



Kuwait Amir offers condolences to Moroccan King over Fez tragedy

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, sent a cable of condolences to Moroccan King Mohammed VI, expressing deep sympathy over the collapse of two buildings in the city of Fez, which resulted in multiple fatalities and

injuries. He wished mercy for the victims and a swift recovery for the injured.
His Highness the Crown Prince, Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, also conveyed his condolences to King Mohammed VI, praying for comfort for

the families of the victims and a speedy recovery for the injured.
His Highness the Prime Minister, Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, likewise sent a cable of condolences to the Moroccan monarch, expressing heartfelt sympathy over the tragic incident in Fez.



Drivers proceed with caution on slick highways after bouts of thundery rain reduced visibility in parts of Kuwait on Thursday.

Education, Public Works lead weather response

Rain, fog to sweep Kuwait weekend

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11, (Agencies): Kuwait is set to experience mild daytime weather and cooler nights this weekend, accompanied by scattered light rain and the possibility of fog forming in some areas, according to forecasts from the Meteorological Department.
The acting Director of the Department, Dhirar Al-Ali, told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the country will be affected by a surface low-pressure system bringing a cold, humid air mass over the region. This will lead to increased low and medium cloud formations, with some cumulonimbus clouds producing scattered light rainfall. Fog is expected to develop in the evening and early morning

hours, reducing horizontal visibility. Winds will vary between southeasterly and northeasterly directions, remaining generally light to moderate but occasionally active.
Weather Forecast for the Weekend
Friday's daytime weather is expected to be mild and partly cloudy, with light to moderate variable-to-northeasterly winds ranging from 8 to 30 km/h and a chance of scattered light rain. Fog may form in the evening, with daytime highs between 21°C and 23°C. The sea will be slight to moderate, between one and four feet.

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Drugs, citizenship fraud top 'threats'

Sheikh Fahad leads nationwide crackdown

By Munif Naif and Jaber Al-Hamoud
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: The acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah has identified drugs and citizenship fraud as the gravest threats facing Kuwait.

Speaking at a seminar on the new drug law held recently at the Kuwait Institute for Judicial Studies, Sheikh Fahad highlighted the gravity of the situation.
He praised the timely leadership of His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, noting that his arrival came at a crucial moment for Kuwait.
Sheikh Fahad emphasized that while drugs pose a serious threat to the nation, "the more serious issue is the forgery of citizenship", stressing that Kuwait's wealth, resources, and people make it a target for those seeking citizenship and employment.
Sheikh Fahad expressed gratitude to the Attorney General, the Public Prosecution, and all Ministry of Interior officers for their cooperation.
He highlighted that His Highness the Amir's support was vital to his work as Interior Minister.
In his speech, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef highlighted both the transformative power of treatment and the dangers of drugs.
He elaborated a serious drug-related case in which a Ministry of Interior captain murdered his sister in January 2022. The crime, uncovered solely by the ministry, had gone unreported by the family. He expressed sorrow for the victim's four-year-old son and condemned the family's inaction, attributing the tragedy to drugs.
Sheikh Fahad recounted another case where a citizen chose treatment over prison, successfully recovered, and became a hospital supervisor, later reuniting with her estranged father.
He emphasized the strict enforcement of the law in Kuwait, noting that past violations are no longer tolerated. He quoted His Highness the Amir, saying, "If you find anything on one of my sons, don't let him go," and highlighted that death sentences are being executed swiftly, sometimes within three months.

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Photo by Mohammad Morsi
Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah speaks at a seminar on the new drug law held recently at the Kuwait Institute for Judicial Studies.

New drug law packs a punch

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11, (KUNA): Anti-drugs officials on Thursday warned that the new relevant decree-into law to fight the scourge stipulates stiff penalties against dealing and taking narcotics and psychotropic substances.
The officials were speaking during a seminar about the new law, due to be effective later this month; organized by Kuwait Institute for Judicial and Legal Studies. It was sponsored and attended by the Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah.
The participants, in the gathering on the decree-into-law 159/2025 including experts and law enforcement officials, called on addicts to seek therapy and spare themselves legal penalties and noted that reporting about cases is a national-social responsibility that may save lives and protect families.
Counselor Mohammad Al-Duajj, a counselor at the Court of Appeal and President of the Law Drafting Committee, said in his speech at the seminar that the new law "is a legislative revolution in the war on narcotics and psychotropic substances stipulating utter and stiff penalties."
Senior psychiatric and Director of the Addiction Treatment Center, Dr. Hussein Al-Shatti, said the new law ensures rights of the doctors and patients. Addiction, he has added, afflicts not only the patient by the entire society.
Dr. Al-Shatti has explained that the treatment center admits addicts who voluntarily seek to get treatment without penalty, while the rehabilitation center receives addicts detained by the competent authorities.

France offers expertise in smart cities French Trade Minister in Kuwait to boost ties

By Fares Ghaleb
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: French Minister of Foreign Trade Nicolas Forissier says his visit to Kuwait comes at a crucial moment amid growing momentum in bilateral relations.
He noted that both countries are now working according to a clear vision outlined by their leaders during the visit of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad, to Paris on July 14.
Minister Forissier expressed his pleasure at meeting with a number of Kuwaiti officials, and thanked the political leadership for their warm welcome.
He emphasized that his discussions in Kuwait were in-depth and constructive, adding that he was accompanied by a large delegation of representatives from French companies.
During a press conference held at the end of his visit, Minister Forissier explained that he met with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah. They both emphasized the special relationship between Kuwait and France, as well as France's commitment to building a future economic partnership that includes strategic projects agreed upon at the highest level.
He also met with Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ali Al-Sabah and Director General of the Public Authority for Civil Aviation (PACA) Sheikh Hamoud Al-



PM Diwan photo
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah receives French Minister of Foreign Trade Nicolas Forissier.

Mubarak Al-Sabah, during which French companies presented their expertise in aviation and airport infrastructure at a time when Kuwait is seeking to strengthen its regional position through major projects such as Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port and the new passenger and cargo airport.
He held discussions with the Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel regarding ways in which French companies can contribute to supporting national projects in line with the New Kuwait 2035 vision.

Minister Forissier also held discussions with Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Abdullatif Al-Meshari on potential cooperation in transportation and logistics, modern mobility, smart and connected infrastructure, and sustainable urban development.
A significant part of the meetings was focused on the energy sector and environmental transition. France has global expertise in waste-to-energy

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News watch

BEIRUT: Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri on Thursday affirmed that the Lebanese Army has executed 90 percent of the cease-fire accord south of the Litani River.
The mission will be entirely finalized by the year-end, said Berri in a statement released after he met with members of the Journalists Syndicate.
Lebanon, since November 2024, when the accord of ceasing hostilities was reached, has "executed the schedule and the army deployed with more than 9,300 officers and soldiers backed by UN Interim Forces in Lebanon, latest report of which verified this," Berri added. (KUNA)



2 Kuwait's energy transition debate shows the real bottleneck – and it isn't Parliament

Sarthak visit boosts Kuwait-India defense ties: Ambassador Tripathi

By Fares Ghaleb
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: The Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Paramita Tripathi says the visit of the Indian Coast Guard vessel Sarthak to Kuwait marks a significant milestone in the growing defense cooperation between the two countries.
She emphasized that Indian-Kuwaiti relations are "built on deep historical ties and are poised to expand into broader strategic partnerships in multiple sectors."
During a reception aboard the ship, attended by several ambassadors, members of the diplomatic corps, the acting Undersecretary of the Amir Diwan Mazen Al-Essa,

and representatives from the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, Coast Guard, and Kuwaiti maritime authorities, Ambassador Tripathi stated that the event "is not merely a celebratory evening, but an occasion to reflect the depth of the friendship between India and Kuwait, built on many years of trust, cooperation, and shared aspirations."
She reiterated that the presence of the Sarthak in Kuwait marks a "significant milestone" in ongoing defense cooperation, especially since both countries share the responsibility of ensuring the security of Arabian Gulf waters and protecting vital maritime shipping lanes.

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KUNA photo
Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Paramita Tripathi in a group photo during a reception aboard the Indian Coast Guard vessel Sarthak.

Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port contract signing set

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11, (KUNA): The executive contract to complete the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port will be signed this month with the Chinese government company affiliated with the China's Ministry of Transportation, said Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan on Thursday.
A statement by the Ministry revealed Dr. Al-Mashaan's announcement came during her chairing of the 38th meeting of ministerial committee tasked with following up on Kuwait's major projects, including deals signed between Kuwait and other nations.
The ministry noted that the meeting touched on other projects, including the national power grid and the development of renewable and green energy infrastructures.
It added that the meeting covered cooperation in recycling, housing projects, sanitation, free trade, and counter desertification.
The statement cited Minister Al-Mashaan as saying that contracts for major projects in the country will be signed soon after proper procedures were taken by gov-

ernment and auditing entities.
For his part, Assistant Foreign Minister for Asia Affairs and Secretary of the Ministerial Committee, Ambassador Sameeh Hayat, affirmed that the upcoming period will witness the implementation of various deals signed by Kuwait and other countries, including China.
He stressed that Kuwait will continue to speed up the previous of development efforts as major international companies continue to express interest in the country's plans.
Attending the ministerial meeting were Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Abullatif Al-Meshari, Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and Minister of Finance and Acting Minister of Economic Affairs and Investment, Dr. Sabeeh Al-Mukhaizeem, Chief of the Administration of Fatwa and Legislations, Salah Al-Majed, Ambassador Hayat, and other officials from the ministries of Public Works, Defense, and Foreign Affairs.

Prayer Timings			
Fajr	05:07	Asr	14:32
Sunrise ..	06:32	Maghrib ..	16:50
Zohr	11:41	Isha	18:12

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:		Weather	
By Day: Mild with light variable wind to light to moderate northeasterly wind, with speeds of 06-30 km/h with a chance for fog forming over some areas.		Abdaly	24
By Night: Rather cold with light		Bubyan	22
		Jahra	25
		Failaka Island	22
		Salmiyah	24
		Ahmadi	21
		Nuwaisib	24
		Wafra	16
Station	Max Exp	Min Rec	
Kuwait City	24	15	
Kuwait Airport	22	16	

Indian goes to gallows for ‘bludgeoning’ wife

Crime does not pay...killer tracked years on

By Jaber Al-Hamoud/Munif Naif and Marwa Al-Bahrawi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: The Criminal Court, presided over by Judge Nayef Al-Dahoum, sentenced an Indian expatriate to death for the premeditated murder of his wife at their home in the Salmi area, following marital disputes.

According to the case file, the defendant attacked his wife with a hammer, inflicting multiple blows to her head that caused her immediate death.

He was subsequently apprehended, investigated by the relevant authorities, and referred to the Criminal Court, which issued its verdict after establishing his guilt.

Sister killed, buried: The Ministry of Interior, under the supervision of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef, has solved the mystery surrounding the disappearance of a Kuwaiti woman in 2022.

Intensive investigations led to the arrest of her brother, an officer in the Ministry of Interior, on charges of murdering her and burying her body in a desert area.

According to a security source, the investigation revealed the brother's involvement in the crime, which

stemmed from drug-related disputes. He allegedly killed her and concealed her body in the desert approximately two years ago.

Butcher shop shut: The Public Authority for Food and Nutrition (PAFN), in coordination with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, shut down a butcher shop in Shuwaikh Industrial for mislabeling the origin of frozen sheep carcasses, with legal action taken against the establishment.

PAFN reported that the shop was cutting New Zealand meat and repackaging it in boxes labeled as Australian products in an attempt to mislead consumers. Inspections uncovered multiple serious violations, including the sale of meat unfit for human consumption due to altered natural properties.

Other Voices

Kuwait's energy transition debate shows the real bottleneck – and it isn't Parliament

By Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri

At a recent roundtable hosted by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (KFAS) and Rice University's Baker Institute, the most revealing moment came not from a keynote speech but from a pointed question posed by energy scholar Dr. Jim Krane asking whether the absence of Kuwait's parliament has made it easier to advance stalled oil and energy projects.

The answer from Baptiste Knipillaire, Senior Consultant at Hartree Partners and co author of Kuwait's Energy Transition White Paper, cut through the political framing entirely. The real obstacle, he argued, is Kuwait's fragmented institutional landscape. More than eighty government bodies operate across energy and environmental files, yet without a unified framework or a coherent execution structure. Coordination, he suggested, is the missing architecture.

Knipillaire also drew attention to two structural

constraints that hinder progress. Kuwait faces an acute shortage of land designated for large energy projects, and foreign investors encounter restrictive terms when entering the market. While other countries provide long term land access and predictable regulatory environments, Kuwait does not offer equivalent clarity. This uncertainty complicates green financing, reduces investor appetite, and slows the rollout of renewable infrastructure.

He stressed that global investors seek more than returns. They look for institutional guarantees that make projects bankable. Without legal and regulatory reforms, technical plans will not close the gap between national ambitions and actual implementation.

His remarks resonated because they reflected direct experience in Kuwait's operating environment rather than distant observation. He has worked closely within the country, giving weight to his diagnosis.

The exchange underscored what Kuwait's public discourse has been missing. Honest and evidence based dialogue remains essential. KFAS deserves recognition for providing a space where clarity is treated as a tool for understanding rather than a trigger for controversy.



Al-Anjeri

Other Voices

God Bless You ...

By Ahmad alsarraf

Sneezing is a natural defensive reflex that helps the body expel irritants from the nose or throat, such as dust, viruses, or other foreign substances, triggered by stimulation of the brain's sneezing center.

Sneezes can vary in type. Silent sneezing is often observed in shy individuals who wish to avoid drawing attention. Loud or forceful sneezes typically occur when the mouth or nose is not properly covered. Frequent sneezing may indicate an allergic reaction or an underlying illness.

It is always best to practice "professional sneezing", which is sneezing in a socially considerate manner while following health guidelines.

According to medical advice, it is best to sneeze naturally, away from others, while covering the mouth and nose with a tissue or using the arm instead of the hand to prevent the spread of infection. Avoid forcefully suppressing a sneeze, as this can increase pressure in the airways and head.

Suppressing sneezes can cause injuries such as a torn throat, damage to the eardrum or sinuses, and in some cases, more serious conditions.

Allergic sneezing, which is frequent, usually occurs without fever, is often accompanied by coughing, and worsens with exposure to specific triggers. It can happen daily or seasonally, especially during the spring.

The most concerning types of sneezing are those linked to viruses and allergies. Identifying the cause, treating it, avoiding triggers, using antihistamines, and staying well-hydrated are all important.

Christina Wright wrote in The New York Times on May 22, 2024 that sneezing occurs when air is suddenly and forcefully expelled through the nose and mouth. It can be triggered by irritants in the nose or throat, environmental allergies, or viral infections of the upper respiratory tract.

Some individuals experience photic sneezing, a reflex triggered by bright light, such as sunlight. This condition is officially known as solar erythema syndrome. Regardless of the cause, the polite response in many cultures is typically "God bless you" or "May God have mercy on you."

In contrast, we rarely acknowledge the body's other functions. In the West, not responding to a sneeze is generally considered impolite. Saying "God bless you" has become so customary that failing to do so can create an awkward silence, which may explain why a single sneeze often draws multiple blessings from those nearby. This raises the question - Why is "God bless you" the standard response to a sneeze?

Throughout history, before the advent of modern medicine in the late 19th century, life expectancy was very low. In 1900, the global average life expectancy for newborns was only 32 years. By 2021, it had more than doubled to 71 years, during which time death came from many different causes.

Infectious diseases, including the plague and influenza, could wipe out entire communities in just months. As a result, any visible sign of illness, such as sneezing, was a cause for concern, making it customary to pray for mercy for the person who sneezed.



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Amir congratulates Burkina Faso Pres. on Republic Day

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Thursday a congratulatory cable to President of Burkina Faso Captain Ibrahim Traore on the occasion of his country's Republic Day.

In the cable, His Highness the Amir wished President Traore good health, the friendly people of Burkina Faso all progress and prosperity.

Kuwait Crown Prince congratulates Burkina Faso on Republic Day.

Crown Prince

His Highness the Crown Prince

Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent on Thursday a congratulatory cable to the President of Burkina Faso Captain Ibrahim Traore on the occasion of his country's Republic Day.

His Highness the Crown Prince wished President Traore good health, and progress and prosperity its people.

Prime Minister

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent on Thursday a congratulatory cable to the President of Burkina Faso Captain Ibrahim Traore on the occasion of his country's Republic Day.

Kuwait donates \$1 million to UN emergency response fund

NEW YORK, Dec 11, (KUNA): The State of Kuwait announced the renewal of its voluntary contribution to the UN Central Emergency Response Fund for 2026 with USD 1 million.

This announcement was made by Deputy Permanent Representative of the State of Kuwait to the United Nations, Minister Plenipotentiary Faisal Al-Enezi, at a high-level CERF pledging event for 2026 at the UN headquarters.

Speaking at the ceremony, Al-Enezi said that the rapid spread of armed conflicts, along with the increasing impact of climate-related disasters, has led to a dramatic rise in humanitarian needs worldwide as more than 300 million people around the world - last year alone - required some form of humanitarian assistance.

He emphasized the importance of the CERF as a leading and effective model for rapid, life-saving responses.

Al-Enezi expressed his sincere appreciation

and gratitude to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher for their continued leadership and unwavering commitment to supporting the international humanitarian system and enhancing the UN's capacity to deliver rapid and effective crisis responses.

The Kuwaiti diplomat stressed that achieving the goal of raising USD 1 billion annually for the Fund has become an urgent and crucial necessity, particularly given the slowdown in funding for humanitarian appeals and the ever-increasing global needs.

He affirmed that Kuwait would continue to support international humanitarian efforts and would remain a reliable and effective partner in alleviating human suffering and upholding the values of human solidarity.

The CERF is the UN's global emergency response fund to deliver funding quickly to humanitarian responders and bring greater balance to emergency assistance. It aims to ensure a rapid response to sudden-onset emergencies or to rapidly deteriorating conditions in an existing emergency and to support humanitarian response activities within an underfunded emergency.



Al-Enezi



KUNA photo
Chairman of Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

KNG chief, HH Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf meet

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11, (KUNA): The Chairman of Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Thursday His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at his office at the KNG headquarters.

KD16 mln installation cost

MEW refers tender to Audit Bureau

By Mohammad Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: In confirmation of the report titled "KD 16.7 Million for Installing Photovoltaic Panels in Electricity Substations" published by the daily on November 24, the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy referred a tender for supplying and installing fiber optic equipment at existing main power plants to the State Audit Bureau recently for review and auditing.

The total cost of the tender is KD

16.713 million.

According to informed sources, if the bureau approves the contract without recording any observations, it will be signed, and work will commence according to the stipulated terms and conditions.

The sources affirmed that the ministry aims to utilize the latest communication technologies in managing its facilities, including the main power stations responsible for transmitting electricity from generation plants to secondary transformers within the regions.

Event highlights soft image significance

Kuwait partakes in 12th Winter Int'l Exhibition in Washington

WASHINGTON, Dec 11, (KUNA): The Embassy of the State of Kuwait in the United States and Kuwait's Ministry of Information are participating in the 12th annual 'winter international' exhibition currently held in Washington.

Commenting on the move, Kuwait's Ambassador to US Sheikh Al-Zain Al-Sabah affirmed to KUNA the significance of partaking in such cultural activities due to their pivotal role in highlighting Kuwait's civilized image.

The ambassador extolled the efforts exerted by the

Kuwaiti Ministry of Information in showing this honorable image in international arenas.

Kuwait's participation is part of Arab Embassies' presence in the event, under the umbrella of the Arab League's mission in Washington, to highlight the cultural and civilized depth of the Arab countries and create cultural bridges with different nations.

Kuwait's pavilion includes a number of books, a video and publications showing the country's heritage.

The Ministry's delegation includes researchers

Sheikha Madhawi Mubarak Al-Sabah and Abdulmohsen Al-Baddah who wore Kuwait's traditional uniform while representing the ministry.

Madhawi said the ministry was keen to be present in the exhibition to highlight the country's national identity.

Al-Baddah expressed the ministry's pleasure for partaking in the exhibition, in cooperation with the Kuwait Embassy in Washington, to affirm Kuwait's role in boosting media and cultural communication with partners in the US and across the world.

Jaber Al-Ahmad co-op launches trial version of mobile application

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: Jaber Al-Ahmad Cooperative Society has launched the trial version of its mobile application to serve its shareholders and the residents of Jaber Al-Ahmad City, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Chairman of the Board of Directors of Jaber Al-Ahmad Cooperative Society, Salama Dahal Al-Enezi, explained that the application acts as a link between shareholders and board members. It includes all offers, commodities, and various services, such as requesting gas cylinder replacements. It has multiple icons, including offers, diwanias (traditional meeting places), a shopping cart, social news, reporting on goods, local mosques, investment shops, ticket purchases, and social activities.

He encouraged shareholders to download the application from the App Store and Google Play, and urged them

to submit their suggestions to the cooperative society's administration during official working hours.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Justice announced the opening of applications for supervisory positions, specifically for the role of Head of Department, from Sunday, December 14, until Sunday, December 21, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a statement, the ministry highlighted that this step reflects its commitment to the principles of transparency and equal opportunity, and supports the ongoing development of its administrative systems.

The ministry invited interested candidates who meet the requirements set out in Ministerial Resolution No. 101/2025, as amended by Ministerial Resolution No. 291/2025, to follow its official platforms for details on the application process.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi has issued a ministerial decree regulating the rules and conditions for issuing medical practice licenses in the private sector, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The decree aims to enhance discipline, regulate the movement of physicians between the public and private sectors, and standardize requirements to ensure quality of service and stability in the training pathway.

Article 1 of the decree stipulates that physicians who have obtained board certification from accredited programs and fellowships supervised by the

Kuwait Institute for Medical Specializations, or those who have completed similar programs, must practice in the public sector for a period equivalent to their study period at the institute.

Article 2 stipulates that physicians who completed their training outside Kuwait must practice in the public sector for a period equivalent to the duration of their scholarship before receiving their license.

Article 3 states that physicians who completed the first part of their scholarship but did not obtain the final qualification, and later completed it at the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specializations, must prac-

tice in the public sector for a period equivalent to their total scholarship period, which includes both the initial scholarship and the study period at the institute.

Article 4 establishes verification mechanisms for issuing or renewing licenses. The Health Licensing Department requires practitioners subject to this decision to submit a clearance certificate from the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specializations confirming completion of the required period of practice in the public sector, along with clearance certificates from the Civil Service Commission (CSC) and the Legal Department of the

Ministry of Health confirming the absence of any outstanding financial obligations to the state.

Article 5 mandates that practitioners covered by this decision must practice medicine in the public sector for the prescribed period.

The Ministry of Health affirmed that this decision establishes a comprehensive regulatory framework that ensures consistency in physicians' career paths, facilitates their smooth transition between the public and private sectors, supports the quality of healthcare services, and balances training requirements with the demands of practical practice.

MoH ensures quality of services

Decree regulates issuance of medical practice licenses

diwaniya

ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Drugs destroying society ...

so what is the solution?

“MANY types of drugs have entered the country. A recent case involved a Bangladeshi expatriate who collapsed on the ground in front of passersby on a street in Farwaniya and died due to the use of the drug “Flakka.” This drug causes users to lose control of themselves within seconds and is accompanied by aggressive behavior, hostility, delirium, and severe hallucinations,” columnist **Ahmad Al-Dawas** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

“There are also drugs manufactured within Kuwait, such as “Fentanyl.” This substance is considered one hundred times more potent than morphine, according to a report published by the American magazine News-week on September 12, 2018. The report stated that in 2022, U.S. authorities seized enough Fentanyl to kill the entire population of the United States, and that most of this drug in the American market is produced in Mexico using chemicals imported from China.

“If just “Flakka” and “Fentanyl” have such extreme and deadly effects, what impact could they have on our youth and their future? Apparently, the Bangladeshi expatriate had writhed on the ground, and one day we may see our own youth writhing in agony, with their futures destroyed, or even dying before our eyes. The issue is vast, but we can summarize it with a few examples. Recently, a young man killed his father after using drugs, and a woman killed her son because of addiction. There are drug-infused juices being sold for five dinars, Kuwaiti girls as young as 13 are addicted to drugs, drugs are found in children’s sweets, drugs have infiltrated schools, some food truck vendors are selling drugs, and Asian delivery workers are delivering drugs.

