host's six-match unbeaten streak.

Empoli was three points below Parma after losing 1-0 at Torino.

Leipzig moves back into top five

Union frustrates Bayern with late equalizer



Dortmund's Julian Brandt, left, and Leipzig's Ridle Baku fight for the ball during the German Bundesliga soccer match between RB Leipzig and Borussia Dortmund at the Red Bull Arena, in Leipzig, Germany. (AP)

BERLIN, March 16, (Xinhua): Benedict Hollerbach scored a late equalizer as Union Berlin battled to a 1-1 draw with Bayern Munich, loosening Bayern's grip on the Bundesliga's top position.

Bayern dominated possession and the tempo of the game from the outset, while struggling to find a way past a well-positioned Union side.

The visitor's first real chance came in the 18th minute when Michael Olise's clever pass found Serge Gnabry, whose shot from a tight angle was saved by goalkeeper Frederik Ronnow.

Union held firmly in the first half, with Ronnow making another fine save to keep out Harry Kane's long-range effort just before the break.

Bayern upped the tempo after the restart and came close to breaking the deadlock in the 50th minute when Jamal Musiala cut through the defense but was again denied by Ronnow.

Bayern's efforts finally paid off in the 75th minute. Josip Stanisic cut the ball back perfectly for Leroy Sane, who kept his cool to finish from close range.

But just when it looked as if Bayern would take all three points, Union struck back against the run of play. Seven minutes from time, Josip Juranovic whipped in a cross that Bayern failed to clear, and Hollerbach showed great composure to slot the ball past goalkeeper Manuel Neuer and level the score at 1-1.

With the draw, Bayern now leads second-placed Bayer Leverkusen, who has a game in hand, by nine points.

"Normally we win games like this. We kept the threat away from our goal for a long time. When you don't get three points, you're disappointed with the result, it's as simple as that. But we'll carry on next week and attack again," said Bayern coach Vincent Kompany.

Elsewhere, Leipzig moved back into the top five after a 2-0 win over Borussia Dortmund. Freiburg drew 2-2 with third-placed Mainz, while Wolfsburg lost 1-0 at Augsburg.

St. Pauli beat Hoffenheim 1-0.

Real Salt Lake edges Dynamo

Sporting rallies for draw with Minnesota to end losing run

KANSAS CITY, Kan., March 16, (AP): Dejan Joveljic scored in the 80th minute and Sporting Kansas City stormed back from a three-goal deficit to earn a 3-3 draw with Minnesota United on Saturday night, snapping a 10-match losing streak across all competitions dating to last season.

Joveljic, who was acquired from the defending-champion Los Angeles Galaxy in the offseason, scored unassisted to help the club end the second longest skid in league history. Only FC Cincinnati's 14-match slide spanning the 2021-22 seasons was longer.

Minnesota United (2-1-1) got a goal from Hassani Dotson in the 15th minute and another one from Tani Oluwaseyi in the 31st to take a 2-0 lead into halftime. Defender Morris Duggan had his first career assist - in his sixth appearance and fourth start - on Dotson's first goal this season. Bongokuhle Hlongwane notched his first assist this season on Oluwaseyi's first goal of the campaign after scoring eight last season.

Oluwaseyi finished off his first career brace in the first minute of the second half for a 3-0 advantage. Joaquín Pereyra earned his first assist of the season and the second of his career in 10 starts and 11 appearances over two seasons.

Sporting KC got on the scoreboard in the 68th minute when Dániel Sallói took a pass from defender Tim Leibold and scored. It was the first goal this season for Sallói and the first assist for Leibold.

Diogo Gonçalves scored in the first minute, Diego Luna added a goal during first-half stoppage time and Real Salt Lake held on for a 2-1 victory over the Houston Dynamo .

Gonçalves scored 43 seconds into the match to give Real Salt Lake (2-2-0) a quick lead. It was his first goal of the season and his third in nine career starts and 13 appearances. Emeka Eneli notched his first assist this season on the score. He collected the first three assists of his career last year.