“Authorities also arrested a citizen, his wife, and their daughter for smuggling drugs hidden in goods from Turkey. There are cases of drugs being smuggled inside the intestines of sheep and in fish. The statistics are alarming - more than 145,000 drug users were reported in Kuwait in November 2022, up from 70,000 previously. In a meeting of specialists and advocates, they sounded the alarm, saying, “Drugs in homes and schools are killing our children. There are more than 8,000 prisoners, of which 7,000 were arrested for drug-related cases. If drugs are not in your house, they are at your neighbor’s. Kuwait is being targeted by drugs.”

“As mentioned before, drug traffickers should be given the death penalty. Drugs are a disaster, as the poisons of traffickers corrode the heart of society, reaching schools and homes, and spreading among young boys and girls in the prime of their youth. The government has acted wisely by bringing into effect the law that imposes stricter penalties on those who target society and its youth. The new law serves as a deterrent and protects families from disintegration and loss. Under this law, drug traffickers face the death penalty or life imprisonment, while smugglers, producers, and cultivators for the purpose of trafficking face heavy fines. Buyers and promoters are subject to either the death penalty or life imprisonment, along with a fine of half a million dinars. The law also mandates the establishment of reform and rehabilitation centers in facilities separate from prisons.

“The smuggling of drugs from the coasts of Iran to Kuwait is particularly concerning. Are Iranian security authorities truly unaware of this activity? At one point, Iranian smugglers secretly landed on the Kuwaiti coast at night, and they were not detected by security forces. It was ordinary citizens who reported them to the police. What, then, is the solution? Doctors and educators propose several solutions to this serious problem. They say the causes include excessive pampering, family breakdown, bad friends, and the lack of recreational activities, which lead to drug use and violence. Many recommend addiction treatment centers.

“However, there is a better approach. We have addressed this issue before with examples, and its solution lies in two words - “You are what you think.” Some fall into the pit of ruin due to addiction, while others envision a bright future through strong willpower. As it has been said, “Strong will can move mountains.” But who is reading my words?”

Also:

“We live in an age of media and communication. The atomic era has ended, and today the media plays the central role in shaping events and circumstances through the insight, intelligence, and actions of its practitioners. Media and communication have the power to both destroy and build nations and societies,” Kuwaiti journalist **Sami Al-Enezi** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

“Achieving positive outcomes, however, depends on media professionals who understand how to shape the future, possess foresight, and can anticipate developments based on current events, lessons from experience, and global trends. Producing and analyzing media to achieve meaningful results requires careful and rigorous intellectual and technical effort, more precise than one might assume, to understand events, connect them, and draw lessons from experiences. Such efforts cannot yield lasting results unless the media is grounded on a firm, authentic founda-

tion, built upon clearly defined links that connect a nation’s civilizational past with its present, thereby clarifying its vision for the future in detail and without ambiguity.

“By connecting with the past, we do not mean excessive glorification, boasting, or praise. Rather, we mean engaging with it in a balanced and scientific manner to learn from past experiences. As my teacher and mentor, the late Professor Mohammad Al-Afifi (May God have mercy on him) once said, “A nation that excessively glorifies its past has a turbulent and fragile present and an uncertain future.” This is particularly relevant when we consider the nation’s adversaries and how they confront us, given the precision of their media operations. They exert every effort and employ every technical means to distort our capabilities and civilization, restricting our thinking to instinctive, emotional, and immediate reactions to urgent situations, without foresight, without learning from past mistakes, and without recognizing the deceiver.

“Today, the media must be closely and effectively integrated with education, curricula, arts, drama, theater, music, and both the general and specific aspects of popular culture. The focus should be on the most effective and co-ordinated approach to these disciplines, ensuring they are not treated separately, so as to counter the fragmentation that adversaries seek to impose on the nation under various pretexts.

“Moreover, it is essential that future generations understand with absolute clarity that the Freemasons of Sykes-Picot, more than a century ago, devised their schemes, and today they aim to achieve the final and most advanced outcome, which is a “Sykes-Picot mosaic.” The unfolding events in the Arab and Islamic worlds make this clear, even to the least perceptive observer.”

□ □ □

“Family businesses are a cornerstone of the global economy because they are not merely commercial ventures but a legacy rooted across generations,” Kuwaiti lawyer **Sarah Al-Jassem** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

“As these companies evolve, the third generation emerges and begins assuming new roles. This may occur through their ownership stakes as partners since childhood or through inheritance, making them part of the company’s ownership structure. At this stage, family disputes often arise due to differing visions between generations. These differences combine traditional management methods with the third generation’s efforts to introduce change, particularly through modern technology. This often leads to disagreements between generations, resulting in conflicts that threaten the company’s stability and ultimately contribute to a decline in its performance and productivity.

“Many family businesses have experienced contraction as a result of these conflicts. The founding generation relies on experience and individual



Sarah Al-Jassem

decision-making based on personal relationships. The second generation often continues this same traditional approach. With the arrival of the third generation, which is the most forward-thinking, driven by technology

and modern education, and favoring digital management and e-transformation, the push for expansion and global competitiveness becomes evident.

“The third generation embraces a culture of remote work, digital marketing, and artificial intelligence, relying on risk management and financial data analysis. This contributes to a generational gap that can lead to natural disagreements, sometimes even escalating to legal disputes. Therefore, establishing a clear legal structure for the company in advance is essential to minimize future conflicts. When the third generation assumes management, disagreements often arise, whether related to management style or decision-making authority, potentially leading to conflicts of interest and mistakes in investment decisions. Most disputes revolve around the distribution of the company’s annual profits. Generational differences within companies are natural and even healthy, as they reflect the passage of time.

“To prevent these issues and ensure continuity, clear rules and regulations must be established and adhered to from the first generation onward. These should define the legal and financial obligations and responsibilities of each partner, combining experience with innovation and ensuring the gradual, well-planned adoption of modern management technologies. Therefore, impartial legal expertise should be employed as a strategic tool to protect the company and its operations.

“Legal guidance should be integrated into the company’s overall structure from the beginning, rather than sought only after a dispute arises, ensuring well-organized relationships between partners and proper documentation of decisions. Companies that recognize generational differences and benefit from the strengths of each generation are more likely to survive and thrive for decades.”

— Compiled by Simi K. Kutty



Chief of Kuwait Fire Force Major General Talal Al-Roumi visits a fire station. Inset: A new fire station opposite the sea.

KUNA photos

Two fire stations to cover marine, land mishaps

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11, (KUNA): Chief of Kuwait Fire Force Major General Talal Al-Roumi inaugurated Thursday two fire stations - Al Joun and Jaber Bridge - equipped with the latest specifications and necessary gear to enable firefighters to perform their duties efficiently and to cover incidents in the surrounding marine and land areas.

In a press statement following the inauguration of the two stations located on Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Bridge, Al-Roumi said that launching

the new centers comes in implementation of the directives of Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yusuf Saud Al-Sabah.

It is aimed at accelerating the provision of firefighting services and expanding their presence to ensure swift response to reports.

He affirmed that Kuwait Fire Force continues to develop capabilities in a way that enhances public safety standards, protects lives and property, and contributes to strengthening community security.

Kuwait eyes local audit talent

Modern technology indispensable: CAIT

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: The acting Director General of the Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT), Najat Ibrahim, affirmed that Kuwait places great importance on developing national competencies in auditing and equipping professionals with the tools and knowledge needed to build a more efficient and sustainable institutional future.



Najat Ibrahim

She said this in a speech delivered on behalf of the Minister of State for Communications, Omar Al-Omar, patron of the 2025 Annual Conference for the Internal Audit Profession in the Public and Private Sectors, held under the theme “Impassioned Auditing Towards a Better Future.”

Ibrahim explained that the conference serves as a platform to support national efforts in enhancing cooperation among entities, developing

the auditing profession, and raising its quality. It further strengthens the profession’s role in promoting governance, managing risks, and improving institutional performance in the country.

The conference represents a pivotal step toward building a more mature and organized professional system by strengthening communication between practitioners, experts, and decision-makers, as well as reviewing the latest global trends and practices. This approach contributes to improving the quality of internal auditing and developing its work systems in both the public and private sectors.

“Here at the Ministry of State for Communications and the Central Agency for Information Technology, we recognize the crucial role of internal audit practices. They are essential for preparing institutions for rapid technological advancements, especially in areas like data protection, cybersecurity, and ensuring the efficiency and reliability of our processes,” Ibrahim said.

She noted that modern technologies, including artificial intelligence and data analytics, have become indispensable, as they allow audit teams to work more effectively, and use proactive and comprehensive approaches to their tasks.

Meanwhile, Waleed Al-Saeed, Vice President of the Kuwait Association of Internal Auditors, stressed in a similar speech that the internal audit profession is currently at a critical juncture due to technological advancements,

the growing interconnectedness of risks, and the accelerating pace of work.

He emphasized the role of internal auditors in assessing risks, analyzing data, and supporting decision-making in accordance with internationally approved standards.

Al-Saeed highlighted that this year’s conference program includes high-quality topics and professional experiences, with participation from more than 250 attendees representing approximately 36 entities, all aimed at enhancing the work of internal auditors.

In addition, Secretary General of the Kuwait Banking Association Dr. Yaqoub Al-Rifai, in his speech, affirmed that the association places great importance on the internal audit profession, viewing it as a cornerstone for ensuring the safety and stability of the banking sector and financial institutions.

He explained that its work contributes to enhancing risk management and maintaining adherence to the highest international standards. It also plays a pivotal role in strengthening corporate governance by ensuring compliance with laws and regulations and implementing procedures that support transparency.

Dr. Al-Rifai affirmed the commitment of Kuwaiti banks to keep pace with global developments and adopt best practices to improve efficiency, mitigate risks, ensure sustainability, and bolster competitiveness in the banking sector.

GTD gives out 309 traffic citations near hospitals

By Munif Nayef
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: The General Traffic Department (GTD) has been continuously carrying out traffic campaigns targeting vehicles that violate traffic laws, particularly around hospitals.

In a recent 24-hour period, these campaigns resulted in the issuance of 309 traffic citations, most of which were issued for parking violations and obstructing traffic flow.

According to a security source, traffic officers will continue these enforcement efforts.

The campaign recorded the following violations at major hospitals:

- 51 citations at Amiri Hospital,
- 28 at Jaber Hospital,
- 99 at Farwaniya Hospital,
- 71 at Adan Hospital,
- 60 at Jahra Hospital.

Emphasizing that these campaigns will continue, the source urged drivers to use only designated parking areas to avoid citations and potential vehicle seizure .

Demolition of dilapidated house in Jleeb suspended

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: Based on an urgent request filed by Lawyer Saud Al-Barghash, the Administrative Court has decided to suspend the demolition of an old house by Kuwait Municipality in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, pending a ruling on the case.

Previously, the Public Relations Department of Kuwait Municipality had announced plans to demolish 67 dilapidated houses in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh. The department clarified that the demolitions would be carried out in the presence of the acting Director General of Kuwait Municipality, Manal Al-Asfour. Kuwait Municipality and relevant authorities are continuing their efforts to remove violations and restore order in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh.

□ □ □

Road closure: The Public Authority for Roads and Transportation (PART), in cooperation with the General Traffic Department, announced the temporary closure of the overpass from King Faisal bin Abdulaziz Road (Route 50) to Ibrahim Al-Muzain Street (Route 404) towards Al-Zahraa and Sheikh Jaber Hospital, reports Al-Anba daily.

The closure will be in effect for one week, starting Thursday, December 11, from 12:00am to 6:00am, to complete the installation of visibility and noise barriers on the bridge.

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Kuwait University photo
Certificates of appreciation distributed to distinguished guests.

KU event to raise ‘awareness’ in anti-graft, cyber crime war

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: In a move to strengthen community partnerships and co-operation with government and civil society, the Community Service and Continuing Education Center at Kuwait University, represented by its Research, Studies, and Community Awareness Department, organized a special event to mark the International Anti-Corruption Day in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior.

According to a press release issued by Kuwait University, the event took place on Tuesday, December 9 at the administrative auditorium of the university administration building. Attendees included Assistant Vice President for Academic Support Services for Community Service and Libraries Dr. Hamed Suleiman Al-Furaih, the acting Director of the Community Service and Continuing Education Center Etemad Al-Kandari, several center supervisors, and representatives from participating organizations.

The event aimed to raise community awareness about the importance of integrity and to promote values of transparency within institutions and among individuals. It included a lecture by Lieutenant Colonel Suleiman Mohammed Al-Hamdan from the Ministry of Interior, who discussed the important measures to combat corruption and cybercrime, preventive mechanisms, and the role of citizens in reporting and cooperating with the relevant authorities. He stressed that fighting corruption is a shared responsibility that helps enhance community security and stability while protecting public funds and national resources.

Meanwhile, actor Mohammed Ashour shared his personal experience of recovering from addiction. He highlighted the importance of willpower and community support in overcoming challenges and emphasized the need to uphold ethical values and abide by the law.

An awareness exhibition was held during the event, with brochures, informational posters, and audiovisual materials highlighting the concepts of integrity and transparency, methods for reporting corruption, and the state’s efforts in this area.

At the end of the event, the Community Service and Continuing Education Center honored Lieutenant Colonel Suleiman Mohammed Al-Hamdan, actor Mohammed Ashour, and representatives of participating organizations in recognition of their contributions to the event’s success.

The event reaffirmed the ongoing cooperation between Kuwait University, the Ministry of Interior, and other community institutions in organizing awareness initiatives that promote integrity and support the reform process.

Kuwait stresses civilian security in war-hit areas

Call for broader joint Arab action

CAIRO, Dec 11, (KUNA): Kuwait’s Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Affairs Ambassador Sheikhha Jawaher Ibrahim Al-Duaij Al-Sabah said the 13th Meeting of Arab National Committees for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) served as an important platform to strengthen efforts and enhance civilian protection in armed conflicts.

Speaking to KUNA after heading Kuwait’s delegation, she said through this meeting, participating states reviewed their obligations under IHL, exchanged national experiences, and highlight best practices in implementing the Geneva



KUNA photo
Sheikha Jawaher Ibrahim Al-Duaij Al-Sabah

Conventions and their additional protocols. She reaffirmed Kuwait’s continued call in

international forums to ensure the protection of humanitarian workers and secure access for aid to conflict areas, describing both principles as central to Kuwait’s position, along with its support for related initiatives and urging parties in conflict to adhere to the Geneva Conventions.

On cooperation, she reiterated Kuwait’s firm support for the establishment of the Arab Committee for IHL, pointing to memoranda of understanding with several Arab countries aimed at bolstering coordination.

She expressed hope for broader joint action following the election of the committee’s chair and adoption of its operational plan, adding that the committee is expected to play a key role in supporting shared legal and humanitarian efforts.

Sheikha Jawaher delivered Kuwait’s statement on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Chair of the National Committee for IHL, Nasser Al-Sumait.

MEW to reset organization setup

New DG, work to begin after CSC gives nod

By Mohammad Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: The Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy has been awaiting the Civil Service Commission’s (CSC) approval of its new organizational structure for several days, following its prior approval by Minister Dr. Subaih Al-Mukhaizeem.

Informed sources from the ministry expect the structure to be approved next week. They explained that as soon as the new or-

ganizational structure is approved by CSC, the ministry will begin considering nominees for the position of Director General and subsequently fill vacant supervisory roles.

The new structure includes merging the Electricity Transmission Networks sector with the Control and Monitoring Centers sector, and the Water Operation and Maintenance sector with the Water Projects sector.

It also involves creating new departments, eliminating others, and merging and creating new supervisory units.

Meanwhile, the Undersecretary of the

Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy, Dr. Adel Al-Zamel, issued an administrative decision granting the acting Assistant Undersecretary for Administrative Affairs, Ahmed Al-Nama, authority over three important areas related to general staff and employees in technical support and auxiliary positions.

These powers include referring ministry employees to administrative investigations, approving the outcomes of such investigations, and imposing all disciplinary penalties, except for dismissal from service.

Commercial Law Forum 2025 kicks off

Strong legal ‘framework’ vital for robust economy

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: The ninth edition of the “Kuwait Commercial Law Forum 2025”, which was organized by Al-Yaqout & Al-Fawzan Law Group in collaboration with strategic partner LexisNexis Global, and supported by the Kuwait Lawyers Society and the Kuwait Real Estate Union, kicked off on Wednesday.

It brought together a select group of experts, consultants, and investment companies from both inside and outside Kuwait.

Khalifa Al-Yaqout, the Managing Partner at Al-Yaqout & Al-Fawzan Law Group, highlighted Kuwait’s commitment to adopting best legislative and economic practices.

He stressed the crucial role of a strong legal framework for the economy, insisting that no economy can thrive without laws that support businesspeople and investors, particularly those seeking to operate in Kuwait.

In his opening speech, Al-Yaqout explained that the forum was initially conceived to analyze the Kuwaiti economic arena and achieve objectives such as enabling Kuwaiti companies to operate in a supportive economic environment, while ensuring that legal and economic professionals have the expertise and knowledge to navigate the system effectively.

The session focused on discussing the Real Estate Developer Law, which is one of the most essential laws Kuwait currently needs. It aims to meet citizens’ needs and keep pace with global technological advancements, including Artificial Intelligence regulations, which are underdeveloped in law firms, legal consultancies, real estate companies, and across the economic, financial, and business sectors.

Al-Yaqout said, “Culture cannot stand still. It requires cooperation and concerted efforts through collective work.”

He highlighted the organizers’ keenness to bring together economists, legal professionals, and business owners to share discussions, consultations, and expertise for business development.

Al-Yaqout said, “We attract expertise, talent, and the best minds from both inside



Khalifa Al-Yaqout

and outside the country to address laws and the legislative environment in a way that fulfills our aspirations”.

Meanwhile, Ibrahim Al-Awadhi, Chairman of the Real Estate Union, stated that the 9th Kuwait Commercial Law Forum has become an important annual event that brings together law, economics, and real estate in a unified dialogue. Their participation is not merely symbolic but reflects a strong belief that the real estate sector cannot thrive without a clear, stable, and modern legal framework.

The forum, under the leadership of Khalifa Al-Yaqout and in partnership with LexisNexis, has over the years been able to raise bold discussions about legislation central to the Kuwaiti economy, including laws on real estate development, registration, licensing, dispute resolution, and investor empowerment. Real estate legislation forms the backbone of economic growth, and developers require a legal framework that offers clarity and assurance before undertaking any project.

The role of the real estate developer within the legal framework is one of the most important themes of this year’s forum, making it a pivotal topic.

Al-Awadhi said, “The developer is the hand that builds, while the law is the ground on which it stands”.

He explained that this highlights the importance of modern and consistent legislation aimed at protecting the rights of investors and buyers, clarifying licensing and enforcement mechanisms, expediting real estate dispute resolution, and enhancing market transparency. These elements are not luxuries but foundations for attracting local and foreign investment and for creating housing, commercial, and tourism projects that add value to the national economy.

Al-Awadhi emphasized that the partnership between the real estate and legal sectors is long-standing, but it is currently stronger and more influential than ever.

He noted that the Real Estate Union sees a significant opportunity for Kuwait to advance its real estate legislation, adding that empowering real estate developers is essential for improving project quality, accelerating implementation, and diversifying real estate products.

Furthermore, Khaled Al-Suwaifan, Secretary of the Kuwait Lawyers Society, affirmed that this annual forum has become one of the most significant legal events in Kuwait.

KSNI marks Anti-Corruption Day

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: Kuwait Society of National Integrity (KSNI) issued a statement on the occasion of International Anti-Corruption Day, highlighting its crucial role in protecting development and safeguarding the future of humanity, as corruption is one of the greatest challenges threatening progress and reform, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In its statement, KSNI explained that Kuwait joins the international community in commemorating the day, reflecting on the country’s efforts in promoting reform and enacting anti-corruption legislation, with active participation from civil society organizations.

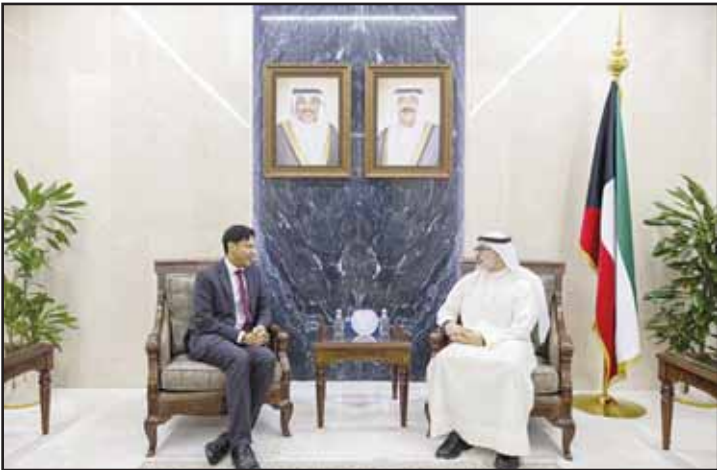
The government’s expansion in digitizing agencies and services, along with the strengthening of governance measures, reflects a commitment to building a more transparent system and securing the future of the nation and its citizens through modern tools that minimize opportunities for corruption and enhance the quality of government performance.

The society affirmed that these reforms would not have been possible without the support of the political leadership, represented by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled.

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Ministry of Foreign Affairs photos

Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister with UK ambassador (left), Netherlands ambassador (center), and Uzbekistan ambassador (right).

Kuwait's Deputy FM receives UK, Netherlands and Uzbekistan ambassadors

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11, (KUNA): Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah held separate meetings on

Thursday with the Ambassadors of the United Kingdom, Qudsi Rasheed, the Netherlands, Wierish Ramsoekh, and Uzbekistan's Ayubkhan Yunusov.

The discussions focused on strengthening bilateral relations, as well as reviewing the latest regional and international developments.

Dr. Faizah Al-Enezi named ambassador for UK STEM

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11, (KUNA): Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) on Thursday announced the selection of Dr. Faizah Al-Enezi, a researcher at the Environment and Life Sciences Research Center, as an Ambassador for the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) program in the UK.

KISR said in a press statement the nomination recognizes Dr. Al-Enezi's efforts to connect scientific research with education and the wider community, and her commitment to inspiring the next generation of scientists and promoting evidence-based innovation for sustainable solutions.

The statement added that the STEM program is a leading initiative that aims to strengthen education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics and encourage innovation by working with researchers and academics to align research outputs with societal needs.

It noted that Dr. Al-Enezi, who holds a PhD in environmental microbiology from the University of Aberdeen (UK), has a distinguished record in natural product extraction from microorganisms and plants, biological disease control and environmental



KUNA photo

Dr. Faizah Al-Enezi

rehabilitation.

KISR pointed to Dr. Al-Enezi's contributions to knowledge production and scientific innovation and her cooperation with leading international institutions, including the universities of Aberdeen, Geneva and Neuchatel and Cornell University, enhancing the standing of national research cadres in international fora.

KD 71,000 to aid needy families

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11, (KUNA): The Kuwaiti Association for Needy Families has earmarked KD 71,000 (USD 231,447) to aid needy families namely those burdened with debts.

The association indicated in a statement, released on Thursday, that the initiative was in line with its pioneering humanitarian role and out of its keen-

ness on boosting humanitarian action in the State of Kuwait and ease off financial burdens afflicting citizens.

The humanitarian move was declared at a gathering sponsored by the Ministry of Social Affairs, under direct supervision by the Undersecretary Dr. Khaled Amer al-Ajmi. The event was attended by board members.

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs Khaled Al-Ajmi affirmed that the completion of the first phase of the Kuwaitization project for supervisory positions in cooperative societies marks a “comprehensive government success story.”

He highlighted that this achievement results from close collaboration between the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM), and the Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies (UCCS), affirming that all procedures were carried out with the highest standards of transparency, integrity, and impartiality.

Speaking to reporters during the lottery and selection process for appointees to supervisory positions in cooperative societies on Monday morning at the Ministry of Social Affairs, Al-Ajmi said, “Our goal from the start was to show the public, the government, and

citizens that the Kuwaitization process for supervisory positions would be conducted with complete transparency.”

He explained that applications were submitted through PAM's “Our Pride” platform, where each application was carefully reviewed, the job description verified, and the names compiled and forwarded to the Kuwaitization Committee.

After coordination with the relevant authorities, all applicants' names were sent to a private university in order for them to take the written exams, following prior approval from the Fatwa and Legislation Department.

The committee decided to allocate 90 points to the written exam and 10 points to the personal interview to ensure fairness and objectivity.

The results were issued immediately after the exams, which reflects the committee's commitment to transparency and avoiding any delays.

All candidates who achieved the top scores successfully passed the first stage, and those tied in scores would be subject to a public lottery held in their presence.

All personal interviews were recorded with audio and video to ensure impartiality.

Al-Ajmi stressed that this achievement is significant, as it reflects the country's progressive image and the political leadership's commitment to

supporting citizens and providing opportunities for national talent within cooperative societies.

He affirmed that further stages and milestones will be implemented in the coming periods.

Al-Ajmi indicated that the number of winners varies depending on the needs of each cooperative society, with some requiring two candidates, others three, and some five.

He said the press will receive the complete lists of winning names, whether selected through a lottery or based on direct results.

Al-Ajmi clarified that the committee conducted the lottery on Monday for more than 48 citizens who had tied for positions as general managers, deputy general managers, and department heads.

He stated that the presence of the candidates and media highlighted the level of transparency adopted by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Al-Ajmi said the ministry had recently offered supervisory positions in five cooperative societies, and has plans to offer more than 47 new supervisory positions in various cooperative societies in the coming period, under the same approach.

He explained that the results of the second phase, which closed with 1,305 eligible candidates, are currently with PAM for auditing and classification.

This process is in preparation for submission to the Kuwaitization Committee for final review before coordinating with the relevant university to approve the optional training courses. Written exams will then be conducted, with results announced immediately to the applicants.

Al-Ajmi emphasized that this procedure represents a “qualitative leap” in Kuwaitization mechanisms.

He indicated that the Ministry of Social Affairs is working to establish a new system within cooperative societies with the aim of increasing the percentage of Kuwaiti nationals employed in supervisory and operational positions, stressing that the strong interest from Kuwaiti citizens reflects their eagerness to engage in cooperative work.

Al-Ajmi confirmed that new job opportunities are announced through the “Our Pride” platform with a minimum one-week notice and are updated quarterly.

Regarding the creation of first and second reserve lists, Al-Ajmi explained that some applicants may decline at the last minute due to prior work commitments. Therefore, a clear and fair ranking system is in place to ensure the rights of all applicants.

He emphasized the continued audio and video documentation of all stages of exams and interviews to maintain transparency and build trust.

Continued from Page 1

Drugs, citizenship

Sheikh Fahad praised Kuwait's addiction treatment hospital as unparalleled globally and stressed the government's full support, under the leadership of His Highness the Amir, in combating drug-related issues.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef emphasized that drug use in Kuwait has significantly decreased thanks to a fair judiciary, diligent prosecution, and active Ministry of Interior personnel, despite the Gulf region being targeted by regional and international smuggling networks.

He stressed that combating drugs is a national responsibility requiring the coordinated efforts of families, schools, media, security agencies, and all citizens, with community cooperation vital for the success of the new law.

Highlighting the efficiency of security forces, he noted that the Drug Control General Department (DCGD), supported by the ministry, eliminated about 90 percent of targeted narcotics in a year. Following the new decree, the Ministry of Interior launched the “Safeguarding Our Homeland” campaign to educate the public on the law, penalties, treatment options, and the dangers of drug abuse.

In conclusion, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef expressed gratitude to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad, for his pivotal support in implementing the new Anti-Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Law, highlighting its role in safeguarding national security and youth. He also thanked the law's drafting committee for their efforts and praised DCGD and all Ministry of Interior's sectors for their work in preventing smuggling, trafficking, and protecting the nation's youth.

Meanwhile, Counselor Bader Al-Musaed, Director of the Kuwait Institute for Judicial and Legal Studies, highlighted Decree-Law No. 159/2025 on narcotics as a modern, balanced approach combining strict deterrence against trafficking with reformative and humanitarian measures for addicts.

He explained that tackling drugs requires both firmness and compassion, as the issue threatens individual health, family stability, and national security. The law, effective December 15, includes 84 articles across 13 chapters, covering punitive, preventative, therapeutic measures, and regulation of medical narcotics use, while the Institute focuses on raising legal awareness of its provisions.

Furthermore, Advisor at the Appeals Court and head of the Narcotics Law Drafting Committee Mohammed Al-Duaij underscored the urgent need for Kuwait's new Law 195/2025, shaped by 27 years of confronting devastating

drug-related cases.

He recounted harrowing incidents, including a case where a son murdered his elderly mother under drug influence, illustrating the human cost behind the legislation.

Al-Duaij noted that the 84-article law, developed over two years with support from His Highness the Amir and guidance from Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef, provides strong deterrence, addresses violence linked to substances like crystal meth, protects children of addicted parents, and targets drug-impaired drivers to safeguard society.

He also highlighted the rising incidence of courtroom violence related to crystal meth, including cases where children suffered due to addicted parents and a father lived in fear of his violent, drug-affected son.

Al-Duaij emphasized that the new law decisively tackles the everyday risks posed by drug-impaired drivers, effectively closing loopholes that previously allowed such offenses.

He recounted the Al-Sadiq Mosque bombing, in which suicide bomber Fahd Al-Qabaa, aided by Abdul Rahman Sabah, used crystal meth in the attack after being supplied by an overseas group.

Al-Duaij emphasized that Law 195/2025 takes a balanced approach, combining strict enforcement with humanitarian care by requiring medical treatment for drug users or imposing severe legal penalties. The law also strengthens Ministry of Health oversight and increases punishments for prescription falsification, medication misuse, and unauthorized narcotic distribution by doctors.

He noted that the law criminalizes anyone who accompanies or shares drugs with users, as such behavior often spreads addiction.

Al-Duaij conveyed four core messages - a firm warning to drug traffickers, an urgent call for users, viewed as patients, to seek treatment and avoid criminalization, a request to the Ministry of Education to implement comprehensive school-based prevention programs, and a reassurance to society that the law will strengthen national security and safeguard families.

Meanwhile, Dr. Hussein Al-Shatti, Director of the Addiction Treatment Center, praised the new law for its medical focus and protections for staff and patients, emphasizing that addiction affects the entire community.

He noted the center provides voluntary treatment with immunity from punishment, while the Rehabilitation Center handles court-mandated cases, and reported a rise in individuals proactively seeking help since the law's implementation.

Rain, fog

Friday night will be cool and partly cloudy, accompanied by variable to northeasterly winds between 8 and 35 km/h. Fog formation remains possible in some areas, with minimum temperatures ranging from 12°C to 14°C.

Saturday will continue to see mild and partly cloudy conditions, with light to moderate winds shifting from various directions to the north at 8–32 km/h. Light fog could appear during the evening. Daytime highs will remain between 21°C and 23°C, and nighttime lows between 12°C and 14°C, with sea conditions expected to stay slight to moderate.

In light of the recent weather forecasts, the Ministry of Education suspended classes on Thursday, December 11, across all levels of government schools—including public, religious, and special education—as well as private Arabic and foreign institutions. The decision, issued by Minister Sayed Jalal AlTabtabaei, came after reviewing meteorological reports predicting rainfall and possible fog.

Kuwait University also announced the switch to online learning on Thursday, citing student safety and the need to maintain academic progress during the unstable weather.

Meanwhile, the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation (PART) reported dealing with minor water accumulations on select highways Thursday morning following rainfall. Field teams promptly intervened to ensure smooth traffic flow, with no disruptions or blockages reported.

French Trade

conversion, solar energy, energy efficiency, and battery technologies, which are aspects that can support Kuwait's strategy to develop and enhance the efficiency of its energy grid.

The minister affirmed the readiness of French companies to offer their expertise in sustainable cities and urban planning, including urban engineering, water management, sewage networks, sustainable construction, and smart urban services.

He stressed that these capabilities support Kuwait's ambitions to establish new areas, modern cities, and major urban development projects.

Minister Forissier also highlighted France's leadership in digital technologies, cybersecurity, space, and artificial intelligence, which are sectors that form fundamental pillars of Kuwait's economic transformation.

He emphasized the willingness of

French companies to support and enhance national capabilities in these fields.

Minister Forissier held discussions with high-ranking Kuwaiti officials, including the Director General of the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) Sheikh Meshal Jaber Al-Ahmad, and the Executive Director of the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) Sheikh Saud Salem Abdulaziz Al-Sabah. These discussions focused on boosting investment flows between France and Kuwait within the framework of the Declaration of Intent for Strategic Investment Partnership (2025–2035), which was formally signed during His Highness the Amir's visit to Paris.

Sarthak visit

The ambassador affirmed that the ship “represents India's naval capabilities and reflects the professionalism, readiness, and humanitarian service of its Coast Guard personnel”, adding that the Indian-Kuwaiti partnership extends across a wide range of sectors, including energy security, food, health, education, and technology.

She also highlighted the countries' support for each other during challenging times, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when India sent a 15-member rapid response medical team, and the Indian Navy and Air Force provided Kuwait with emergency oxygen supplies in 2021.

Ambassador Tripathi highlighted the important milestones that shaped the modern phase of bilateral relations, beginning with the visit of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad to India in 2006, which “paved the way for deeper strategic dialogue,” followed by the visit of the Indian vice president to Kuwait in 2009.

She affirmed that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Kuwait last December “opened a new chapter,” during which His Highness the Amir awarded him the Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer and four significant agreements were signed, including a memorandum of understanding on defense cooperation, ratified by both countries.

Looking ahead, the ambassador affirmed that the bilateral partnership is “moving towards promising horizons” in maritime security, defense, renewable energy, digital innovation, food security, and healthcare, adding, “India is ready to work side by side with Kuwait for a more prosperous and stable future for our two peoples.”



Photos by Samer Shiger

Photos during a conference titled 'Digital Consumption and Digital Addiction... Towards Societal Awareness,' held at the Social Workers Association headquarters.

Kuwait pushes back against digital overload

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: Abdullah Al-Rawdan, Chair of the Board of Directors of the Social Workers Association, affirmed the importance of building a conscious and balanced society capable of dealing with the challenges of digital addiction.

In his speech at the conference titled “Digital Consumption and Digital Addiction... Towards Societal Awareness,” held at the association's headquarters, Al-Rawdan explained that the conference aims to promote responsible digital role models and cultivate a critical, informed approach to advertising and digital content. It seeks to solidify rational consumer behavior and digital awareness within Kuwaiti and Gulf societies for reinforcing the values of social responsibility and informed critique, and reducing the effects of addiction and irresponsible consumption.

Al-Rawdan emphasized that the conference title is not just a slogan, but a clear call to reflect on the digital reality and reassess daily relationship with technology, as technology has permeated every home, school, and workplace, with smartphones and screens serving as open windows to the world.

He explained that these windows offer vast opportunities for learning, communication, and creativity, but they can also become wide-open doors to the dangers of addiction, irrational consumption, and negative influence from targeted advertising and content.

Digital role models begin with the

individual and extend to the family that nurtures them, the school that educates, the media that guides, and the institutions that legislate and plan.

The cooperation of all these parties is essential to building a balanced digital society that seizes opportunities and addresses challenges with awareness and wisdom.

Studies have shown internet addiction to be just as dangerous as any other form of addiction, as it negatively impacts mental and physical health, weakens social bonds, and reduces productivity.

However, Al-Rawdan noted that technology can serve as a tool for progress if used properly in supporting open education, intercultural communication, and innovation in various fields.

Conference recommendations:

1. Develop practical training programs for parents and teachers on strategies to deal with addictive technology behaviors in children and adolescents.

2. Encourage Kuwaiti social media influencers to create content that promotes responsible digital role models through a “Media Code of Ethics” that limits the unconscious promotion of excessive consumption.

3. Strengthen oversight of digital advertising, particularly content targeting children and adolescents, to reduce misinformation and excessive consumption.

4. Establish a national digital misinformation observatory to monitor content and provide regular reports to policymakers.

5. Develop legislation requiring platforms and influencers to clearly disclose advertising content and sponsorships.

Foreigners allowed to travel to US without visa could soon face new social media screening

Trump’s ‘gold card’ program goes live, offering US visas starting at \$1 million per person

WASHINGTON, Dec 11, (AP): US President Donald Trump announced Wednesday that his long-promised “gold card” was officially going on sale, offering legal status and an eventual pathway to U.S. citizenship for individuals paying \$1 million and corporations paying up to twice that per foreign-born employee.

A website accepting applications went live as Trump revealed the start of the program while surrounded by business leaders in the White House’s Roosevelt Room. It is meant to replace EB-5 visas, which Congress created in 1990 to generate foreign investment and had been available to people who spend about \$1 million on a company that employs at least 10 people.

Trump sees the new version as a way for the US to attract and retain top talent, all while generating revenue for federal coffers. He’s been promoting the gold card program for months, and once suggested that each card would cost \$5 million, though he more recently revised that to the \$1 million and \$2 million pricing scheme.

The president said all funds taken in as part of the program will “go to the U.S. government” and predicted that billions would flow into an account run by the Treasury Department “where we can do things positive for the country.”

The new program is actually a green

card, effectively offering permanent legal residency with the chance for citizenship.

“Basically, it’s a green card but much better,” Trump said. “Much more powerful, a much stronger path.”

The president made no mention of requirements for job creation for applying corporations or on overall caps on the program, which exist under the current EB-5 program. Instead, he said he’d heard complaints from business leaders who had been unable to recruit outstanding graduates from U.S. universities because they were from other countries and lacked permission to stay.

“You can’t hire people from the best colleges because you don’t know whether or not you can keep the person,” Trump said.

Trump has built his political career around clamping down on the U.S.-Mexico border and championing hard-line immigration policies. His second administration spent its first 10-plus months launching mass deportation pushes and sweeping immigration crackdowns that have targeted cities including Los Angeles and Charlotte.

But he’s also drawn criticism from leading voices of his “Make America Great Again” movement for repeatedly suggesting that skilled immigrants should be allowed into the U.S. - something the gold card program could facilitate.



Flanked by CEO of Dell, Michael Dell, left, CEO of IBM Arvind Krishna, second right, and Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick, (right), listen to US President Donald Trump during a roundtable discussion with business leaders in the Roosevelt Room of the White House on Dec 10 in Washington. (AP)

Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said the program will include \$15,000 for applicant vetting and that the thorough process would “make sure these people absolutely qualify to be in America.” Companies will be able to receive multiple cards, but will be limited to one individual per card, he said.

Lutnick also said the current green

card holders earn less money than the average American, and that Trump wanted to change that.

“So, same visas, but now just full of the best people,” Lutnick said.

Investors’ visas are common around the world, with dozens of countries offering versions of “golden visas” to wealthy individuals, including the United Kingdom, Spain, Greece, Mal-

ta, Australia, Canada and Italy.

Trump said the program means the U.S. is “getting somebody great coming into our country because we think these will be some tremendous people” and singled out top U.S. college graduates from China, India and France as among those who will possibly be receiving gold cards.

“The companies are going to be very happy,” he said.

Also:

WASHINGTON: Foreigners who are allowed to come to the United States without a visa could soon be required to submit information about their social media, email accounts and extensive family history to the Department of Homeland Security before being approved for travel.

The notice published Wednesday in the Federal Register said Customs and Border Protection is proposing collecting five years’ worth of social media information from travelers from select countries who do not have to get visas to come to the US. The Trump administration has been stepping up monitoring of international travelers and immigrants.

The announcement refers to travelers from more than three dozen countries who take part in the Visa Waiver Program and submit their information to the Electronic System for

Travel Authorization (ESTA), which automatically screens them and then approves them for travel to the US. Unlike visa applicants, they generally do not have to go into an embassy or consulate for an interview.

DHS administers the program, which currently allows citizens of roughly 40 mostly European and Asian countries to travel to the U.S. for tourism or business for three months without visas.

The announcement also said that CBP would start requesting a list of other information, including telephone numbers the person has used over the past five years or email addresses used over the past decade. Also sought would be metadata from electronically submitted photos, as well as extensive information from the applicant’s family members, including their places of birth and their telephone numbers.

The application that people are now required to fill out to take part in ESTA asks for a more limited set of questions such as parents’ names and current email address.

Asked at a White House event whether he was concerned the measure might affect tourism to the US, President Donald Trump said no.

“We want safety, we want security, we want to make sure we’re not letting the wrong people come into our country,” Trump said.

‘Raise troop pay, overhaul arms purchases’

US House passes \$900b defense bill

WASHINGTON, Dec 11, (AP): The House voted to pass a sweeping defense policy bill Wednesday that authorizes \$900 billion in military programs, including a pay raise for troops and an overhaul of how the Department of Defense buys weapons.

The bill’s passage on a 312-112 vote comes at a time of increasing friction between the Republican-controlled Congress and President Donald Trump’s administration over the management of the military.

The annual National Defense Authorization Act typically gains bipartisan backing, and the White House has signaled “strong support” for the must-pass legislation, saying it is in line with Trump’s national security agenda. Yet tucked into the over-3,000-page bill are several measures that push back against the Department of Defense, including a demand for more information on boat strikes in the Caribbean and support for allies in Europe, such as Ukraine.

Overall, the sweeping bill calls for a 3.8% pay raise for many military members as well as housing and facility improvements on military bases. It also strikes a compromise between the political parties - cutting climate and diversity efforts in



US Speaker of the House Mike Johnson (center), flanked by House Majority Whip Tom Emmer (left), and House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, prepares to speak to reporters following a strategy session with House Republicans, at the Capitol in Washington on Dec 10. (AP)

line with Trump’s agenda, while also boosting congressional oversight of the Pentagon and repealing several old war authorizations. Still, hard-line conservatives said they were frustrated that the bill does not do more to cut US commitments overseas. “We need a ready, capable and lethal fighting force because the threats to our nation, especially those

from China, are more complex and challenging than at any point in the last 40 years,” said Rep. Mike Rogers, the GOP chair of the House Armed Services Committee.

Lawmakers overseeing the military said the bill would change how the Pentagon buys weapons, with an emphasis on speed after years of delay by the defense industry.

Without affirmative action, elite colleges prioritize economic diversity in admissions

WASHINGTON, Dec 11, (AP): Some of the country’s most prestigious colleges are enrolling record numbers of low-income students - a growing admissions priority in the absence of affirmative action.

America’s top campuses remain crowded with wealth, but some universities have accelerated efforts to reach a wider swath of the country, recruiting more in urban and rural areas and offering free tuition for students whose families are not among the highest earners.

The strategy could lead to friction with the federal government. The Trump administration, which has pulled funding from elite colleges over a range of grievances, has suggested it’s illegal to target needier students. College leaders believe they’re on solid legal ground.

At Princeton University, this year’s freshman class has more low-income students than ever. One in four are eligible for federal Pell grants, which are scholarships reserved for students with the most significant financial need. That’s a leap from two decades ago, when fewer than 1 in 10 were eligible.

“The only way to increase socioeconomic diversity is to be intentional about it,” Princeton President Christopher Eisgruber said in a statement. “Socioeconomic diversity will increase if and only if college presidents make it a priority.”



Nassau Hall at Princeton University is seen on Oct 8, 2024, in Princeton, NJ. (AP)

Last year, Princeton set aggressive goals to recruit more low-income students in the wake of the Supreme Court’s ban on affirmative action in higher education. Without the ability to consider race, officials wrote in a campus report, focusing on economic diversity offers “the university’s greatest opportunity to attract diverse talent.”

The country’s most selective colleges

still enroll large proportions of students from the wealthiest 1% of American families. Many of those campuses have tried for years to shed reputations of elitism, with only gradual changes in enrollment. Only a small fraction of the nation’s colleges have publicly disclosed their low-income enrollments this year, and national data won’t be released by the federal government until next year. But early numbers show a trend.

EU nations agree to consider weakening protections for migrants dating to WWII

BRUSSELS, Dec 11, (AP): As sympathy for immigrants erodes around the world, European nations agreed Wednesday to consider changes that rights advocates say would weaken migrant protections that have underpinned European law since World War II.

The consensus coalesced as mainstream political parties across Europe have adopted tougher migration policies as a way to blunt the momentum of far-right politicians exploiting discontent over immigration, even though illegal border crossings are actually falling.

Members of the 46 countries that make up the Council of Europe acknowledged “challenges” posed by migration while reaffirming their respect for the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights, the council’s secretary general, Alain Bertset, told journalists after discussions in Strasbourg, France.

Bertset described the 75-year-old convention as a “living instrument.” While nations reaffirmed their commitment to the rights and freedoms of the convention, they also recognized



From left: European Commissioner for Financial Services Maria Luis De Albuquerque, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration Magnus Brunner attend a Conference of the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling at the EU Charlemagne building in Brussels on Dec 10. (AP)

countries’ responsibility to “safeguard national vital interests such as security.”

The convention and the court, which handles complaints against the council, have been increasingly criticized

by some member states, including Italy, Denmark and the United Kingdom. They argue that they are too limited in how far they can go to tackle illegal migration and deport migrants who commit crimes.

Trump pushes for swift peace deal with Russia

Zelenskyy to hold urgent talks with 30 countries

KYIV, Ukraine, Dec 11, (AP): Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was due to hold urgent talks Thursday with leaders and officials from about 30 countries that are supporting Kyiv’s effort to obtain fair terms for an end to the war with Russia.

The leaders of Germany, Britain and France were among those expected to take part in the meeting of Ukraine’s allies, dubbed the Coalition of the Willing, via video link.

Zelenskyy indicated the talks were hastily arranged as Kyiv officials scramble to avoid getting boxed in by US President Donald Trump’s demands for a swift settlement. European governments are trying to help steer the peace negotiations because they say their own security is at stake.

Trump said Wednesday that he and European leaders discussed proposals by phone in “pretty strong terms,” adding that Zelenskyy “has to be realistic” about his country’s position on a peace plan that would cede Ukrainian territory to Russia. He didn’t elaborate.



A worker walks in front of a production hall after a recent Russian missile attack at DTEK’s power plant in Ukraine, on Dec 10.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said Thursday that he, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron suggested to Trump that they finalize the

peace proposals together with U.S. officials over the weekend. There may also be talks in Berlin early next week, with or without American officials, he said.



Protesters light their phones as torches as a swelling crowd of tens of thousands of Bulgarians filled Sofia’s central square, demanding the government’s resignation amid rising anger over corruption and contested economic policies, Sofia, Bulgaria on Dec 10. (AP)

Bulgaria’s govt resigns as mass protests grip nation

Bulgaria’s government resigned on Thursday as mass protests gripped the country just weeks before it’s due to join the eurozone.

The resignation of the minority coalition, led by the center-right GERB party, was announced minutes before parliament was scheduled to vote on a no-confidence motion tabled by the opposition

over economic mismanagement and supported by growing public anger with widespread corruption.

“Ahead of today’s vote of no confidence, the government is resigning,” Prime Minister Rosen Zhelyazkov told reporters in parliament.

The demonstrations on Wednesday came after last week’s protests

that were sparked by the government’s budget plans for higher taxes, increased social security contributions and spending increases. The government later withdrew the controversial 2026 budget plan.

The protesters’ demands had expanded to include calls for the center-right government to step down. (AP)

Europe

Parmelin elected Swiss prez for 2026: The Swiss parliament elected Economics Minister Guy Parmelin as President of the Swiss Confederation for 2026 on Wednesday.

Parmelin, 66, from the Swiss People’s Party, secured 203 votes out of the 228 ballots cast. According to Swiss media outlet swissinfo, this marks the highest vote count recorded so far this century.

Parmelin has served as the head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research since 2019. He was the vice president of the Swiss Confederation for 2025, and previously held the rotating presidency in 2021.

Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis will serve as vice president of the Swiss Confederation for 2026. Both Parmelin and Cassis will assume their new offices on Jan. 1. Each December, the Swiss parliament elects the President of the Swiss Confederation from the seven members of the Federal Council for a one-year term. The president, regarded as first among equals, serves as the formal head of Switzerland’s seven-member executive branch while continuing their regular ministerial responsibilities. (Xinhua)



A Croatian police officer looks from the shore of Sava river near the site where a boat carrying migrants from Bosnia overturned in eastern Croatia, in Slavonski Brod on Dec 11. (AP)

Boat capsizes in Croatia, 1 dead: A boat carrying migrants overturned early on Thursday on the Sava river in eastern Croatia, killing at least one person and injuring several others, officials said.

The accident happened in the eastern town of Slavonski Brod, by the border with Bosnia. Migrants were apparently trying to cross the Sava River in dense fog when their boat capsized, rescuers told HRT state television. (AP)

Cambodia-Thailand border clashes leave 19 dead as fighting escalates

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 11, (Agencies): Renewed military clashes erupted Thursday along the Cambodia-Thailand border, leaving at least 19 people dead, including Thai soldiers and Cambodian civilians, amid a sharp escalation in the long-running border dispute.