The Dynamo (0-3-1) pulled even when Ezequiel Ponce took a pass from Jack McGlynn and found the net in the 16th minute. It was Ponce's first goal this season after scoring five times in 10 appearances as a rookie last season. McGlynn's assist was his first in his first season with Houston. McGlynn had seven goals and 13 assists over four prior seasons with the Philadelphia Union.

Eduard Löwen opened the scoring with a goal in the 15th minute and St. Louis City beat the Seattle Sounders 1-0.

Löwen scored on a set piece, blasting a free kick from 25 yards that slipped inside the post to give St. Louis (2-0-2) a 1-0 lead.

Ben Lundt made his first start of the season for St. Louis, finished with a save and recorded his first career shutout in MLS.

The 29-year-old Lundt replaced Roman Bürki, who broke a bone in his hand during training on Friday and will see a specialist in the coming days. Bürki has not conceded a goal this season in three starts and had eight saves Sunday in a 3-0 win over the defending MLS Cup champion LA Galaxy.

Calvin Harris and Cole Bassett each scored a goal, Zack Steffen had a career-high 12 saves and the Colorado Rapids beat the San Jose Earthquakes 2-1.

Harris and Omir Fernández subbed on in the 65th minute, replacing Kévin Cabral and Wayne Frederick, respectively, and made an almost immediate impact.

Onni Valakari scored San Diego FC's first-ever goal at Snapdragon Stadium in a 1-1 tie with the Columbus Crew.

Valakari flicked a header off a corner kick played in by Luca de la Torre into the net for his first career MLS goal to make it 1-1 in the 69th minute.

Columbus (2-0-2) played a man down - and San Diego had six of its seven shots on goal - after Malte Amundsen was shown a straight red card in the 61st minute.

Jonathan Sirois finished with seven saves for CF Montreal and Kim Joon Hong stopped three shots for D.C. United in a scoreless draw at Audi Field .



CF Montréal midfielder Victor Loturi, front, and D.C. United midfielder Matti Peltola (4) battle for the ball during the second half of an MLS soccer match in Washington. (AP)





McLaren driver Lando Norris of Britain celebrates on the podium after winning the Australian Formula One Grand Prix at Albert Park, in Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

Sports

Blues lose to China in friendly

Kuwait wraps up Dubai training ahead of qualifier against Iraq



A Kuwaiti challenges for the ball with an opponent during Kuwait, China friendly.

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

DUBAI, March 16: Kuwait concluded its training camp in Dubai, UAE, on Monday evening and is set to depart for Basra, Iraq, tomorrow in preparation for their crucial clash against the Iraqi national team in the seventh round of Group B of the 2026 World Cup qualifiers on Thursday.

During their Dubai camp, which began on March 9, the Blues played a single friendly match, suffering a 1-3 defeat to China on Saturday at Al Maktoum Stadium. Eid Al-Rashidi scored Kuwait's only goal. The team is now focused on continuing their qualifying campaign, with another key match against Oman in the eighth round on March 25 at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

Kuwait currently sits in fifth place in Group B with four points. South Korea leads the standings with 14 points, followed by Iraq with 11 points. Jordan holds third place with nine points, while Oman is fourth with six points. Palestine remains at the bottom with three points.

Argentine coach Juan Pizzi utilized the friendly against China to test as many players as possible, ensuring squad readiness for the crucial encounter against Iraq. The starting lineup featured:

Abdulrahman Al-Fadhli, Sami Al-Sanea, Fahad Al-Hajri, Salman Burmiah, Hamad Al-Harbi, Sultan Al-Enezi, Moaz Al-Osaima, Fawaz Ayed, Mohammed Daham, Fawaz Al-Mubailish, Yousef Nasser

Pizzi opted not to start Al-Qadsiya and Al-Arabi players due to their recent participation in Gulf Champions League and AFC Champions League matches. He later introduced them as substitutes in the second half.