Thailand's Ministry of Defense said nine soldiers and three Thai civilians were killed in exchanges with Cambodian forces along the border. Cambodia's Ministry of Defense reported the civilian death toll on its side had risen to seven.

The Nation newspaper quoted Thai Defense Ministry spokesman Rear Admiral Surasart Kongsiri as saying around 120 soldiers were wounded, while nearly 618,199 civilians were now sheltering in 849 evacuation centers.

He noted that the The Royal Thai Navy continued operations against military targets deemed threats to national security along the maritime border, whilst the Royal Thai Air Force employing precision-guided weapons to minimize collateral damage.

Cambodia's Defense Ministry, cited by the Khmer Times, said dozens of wounded civilians were receiving treatment following Thai military strikes, adding that more than 127,000 civilians had been displaced due to intensifying operations.

Cambodia has formally asked the UN Security Council to take urgent ac-



A Thai police officer splashes water to control fire at a house which, Thai local security forces say, was damaged by a Cambodian artillery strike in Surin province, Thailand on Dec 11. (AP)

tion over what it described as "a series of unprovoked and escalating armed attacks" by Thai forces along their shared border, elevating the dispute from a bilateral conflict to an international security issue.

The conflict dates back to the early 20th century, rooted in colonial-era maps that left stretches of the frontier

undefined, tensions have often centered around the areas surrounding Preah Vihear, which has witnessed repeated confrontations over the past two decades.

A Thai Army statement said Cambodia on Wednesday night launched an attack with artillery and mortars against Thai positions, to which it replied with the same kinds of heavy weapons, causing damage including "the destruction of enemy trucks."

Cambodia's Fresh News online news site, which closely reflects government positions, said artillery duels were continuing Thursday morning.

The combat has drawn international concern, including from Pope Leo XIV, who told an audience at the Vatican that he was "deeply saddened by the news of the renewed conflict."

"There have been casualties, including among civilians, and thousands of people have been forced to leave their homes. I express my closeness in prayer to these dear peoples," he said on Wednesday.

The original ceasefire in July was brokered by Malaysia and pushed through by pressure from Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges unless Thailand and Cambodia agreed. It was formalized in more detail in October at a regional meeting in Malaysia that Trump attended.

Asia

US and Japan hold joint flight drills: US strategic bombers joined a fleet of Japanese fighter jets in a joint military exercise meant to demonstrate their military cooperation around Japan's airspace, defense officials said Thursday, as tensions with China escalate.

The exercise showcasing joint Japanese-US air power came a day after Chinese and Russian bombers flew together around western Japan, prompting Tokyo to scramble fighter jets, though there was no airspace violation. It also follows China's military aircraft locking radar on Japanese jets Saturday, another incident that has caused Tokyo-Beijing relations to further deteriorate.

Japan's Air Self Defense-Force and the US military conducted the joint exercise Wednesday as "the security environment surrounding our country is becoming even severer," the Japanese Joint Staff said.

It said the allies "reaffirmed the strong resolve to prevent unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force and the readiness between the SDF and the US forces."

Two US B-52 strategic bombers and three Japanese F-35 stealth fighter jets and three F-15 jets conducted their joint flight drills near Japan's western airspace, above the waters between the country and South Korea, officials said. (AP)

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Critics of army rule in Myanmar stage strike: Opponents of military rule in Myanmar staged a joint protest on Wednesday calling on people to stay indoors to show they are boycotting elections scheduled for late this month.

They defied harsh legal penalties for attempting to disrupt the polls. The military government has announced charges against 10 pro-democracy activists who staged a rare street protest last week in Mandalay, the country's second biggest city.

Critics say the Dec. 28 polls will be neither free nor fair and are an effort by the military to legitimize its rule after seizing power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021.

The General Strike Coordination Body, the leading non-violent organization opposing army rule, had urged people



A high-angle view of a busy road with famous Inya Lake in the background in Yangon, Myanmar on Dec 10. (AP)

to join a "silent strike" on Wednesday.

It called on the public to stay inside homes or workplaces from 10 am to 3 pm on International Human Rights Day. The tactic has been used on special occasions since the military takeover.

Images on social media showed uncrowded streets in Yangon, Myanmar's largest city, and elsewhere.

Also on Wednesday, the state-run Myanma Alinn newspaper reported that authorities were seeking the arrest of the 10 activists under a section of a new election law that carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison for disrupting the electoral process. (AP)

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3 killed in north China building fire: Three people were killed in a blaze on Wednesday evening in Linfen City, north China's Shanxi Province, according to local authorities on Thursday.

The fire broke out in a building in the Yaodu District at around 8 p.m. on Wednesday and was extinguished about six hours later. Three people in an internet cafe on the second floor died in the accident, according to the publicity department of Yaodu.

The cause of the fire is under investigation. (Xinhua)

Library under construction collapses, killing 1 and trapping 3 under rubble

South Korea's former acting leader indicted over former president's martial law imposition

SEOUL, South Korea, Dec 11, (AP): South Korea's former acting leader Choi Sang-mok waws indicted Thursday on charges related to the brief imposition of martial law in December 2024 by then-President Yoon Suk Yeol, becoming the latest high-profile figure embroiled in legal troubles over the case.

Choi is one of three top Yoon administration officials who served as caretaker presidents during moments of a political crisis caused by Yoon's martial law declaration that led to his impeachment and eventually his removal from office.

Yoon is now in jail while facing a high-stakes criminal trial on rebellion charges. Dozens of high-level officials and military commanders of the Yoon administration have also been arrested, indicted or investigated over their roles in Yoon's martial law debacle and other allegations.

On Thursday, an investigation team led by independent counsel Cho Eun-suk charged Choi with dereliction of duty for not fully restoring the three vacant seats at the nine-member Constitutional Court, which was deliberating whether to unseat Yoon.

Reinstating the court to full strength was seen as a move that could increase prospects for Yoon's ouster because a court ruling to dismiss him needed support from at least six court justices. Choi, who was Yoon's prime minister and finance minister, appointed two new justices but left a ninth justice seat vacant, citing a lack of bipartisan agreement when he became interim president.

In April, the court's eight justices unanimously ruled to throw Yoon out of office.

Cho's team also indicted another former acting leader, Han Duck-soo, on the same dereliction of duty charge, assistant special prosecutor Park Ji-young told a briefing. Han, who served as Yoon's prime minister, the No. 2 post, was already indicted in August on the graver charges of abetting Yoon's martial law imposition.

Cho's team accused Han of trying to push Yoon's martial law decree through a Cabinet Council meeting to give it procedural legitimacy. Han has maintained he



South Korea's acting President Choi Sang-mok speaks during the National Security Council at the government complex building in Seoul, South Korea, on Dec 27, 2024. (AP)

told Yoon that he opposed his martial law plan.

Park said five other people including Yoon's justice minister were also indicted on Thursday on various charges related to the martial law crisis. She said Choi faces perjury charges as well for his comments made at Han's trial.

Investigations into Yoon's imposition of martial law was one of three independent counsel probes targeting Yoon, his wife and associates. Those probes were approved by new President Lee Jae Myung, who won an early election in June triggered by Yoon's ouster.

In August, Yoon's wife, Kim Keon Hee, was arrested and indicted for allegedly violating financial market and political funding laws and receiving bribes. The 82-year-old leader of the Unification Church, Hak Ja Han, was later arrested and indicted over allegations that she instructed church officials to bribe a senior lawmaker close to Yoon.

The Unification Church-involved scandal has roiled South Korea, with local media speculating some prominent politicians, including some at the Lee administration, might also have received money from the church.

On Thursday, Oceans Minister Chun Jae-soo denied any bribery allegations but offered to resign, suggesting he didn't want to burden the Lee administration. Lee accepted Chun's resignation after later Thursday.

Earlier this week, Lee called for a thorough investigation into allegations involving politicians and a religious group, without citing the Unification by name.

Also:

SEOUL, South Korea: A library under construction in South Korea collapsed on Thursday, leaving one worker dead and three others trapped under the rubble, officials said.

Four workers were initially buried in the collapse in the southern city of Gwangju.

One of them was pulled out but later declared dead at a nearby hospital, local emergency officer Ahn Gyun-jae told a televised briefing. Ahn said rescuers found the location of a second worker and were trying to retrieve that person.

Ahn said authorities have mobilized cranes, drones, thermal imaging cameras and rescue dogs.

Subcontinent

Pakistan sentences ex-spy chief to 14 years: A military court on Thursday sentenced a former spy chief of Pakistan to 14 years in prison, more than a year after court-martial proceedings began against him on multiple charges, including engaging in political activities and violating the Official Secrets Act, the military said.

In a statement, it said the Field General Court Martial tried the former director general of the Inter-Services Intelligence, retired Lt Gen **Faiz Hameed**, under the Pakistan Army Act during proceedings that lasted 15 months.

"The accused was tried on four charges related to engaging in political activities, violation of the Official Secrets Act detrimental to the safety and interest of the state, misuse of authority and government resources, and causing wrongful loss" to individuals, the statement said. It did not specify who suffered any such loss, however. (AP)

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Bangladesh to hold elections on Feb: Bangladesh's next national elections will be held on Feb. 12, 18 months after former prime minister Sheikh Hasina was ousted through a mass uprising following weeks of violence that left hundreds dead and thousands injured, the chief election commissioner said Thursday.

A.M.M. Nasir Uddin confirmed the date in a televised address to the nation. He said that a national referendum would also be held on the same day as voting to elect 300 lawmakers.

The last elections were held in January 2024, when Hasina returned to office for a fourth consecutive term. The vote was boycotted by her main rivals, who accused her administration of rigging the result.

In July and August 2024, huge protests broke out, leading to Hasina's removal from office. She fled to India, where she is now in exile.

An interim government headed by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus has been running the country since Aug. 8, 2024. The Yunus-led administration has banned all activities of Hasina's Awami League party, which means the former ruling party would not be able to join the race. (AP)

Nobel laureate Machado plans return to Caracas

US seizes oil tanker off coast of Venezuela: President Trump

WASHINGTON, Dec 11, (AP): US President Donald Trump said Wednesday that the United States has seized an oil tanker off the coast of Venezuela as tensions mount with the government of President Nicolás Maduro.

Using US forces to take control of a merchant ship is incredibly unusual and marks the Trump administration's latest push to increase pressure on Maduro, who has been charged with narcoterrorism in the United States. The US has built up the largest military presence in the region in decades and launched a series of deadly strikes on alleged drug-smuggling boats in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean. The campaign is facing growing scrutiny from Congress.

"We've just seized a tanker on the coast of Venezuela, a large tanker, very large, largest one ever seized, actually," Trump told reporters at the White House, later adding that "it was seized for a very good reason." Trump did not offer additional details. When asked what would happen to the oil aboard the tanker, Trump said, "Well, we keep it, I guess."

The seizure was led by the US Coast Guard and supported by the Navy, according to a US official who was not au-



This image from video posted on Attorney General Pam Bondi's X account, and partially redacted by the source, shows an oil tanker being seized by US forces off the coast of Venezuela on Dec 10. (AP)

thorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity. The official added that it was conducted under US law enforcement authority.

The Coast Guard members were taken to the oil tanker by helicopter from the aircraft carrier USS Gerald

licopters involved in the operation as it hovers just feet from the deck.

The Coast Guard members can be seen later in the video moving throughout the superstructure of the ship with their weapons drawn.

Bondi wrote that "for multiple years, the oil tanker has been sanctioned by the United States due to its involvement in an illicit oil shipping network supporting foreign terrorist organizations." Venezuela's government said in a statement that the seizure "constitutes a blatant theft and an act of international piracy."

Also:

OSLO, Norway: Opposition leader María Corina Machado on Thursday asserted she plans to return to Venezuela whether or not President Nicolás Maduro is ousted, saying his government is at its weakest point due to US President Donald Trump's "decisive" actions.

Machado's statements to reporters came hours after she appeared in public for the first time in 11 months following her arrival in Norway's capital, Oslo, where her daughter received the Nobel Peace Prize award on her behalf on Wednesday.

Over 400 civilians killed in eastern Congo, say officials

GOMA, Congo, Dec 11, (AP): More than 400 civilians have been killed as the Rwanda-backed M23 armed group continues its offensive in Kivu province in eastern Congo, regional officials said late Wednesday, adding that Rwandan special forces were in the strategic city of Uvira.

M23's latest offensive comes despite a US-mediated peace agreement signed last week by the Congolese and Rwandan presidents in Washington. The accord didn't include the rebel group, which is negotiating separately with Congo and agreed earlier this year to a ceasefire that both sides accuse the other of violating. However, it obliges Rwanda to halt support for armed groups and work to end hostilities.

"More than 413 civilians (have been) killed by bullets, grenades, and bombs, including many women, children, and young people" in localities between Uvira and Bukavu, the regional capital, the South Kivu government spokesperson said in a statement late Wednesday.

"According to the information gathered, the forces present in the city are composed of Rwandan special forces and some of their foreign mercenaries, operating in clear violation of the ceasefire as well as the Washington and Doha agreements, in total disregard of the commitments made," the statement added.



US President Donald Trump stands with Rwanda's President Paul Kagame and Democratic Republic of Congo President Felix-Antoine Tshisekedi at the US Institute of Peace on Dec 4, in Washington. (AP)

M23 said it had taken control of the strategic city of Uvira in eastern Congo on Wednesday afternoon, following a rapid offensive since the start of the month.

The announcement by M23 spokesperson Lawrence Kanyuka, posted on the social platform X, encouraged citizens who fled to return to their homes. Uvira is an important port city on the northern tip of Lake Tanganyika and is directly across from neighboring Bu-

rundi's largest city, Bujumbura.

Congo, the US and UN experts accuse Rwanda of backing M23, which had hundreds of members in 2021. Now, according to the UN, the group has around 6,500 fighters.

While Rwanda denies that claim, it acknowledged last year that it has troops and missile systems in eastern Congo, allegedly to safeguard its security. UN experts estimate there are up to 4,000 Rwandan forces in Congo.

Former Bolivian president Luis Arce arrested in corruption investigation

LA PAZ, Bolivia, Dec 11, (AP): Bolivian law enforcement officials arrested former president Luis Arce as part of a corruption investigation, opening an uncertain chapter in the country's politics a month after the inauguration of conservative President Rodrigo Paz ended 20 years of socialist rule.

A senior official in Paz's government, Marco Antonio Oviedo, told reporters that Arce had been arrested on charges of breach of duty and financial misconduct related to the alleged embezzlement of public funds during his stint as economy minister in the government of charismatic former leader Evo Morales (2006-2019).

A special police force dedicated to fighting corruption confirmed to The Associated Press that Arce was in custody at the unit's headquarters in Bolivia's capital of La Paz.

Officials described Arce's arrest as proof of the new government's commitment to fighting graft at the highest levels in fulfillment of its flagship campaign promise.

"It is the decision of this government to fight corruption, and we will arrest all those responsible for this massive embezzlement," Oviedo said.

But underlining the country's po-



Former minister of the presidency Maria Nela Prada knocks on the door at the police station, after former President Luis Arce was arrested for corruption in La Paz, Bolivia, on Dec 10. (AP)

larization, Arce's allies said his arrest was unjustified and smacked of political persecution.

Authorities accused Arce and other officials of diverting an estimated \$700 million from a state-run fund dedicated to supporting the Indigenous people

and peasant farmers who formed the backbone of Morales' Movement Toward Socialism party. As Bolivia's first Indigenous president, Morales transformed the country's power structure and gave Indigenous people more sway than ever.

Kuwait oil drops to \$61.43 pb

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11, (KUNA): The price of Kuwaiti oil dropped 54 cents to reach USD 61.43 per barrel on Wednesday, compared to USD 61.97 pb on Tuesday, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC). In global markets, Brent crude and the West Texas Intermediate went up 27 cents and 21 cents respectively, reaching USD 62.21 pb and USD 58.46 pb.

Business

Partnership of Kuwait's first regional Hearth Summit advanced individual, organizational, & environmental wellbeing

Zain puts human wellbeing at the heart of its digital transformation & inclusion journey



Waad Al-Azmi shares her experience with the audience during the panel discussion.



Zain's team and organizers in a group photo at the summit.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: Zain Kuwait's partnership of the Hearth Kuwait 2025 Summit marked the first regional event of its kind in Kuwait dedicated to individual, institutional, community, and environmental wellbeing. Organized by en.v in collaboration with The Wellbeing Project, the three-day Summit was hosted by the American University of Kuwait (AUK). Zain's support for this event builds on the company's Inclusion, Diversity and Equity (IDE) department's 'BE WELL' initiative, a pioneering mental health and wellbeing program launched across Zain's operations to provide employees with practical tools and professional support to manage stress, protect their mental health, and foster healthier workplace cultures.

BE WELL was introduced in 2021 and developed in cooperation with leading partners, reflects the company's belief that employee mental health is a core element of its "psychological capital" and a foundation for sustainable performance and engagement.

Through BE WELL, Zain aims to normalize conversations around mental health, encourage leaders and teams to adopt mindfulness and self-care practices, and create work environments that reduce burnout, absenteeism, and the negative impact of chronic stress. The company sees Hearth Summit Kuwait 2025 as a natural extension of this journey, opening a wider community space for dialogue, learning, and collaboration on wellbeing beyond the workplace and into society at large.

The summit brought together more than 200 changemakers from civil society, education, business, the arts, philanthropy, and public institutions. Over the course of the event, participants took part in inspiring discussions, interactive workshops, and artistic, cultural, and culinary experiences that explored the role of wellbeing in building more resilient and sustainable communities.

Within this broader wellbeing agenda, Zain is also advancing its IDE strategy and WE ABLE 2030 roadmap, which together seek to build an inclusive and equitable workplace for all, including persons with disabilities. This approach focuses on embedding accessibility principles into recruitment, career development, and workplace design, and on translating inclusion from generic slogans into everyday practices that strengthen innovation and sustainability across the business.

As part of the summit's program, Waad Al-Azmi, Inclusion and Accessibility Advocate at Zain Group, took part in a special panel discussion in which she shared her experience of working within Zain's inclusive environment. She spoke about the importance of wellbeing, psychological resilience, and institutional support in enabling employees with disabilities to contribute their full potential, and emphasized that a culture of listening, respect, and acceptance is the foundation of all inclusion policies and initiatives at Zain.

During its participation at the summit, Zain also spotlighted its GROW program,

which is specifically designed to empower graduates with disabilities through clear career pathways and individual development plans that build their skills and prepare them for future leadership opportunities. The program combines on-the-job training, professional mentoring, and capacity-building aligned with Zain's competency framework and business objectives, providing a practical model for inclusive workplaces capable of discovering and developing untapped talent.

Zain is inviting graduates with disabilities to apply for the new cohort of the GROW program via the link: <https://zain.com/en/grow> to join a holistic professional development journey that offers structured opportunities for career growth, experience-building, and meaningful contribution to the future of the digital economy.

The company's support of the Hearth Kuwait Summit reflects its ongoing commitment to supporting initiatives that put human wellbeing at the top of the agenda and connect mental health and social inclusion on one side with innovation, digital transformation, and sustainable development on the other, in line with its purpose of creating "Better Lives, Lasting Connections" for all.

The summit was organized by en.v, a Kuwait-based organization focused on community development initiatives and building the capacities of civil society institutions, in partnership with The Wellbeing Project, a global initiative dedicated to the wellbeing of people working in fields of social change.

Kuwait participates in the 18th Global Tax Transparency Forum

Al-Munaifi urges greater focus on GCC in global tax dialogue

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: Kuwait's delegation, led by the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Finance, Aseel Sulaiman Al-Saad Al-Munaifi, participated in the 18th meeting of the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes.

According to a press release issued by the Ministry of Finance, the event was held in New Delhi, India from December 2 to 5 under the patronage of Indian Finance and Institutional Affairs Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, and brought together delegations from over 120 countries and tax authorities.

The main focus of the discussions was the review of national reports and the progress achieved in strengthening automatic exchange of information procedures between countries, as well as addressing challenges faced in implementing these crucial processes.

Kuwait's commitment to global tax transparency was highlighted on the first day during the ministerial dialogue session, "Promoting a Shared Vision for Global Tax Transparency," when the undersecretary delivered the country's statement.

She underscored Kuwait's adherence to international standards for exchanging tax information, which is reinforced by domestic laws that enable information sharing with other countries that are signatories to multilateral agreements aimed at promoting tax transparency.

Discussions also addressed the Global Forum's initiatives to support member states in achieving tax transparency and combating tax evasion.

Al-Munaifi highlighted the importance of the World Economic Forum's ongoing efforts to train and develop human resources in countries



Kuwait participates in Global Forum on Tax Transparency in New Delhi.

newly implementing tax systems.

In conclusion, the undersecretary called on the forum to prioritize initiatives targeting Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, given their regional importance and impact on the global economy.

On the sidelines of the forum, Al-Munaifi met with Kuwait's assessors

to review the latest requirements and preparations for the upcoming assessment scheduled for April.

She also met with Kuwait's Ambassador to India, Mishal Mustafa Al-Shamali, and embassy staff, and briefed them on the meeting's outcomes and Kuwait's ongoing efforts in tax transparency.

Students engage with Gulf Bank's red Youth Account

Gulf Bank backs youth empowerment as Silver Sponsor of 'Make a Move' initiative

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: As part of its sustained commitment to supporting youth development and fostering a culture of financial empowerment among the younger generation, Gulf Bank has successfully concluded its role as the Silver Sponsor of the Make a Move initiative, a program spanned seven weeks and engaged students across Kuwait's major universities through a series of athletic competitions, recreational activities, and youth-centered experiences designed to promote well-being, confidence, and community engagement.

Running from 29 October to 10 December 2025 at an average of two universities per week, the initiative provided Gulf Bank with a strategic platform to directly connect with students and strengthen financial literacy within the academic environment. The Bank's interactive booth served as a dynamic hub where students were encouraged not only to participate in sports and wellness activities but also to explore how smart financial choices early in life can support their long-term goals.

Throughout the tour, Gulf Bank showcased the red Youth Account and the red Plus prepaid card—two flagship offerings designed for university and college students. These solutions empower young customers to build foundational financial skills by providing tools that help them track spending, plan budgets, and make informed decisions about managing their resources. Students expressed strong interest in the practical features of both products, such as prepaid card control, exclusive partner offers, purchase rewards, and invitations to curated events that enhance their lifestyle and align with their personal aspirations.

The red Account represents a core pillar of Gulf Bank's youth strategy, offering a suite of benefits that go beyond traditional banking. By integrating rewards, entertainment, and experiential learning, the account encourages financial responsibility in a way that resonates with today's fast-moving and digitally engaged generation. Meanwhile, the red Plus prepaid card provides an accessible and secure payment tool that helps young people gain real-world financial experience under a structured and safe framework. During its multiple on-campus en-



The bank team responds to student inquiries.



The bank's booth introduces students to the benefits of the red Youth Account.

gagements, Gulf Bank's dedicated sales team emphasized the importance of financial literacy as a life skill, highlighting how early awareness of budgeting, savings, and responsible spending can positively influence students' academic journeys and future careers. The Bank also reinforced its commitment to supporting youth-driven initiatives that contribute to building a more informed, resilient, and opportunity-ready society.

This initiative forms part of Gulf Bank's broader youth strategy, which aims to build lasting relationships with young customers, understand their evolving expectations, and deliver products and services that support their progress. By engaging directly with students in their educational environment, the Bank continues to solidify its role as a partner in their growth, offering them financial tools that adapt to their ambitions and lifestyles.

'This is Your Role' closing ceremony attended by Ministers & Governors

KFH receives honor for societal leadership & prominent role in environment preservation

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) participated in the closing ceremony of the national campaign, "This Is Your Role," which aims to promote environmental awareness, cleanliness, and the greening of Kuwait.

During the ceremony, KFH was honored in recognition of its leadership in social responsibility and prominent role in supporting environmental initiatives and promoting volunteerism culture as a key pillar of sustainable development.

KFH Executive Manager Social Media and PR Services Center, Abdullah Al-Saif, received the award on behalf of the Bank, in the presence of the Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah, Minister of Education, Sayed Jalal Al-Tabtabaei, Ahmadi Governor Sheikh Homoud Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and Governor of Mubarak Al-Kabeer and Acting Governor of Hawally, Sabah Bader Al-Salem Al-Sabah. They commended KFH's role and commitment toward community development, environment preservation and its major contributions to sustainability and social responsibility.

On this occasion, KFH Executive Manager Social Me-



Kuwait Finance House pavilion.

dia and PR Services Center, Abdullah Al-Saif, stated that the Bank's participation in this national initiative, which ran from 2 November to 3 December, in cooperation

with the Ministry of Social Affairs among a wide participation from public and private entities in addition to volunteering teams, reflects KFH's commitment to sup-

porting national initiatives. It also highlights its keenness to strengthen efforts to protect the environment and promote awareness among all segments of society.

He emphasized that KFH's involvement in community and environmental initiatives serves as a model for the private sector's role in supporting and driving activities that positively impact society.

He also noted the strong response from the KFH volunteer team and employees to the "This is Your Role" initiative, highlighting their efforts in cleaning beaches and waste areas, alongside rehabilitating and greening various locations across all Kuwaiti governorates.

Al-Saif explained that these efforts fall under "Keep It Green" initiative, an umbrella program dedicated to environmental protection and engaging youth in cleaning and beautifying facilities through field and awareness activities across all governorates.

It serves to note that KFH actively reinforces its role in fostering public-private sector partnerships to support environmental preservation and sustainability. The bank achieves this by backing initiatives and programs specifically designed to protect Kuwait's environment and boost general environmental awareness.



CBK honors winners of '24 Kuwaiti economics student award. KUNA photo

Highlighting research innovation

CBK honors winners of Kuwaiti Economics Student Award 2024

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11, (KUNA): The Central Bank of Kuwait held a ceremony Wednesday honoring winners of the 2024 Kuwaiti Economics Student Award, under the patronage and attendance of CBK Governor Basel Al-Haroon and senior banking officials.

The Governor affirmed the Bank's commitment to supporting national talent and promoting scientific research in economic and banking fields. He said the award encourages young Kuwaitis to develop research skills grounded in rigorous academic standards across economic and financial disciplines.

Institute of Banking Studies Director General Rana Al-Nibari said the award forms a key pillar of the CBK's "Kafa'a" initiative to develop national capabilities, noting the submission of 26 research papers reflecting promising analysis of contemporary economic and financial issues.

First place went to Salem Al-Shehab for a study on predicting bank stability; second to Mohammad Al-Doub for research on narrative alignment in earnings communications; third to Dalal Darwish on digital transformation. A special encouragement award was granted to Mubarak Al-Duaij.

Sustaining financial stability

CBK slashes discount rate by 25 basis points to 3.5%

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11, (KUNA): The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) decided on Wednesday to cut the discount rate by 25 Basis Points to 3.5 percent effective Thursday, December 11.

In a press release, the CBK said the step was taken "as part of the Central Bank of Kuwait's (CBK) ongoing monitoring of key global economic and monetary indicators and their potential impact on the performance of the local economy, and in light of the need for policies to be tailored to the specific requirements and circumstances of each economy".

It also underlined that this decision aims to keep pace with developments in the local economy, stimulate economic activity across various sectors,

and maintain the financial stability of banking and financial institutions.

"Indicators as of the end of October 2025 show the sustained relative stability of the KWD exchange rate against major currencies and its attractiveness as a lucrative and reliable store of domestic savings," added the CBK.

In conclusion, the CBK affirmed its continued vigilant monitoring of global and domestic economic and monetary developments, in a manner that ensures the adoption of necessary measures through the use of available monetary policy and macro-prudential tools, following a gradual and balanced approach to reinforce monetary and financial stability in the State of Kuwait.

Don't settle for a subpar health savings account

Paired with high-deductible healthcare plans, health savings accounts help ease healthcare costs. HSAs are a triple tax-advantaged vehicle in the tax code, allowing for pretax contributions, tax-free compounding, and tax-free withdrawals for qualified medical expenses. However, few owners fund their HSAs to the maximum, and even fewer invest their HSA dollars outside a savings account.

Most consumers likely don't fill their HSAs because they lack the financial means; critics note that the HDHP/HSA combination can be less beneficial for lower-income workers. But even wealthy consumers may decline to fully fund their HSAs. Many HSAs charge account-maintenance fees and extra costs for investing in long-term assets.

Unlike 401(k)s, where participants are typically captive in employer plans, HSA savers can move money from one HSA to another via transfer or rollover. Below, how to know if your HSA is subpar, and what to do if it is.

HSAs appear preferable to other tax-advantaged savings vehicles, especially for investors expecting out-of-pocket healthcare expenses. Even in a worst-case scenario-using HSA funds for non-healthcare expenses-the HSA is at least as good as a traditional tax-deferred 401(k) or IRA.

Yet HSA expenses and/or investment shortcomings can erode their tax benefits, particularly for smaller HSA investors. Flat dollar-based account-maintenance fees (say, \$45/year) hit smaller HSA investors harder, and interest rates for smaller HSAs may be lower. It's worthwhile to conduct due diligence on your HSA, assessing the following:

1. Setup Fees: A one-time fee imposed at account opening, sometimes covered by employers.

2. Account-Maintenance Fees: Monthly or annual fees for maintaining your account, also sometimes covered by employers.

3. Transaction Fees: Dollar-based fees that may be levied when paying for services using the HSA.

4. Interest Rate on Savings Accounts: For people using the HSA to fund out-of-pocket healthcare costs (or taking a hybrid approach),

it's particularly important to monitor your savings rate of return. Many HSAs offer higher interest rates on larger balances; that argues for building and maintaining critical mass in your HSA.

5. Investment-Related Expenses: Investors may face mutual fund or ETF expense ratios, sales charges, and dollar-based fees for maintaining investment accounts.

6. Investment Choices: Assess the investment lineup on offer to make sure it aligns with your investment philosophy.

If your employer-provided HSA is lacking, you have three choices.

Option 1: Contribute to an HSA on Your Own

If you're enrolled in a HDHP, you can choose a different HSA provider and deduct your HSA contributions on your tax return. That's more cumbersome and requires more discipline than payroll deductions, so forgoing payroll deductions is usually not the best option.

Option 2: Transfer the Money from Your Employer-Provided HSA Into Another HSA

Your HSA contribution comes directly from your paycheck and goes to your employer-provided HSA; you can then periodically transfer some or all of that balance into your preferred HSA provider. There are no tax consequences on HSA transfers, and you can conduct multiple transfers per year. You can have more than one HSA, so this approach can work well for employees whose "captive" HSAs feature decent savings but less-compelling investment options.

Option 3: Roll Over the Money From Your Employer-Provided HSA Into Another HSA

This is similar to option 2. You contribute to your employer-provided HSA via payroll deduction, then roll over the money to your preferred HSA provider.

There are two key differences between a rollover and a transfer. In a transfer, two trustees handle the funds. In a rollover, you get a check that you must deposit into another HSA within 60 days, or it counts as an early withdrawal, and a 20% penalty will apply if you're not yet 65. Multiple transfers are permitted between HSAs, but only one HSA rollover is allowed every 12 months. (AP)

As part of the 'Let's Be Aware' Campaign

NBK hosts an awareness session on digital fraud for Ahmed Al-Adwani secondary school students

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: As part of its commitment to promoting banking culture and spreading financial awareness among various society segments, National Bank of Kuwait organized an awareness session for students of Ahmed Al-Adwani High School for Boys in Adailiya, as part of its support for the "Let's Be Aware" campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait in cooperation with the Kuwait Banking Association.

During the session, NBK's team reviewed the initiative's objectives and highlighted the importance of being cautious of the advanced methods used by fraudsters in conducting online scams, in addition to bringing the students' attention to the most common scam techniques and how to identify and avoid them. Moreover, the session included real-life examples and practical demonstrations of online fraud techniques, such as fake messages impersonating banks or major companies, fake links aimed at stealing personal banking information, in addition to warning against fake offers and enticing prizes that scammers use to build trust with victims.

NBK's team also provided a set of essential tips for protecting personal information, most notably not sharing banking information with any untrusted entity and not responding to messages or calls claiming to be from the bank, stressing that the bank does not request any sensitive data via email, text messages, or phone calls. The Team also emphasized the importance of activating dual authentication and regularly monitoring bank accounts to check for any unauthorized activity.

The session saw remarkable interaction from the students through discussions that brought real-life examples and questions to test their understanding, which aimed to make them more vigilant and proactive in protecting their information when using the internet and social media.

Additionally, NBK called for the need to follow the tips and guidance it provides on its digital platforms to keep up with the latest common fraud techniques and avoid them, noting that scammers are now using artificial intelligence, which is why the bank is keeping a vigilant eye on these devious methods and warning the public about them.

On this occasion, Saud Al Askar, Senior Officer - Social Media, Digital Communications commented: "Spreading banking awareness is a crucial step in facing and combating digital fraud, which is why we are keen to come up with educational methods that keep pace with technological developments and reach all society segments, including schools and universities".

Al Askar added: "NBK is harnessing all its digital capabilities and inter-



Adnan Al-Tamimi



Saud Al Askar



Part of the session.



Students of Ahmed Al-Adwani High School

Al Askar:

- Spreading banking awareness is a crucial step in facing and combating digital fraud.
- We are keen on harnessing our digital capabilities to ensure that the Diraya Campaign reaches the widest possible audience.
- At NBK, we monitor the latest fraud techniques and provide tips and guidance on how to avoid them.

active channels, which have wide and leading following, to ensure that the campaign's objectives reach the largest possible audience, thereby enhancing the protection of customers and society from the risks of electronic fraud".

Al Askar continued: "Our commitment to combating fraud is not limited to warning against traditional methods but also includes monitoring the latest technologies exploited by scammers and providing practical guidance that

helps customers protect their information and accounts".

Finally, Al Askar emphasized that NBK's efforts in combating digital fraud and raising customer awareness represent a fundamental pillar of its strategy, further noting that the "Let's Be Aware" campaign is the largest in the region in raising banking and financial awareness, and addresses important topics such as promoting a culture of saving and investment, and

the safe use of digital banking services.

It is worth noting that the bank is a vital supporter and key partner of all the campaigns and initiatives made by the Central Bank of Kuwait that aim to raise financial awareness and promote banking culture in society. As a leading financial institution, NBK has been keen to organize various events that contribute to raising awareness in society about all banking-related issues.

General index up 43.21 points

Boursa Kuwait closes higher on Thursday

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait ended Thursday's trading session on a positive note, with the general market index gaining 43.21 points, or 0.48%, to close at 9,058.21 points.

Trading activity saw 405.3 million shares exchanged through 24,205 cash transactions, with a total turnover of KD 98.8 million (approximately USD 301.3 million). The Main Market Index advanced 35.35 points, or 0.43%, to 8,268.58 points. A total of 240.6 million shares were traded via 14,816 transactions, valued at KD 38 million (around USD 115.9 million).

Meanwhile, the Premier Market Index climbed 47.28 points, or 0.49%, reaching 9,701.34 points. Trading volume in this segment stood at 164.7 million shares through 9,389 transactions, worth KD 60.8 million (roughly USD 185.4 million).

The Main 50 Index also posted a modest increase of 10.52 points, or 0.12%, to close at 8,612.54 points. It recorded 129 million shares traded across 7,262 cash transactions, with a total value of KD 20.5 million (about USD 62.5 million).

In line with its commitment to social responsibility & supporting talents

NBK sponsors the Rafa Nadal Academy Team at the 'TenPro' Tennis Tournament in Mallorca

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: As part of its strategic partnership with Rafa Nadal Academy, National Bank of Kuwait sponsored the academy's team during the Mallorca Tennis Tournament in Spain, which was held from November 22 until December 9, 2025, with the participation of 6 players and 2 coaches.

This is the third trip that NBK sponsors during this year, in continuation of its efforts to support sports and encourage the youth to adopt healthy lifestyles, in line with its longstanding commitment to contributing to social responsibility and achieving sustainable development.

Two Former Trips Towards Athletic Excellence

NBK had formerly sponsored two tournaments for the academy team this year: the first was a tennis tournament in Mallorca, Spain, held last March and the second was the "TenPro" tennis tournament in Antalya, Turkey.. These tournaments were met with great interaction, as the participants were introduced to professional training experience and new skills in world-class athletic environments, further enhancing their self-confidence and abilities.

On this occasion, Mohammed Al-Sarraf, Specialist - Public Relations Department at National Bank of Kuwait, said: "NBK pays great attention to sports and health, and is always keen to support initiatives that empower athletes and encourage them to thrive. Our partnership with Rafa Nadal Academy stems from our vision to invest in sports and consequently build a better future for the national youth.

Al-Sarraf added: "This tournament represents a unique opportunity for players to gain experience and compete against world-class players in a professional environment. The impact of these trips is not limited to the sporting aspect only, but extends to include enhancing core values such as commitment, discipline and self-confidence, which are essential elements in building an aspiring generation."

Members of the Rafa Nadal Academy have access to 15 tennis courts, including outdoor and indoor courts equipped with the latest global technologies. The academy also has padel and squash courts, as well as an indoor swimming pool and separate gyms for women and men to practice fitness exercises.



Mallorca group photo

Al-Sarraf:

- This tournament is a golden opportunity for the players to gain experience and compete against world-class players.
- Participating in tournaments abroad contributes to enhancing core values that build an aspiring generation such as commitment, discipline, and confidence
- We are always keen to support initiatives that empower athletes and encourage them to thrive.

It is worth noting that NBK is firmly committed to fulfilling its social responsibilities and making a positive impact in the communities where it operates. Through initiatives and programs, the bank is

dedicated to youth development, education, health, women's empowerment, and environmental sustainability, in addition to striving to build a better future for upcoming generations.

BUSINESS

US unemployment claims jump by 44,000 but remain historically low

Fed cuts rates as job market weakens

WASHINGTON, Dec 11, (AP): The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits jumped last week, but remain in the same historically healthy range of the past few years despite growing concern over the health of the labor market.

U.S. jobless claim applications for the week ending Dec. 6 climbed by 44,000 to 236,000 from the previous week’s 192,000, the Labor Department reported Thursday. That’s more than analysts’ forecast of 213,000 new applications.

The previous week’s figure, analysts say, was distorted by the Thanksgiving holiday.

Applications for unemployment aid are viewed as a proxy for layoffs and are close to a real-time indicator of the health of the job market.

Despite what on the surface appears to be a historically healthy job market, the Federal Reserve trimmed its benchmark lending rate by a quarter-point on Wednesday, its third straight cut.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell said the committee reduced borrowing costs out of concern that the job market is even weaker than it appears. While government data shows that the economy has added a sluggish 40,000 jobs a month since April, Powell said that figure could be revised lower by as much as 60,000. That would mean employers have actually been shedding an average of 20,000 jobs a month since the spring.

“It’s a labor market that seems to have significant downside risks,” Powell told reporters. “People care about that. That’s their jobs.”

Jobless claims figures in recent years have remained in a historically healthy range, suggesting that overall layoffs have been muted despite some high-profile job cuts. Hiring is also sluggish, which makes finding a job for those out of work challenging.

For now, the U.S. job market appears stuck in a “low-hire, low-fire” state that has kept the unemployment rate historically low.

Last week, private payroll data firm ADP es-



Applicants line up at a job fair at the Ocean Casino Resort in Atlantic City, N.J., on April 11, 2022. (AP)

timated U.S. job losses of 32,000 in November. The surprisingly weak report comports with recent government employment data, which has shown a significant decline in job growth since President Donald Trump implemented his sweeping tariffs on U.S. trading partners in April.

Though September had a solid gain of 119,000 jobs, June and August both showed net job losses. The unemployment rate has inched up to 4.4%, its highest level in four years.

November’s comprehensive jobs data has been delayed for release until next week due to the government shutdown.

Job cuts announced recently by large companies such as UPS, General Motors, Amazon and

Verizon typically take weeks or months to fully implement and may not be reflected in Thursday’s data.

The total number of Americans filing for jobless benefits for the previous week ending Nov. 29 fell by 99,000 to 1.84 million, the government said. That’s the lowest level for continuing claims since mid-April, but some analysts said the plunge is due to a variety of factors, including seasonal adjustments and the fact that most people aren’t eligible for benefits after 26 weeks.

The Labor Department’s report Thursday showed that the four-week average of claims, which evens out some of the week-to-week volatility, rose by 2,000 to 216,750.

White House defends tariffs as Democrats decry rising prices

Trump tariffs cost US households nearly \$1,200

WASHINGTON, Dec 11, (AP): Sweeping taxes on imports have cost the average American household nearly \$1,200 since Donald Trump returned to the White House this year, according to calculations by Democrats on Congress’ Joint Economic Committee.

Using Treasury Department numbers on revenue from tariffs and Goldman Sachs estimates of who ends up paying for them, the Democrats’ report Thursday found that American consumers’ share of the bill came to nearly \$159 billion - or \$1,198 per household - from February through November.

“This report shows that (Trump’s) tariffs have done nothing but drive prices even higher for families,” said Sen. Maggie Hassan of New Hampshire, the top Democrat on the economic committee. “At a time when both parties should be working together to lower costs, the president’s tax on American families is simply making things more expensive.”

In his second term, Trump has reversed decades of U.S. policy that favored free trade. He’s imposed double-digit tariffs on almost every country on earth. According to Yale University’s Budget Lab, the average U.S. tariff has shot up from 2.4% at the beginning of the year to 16.8%, the highest since 1935.

The president argues that the import taxes will protect U.S. industries from unfair foreign competition, bring factories to the United States and

raise money for the Treasury.

“President Trump’s tariffs have actually secured trillions in investments to make and hire in America as well as historic trade deals that finally level the playing field for American workers and industries,” said White House Spokesman Kush Desai. “Democrats spent decades complaining about lopsided trade deals undermining the American working class, and now they’re complaining about the one president who has done something about it.”

The taxes are paid by importers who typically attempt to pass along the higher costs to their customers.

Democrats did well in elections last month in Virginia, New Jersey and elsewhere largely because voters blame Trump and the Republicans for the high cost of living, just as they’d blamed Trump’s predecessor, Democrat Joe Biden, for the same thing a year earlier.

Economist Kimberly Clausing of the UCLA School of Law and the Peterson Institute for International Economics, last week told a House subcommittee that Trump’s tariffs amount to “the largest tax increase on American consumers in a generation, lowering standards of living for all Americans.” Clausing, a Treasury Department tax official in the Biden administration, has calculated that Trump’s import taxes “amount to an annual tax increase of about \$1,700 for an average household.”

Congress passes wide tariff increases amid US trade tensions

Mexico approves tariff hikes on 1,400 imports

MEXICO CITY, Dec 11, (AP): Mexico’s Congress approved Wednesday most of the tariff increases proposed by the government on more than 1,400 products imported from China and other countries that do not have free trade agreements with Mexico.

The Senate passed the measure Wednesday evening, following the lower chamber, which had approved the increases before dawn. The governing Morena party of President Claudia Sheinbaum, who said the tariffs were necessary to spur domestic production, controls both chambers. The Senate passed the legislation with 76 votes in favor, five against and 35 abstentions.

Analysts say the real motivation is ongoing negotiations with Washington, Mexico’s most important trading partner. Sheinbaum

has been trying to find relief from remaining tariffs imposed on Mexican imports by the Trump administration, which has accused China of using Mexico as a backdoor into the U.S. market.

Tariff increases of as much as 50% will affect textiles, shoes, appliances, cars and auto parts among other things beginning in January.

China will be the most affected as Mexico imported \$130 billion worth of products from the country in 2024, second only to the what Mexico bought from the United States. The Chinese government was critical of the proposed tariff increases when they were announced in September.

“The real reason has to do with the United States, it has to do with the review of the

USMCA (free trade agreement) that is coming up, with the negotiations to obtain reductions, exemptions from the tariffs that Mexico is facing at this moment to access the U.S. market,” said Oscar Ocampo, director of economic development at the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness. Mexico still faces U.S. tariffs on the automotive sector, steel and aluminum.

But Ocampo said Mexico was bending to an unpredictable U.S. President Donald Trump and changing its commercial policy “in the wrong direction.” He said the government was creating problems for a number of sectors, including auto parts, plastics, chemicals and textiles, because the tariffs will create disruptions in supply chains and could push inflation up at a time when the economy is slowing.

Voter discontent grows

Poll shows sharp decline in Trump's economic approval

WASHINGTON, Dec 11, (AP): President Donald Trump’s approval on the economy and immigration have fallen substantially since March, according to a new AP-NORC poll, the latest indication that two signature issues that got him elected barely a year ago could be turning into liabilities as his party begins to gear up for the 2026 midterms.

Only 31% of U.S. adults now approve of how Trump is handling the economy, the poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds. That is down from 40% in March and marks the lowest economic approval he’s registered in an AP-NORC poll in his first or second term. The Republican president also has struggled to recover from public blowback on other issues, such as his management of the federal government, and has not seen an approval bump even after congressional Democrats effectively capitulated to end a record-long government shutdown last month.

Perhaps most worryingly for Trump, who’s become increasingly synonymous with his party, he’s slipped on issues that were major strengths. Just a few months ago, 53% of Americans approved of Trump’s handling of crime, but that’s fallen to 43% in the new poll. There’s been a similar decline on immigration, from 49% approval in March to 38% now.

The new poll starkly illustrates how Trump has struggled to hold onto political wins since his return to office. Even border security - an issue on which his approval remains relatively high - has declined slightly in recent months.

The good news for Trump is that his overall approval hasn’t fallen as steeply. The new poll found that 36% of Americans approve of the way he’s handling his job as president, which is down slightly from 42% in March. That signals that even if some people aren’t happy with elements of his approach, they might not be ready to say he’s doing a bad job as president. And while discontent is increasing among Republicans on certain issues, they’re largely still behind him.

Republicans are more unhappy with Trump’s performance on the economy than they were in the first few months of his term. About 7 in 10 Republicans, 69%, approve of how Trump is handling the economy in the December poll, a decline from 78% in March.

Larry Reynolds, a 74-year-old retiree and Republican voter from Wadsworth, Ohio, said he believes in Trump’s plan to impose import duties on U.S. trading partners but thinks rates have spiraled too high, creating a “vicious circle now where they aren’t really justifying the tariffs.”

Reynolds said he also believes that inflation became a problem during the coronavirus pandemic and that the economy won’t quickly recover, regardless of what Trump does. “I don’t think it’ll be anything really soon. I think it’s just going to take time,” he said.

Trump’s base is still largely behind him, which was not always the case for his predecessor, President Joe Biden, a Democrat. In the summer of 2022, only about half of Democrats approved of how Biden was handling the economy. Shortly before he withdrew from the 2024 presidential race two years later, that had risen to about two-thirds of Democrats.

More broadly, though, there’s no sign that Americans think the economy has improved since Trump took over. About

two-thirds of U.S. adults, 68%, continue to say the country’s economy is “poor.” That’s unchanged from the last time the question was asked in October, and it’s broadly in line with views throughout Biden’s last year in office.

Trump’s approval ratings on immigration have declined since March, but border security remains a relatively strong issue for him. Half of U.S. adults, 50%, approve of how Trump is handling border security, which is just slightly lower than the 55% who approved in September.

Trump’s relative strength on border security is partially driven by Democrats and independents. About one-third of independents, 36%, approve of Trump on the border, while 26% approve on immigration.

Jim Rollins, an 82-year-old independent in Macon, Georgia, said he believes that when it comes to closing the border, Trump has done “a good job,” but he hopes the administration will rethink its mass deportation efforts.

“Taking people out of kindergarten, and people going home for Thanksgiving, taking them off a plane. If they are criminals, sure,” said Rollins, who said he supported Trump in his first election but not since then. “But the percentages - based on the government’s own statistics - say that they’re not criminals. They just didn’t register, and maybe they sneaked across the border, and they’ve been here for 15 years.”

Other polls have shown it’s more popular to increase border security than to deport immigrants, even those who are living in the country illegally. Nearly half of Americans said increasing security at the U.S.-Mexico border should be “a high priority” for the government in AP-NORC polling from September. Only about 3 in 10 said the same about deporting immigrants in the U.S. illegally.

Shaniqwa Copeland, a 30-year-old independent and home health aide in St. Augustine, Florida, said she approves of Trump’s overall handling of the presidency but believes his immigration actions have gone too far, especially when it comes to masked federal agents leading large raids.

“Now they’re just picking up anybody,” Copeland said. “They just like, pick up people, grabbing anybody. It’s crazy.”

About 3 in 10 U.S. adults approve of how Trump is handling health care, down slightly from November. The new poll was conducted in early December, as Trump and Congress struggled to find a bipartisan deal for extending the Affordable Care Act subsidies that will expire at the end of this month.