The Kuwait Football Association has announced that applications for fans wishing to attend the match against Iraq will be accepted for two days only, starting Sunday evening. Registration will be open from 9:00 am to 11:00 pm at the association's headquarters in Adailiya. Applicants must be over 18 and provide a copy of their passport. The association will facilitate travel arrangements, including transportation from the headquarters (departing at 2:00 PM on Thursday, March 20), match tickets, entry visas, and breakfast. The return flight will take place immediately after the match.

Kuwait adds silver, bronze to medal tally at World Winter Games in Turin

Bouresli expresses pride in athletes' remarkable achievements

TURIN, Italy, March 16, (KUNA): Kuwait's Special Olympics delegation wrapped up its participation in the World Winter Games (Turin 2025) with a total of four medals, after securing one silver and one bronze.

Abdullah Al-Ali clinched silver, while Hajar Al-Rashidi secured bronze in the 100-meter ice skating final, adding to Kuwait's overall haul of one gold, one silver, and two bronze medals.

Rehab Bouresli, National Director of Special Olympics Kuwait, expressed her pride in the athletes' remarkable achievements during their first-ever participation in the event. She dedicated the success to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince, and the Kuwaiti people.

Bouresli praised the athletes for their dedication and resilience, highlighting their commendable representation of Kuwaiti sports for individuals with intellectual disabilities. She acknowledged the challenges faced by the delegation but emphasized that their perseverance earned widespread recognition.

She also extended her gratitude to the participating delegation, the athletes' families, and the Kuwaiti diplomatic mission for their unwavering support in ensuring the team's success. Bouresli reaffirmed Special Olympics Kuwait's commitment to empowering individuals with intellectual disabilities, fostering their skills, and showcasing their talents on global platforms.



KUNA photo

The Kuwaiti delegation from the Special Olympics Kuwait at the closing ceremony of the Winter Games.

Al-Kharafi qualifies for World Cup finals

KUWAIT CITY, March 16: Kuwait Equestrian Club rider Ali Jassim Al-Kharafi secured first place in the Grand Prix round of the third round of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation League, riding at a height of 140 cm with a time of 34.87 seconds in the qualifying round. He was followed by riders Abdullah Al-Awadhi, Abdullah Al-Roudhan, Yara Al-Hunaidi, Hussein Al-Kharafi, Rakan Al-Hasawi, Dalia Al-Zahem, Khaled Al-Khubaizi, and Fawaz Al-Subaie. The champions were crowned by Ghazi Faisal Al-Jariwi, Secretary General of the Equestrian Federation.

Al-Kharafi also clinched victory in the ninth round at a height of 130 cm, while Musab Al-Otaibi triumphed in the eighth round at 120 cm.

On the first day of the tournament, international rider Ali Al-Kharafi won the main round at a height of 135-140 cm.

Ghazi Al-Jariwi praised the intense competition among riders from various clubs in all categories, ranging from beginners to intermediate and advanced levels.

It is worth noting that Ali Al-Kharafi is the defending champion of the local league and recently qualified for the 2025 World Cup Finals in Switzerland, marking a significant achievement for both Al-Kharafi and Kuwait's equestrian sports.



Al-Jariwi crowns the Grand Prix champions.

Miserable Ferrari debut for Hamilton

Norris wins wet and wild Australian GP

MELBOURNE, Australia, March 16, (AP): McLaren's Lando Norris has won a chaotic rain-affected Australian Grand Prix, his first at Albert Park, with the Brit just managing to stay ahead of Red Bull's Max Verstappen following a third safety car late in Sunday's race.

Lewis Hamilton had a miserable Ferrari debut. The seven-time champion finished 10th and was annoyed by constant radio messages from his pit team.

Norris started the season-opening race, Melbourne's first wet race since 2010, from pole position. But, while he initially came under increasing pressure from Piastri, who set a series of fastest laps until his papaya team told him to hold position, the Australian spun at the penultimate corner on lap 44 as the rain intensified and dropped down the order. A late race fightback helped Piastri recover to take ninth place - including passing Hamilton on the final lap - and two championship points.