That health care fight was also the source of the recent government shutdown. About one-third of U.S. adults, 35%, approve of how Trump is managing the federal government, down from 43% in March.

But some Americans may see others at fault for the country’s problems, in addition to Trump. Copeland is unhappy with the country’s health care system and thinks things are getting worse but is not sure of whether to blame Trump or Biden.

“A couple years ago, I could find a dentist and it would be easy. Now, I have a different health care provider, and it’s like so hard to find a dental (plan) with them,” she said. “And the people that do take that insurance, they have so many scheduled out far, so appointments because it’s so many people on it.”

Eurozone faces leadership vote amid Donohoe’s exit

BRUSSELS, Dec 11, (KUNA): The finance ministers of the eurozone countries which comprise 20 states using the single currency are set to elect a new president for the Eurogroup today, Thursday.

Belgium’s Finance Minister Vincent Van Peteghem and Greece’s Finance Minister Kyriakos Pierrakakis are competing to succeed the current president, Ireland’s Paschal Donohoe, who submitted his resignation unexpectedly from the leadership of this influential financial body.

Van Peteghem, 45, has served as Belgium’s finance minister since 2020 in two successive coalition governments and is known for his firm support of fiscal discipline in a country that ranks among the most indebted in the eurozone.

Pierrakakis, 42, assumed the position of Greece’s finance minister last March.

Van Peteghem and Pierrakakis announced their candidacies after Donohoe, 51, declared on 20 November that he was stepping down from the position to join the World Bank, despite having been re-elected in July for a two-and-a-half-year term.

The position of Eurogroup president is considered highly influential in shaping economic policy within the bloc, and winning it requires a simple majority vote.

The Eurogroup was established in 1997 to coordinate the economic and budgetary policies of eurozone countries, which will rise to 21 members when Bulgaria adopts the single currency on January first.

Portugal hit by biggest strike in over a decade

LISBON, Dec 11, (AP): A strike called by Portugal’s two main trade union confederations brought severe travel disruption Thursday and forced the cancellation of many medical appointments and school classes. Government and municipal services, including trash collection, were also badly hit.

The two labor groups representing close to a million Portuguese workers say it could be the country’s biggest walkout in more than 10 years as they contest the center-right government’s planned changes to employment laws.

The unions say the changes strip workers of entitlements, while the government argues they are needed to make the economy more supple and spur growth.

The proposed changes include making it easier for companies to fire workers, denying the right to strike in additional sectors of the economy and limiting breastfeeding breaks for mothers to the first two years of a baby’s life from the current open-ended dispensation.

Downtown Lisbon was strikingly quiet, with few pedestrians and light traffic compared to a usual weekday in the capital as some people went on strike and others worked from home to avoid the transport disruption.

At Lisbon international airport, dozens of flights were canceled as pilots, flight attendants and baggage handlers walked out. The airport was open but largely deserted.

Flag carrier TAP Air Portugal operated only 63 of its 283 scheduled

flights, in line with the minimum level of service required by law. The airline had previously warned passengers about the strike and offered to put them on other flights.

Train and bus services across Portugal also ran a skeleton service. The Lisbon Metro subway said services were suspended at 11 p.m. Wednesday and would resume only on Friday morning.

Private companies were also affected, with manufacturing and distribution companies reporting walkouts.

Portugal has one of the European Union’s smallest economies and its workers are among the lowest paid in the 27-nation bloc. The average monthly wage is around 1,600 euros (\$1,870) before tax, according to the National Statistics Institute. The minimum monthly wage earned by hundreds of thousands of workers is 870 euros (\$1,018) before tax.

The Portuguese are also being pinched by a housing and cost of living crisis, as property prices soar and inflation sticks at just over 2%.

The European Commission expects Portugal to achieve GDP growth of around 2% this year, above the EU average of 1.4%. Unemployment stands at under 6%, roughly the EU average.

Trade unions planned street marches later Thursday. It is the first time since 2013 that the umbrella groups - the General Workers’ Union and the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers - have joined forces.

Social Democrat Prime Minister Luis Montenegro has described the strike as “senseless” because the country is doing well.

Film hits high notes visually, low notes narratively

In ‘Scarlet,’ transplanting ‘Hamlet’ to an anime dreamworld

NEW YORK, Dec 11, (AP): The Japanese writer-director Mamoru Hosoda has made some amazing films that take profound leaps into dreamlike worlds.

Hosoda’s “Mirai” (2018) is about a 4-year-old boy who’s resentful of his newborn sister. But in his backyard garden, he meets his sister as a teenager. This is just the first of many domestic time travels, as the boy meets other relatives from other points in their lives. A new understanding begins to dawn.

In “Belle” (2022), a teenager who’s lived through tragedy finds a soaring catharsis in a virtual realm. I thought it was one of the best films of that year, and I still think it might be the best movie ever made about the internet. Either way, its song-and-soul-shattering climax is unforgettable.

Yet in Hosoda’s latest, “Scarlet,” the director’s enviable reach exceeds his grasp. In it, his female protagonist is a medieval princess who, after seeing her king father killed by her uncle, and dying herself, awakes in an expansive purgatory. In this strange afterlife, peopled by the dead from all time periods, she seeks revenge for her father.

Anyone, I think, would grant that a Japanese anime that transplants “Hamlet” to a surreal netherworld is a touch more ambitious than your average animated movie. Unlike the wide majority of cartoons, or even live-action movies, the problem with “Scarlet” isn’t a lack of imagination. It’s too much.

Hosoda, a former Studio Ghibli animator whose other films include “Wolf Children” and “Summer Wars,” has an extraordinary knack for crafting anime worlds of visual complexity while pursuing existential ideas with a childlike sincerity. But an excess of baroque design, of emotion, of scope, sinks Hosoda’s “Scarlet.” It’s the kind of misfire you can forgive. If you’re going to fail by overreach, it might as well be with a wildly ambitious rendering of “Hamlet.”



This image released by Netflix shows the character Scarlet in a scene from the animated film ‘Scarlet.’ (AP)

In the thrilling prologue, set in 16th century Denmark, Scarlet (Ashida Mana) watches as her uncle Claudius (Kôji Yakusho) frames her father as a traitor and has him executed. Enraged, Scarlet - without any visitation from her father’s ghost - goes to kill Claudius. Only he poisons her first, and Scarlet awakes in what she learns is called the Otherlands.

It’s a kind of infinite wasteland, full of wandering souls and marauding bandits. People are there for a time, and then they pass into nothingness. A stairway to heaven is rumored to exist somewhere. As she seeks Claudius, Scarlet is joined by a stranger she encounters named Hijiri (Okada Masaki). A paramedic from modern day, he spends most of his time in the Otherworld trying to heal the wounds of others, including Scarlet’s foes.

“Scarlet” can be meandering and tedious. Even Rosencrantz and Guildenstern turn up. If the Otherworld is laid out like Scarlet’s troubled conscience, the ensuing battle between vengeance and forgiveness feels dully simplified. It’s all a sea of troubles. Hosoda tries to build some interiority to the story (not a small aspect of “Hamlet”) through Hijiri’s backstory, telescoping Shakespeare’s quarries to contemporary times.

Hosoda grafted “Beauty and the Beast” into “Belle,” to sometimes awkward, sometimes illuminating effect. But in “Scarlet,” he struggles to bridge “Hamlet” to today. It’s a big swing, the kind filmmakers as talented as Hosoda should be taking, but it doesn’t pay off. Still, it’s often dazzling to look at it and it’s never not impassioned. Hosoda remains a director capable of reaching trembling, operatic heights. In “Scarlet,” for instance, Claudius gets a spectacular death scene, a remarkable accomplishment considering he’s already dead.

“Scarlet,” a Sony Pictures Classics release, opens in limited release Friday and in wider theatrical release Feb. 6. Rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for violence/bloody image. Playing in both Japanese with subtitles and English dubbed versions. Running time: 112 minutes. Two stars out of four.

Long overdue

Casting directors finally get Oscar recognition

NEW YORK, Dec 11, (AP): Behind the Wizard of Oz in the two-part “Wicked” movies were people actually pulling the strings. They set the table for the hit double-punch movies long before the cameras ever rolled out: The casting directors, helped pick who made it to Oz.

“Our job is to know the actors that are out there or know how to find the actors that we don’t know,” says Bernard Telsey, one of the heavy hitters in the world of casting, who, with Tiffany Little Canfield, populated both “Wicked” movies.

Casting will get some Oscar love next year. A new prize for achievement in casting was added to the Academy Awards in March, a step casting directors believe is long overdue. The 98th Academy Awards will air live on ABC on March 15, 2026.

“It’s really hard for people to understand what it is that we do because it’s so private,” says Telsey. “It’s only going to make the profession that much stronger and people that much more aware of what we do.”

The Emmys have three categories for casting, and the Critics Choice Awards just added a casting trophy this year. The casting industry has its own prize, the Artios Awards, first held in 1985. But the Golden Globes and Tony Awards don’t recognize the profession.

“When casting is great, it sometimes feels invisible. Because it’s so well done, you don’t see the fingerprints,” says Destiny Lilly, president of the 1,200-strong Casting Society who also works with Telsey.

“I think that it’s taken time just to get recognition for that art because a lot of the work that casting directors do happens before a lot of the rest of the production team is brought on board.”

Telsey, along with his team at The Telsey Office, casts in every medium, from the films “Mary Poppins Returns” and “Kiss of the Spider Woman” to TV shows like “The Gilded Age” and “Only Murders in the Building.” He came up through theater, casting such Tony Award-winners as “Maybe Happy Ending,” “Kinky Boots” and “Hairspray.”

“Wicked” and “Wicked: For Good” represented one of his team’s biggest challenges, filling hundreds of roles and dance parts over more than a year of filming and across continents.

Inevitable

Even though it may have seemed inevitable that Cynthia Erivo was a natural Elphaba and Ariana Grande was a shoo-in for Glinda, that’s hindsight. Like all casting decisions, it was a bit of a gamble.

“Not until they got in the room were you like, ‘Oh, this is magic. This has to be. There is nobody else to play the part but the two of them,’” he says. “You don’t really know until you get to see it.”

To keep tabs on as many actors as possible, Telsey goes to the theater four or five nights a week and spends weekends trying to catch up on TV and movies. Twice a week, he and his staff meet to trade tips about who they’re seeing and make recommendations.

“Every day you feel like you’re behind and there’s another hundred actors I don’t know and how am I going to meet them and how am I going to see them? So it’s a constant race,” he says.

Casting directors first talk with the directors, writers and producers to get a sense of what their vision is for the project and then get the right actors to audition. Telsey likens it to how a costume designer must know all the potential different fabrics and colors out there.

Lilly recently scored a coup by suggesting comedian Bill Burr join the latest Broadway revival of David Mamet’s “Glengarry Glen Ross” alongside Kieran Culkin and Bob Odenkirk. It was Burr’s stage debut, but Mamet’s explosive dialogue seemed to fit perfectly.

“I think that there’s so many people who haven’t done theater who can really shine. They just need to be given the right opportunity and the right project and have the right director working with them,” she says.

Over the years, Telsey has seen the walls between film, TV and theater work fall away as actors change mediums freely. He doesn’t subscribe to the belief that stage skills are so very dissimilar from screen skills.

“It’s a myth that they’re different. They’re technically different, but they’re the same. Good acting is good acting,” he says. “Glenn Close can do a musical, a play, a television show and a movie and be nominated in every ... category. Those things have changed over the last 20 years.”



This image released by the Television Academy shows Bernard Telsey at the Television Academy’s Casting Directors Nominee Reception in West Hollywood, Calif. (AP)

Film



This image released by 20th Century Studios shows Emma Mackey in a scene from ‘Ella McCay.’ (AP)

Emma Mackey deserves better

‘Ella McCay’ undone by scandal and stiff writing

NEW YORK, Dec 11, (AP): “I can’t trust my brain right now,” says our hero, Ella, deep into James L. Brooks’ bafflingly disjointed, uneven, unfunny and illogical “Ella McCay.”

And finally, nearly two hours into a perplexing muddle of a storyline, we have some clarity of thought. No, dear, we want to tell Ella, played by the lovely Emma Mackey, who is truly the only reason to watch any of this. No, your brain is fine (and by the way, what a depressing line to put in the mouth of your most intelligent character - a hard-working woman in politics). It’s your script you can’t trust, Ella! Run away from it. Now.

It’s hard to understand how “Ella McCay,” the first original feature from writer-director Brooks in 15 years, goes so utterly haywire. Is this really the same mind that wrote the memorable “Broadcast News”? “Terms of Endearment”? “As Good As It Gets”? We get a bit of a hint in the studio’s press notes, which mention that Brooks began his script “without a specific storyline in mind.”

Hmm. Perhaps that (unintentionally) explains this tangle of half-baked characters and subplots - each more head-scratching than the next, but also boring - and an ending that’s unbelievable, by which we mean not believable. What’s even less believable is that smart supporting actors like Jamie Lee Curtis, Ayo Edebiri, Woody Harrelson and Rebecca Hall didn’t walk out in protest of a lack of coherence. (Well, actually, Hall is gone in a matter of minutes.)

The main action takes place over three days in 2008, in an unnamed state. An aggressively folksy Julie Kavner as narrator tells us Ella is a great person, and super-bright, and

at 34, one of the youngest people to serve as lieutenant governor.

She’s also a moral compass - both in the dog-eat-dog world of politics, where she just wants to pass good laws that help good people - and in her messed-up family. This family includes her weaselly father (Harrelson, intermittently amusing) who, in a flashback to when Ella was 16, loses his job in a sexual harassment scandal.

Soon after, when Ella’s mother (Hall, wasted) tells her that Dad is moving the family to California, Ella insists on staying put, at her school. She’ll live with her loyal and loving Aunt Helen (Curtis), who runs - of course! - the diner next door.

Flash forward 18 years, and Ella is summoned by her governor boss (Albert Brooks). He tells her he’s in line for a Cabinet position, which means Ella would be interim governor. “You wouldn’t get this any other way,” he notes, helpfully.

There’s one prickly problem. Ella is enmeshed in scandal; she’s been having amorous relations, with her own husband, at lunchtime, in a room that’s technically state property. (Yep, this is the best scandal they could come up with.)

Also, there’s a reporter who knows this, and he’s trying to extort her in exchange for better access (to what, is unclear). Her husband is the one handling it. And so we flash back to high school to meet Ryan, who seems nice enough (but truly ridiculous as a high school student - there clearly was no de-aging budget).

Anyway, Ryan (Jack Lowden) is now poised to become the state’s first gentleman. We can see how Ella likes his easy good looks. But then, poof, he suddenly becomes a total

jerk and we can’t believe Ella would even think to be married to such a cad. But there’s a lot here that we wouldn’t think would happen.

So Ella becomes governor. Yay! But Ryan is peeved to be sidelined. In a quickly abandoned subplot involving his mother, he threatens to leave Ella unless she allows him to co-govern. If only Ella would listen to Helen, who tells her, in advice that’s ignored, that Ryan is “a ticking time bomb in your life.” Which just might be the one decent line given to poor Curtis in the whole movie.

Then we have the strange story of Ella’s agoraphobic younger brother, Casey (Spike Fearn) and his former would-be girlfriend, Susan (Edebiri). In a long sequence that feels like it comes from nowhere, just like the subplot about the state troopers and the overtime - don’t ask! - Casey works up the courage to find Susan and ask her to be his girlfriend. The talented Edebiri almost makes your ticket price worthwhile - she’s adorable. But the scene is ludicrous.

Finally, somebody just says “this script is a mess.” Oh, wait - that’s just the scribble in my screening notebook.

Anyway, it all comes to a denouement in a confrontation with Ella’s political opponents. We won’t reveal the specifics, but soon after, when Ella and Helen have a screaming session in the living room - you know, just for fun - it’s tempting to join in.

Like them, we’re confused. We’re annoyed. And we’re not getting these two hours back.

“Ella McCay,” a 20th Century Studios release, has been rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association “for strong language, some sexual material and drug content.” Running time: 115 minutes. One star out of four.

‘Broad, eclectic and bold program’

90 films headline Sundance’s last Utah run

WASHINGTON, Dec 11, (AP): Charli XCX is making a trip to the Sundance Film Festival in January. The pop singer-songwriter appears in three films premiering at the 2026 festival, including a mockumentary that she produced and stars in. Programmers unveiled a lineup of 90 feature films set for the festival’s last hurrah in Park City, Utah.

The slate includes documentaries on basketball great Brittney Griner, Nelson Mandela, Salman Rushdie, Courtney Love and Billie Jean King. There are starry features with the likes of Natalie Portman, Jenna Ortega, Seth Rogen, Channing Tatum, Danielle Brooks, Olivia Colman, Da’Vine Joy Randolph, Alexander Skarsgård and Ethan Hawke. Olivia Wilde directs her first feature since “Don’t Worry Darling,” in “The Invite.” Judd Apatow chronicles comedian Maria Bamford’s mental health journey. And Gregg Araki will be back in Park City with a restoration of his 2004 coming-of-age drama “Mysterious Skin” and a new film as well.

“It’s a broad, eclectic and bold program,” Sundance public programming director Eugene Hernandez told The Associated Press. He said the lineup for the festival’s final year in Park City “really honors that well with this mixture of new, exciting voices paired with some really, really great familiar faces from Sundances past that I think will create a great alchemy for this really unique edition in Utah.”

Ever a festival of discovery, of the 90 features culled from 4,255 submissions, 40% are from first-time directors. The programmers laugh when they hear people say things like “that’s a Sundance movie,” as if it’s one, easily categorizable thing.



Natalie Portman, foreground, and Jenna Ortega appear in a scene from ‘The Gallerist,’ an official selection of the 2026 Sundance Film Festival. (AP)

“I look at the films in this program and say, ‘You tell me what a Sundance film is’ because they’re so different,” said programmer John Nein.

Charli XCX plays a rising pop star prepping for her first arena tour in the mockumentary “The Moment,” which Hernandez said is “like her version of ‘This Is Spinal Tap.’” She also appears in Araki’s “I Want Your ...,” in which Cooper Hoffman plays an intern who gets wrapped up in the world of an artist and provocateur (Wilde). And she’s among the

ensemble of “The Gallerist.”

“There’s a sense of humor that she has about herself and her work, but also a creativity and a star quality that is apparent. I mean, she is magnetic on the screen,” Hernandez said. “It’s great to have someone who represents sort of a next generation of creativity embracing the world that we inhabit.”

This year’s slate includes more than a few exciting comedies in unexpected places. Cathy Yan directed and co-wrote “The Gallerist,” a satirical look at the art world and attempting to sell a corpse at Art Basel Miami, with a large ensemble including Portman, Ortega, Sterling K. Brown and Zach Galifianakis. David Wain also has “Gail Dagher and the Celebrity Sex Pass” about a woman out to even the score after her fiancé uses the “free pass,” starring Zoey Deutch and Jon Hamm.

Programmer Kim Yutani said she thinks “Wicker,” about a woman who asks a basket maker to weave her a husband, starring Colman and Skarsgård, will be a big crowd pleaser.

Other standouts are Jay Duplass’s grief-themed “See You When I See You,” with Cooper Raiff and David Duchovny, “Ha-Chan, Shake Your Booty!” set inside Tokyo’s ballroom dance scene and Wilde’s “The Invite,” about a crumbling marriage in which she stars alongside Rogen.

“They are finding comedy in some of the toughest places,” Nein said.

In the Midnight section, there’s “Buddy,” from “Too Many Cooks” creator Casper Kelly, about a girl who has to escape a kids TV show. There are some quirky, humorous documentaries too, including “Joybubbles” and John Wilson’s “The History of Concrete.”

In photos, the details that illuminated Marrakech International Film Festival



An actress poses for a photo on the red carpet during the 22nd Marrakech Film Festival, in Morocco. (AP)



A couple poses for a photo on the red carpet during the opening ceremony of the 22nd Marrakech Film Festival, in Morocco. (AP)



An actress poses for a photo on the red carpet during the 22nd Marrakech Film Festival, in Morocco. (AP)



British filmmaker Akinola Davies Jr. gestures while wearing a pro-Palestinian pin during the 22nd Marrakech Film Festival. (AP)



A Moroccan actor wearing a traditional outfit poses for a photo on the red carpet during the 22nd Marrakech Film Festival. (AP)

MARRAKECH, Morocco, Dec 11, (AP): The carpet outside the 2025 edition of the Marrakech International Film Festival was unfurled in its usual red, but the stars who walked across it shimmered in every color.

Actors and filmmakers drifted down its length in embroidered velvet robes and delicately cut black lace dresses, amid the sounds of camera shutters and microphones

humming.

Some ensembles nodded explicitly to the region: hand-stitched caftans and robes with hems that followed the geometry of North African embroidery. Youssra, one of Egypt's best-known actors, carried a black sequined, pearl-trimmed clutch emblazoned with her name across the front, recognizable to audiences all over the Middle

East.

Others went crisp and relied on an austere palette of black and white to make their statement. And woven through were quiet gestures of political intent. Clutches patterned like keffiyehs, pins worn close to the heart - small but unmistakable signals of solidarity with Palestinians at a festival on the edge of a region in conflict.

The images that follow push past standard red-carpet fare, focusing on textures, silhouettes and accessories to show how style took shape at one of the Middle East and North Africa's major film gatherings.

This year's festival - whose guests included jury president Bong Joon Ho, Jafar Panahi and Anya Taylor-Joy - concluded Saturday.

Painting that introduced 'Star Wars' to the world fetches \$3.9 mln at auction



This image provided by Heritage Auctions shows artwork by Tom Jung created for the 1977 movie 'Star Wars.' (AP)

WASHINGTON, Dec 11, (AP): The painting that introduced "Star Wars" to the world nearly 50 years ago - and was reproduced in an iconic movie poster - sold at auction on Wednesday for \$3.875 million.

The acrylic and airbrush painting by the artist and movie poster designer Tom Jung first appeared in newspaper advertisements on May 13, 1977, a little less than two weeks before the space epic created by George Lucas opened. It also adorned billboards, magazine ads and theater programs.

"For most of America, this was the first time they got a glimpse of the galaxy far, far away," said Charles Epting, the director of pop culture and historical consignments at Heritage Auctions.

"Star Wars" producer Gary Kurtz kept the original painting and hung it on his office wall before passing it down to his daughter. The Kurtz family later put the work up for sale at the Dallas headquarters of Heritage Auctions, where bidding started

at \$1 million.

The sale set records for highest selling piece of memorabilia from the film franchise, and in general, for any movie poster artwork, Epting said. The buyer, whose winning bid came in through the website, has chosen to keep his identity private.

Prior to this, the highest price for franchise memorabilia was Darth Vader's lightsaber which sold at auction for \$3.6 million.

"Star Wars" is one of the highest-grossing movie franchises of all time since its 1977 debut, starring Mark Hamill as Luke Skywalker. The original was followed by sequels and prequels, and spawned offshoot books, movies and other series. Its fans span the globe.

One side of the painting shows Skywalker holding up a lightsaber behind Princess Leia. Darth Vader looms over them in the background. On the other, a team of X-wing starfighters is launching an attack. Han Solo and Skywalker are depicted re-

ceiving medals.

In the lower right hand corner are R2-D2 and C-3PO, which were added at the last minute, Epting said. The droids are absent from the early reproductions of the painting and later appeared when the movie poster and the billboard were produced. The exact date of the latter is unknown but it was around June or July 1977, Epting said.

"You can watch the evolution of this piece and how they were figuring out what was important to include, what are we going to represent, what's going to draw people in," Epting said.

The painting is not just film memorabilia but is also a cultural artifact and part of American history, Epting said. The emotional connection that people form with "Star Wars" movies also helps explain the sales price, he said.

"Anyone who's seen these movies or the marketing materials around it - you see this piece, your heart starts racing," Epting said.

Entertainment

Korean among The AP Breakthrough Entertainers of 2025

Cho seizes golden moment after heartbreak

LOS ANGELES, Dec 11, (AP): Three years ago, Arden Cho was ready to walk away from acting. She'd landed her first lead role in the Netflix series "Partner Track," only to see it canceled after one season. She was heartbroken.

Her agent wouldn't let her go. "She refused to say 'You're done,'" Cho said. "She just keep being like, 'Look, I know you're not auditioning. I know you're done, but I think you'd like this.'"

Now, Cho is juggling multiple projects after voicing the lead character Rumi in Netflix's animated summer-time sensation "KPop Demon Hunters," which has become the all-time most-streamed movie on the platform - and spawned inescapable earworms "Golden" and "Soda Pop" as its soundtrack dominated pop charts.

"I am so ready," Cho said. "It feels like it is my golden moment."

Now, Cho is among The Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of 2025. The timing feels almost cosmic. Netflix announced that "KPop Demon Hunters" was its most-watched movie on Aug. 26 - exactly three years after it began streaming "Partner Track." "It was kind of like a gift from God of, hey, you lost something, but I've given you something better," Cho said.

Cho - who doesn't sing in the movie - says she sees her own insecurities in the character, a K-pop idol and demon hunter who loses her voice. And she's ready to join in more stories in the world created by Maggie Kang.

"I hope there are sequels, I hope there's prequels, I hope that every little Asian girl and boy feels so seen and feels like they deserve to be the main character. I hope this opens doors for more Korean and American collaborated projects," she says. "I hope that ... Rumi gets to find out a little bit more about her mom and dad. I hope to know how HUNTR/X became HUNTR/X. And I kind of hope to go save Jinu."

The movie has led a fresh wave of worldwide interest in Korean food, culture and K-pop idol life, which Cho, her co-stars and the singer-song-



Actor Arden Cho poses for a portrait in Los Angeles. (AP)

writers behind HUNTR/X have leaned into as the film's publicity tour grinds into Hollywood's awards season.

"I just feel so blessed to be able to have these conversations because I am so proud to be, obviously, to be American, but at the same time, I'm also so proud to be Korean," Cho said.

Growing up in Texas and Minnesota, she hadn't thought much about racial identity. But while attending college at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, something shifted. "I realized that was the first time when I was like, oh, people look at me and don't think that I'm an American," she recalled. "And it was interesting because I realized at that time, there are two ways to look at it. You can just be mad and say, 'Oh, I hate that we don't have representation, I hate people that don't see us, I hate that people don't see our stories,' or you can say, 'I'm going to try.'"

So she tried. In 2007, she moved to Los Angeles. "It was tough to leave my friends and family behind, it was tough to stay positive and to have thick skin. I still don't have thick skin," she said.

She found success as superpowered Kira Yukimura on MTV's "Teen Wolf" series starting in 2014 but oth-

erwise struggled to find meaty roles before "Partner Track."

For the legal drama, she was finally No. 1 on the call sheet. But she says, "I blinked and it was done and I was devastated."

"I'm such a 'I want to take care of everything and everyone' type of personality. And I want to do it all. And so I think that whole experience sort of went by in a way where it was over before it began," Cho said. "I missed my moment because I was so busy trying to make it perfect, trying to fix it all by myself. And in a weird way, like, it reminds me so much of Rumi."

Then "KPop Demon Hunters" came her way. The film's producer Michelle Wong said she and other filmmakers narrowed finalists down to six actors, then did a blind "listen test" to pick the voice of Rumi. Cho was the unanimous choice.

"Our movie is dramatic, it's action, it's comedy, it's everything. The talent needs to be at the highest level, which you know, Arden obviously encapsulates all of that. She has a great range," Wong said. "I hope this opens doors for her because she deserves it."

Cho celebrated her 40th birthday in August as "Demon Hunters" was peaking in popularity.

Art

American West art masterpieces from billionaire Koch brother head to auction

WASHINGTON, Dec 11, (AP): Some of the most recognizable artwork depicting the American West is heading to auction at Christie's, where dozens of pieces from billionaire Bill Koch's collection are expected to fetch at least \$50 million.

The in-person "Visions of the West" sale will take place in New York over two sessions beginning Jan. 20, with the final lots offered - appropriately - at high noon the following day. Koch's holdings include major works by Frederic Remington, Charles Marion Russell and Albert Bierstadt, artists whose images of cowboys, Native Americans and sweeping landscapes helped define how generations came to picture the American frontier.

Tyler Abbott, head of Christie's American Art Department, said interest in Western subjects has remained strong as new audiences discover the culture and mythology of the region.

"What is out West? What is over the horizon?" he mused. "It goes on to embody the American spirit."

Bill Koch's brothers David and Charles Koch were major donors to conservative causes. Although he has pursued different ventures since a 1980s business dispute with his brothers, Bill Koch traces his long-time love of Western art to their childhood.

"I was born and raised in Kansas and spent childhood summers working on my father's ranches in Montana and Texas," Koch said in a statement to The Associated Press. He described himself as "a child of the American Plains," shaped by the Western art that hung in his home and the stories of the region's past.

The auction will include 16 sculptures by Remington, along with his

painting "Coming to the Call," which is expected to sell for \$6 million to \$8 million, according to Christie's. There will also be both a small and large version of Remington's "Bronco Buster" bronze sculpture. Russell's "The Sun Worshippers" is projected to sell for \$4 million to \$6 million. Bierstadt's bright vistas of mountains and plains are also among the featured works.

Michael Clawson, executive editor of Western Art Collector magazine, said the esthetics of the region continue to surprise people who see them for the first time.

"When you come here, there is

something about the light, the atmosphere, the colors," said Clawson, who grew up in Phoenix. He said the Western art genre has existed since the early 1800s and remains vibrant today, as younger collectors discover the genre and new artists keep it alive.

And in the current century, population and wealth have surged across several Western states, with Arizona, Utah and Nevada each gaining well over a million residents since 2000. In the last decade, the median household income in the West rose from \$58,000 in 2014 to almost \$93,000 in 2024, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.



This undated image provided by Christie's shows Charles Marion Russell's painting, 'The Sun Worshippers.' (AP)

Variety

LONDON: Iceland's national broadcaster said Wednesday it will boycott next year's Eurovision Song Contest because of discord over Israel's participation, joining four other countries in a walkout of the pan-continental music competition.

Broadcasters in Spain, the Netherlands, Ireland and Slovenia told contest organizer the European Broadcasting Union last week that they will not take part in the contest in Vienna in May after organizers declined to expel Israel over its conduct of the war against Hamas in Gaza.

The board of Iceland's RÚV met Wednesday to make a decision.

At its conclusion the broadcaster said in a statement that "given the public debate in this country ... it is clear that neither joy nor peace will prevail regarding the participation of RÚV in Eurovision. It is therefore the conclusion of RÚV to notify the EBU today that RÚV will not take part in Eurovision next year."

"The Song Contest and Eurovision have always had the aim of uniting the Icelandic nation but it is now clear that this aim cannot be achieved and it is on these program-related grounds that this decision is taken," the broadcaster said. (AP)

COPENHAGEN: As Australia began enforcing a world-first social media ban for children under 16 years old this week, Denmark is planning to follow its lead and severely restrict social media access for young people.

The Danish government announced last month that it had secured an agreement by three governing coalition and two opposition parties in parliament to ban access to social media for anyone under the age of 15. Such a measure would be the most sweeping step yet by a European Union nation to limit use of social media among teens and children.

The Danish government's plans could become law as soon as mid-2026. The proposed measure would give some parents the right to let their children access social media from age 13, local media reported, but the ministry has not yet fully shared their plans.

Many social media platforms already ban children younger than 13 from signing up, and a EU law requires Big Tech to put measures in place to protect young people from online risks and inappropriate content. But officials and experts say such restrictions don't always work.

Danish authorities have said that despite the restrictions, around 98% of Danish children under age 13 have profiles on at least one social media platform, and almost half of those under 10 years old do.

The minister for digital affairs, Caroline Stage, who

announced the proposed ban last month, said there is still a consultation process for the measure and several readings in parliament before it becomes law, perhaps by "mid to end of next year." (AP)

NEW YORK: Time magazine is set to name its person of the year for 2025 on Thursday.

Among those in the running according to prediction markets is artificial intelligence itself, along with tech CEOs Jensen Huang of Nvidia and Sam Altman of OpenAI. Pope Leo XIV, the first American pope whose election this year followed the death of Pope Francis, is also considered a contender, with President Donald Trump, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and New York Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani topping lists as well.

Trump was named the 2024 person of the year by the magazine after his winning his second bid for the White House, succeeding Taylor Swift, who was the 2023 person of the year.

The magazine's selection dates from 1927, when its editors have picked the person they say most shaped headlines over the previous 12 months. (AP)

SAO PAULO: Brazilian authorities said Wednesday that one of the two suspects behind a brazen daylight robbery over the weekend in Sao Paulo remained at large following a heist that included eight works by French artist Henri Matisse.

The other suspect was apprehended on Monday, Sao Paulo state's secretariat for public safety said. The artwork, which also included five pieces by Brazilian artist Candido Portinari, has not been recovered.

Footage from security cameras distributed by authorities following the heist at the Mário de Andrade library in the Brazilian city on Sunday, the last day of an exhibition featuring the two artists, shows the suspects handling the artworks and leaning them against a low wall.

One suspect can be seen balancing them on his head and running.

The heist came less than two months after thieves stole more than \$100 million in crown jewels from the Louvre Museum in Paris.

The stolen Matisse pieces on display were part of a copy of "Jazz," a limited edition book of prints first published in 1947 of which there are 270 in total, according to official documents.

The cover - where Matisse's name and the title appear in black, looping calligraphy - was stolen, as was the cut-out known as 'circus.'

Matisse prints can be worth up to \$15,000, said Wiona Raba, a manager at the Art Loss Register. Engravings by Portinari can go for up to \$2,000 but do not come to the international market frequently, she added. (AP)

Scientists develop new gene-mapping method to unlock cancer’s hidden drivers

Experts uncover how immune cells sense bacteria, paving way for better vaccines

MELBOURNE, Dec 11, (Xinhua): Scientists in Australia have identified how human immune cells detect bacteria, a discovery that could lead to effective vaccines and therapies for many diseases.

Researchers at Australia’s Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity found that macrophages -- immune cells known for engulfing pathogens -- act as “couriers” that alert the immune system to bacterial presence, a media release from the Doherty Institute said late Tuesday.

“This activates the immune system and helps our body stay in balance with the good bacteria that live within us (forming the microbiota) while protecting us from dangerous bacteria,” according to Deng Jieru from the University of Melbourne, who conducted postdoctoral research at the Doherty Institute.

The study shows macrophages carry the highest amount of a molecule called MR1, which captures chemical signals from bacteria and presents them to specialized immune cells known as MAIT cells.

“By using glowing ‘chemical messages’ we showed that macrophages were the most efficient cells at picking messages and to use this to engage MAIT cells to fight infections,” said Deng, who led the study published in Science.

This discovery is important because MAIT cells can rapidly “switch on” powerful immune responses, she said, adding that by understanding how macrophages control this process, this discovery paves the way for better vaccines and treatments.

Meanwhile, scientists in Australia have developed a powerful new way to uncover the genetic interactions that fuel cancer progression, paving the way for earlier and more precise treatments.



A man walks along a trail during sunset near Manhattan, Kansas on Nov. 20, 2015. (AP)

US suicide rate fell in 2024 after hovering at high level

NEW YORK, Dec 11, (AP): The US suicide rate dropped slightly last year from some of the highest levels ever reported, preliminary data suggests. Experts say it’s hard to know exactly why, or whether the decline will continue.

A little over 48,800 suicide deaths were reported in 2024, according to provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, roughly 500 fewer than the year before.

The overall suicide rate fell to 13.7 per 100,000 people.

Suicides rose for nearly two decades aside from a two-year drop around the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Then they shot up again, to more than 14 per 100,000 from 2021 to 2023.

Experts caution that suicide - the nation’s 10th leading cause of death in 2024 - is complicated and that at-

tempts can be driven by a range of factors. Contributors include higher rates of depression, limited availability of mental health services and the availability of guns. About 55% of all suicide deaths involve firearms, according to CDC data.

Rates vary across age groups and locations. For example the suicide rate for Americans in their late 20s and early 30s fell significantly in 2024, but it remained pretty stable for other age groups. And rates fell in some states in the South and Midwest but not in the Mountain West.

“There’s a lot to dig into as we’re starting to think about what could be responsible for a potential decline,” said Katherine Keyes, a Columbia University public health professor who studies suicide.

The artificial intelligence (AI)-driven method reveals that tumor progression is driven by cooperating groups of genes, rather than mutated genes acting alone, a media release from the University of South Australia (UniSA) said Wednesday.

The UniSA team used AI tools to identify groups of genes working in concert to push cancer forward, according to the study published in Royal Society Open Science.

“The system assesses how genes influence each other over time, providing a clearer picture of the underlying biological approaches that enable tumors to grow, spread and resist treatment,” said study lead researcher Andres Cifuentes Bernal at UniSA.

Traditional genome-wide cancer studies typically focus on mutations that appear frequently across patients, identifying key cancer drivers but overlooking subtle or rare genetic changes and missing the complex gene interactions that propel tumor growth, said Cifuentes Bernal.

Study co-author, UniSA Associate Professor Thuc Le, said the new framework highlights the growing role of AI in biomedical discovery, addressing a long-standing gap in cancer biology.

“Cancer is not static. It develops through a cascade of dynamic changes. Many genes act together to disrupt normal cell behavior, but existing methods can struggle to detect that. Our approach is designed to capture that complexity,” Le said.

Testing the model on large breast cancer datasets, researchers found it successfully recognized many well-known cancer drivers, while also revealing novel candidates involved in cell signaling, immune response and metastasis.

The technique identifies cooperative networks rather than isolated genes, Le

said, adding that these networks highlight “how genes collaborate to collectively push cancer into more aggressive states.”

The researchers are hopeful their method could help pinpoint new therapeutic targets, especially for cancers lacking common high-profile mutations.

Also:

WELLINGTON: New Zealand is making headway in improving cancer prevention, detection and treatment, Health Minister Simeon Brown said Thursday.

The State of Cancer in New Zealand 2025 report, released Thursday by the Cancer Control Agency, showed “real progress” in cancer prevention, early detection, and treatment.

“Smoking rates continue to fall across all ethnicities, screening programs are more effective and accessible, and long-term survival rates have improved over the past two decades,” Brown said, citing the report.

Key initiatives include a 604-million-NZ dollar (about 350.17 million US dollar) investment to fund 33 cancer medicines through Pharmac, New Zealand’s medicines funding agency, the minister said.

The government is lowering the bowel screening age to 58 as a first step toward matching Australia, expanding breast screening to women aged 70 to 74, and launching the country’s first cervical cancer elimination strategy, he said, adding the government is also investing in critical cancer infrastructure.

The report said that the number of people diagnosed with cancer will rise sharply, from more than 30,000 in 2025 to over 45,000 by 2044.

The updated New Zealand Cancer Action Plan 2019-2029, due next year, will help the system prepare for the increase in diagnoses, Brown said.

‘I don’t know where I’ll find the money’

Free childbirth program ends in eastern Congo at worst of times

GOMA, Congo, Dec 11, (AP): In a maternity ward in eastern Congo, Irene Nabudeba rested her hands on her bulging midsection, worried about giving birth in a city under rebel control.

The conflict that flared this year has left many medical supplies stranded beyond the front line. Infrastructure like running water has collapsed, along with the economy in Goma, the region’s humanitarian and commercial hub.

And now the one glimmer of hope for mothers - a free maternity care program offered by Congo’s government - has ended after it was not renewed in June. It was not clear why, and Congolese did not respond to questions.

Nabudeba has five children and wonders whether the sixth will survive.

“At the hospital, they ask us for money that we don’t have. I’m pushing myself to come to the consultations, but for the delivery ... I don’t know where I’ll find the money,” she said at the Afia Himbi health center.

Several women told The Associated Press they cannot afford maternal care after Congo’s program that was aimed at reducing some of the world’s highest maternal and neonatal death rates ended earlier this year. The program launched in 2023 offered free consultations and treatment for illnesses and at-risk pregnancies at selected health facilities across the country.

Congo ranked second in maternal deaths globally with 19,000 in 2023, behind Nigeria’s 75,000 deaths, according to U.N. statistics.

Health workers said more women in Goma are now giving birth at home without skilled help, sometimes in unsanitary conditions, leaving them



Irene Nabudeba, pregnant, mother of 5, waits for a consultation that used to be free at the Afia Himbi Hospital in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo on Nov 11. (AP)

vulnerable to hemorrhage, infection or death.

Clinics and hospitals were already struggling after the M23 rebels, backed by neighboring Rwanda, seized Goma in an escalation of fighting in January.

Although clashes subsided amid U.S.- and Qatar-led peace efforts, fighting escalated again in recent days and the conflict has collapsed public institutions, disrupted essential services and displaced more than 700,000 people, according to the U.N. humanitarian office.

In Goma, the armed rebels are seen everywhere, making a pregnant woman’s walk to clinics another source of anxiety.

Freddy Kaniki, deputy coordinator of M23, asserted to the AP that the

free maternal care “was not renewed because it was a failure,” without elaborating. Congolese officials did not respond to questions.

Rwanda denies supporting the M23 despite U.N. experts saying they have evidence of it. Rwanda prides itself on health care and recently signed a five-year deal with the U.S. for investment of up to \$158 million in its own health care sector.

The collapse of essential services in rebel-held areas, combined with mass displacement and insecurity, has left civilians struggling to access even basic care.

An International Committee of the Red Cross assessment in September found that at least 85% of health facilities were experiencing medicine

shortages, and nearly 40% have seen an exodus of staff after the conflict surged in the provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu.

The ICRC in October said 200 health facilities in eastern Congo had run out of medicines because of looting and supply disruptions. Doctors Without Borders, or MSF, has reported hospitals attacked, ambulances blocked and medical staff threatened or killed.

Childbirth at a clinic in Goma now costs \$5 to \$10, out of reach for many families in a region where over 70% of the population lives on less than \$2.15 a day, according to the World Bank.

Franck Ndachetere Kandonyi, chief nurse at the Afia Himbi health center, said the number of births there under the free program had jumped from around five a month to more than 20. But the program ended in June.

Facing a table of statistics in his office, Kandonyi said the number of births per month is now down to nine.

“When a parent cannot even pay 10,000 Congolese francs (\$4.50) for their wife’s or child’s care, it’s a real problem,” the nurse said.

Meanwhile, banks have closed in Goma, prices have soared and the dollar has depreciated.

Nabudeba’s husband, a driver, has been unemployed since January. She said her family is barely surviving.

“When the war broke out, we lost all our resources,” she said. “Lately, the situation has not been favorable, and we are suffering greatly.”

Across town at the Rehema Health Center, Ernestine Baleke waited for help with her ninth pregnancy, with concern on her face. She said she doesn’t know where she will get money for the delivery.

World Health Organization reports influenza A viruses dominate ongoing global flu season

GENEVA, Dec 11, (Agencies): Influenza activity has risen globally since October this year, with influenza A viruses dominating circulation, the World Health Organization (WHO) said in a report released late Wednesday.

The latest “Seasonal influenza - Global situation” update noted that the increase coincides with the onset of winter in the Northern Hemisphere and a seasonal uptick in acute respiratory infections caused by influenza and other respiratory viruses.

Although global influenza levels remain within expected seasonal ranges, early increases and more intense activity than usual have been observed in some regions, particularly involving influenza A (H3N2) viruses.

In many Northern Hemisphere countries, acute respiratory infection rates have increased, driven by seasonal epidemics of respiratory pathogens such as influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and other common respiratory viruses, WHO said.

The timing of onset, duration, magnitude, and severity of each seasonal wave remain difficult to predict, as they depend on the type of circulating viruses, population immunity, and environmental conditions.

Some Northern Hemisphere countries have reported early starts to the flu season, though activity has not yet reached the epidemic threshold. Meanwhile, parts of the Southern Hemisphere have recorded above-average virus activity in recent months.

Across temperate, sub-tropical, and tropical regions, detections of H3N2 viruses have increased, making this virus predominant since late September.

The report noted that seasonal influenza viruses continue to evolve. Since August 2025, based on available genetic sequence data, there has been a rise in the detection of H3N2 J.2.4.1 (alias K subclade) viruses from several countries.

These subclade K viruses showed several genetic changes from related H3N2 viruses, though current epidemiological data do not indicate an increase in disease severity.

WHO stated that vaccines remain essential, especially for people at high risk of influenza complications and their caregivers. Even when circulating strains differ from those included in vaccines, seasonal influenza vaccines can still provide protection.



A glass case displaying a vial of BabyBIG, the treatment for infant botulism is shown on Nov 21, in Aos Altos, Calif. (AP)

Botulism: Federal health officials on Wednesday expanded an outbreak of infant botulism tied to recalled ByHeart baby formula to include all illnesses reported since the company began production in March 2022.

The US Food and Drug Administration said investigators “cannot rule out the possibility that contamination might have affected all ByHeart formula products” ever made.

The outbreak now includes at least 51 infants in 19 states. The new case definition includes “any infant with botulism who was exposed to ByHeart formula at any time since the product’s release,” according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The most recent illness was reported on Dec. 1.

No deaths have been reported in the outbreak, which was announced Nov. 8.

Previously, health officials had said the outbreak included 39 suspected or confirmed cases of infant botulism reported in 18 states since August. That’s when officials at California’s Infant Botulism Treatment and Prevention Program reported a rise in treatment of infants who had consumed ByHeart formula. Another 12 cases were identified with the expanded definition, including two that occurred in the original timeline and 10 that occurred from December 2023 through July 2025.

ByHeart, a New York-based manufacturer of organic infant formula founded in 2016, recalled all its products sold in the US on Nov 11. The company, which accounts for about 1% of the U.S. infant formula market, had been selling about 200,000 cans of the product each month.

News that ByHeart products

could have been contaminated for years was distressing to Andi Galindo, whose 5-week-old daughter, Rowan, was hospitalized in December 2023 with infant botulism after drinking the formula. Galindo, 36, of Redondo Beach, California, said she insisted on using ByHeart formula to supplement a low supply of breast milk because it was recommended by a lactation consultant as “very natural, very gentle, very good for the babies.”

“That’s a hard one,” Galindo said. “If there is proof that there were issues with their manufacturing and their plant all the way back from the beginning, that is a problem and they really need to be held accountable.”

Amy Mazziotti, 43, of Burbank, California, said her then-5-month-old son, Hank, fell ill and was treated for botulism in March, weeks after he began drinking ByHeart. Being included in the investigation of the outbreak “feels like a win for all of us,” she said Wednesday.

“I’ve known in my gut from the beginning that ByHeart was the reason Hank got sick, and to see that these cases are now part of the investigation brings me to tears - a mix of relief, gratitude and hope that the truth is finally being recognized,” she said.

In a statement late Wednesday, ByHeart officials said the company is cooperating with federal officials “to understand the full scope of related cases.”

“The new cases reported by CDC and FDA will help inform ByHeart’s investigation as we continue to seek the root cause of the contamination,” the statement said.

□ □ □

Dengue: The dengue outbreak has killed 401 people so far this year in Bangladesh, health department figures showed Wednesday.

According to data released by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) under the Ministry of Health, the total number of dengue fever cases has reached 98,705 since January in the South Asian country.

Bangladesh recorded three more deaths and 421 more dengue infections in the last 24 hours till 8:00 am local time on Wednesday.

According to the DGHS, the dengue death toll amounted to 401, including 19 so far in December and 104 in November and 80 in October.

So far, a total of 4,308 cases of dengue fever have been recorded in December, compared to 24,535 in November.



A semi-submerged freighter lists by the coast of the South Luzon Thermal Energy Power Plant in Calaca, Batangas in the Philippines on Oct 4. (AP)

Philippines tests ‘transition credits’ to cut coal use in novel experiment

CALACA, Philippines, Dec 11, (AP): The Philippines is testing a new type of carbon credit aimed at encouraging companies to cut their climate warming emissions by creating funds that can be used to turn coal-fired power plants into renewable energy facilities.

Called transition credits, they are meant to help pay for phasing out coal use by creating value out of the emissions that would prevent. The funds would then pay to replace fossil fuel equipment with clean energy gear.

Proponents say transition credits could unlock a windfall of investment for the power hungry Asia-Pacific region and speed up Southeast Asia’s transition to renewable energy. But some experts wary of longstanding problems in the carbon market view them as a dead end.

A carbon credit represents one metric ton of carbon dioxide removed or not sent into the atmosphere. Credits are bought and sold on carbon markets by countries and companies trying to comply with emission regulations, meet pollution reduction targets or offset environmental impacts.

Transition credits differ because they put a value on prevented future emissions caused by burning fossil fuels, which contributes to climate change.

But integrity concerns plague carbon credit projects around the world.