Verstappen finished 0.895 of a second behind Norris after starting from third on the grid, and took advantage of Piastri's misfortune and the final safety car and tire stops. Mercedes' George Russell closed out the top-three.

"I knew I had a good pace, but I made one mistake in turn six and he got me in the DRS and the DRS around here is probably like a second or something so that allowed it to keep staying within that second," said Norris, who scored McLaren's 12th win in Australia to steal the outright record from Ferrari.



Cars head in to turn two at the start of the Australian Formula One Grand Prix at Albert Park, in Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

"I know what I'm capable of, I know what I can do, but obviously it's just round one, so we need to go and do it again next weekend and then continue from there. A long season ahead, we've just got to keep our head down and keep pushing."

Williams endured a mix bag, with Alex Albon securing his best result since Abu Dhabi 2020, and new recruit Carlos Sainz - who won here last year driving for Ferrari - out at the final turn on the opening lap.

Mercedes was thrilled to get two cars in the top five, with Russell onto the podium, his first since winning in Las Vegas last year. Rookie Andrea Kimi Antonelli, who replaced Hamilton at the silver squad, showed his class with a superb fightback drive from 16th on the grid, following his Q1 exit, to finish fifth.

Aston Martin's Lance Stroll also made the best of the chaotic conditions to move up from 13th to sixth, ahead of Sauber's Nico Hülkenberg, bringing home eight points in what has been a difficult weekend for the green team with its car uncompetitive in dry running.

Ferrari is the most successful constructor at the Australian Grand Prix, with 11 wins since its first in 1987, but it will leave Melbourne disappointed with just five points to show after Charles Leclerc finished eighth and Hamilton 10th.

The Scuderia was seen as a potential championship challenger ahead of the season start and has plenty of work to do ahead of the Chinese Grand Prix next week.

The Melbourne race had a thrilling start with Racing Bull's Isack Hadjar out on the formation lap, and Alpine's Jack Doohan joined Sainz in crashing out on the opening lap.

There were just 14 finishers, after Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso hit the turn eight barriers on lap 34, while Red Bull's Liam Lawson and Sauber's Gabriel Bortoleto went into the barriers and out of the race 10 laps from home in the treacherously wet conditions.

Kuwait Club aiming to retain title

Road to the Kuwait Handball Super Cup final begins

KUWAIT CITY, March 16, (KUNA): The 2024/25 Kuwait Handball Super Cup will begin tomorrow, Monday, featuring a four-team format for the semi-finals. The tournament will take place at the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Complex in the Sabah Al-Salem suburb, with Kuwait Club facing Salmiya and Al-Arabi playing Kazma.

Salmiya's coach, Yaqoub Al-Mousawi, spoke to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on Sunday, emphasizing that the main objective is to compete in a high-level tournament to prepare fully for the Premier League. While Salmiya aims to give its best and seize the opportunity to win the Kuwait Super Cup, Al-Mousawi hopes the tournament will attract a large crowd. He acknowledged the impact of the league's suspension and the delayed return of international players on the team's preparations but assured that they are focusing on utilizing available players until the tournament kicks off.

Walid Salmeen also shared his thoughts with KUNA, noting that the Kuwait Super Cup is an important competition, offering both moral and physical value for the teams and players, especially with the upcoming sports season in mind. Salmeen highlighted Kuwait Club as the likely favorite to win the title due to their roster of high-caliber international players and their strong mental readiness. However, he cautioned that surprises are possible, given the determination of teams like Kazma, Salmiya, and Al-Arabi.

Kuwait Club is aiming to retain its title, having won last season's Super Cup by defeating Al-Qadsia in the final. This victory would mark fourth title in the competition, further solidifying its dominance as the most decorated team. Kazma, on the other hand, is hoping to claim its second Super Cup title, following their 2022 victory when they triumphed over Kuwait Club in the final.



In this file photo, Kuwait Club players celebrate after winning the Super Cup.

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