Projects meant to save carbon-absorbing forests have been accused of greenwashing, miscalculations and causing carbon leakage, a term for

when companies move to countries with looser emission rules. They’ve been found failing to deliver on promised benefits to local communities and linked to allegations of human rights violations in Cambodia and an uptick in deforestation in Peru, among other problems.

The credits have pros and cons, like any untested new idea, said Rammath Iyer, of the United States-based Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis. He calculates that a transition credit could be worth \$11 to \$52.

“There will be challenges and flaws, like in every deal,” Iyer said. “But it’s not like we have a smorgasbord or buffet of climate change solutions to choose from.”

The world will likely overshoot the global goal of keeping Earth’s temperatures from warming above 1.5 degrees Celsius.

In November, the United Nations failed to negotiate an international road map to phase out fossil fuels at annual climate talks, known as COP30.

Emissions are rising as coal is used to meet growing energy demand in the Asia-Pacific region’s emerging economies, worsening air pollution.

Southeast Asia is the world’s third largest coal-consuming region after India and China, according to the International Energy Agency, which forecasts regional electricity demand will double by 2050.

“There’s no question that efforts to support phasing out coal-fired power

plants are worthy, important and of critical need,” said Danny Cullenward, of the University of Pennsylvania’s Kleinman Center for Energy Policy. “But it is a really thorny issue to try to accurately quantify the benefits of an intervention, like transition credits.”

The transition credit experiment is playing out at the 270-megawatt South Luzon Thermal Energy Corp. power plant in Calaca City, south of Manila.

The site was built a decade ago by ACEN Corp., the energy arm of the massive Philippine conglomerate Ayala Corp.

Coal plants typically can run for 50 years. Southeast Asia’s coal sites are on average under 15 years old, like the one in Calaca. However, ACEN has committed to retiring the South Luzon facility by 2040.

Transition credits may speed this up.

“If it works, there will be a playbook for coal asset owners and their energy transitions,” said Irene Maranan with ACEN. “There will be more believers than non-believers in this initiative.”

The Rockefeller Foundation designed the transition credits concept to help finance early retirement of coal plants by paying for replacing fossil fuel gear with renewable energy equipment used to keep generating power at the same sites.

“It would be irresponsible to just turn off a coal plant without a replacement,” Maranan said. “The country still needs its energy supply. There is a growing demand that isn’t stopping.”

‘If the players feel like the ice is unsafe, we’re not going to play’

NHL cautiously optimistic of Oly participation despite smaller rink size, safety concerns

MONTREAL, Dec 11, (AP): The NHL said it remains cautiously optimistic about sending the world’s best hockey players to the Milan Cortina Winter Olympics in February amid issues with a smaller-than-expected rink size and questions regarding ice quality due to construction delays.

Deputy commissioner Bill Daly reiterated that belief in an email to The Associated Press a day after briefing the NHL’s board of governors on the Olympics during their meeting in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

“We’re making progress and moving towards the goal, but there doesn’t seem to be anything insurmountable in getting to completion,” Daly told reporters on Monday.

Daly said there’s nothing the NHL or organizers can do about the dimensions of the not-yet-completed 16,000-seat Santagiulia Ice Hockey Arena and secondary Rho facility. “It’s a structural issue. It would be impossible to correct,” he said.

What can still be addressed is ensuring the ice quality is safe for players, with Daly saying Olympic officials are taking up the NHL’s offer to use their experts to assist once the ice surface is scheduled to be laid in the coming weeks.

“We’re basically moving everybody there to try to help get this done in a way that’s acceptable for NHL athletes,” he said. “I’m cautiously optimistic that’s all going to be fruitful.”

At this point, with the Games less than two months away, Daly said the only issue that would prevent the NHL from returning to Olympic participation for the first time since the 2014 Sochi Games would be safety concerns due to the ice surface. “Obviously, if the players feel like the ice is unsafe, we’re not going to play. It’s as simple as that,” Daly said. “So whatever flows from that, flows from that. I’m not really all that concerned about it.”



In this file photo, Canada's Sarah Nurse (20) celebrates a goal during the women's gold medal hockey game against the United States at the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing. (AP)

Daly said the completion date of the main rink is set for Feb. 2, three days before the women’s tournament opens and nine days before the men begin play.

The NHL was caught off guard when it became apparent the two rinks’ dimensions will be slightly wider and 3 feet shorter than what the league and International Ice Hockey Federation agreed upon. Daly said the league and NHL Players’ Association have reminded the IIHF that they expect the ice surface to be standard NHL size at the 2030 Winter Games in France. The ice is already in at Rho, which is playing host to the Group B Under-20 world championship tournament this week. Japan captain Daigo Hotta referred to the ice as feeling “a little soft” during a pre-game skate, but firmed up by game time.

The 19-year-old Hotta, who has played in the U.S. since his family relocated when he was 5, almost immediately noticed the difference in rink dimensions.

“I play back in the States. The rinks are pretty small, but I think this one is one of the smallest rinks I’ve ever played in,” he said Tuesday. “The neutral zone’s smaller. The space between the dots and the boards. I think everything’s a little smaller than normal.”

The head of games operations for Milan Cortina dismissed questions about the rink size by noting the ice surfaces are consistent with IIHF rules, and have the same dimensions as the ones used in Beijing in 2022, and the one in Stockholm, Sweden, on which the Pittsburgh Penguins and Nashville Predators played twice last month as part of the NHL’s Global Series.

“It is clear that the dimensions of the rink are different, but if you come to play in Europe, all the rinks have this type of size,” Andrea Francisi said Tuesday. “So somehow you have to adapt to this kind of dimension.”

Francisi agreed that a more important issue is the quality of ice “for the spectacular nature of the competition, but also above all for the safety of the athletes.” He expects the ice sheet to begin being laid on Dec. 20, and have it ready within 11 days.

More accessible to people with disabilities

Verona’s ancient Roman Arena gets modern facelift for Games

VERONA, Italy, Dec 11, (AP): Verona’s ancient Roman Arena will receive a modern facelift and become more accessible to people with disabilities ahead of the 2026 Milan Cortina Games, where it will host both the Olympic closing ceremony and the Paralympic opening ceremony.

Built by the Romans in the 1st Century, the Verona Arena was envisioned for gladiator fights and ancient hunts of exotic beasts, repurposed as a Medieval marketplace and most recently functions as the venue of a renowned opera festival.

In none of its previous iterations has the imposing structure been made suitably accessible for disabled people or those needing assistance of any kind. In addition, some safety features intended as stopgaps have endured for decades without being updated.

The upcoming Games have provided the occasion to give the ancient Arena - which predates the Roman Colosseum by decades - an accessibility and safety makeover before it hosts an expected 11,000 people for the Feb. 22 closing ceremony and nearly 10,000 for the Paralympic opening ceremony on March 6.

“This is an ancient monument that is some 2,000 years old, that remains active and hosts audiences,” said architect Giulio Fenyves, whose Milan studio designed the new safety and accessibility features.

“The occasion of the Olympics has made it possible to reconsider a series of logistical aspects, including facilitating the entry and exit, precisely because it continues to host major events with thousands of people,” Fenyves said.

The facelift is part of a 18 million euro (\$21 million) project that improves accessibility for the entire area surrounding the Arena and is being overseen by the governmental company responsible for Olympic infrastructure.

The works include making a kilometer-stretch of sidewalks from Verona’s main train station to the Arena safer for wheelchairs or baby strollers by building small curb ramps. Dedicated bike lanes are also being built.

Paralympians participating in the Parade of Athletes up Corso Porta Nuova, across Piazza Bra, and into the Arena will find that the route has been significantly upgraded for people who require wheelchairs or have other mobility issues.

The work is being coordinated with officials responsible for the preservation of the monument as well as those overseeing accessibility codes to bring the structure more in line with current legislation.

The new elements “must be integrated in the most delicate and harmonious way possible to a monument that is both robust and fragile at the same time,” Fenyves said.

Inside the Arena, the centerpiece project is a wheelchair-accessible ramp clad with pre-rusted steel and the same Prun stone from the Lessinia hills above Verona that was used by the Romans to build the Arena.

The local stone gives the Arena its pinkish-yellow hue and contains fossilized shells - remnants of a prehistoric sea that once covered this region now known for hills and vineyards.

The ramp will be removable, but project manager Paolo Zecchini said he hopes that it will be retained as a legacy of the Games.

Until now, people with wheelchairs or walkers approached from a natural slope leading down from the adjacent Piazza Bra.

In addition to the ramp that is meant to blend with the Arena’s original features, the local organizing committee is planning an ad hoc temporary ramp to accommodate not only disabled spectators and athletes, but also the elderly, families with children and anyone needing assistance.

The overall project also includes a new railing along the top level of the Arena to replace one built in the 1950s that was meant to be temporary, as well as new handrails at varied heights on internal stairways and at the 72 entrances to the tiered seats. Bathrooms are being renovated by the city, and the infrastructure company is making new ramps to make them more accessible.



A worker removes seat number stickers used to mark places during concerts at the Arena of Verona, Italy. (AP)

Best of the Rest

Ferreira signs contract extension: Portuguese manager Abel Ferreira has agreed to a two-year contract extension with Palmeiras, the Brazilian Serie A club said on Wednesday.

The 46-year-old’s contract, which had been due to expire this month, will now run until December 2027 with no release clause.

Ferreira has guided Palmeiras to 10 trophies since taking charge of the Sao Paulo side in October 2020, including two Copa Libertadores triumphs and two Brazilian Serie A titles.

The former Sporting Lisbon defender is the most successful foreign coach in the history of Brazilian football and the only Palmeiras manager to win at least one trophy in five consecutive seasons. (Xinhua)

■ ■ ■

Corinthians reach semis: Dutch striker Memphis Depay scored in the first half as Corinthians secured a 1-0 away win over Cruzeiro in the first leg of their Copa do Brasil semifinal on Wednesday.

Depay tapped in from point-blank range in the 22nd minute at the Mineirao after Yuri Alberto headed down Andre Carrillo’s cross from the right flank.

The visitors took control thereafter to take the advantage going into Sunday’s second leg in Sao Paulo.

Vasco da Gama will host Fluminense in the first leg of the other semifinal at Sao Januario Stadium in Rio de Janeiro on Thursday. (Xinhua)

■ ■ ■

Wolfsburg names new sporting director: Wolfsburg have appointed football executive Pirmin Schwegler as sporting director, completing a move that brings the former Bundesliga midfielder to the club on Wednesday.

The 38-year-old Swiss leaves his role as head of professional football at Eintracht Frankfurt to fill the vacancy, which has remained open since Sebastian Schindzielorz was relieved of his duties in mid-November. (Xinhua)

Barcelona remains on top, Pajor closes in on Kerr’s scoring mark



Roma's Winonah Heatley, right, and Chelsea's Sam Kerr in action during the Women's Champions League soccer match between Chelsea and Roma at Stamford Bridge, London. (AP)

Chelsea routs Roma in Women’s Champions League

LONDON, Dec 11, (AP): Ewa Pajor put Barcelona on course for a 3-1 win against Benfica in the Champions League and moved within sight of Sam Kerr’s scoring record.

Pajor’s opening goal in the 29th minute at Estadi Johan Cruyff was her 15th in 16 appearances in the group or league phase of European club soccer’s top competition. According to UEFA, only Chelsea striker Kerr has more at this stage of the Champions League, with 16 goals.

“For me it was most important that today we won,” Pajor said after a victory that keeps Barcelona top of the standings with one game to go.

Barcelona was already guaranteed a place in the

playoffs at least and is ahead of Lyon on goal difference.

Chandra Davidson equalized for Benfica just after halftime, but two goals in the space of four minutes effectively sealed the win for Barcelona.

Christy Ucheibe scored an own goal in the 54th and that was followed by another from Alexia Puteillas.

Twelve teams advance from the league phase, with the top four qualifying directly for the quarterfinals. The other eight teams advance to the playoffs.

Arsenal, Bayern Munich, Juventus, Manchester United, Lyon, Real Madrid, and Wolfsburg have also qualified for the quarterfinals or playoffs.

Melchie Dumornay scored twice in Lyon’s 3-0 win at Manchester United. She now has eight goals in her last nine Champions League games.

Tabitha Chawinga headed Lyon in front in the 12th and Dumornay scored in the 81st and 90th

to keep the French giant neck and neck with Barcelona.

Chelsea routed Roma 6-0 at Stamford Bridge with six different scorers.

Roma got off to a bad start when Valentina Bergamaschi scored an own goal in the 13th and trailed 3-0 by halftime. Chelsea got another three after the break with Lucy Bronze rounding off the scoring in the 86th.

Fiamma Benitez struck in the 88th to secure a 2-2 draw for Atletico Madrid against Bayern Munich after Pernille Harder’s double had looked like leading the Germans to victory.

Shooting from just outside the area, Fiamma’s effort clipped the bar on the way into the back of the net.

A penalty in the 81st by Lorena Azzaro sealed a 1-0 win for Paris FC at Valerenga, which had to play the second half with 10 players after Karina Saevik was sent off.

‘The things she’s done on the court have never been done’

A’ja Wilson wins AP Female Athlete of the Year

WASHINGTON, Dec 11, (AP): A’ja Wilson stood atop the WNBA again in 2025, winning an unprecedented fourth MVP as her Las Vegas Aces earned a third championship in four seasons.

For that, she earned The Associated Press Female Athlete of the Year on Wednesday for the first time in her career. It’s the second consecutive year a basketball player won the award after Caitlin Clark was honored in 2024.

“It’s an honor when you think about the group of women who have won before,” Wilson said in a phone interview. “Just to have my name be a part of it, I’m blessed.”

Wilson is only the fifth basketball player to be honored as the Female Athlete of the Year since it was first presented in 1931, joining Sheryl Swoopes (1993), Rebecca Lobo (1995), Candace Parker (2008, 2021) and Clark.

A group of 47 sports journalists from the AP and its members voted. Wilson received 17 votes, tennis star Aryna Sabalenka was second with nine and Paige Bueckers was third with five.

“The things she’s done on the court have never been done. To me, she’s in a category all her own,” Aces coach Becky Hammon said of Wilson. “People always ask who’s on your Mount Rushmore? I’m saying she’s on Everest - there’s nobody up there with her.”

Shohei Ohtani won the AP Male Athlete of the Year on Tuesday for the fourth time.

Hammon has been impressed with everything about Wilson in her four years coaching in Las Vegas.

“Her relatability, her being down to earth makes her a great superstar,” Hammon said. “Her skill set is unmatched, but she’s also the easiest player to coach. To have that mixture of humility, grace and skill, there’s a reason why she’s doing things that have never been done.”

This season was different for Wilson and the Aces, who had cruised to their previous two titles as a heavy favorite. This year, with a month to go, the Aces were sitting at .500 and were in danger of missing the playoffs after coming off a record 53-point loss against Minnesota.

Wilson rallied her team to wins in the final 16 regular-season games to secure the No. 2 seed, and Las Vegas went on to win the championship.

“This season I found myself through the adversity and mud we went through,” she said. Despite her numbers being on par with her unanimous MVP season the year before, Wilson heard the chatter that she wasn’t playing as well and that she wasn’t the front-runner to repeat as the league’s top player.

The 29-year-old used that as fuel on the court. She led the league with 23.4 points and 2.3 blocks per game.

“The way they talk about us, the way they talk about me, I’m ready for that, I’m ready for the noise,”



Athlete of the year honoree A'ja Wilson attends the A Year in TIME honors gala at Current at Chelsea Piers in New York. (AP)

Wilson said. “It’s always going to be something. If we sit here and try to please everybody, we’re going to go insane. I’m just going to continue to prove why I’m one of the greatest and why my team is part of a dynamic dynasty.”

Wilson raised her game even further in the playoffs, helping the Aces survive decisive winner-take-all games in the quarterfinals and semifinals. She then helped Las Vegas sweep Phoenix in the WNBA Finals, hitting the winning shot in Game 3.

“It’s fair to say the expectations for her are so sky high now, she’ll be compared to a degree to the unanimous MVP she was the year before,” ESPN analyst Rebecca Lobo said. “Even though she wasn’t unanimous MVP this year, the journey she had this season was different and she was playing the best basketball of her career in the playoffs.”

“Every year, you wonder how she’ll get better, and she always does.”

Wilson became the first player in either the WNBA or NBA to win the MVP, Defensive Player of the Year, Finals MVP and lead the league in scoring in the same season.

Wilson broke a tie with Swoopes, Lisa Leslie and Lauren Jackson, who all won the WNBA MVP three times. She plans to have another relaxing offseason as she won’t play overseas or in Unrivaled, the domestic 3-on-3 league.

Wilson became a free agent at the end of the season and could be in for a significant raise as the league and players union negotiate a new collective bargaining agreement, but she is widely expected to return to the Aces. She’s already crossed one thing off her bucket list, meeting her idol Beyonce at the Formula 1 race in Las Vegas last month.

“It was super cool, Beyonce is someone that I’ve always wanted to meet because I just admired her work,” Wilson said.

Burgan faces Al-Arabi

Al-Qadsia faces tough challenge against determined Al-Shabab

By Hassan Mosa
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: The Volleyball League continues today with two key matches at the Kuwait Volleyball Federation Hall in Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Indoor Sports Complex. Al-Qadsia opens its campaign against Al-Shabab at 5:30 PM, followed by Al-Arabi facing Burgan at 7:30 PM.

The league format features a preliminary single round, with the top six teams advancing to the Premier Division, divided into three groups. The team with the most wins will claim the title, and the first-place team from the preliminary round carries one victory into the next stage as an advantage.

Teams ranked seventh to tenth, along with the youth national team, compete in the First Division, also divided into three groups.

Al-Qadsia faces a tough challenge against a determined Al-Shabab, who impressed in the Federation Cup — the season's first tournament — which Kuwait Club won over Al-Qadsia. Seeking redemption, Al-Qadsia aims for a strong league start under Serbian coach Snezha Reljic, relying on key players Rashid Anbar, Nasser Dashti, Abdunnasser Al-Anzi, and Brazilian professionals Alisson Melo and Caio Ribeiro.

Meanwhile, Burgan and Al-Arabi clash in the evening match, both teams eager to make an early impact and set the tone for a competitive season.



Action from Al-Qadsia as Al-Arabi player rushes to block the spike.

High praise for Kuwait's hosting

West Asia Volleyball Clubs Championship wraps up

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 11: The West Asia Women's Volleyball Clubs Championship wraps up tomorrow at Salwa Al-Sabah Club Hall, under the patronage of Kuwait's Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi.

Today's semifinals feature Al-Fatat Club against Jordan's Al-Nasr at 3:00 PM, and UAE's Sharjah Club facing Saudi Arabia's Al-Ula at 5:00 PM.

In the quarterfinals, Al-Fatat beat Lebanon's Al-Qalamoun 3-0, Sharjah defeated Al-Fayhaa by the same score, Al-Ula overcame Iraq's Sanharib 3-2, and Salwa Al-Sabah fell 1-3 to Al-Nasr. The matches were attended by Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governor Sheikh Sabah Badr Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Volleyball Federation President Dr. Jaber Al-Mary, and Salwa Al-Sabah Club President Sheikhha Naeema Al-Ahmad, along with heads of all participating delegations.

Sanharib Club official Dawood Raba Dankharis praised the championship's organization, saying the committees ensured a smooth and welcoming experience for all teams. "The hospitality and management reflect the excellence Kuwait is known for," he added.

Hassan Ahmed, head of Al-Qalamoun Club's delegation, highlighted the high technical level of play, boosted by three professional players, noting that matches were competitive and thrilling until the final set. He thanked Sheikhha Naeema Al-Ahmad for facilitating participation for the



From the guest of honor stand, Sheikhha Naeema, Sheikh Sabah Badr Al-Salem Al-Sabah and Volleyball Federation President Dr. Jaber Al-Marri watch the tournament action unfold.

maximum number of clubs.

Fawaz Al-Mutairi, Director of Sports at Al-Fayhaa Club, welcomed the tournament's launch as a major step in developing women's volleyball and expressed hope for its continued growth.

Dr. Hadeel Abu Bakr of the Pal-

estinian Jerusalem Club praised Sheikhha Naeema Al-Ahmad for ensuring the club's participation, saying, "We are proud to be here among our community in Kuwait."

Sharjah Club official Anoud Al-Muhairi said the championship achieved "the highest level of suc-

cess both administratively and technically," noting the participation of 12 clubs from West Asia reflects the dedication to promoting women's volleyball. She also highlighted the continuous development of the sport in GCC countries, supported by regional leaders.

OKC ties NBA record for best start with blowout of Phoenix



Phoenix Suns forward, right, tries to keep the ball away from Oklahoma City Thunder guard Aaron Wiggins, left, during the first half of an NBA Cup basketball game in Oklahoma City. (AP)

Castle leads Spurs into Cup semifinals

OKLAHOMA CITY, Dec 11, (AP): Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 28 points, and the Oklahoma City Thunder matched the best 25-game start to an NBA season by dominating the Phoenix Suns 138-89 in an NBA Cup quarterfinal.

The Thunder's 24-1 mark ties the 2015-16 Golden State Warriors, who won their first 24 games before finally losing.

Chet Holmgren added 24 points and eight rebounds for the Thunder, who set a franchise record with their 16th straight win. They advanced to the semifinals on Saturday against the San Antonio Spurs.

It seemed this could be a tough one for the Thunder. Oklahoma City's 123-119 win over the Suns in NBA Cup group play on Nov. 28 was its closest game during its win streak.

But Phoenix star Devin Booker missed his third straight game with a strained right groin. Booker scored 21 points in the previous matchup and said in the postgame that the "secret is out" about the Thunder's

league-leading defense.

It appears the Suns have more to learn. They shot 39.3% from the field and scored a season-low point total in the most lopsided loss in franchise history. Dillon Brooks led the Suns with 16 points, but he made just 4 of 16 shots. It was the fewest points Oklahoma City has allowed this season.

Jalen Williams hit a 3-pointer at the halftime buzzer to give the Thunder a 74-48 lead. Gilgeous-Alexander scored 17 points in the first half despite just eight shot attempts.

It was Gilgeous-Alexander's 96th straight game with at least 20 points. He reached the total on a breakaway dunk that put the Thunder up 84-50 with 9:15 left in the third quarter.

Phoenix guard Grayson Allen was ejected after he shoved Holmgren and knocked him to the floor. The Thunder led 94-58 with 5:18 left in the third quarter when the two collided while Holmgren appeared to be setting a screen. Allen extended both arms, knocking Holmgren off balance, and was called for a Flagrant 2.

Stephon Castle scored 21 of his 30 points in the second half, and De'Aaron Fox added 20 points in the San Antonio Spurs' 132-119 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers in



an NBA Cup quarterfinal.

Keldon Johnson had 17 points and eight rebounds as the Spurs maintained a healthy double-digit lead for most of the final three quarters to claim the last Cup semifinal spot in Las Vegas, where they will face the Oklahoma City Thunder on Saturday.

Luka Doncic scored 35 points and LeBron James had 19 points, 15 rebounds and eight assists for the Lakers, who lost for only the third time in 12 games. Los Angeles trimmed its deficit to eight points late in the fourth quarter, but couldn't get closer.

Marcus Smart scored a season-high 26 points with eight 3-pointers for the Lakers, and Austin Reaves had 15 points.

San Antonio has won nine of 12 overall after steadily controlling this meeting of two Western Conference teams hoping to challenge the defending champion Thunder, both this week and in the postseason.

Castle was outstanding in his second game back from a 10-game absence with a hip injury, adding 10 rebounds and six assists. Eight Spurs scored at least eight points, and their bench outscored Los Angeles' reserves 48-31.

The Lakers won the inaugural NBA Cup in 2023, and they went unbeaten through group play this fall before running into the Spurs.

San Antonio made a 17-2 run and jumped to an 18-point lead in the second quarter, with Castle and Harrison Barnes exploiting Los Angeles' season-long struggles in perimeter shooting defense.

Jordan's court fight with NASCAR highlights family roots in racing

CHARLOTTE, N.C., Dec 11, (AP): The theme of family ties in motorsports has been woven through Michael Jordan's federal antitrust lawsuit against NASCAR, with witness after witness testifying to their emotional connections to the top motorsports series in the United States.

It began on the opening day when three-time Daytona 500 winner Denny Hamlin broke down in tears talking about his dying father introducing him to racing and financially leveraging the entire family to help his son make it to NASCAR.

Next came Jordan himself, a basketball Hall of Famer who was actually raised going on family "weekend vacations" to NASCAR races across the South with his Richard Petty-loving father. So began a love affair that led him to partner with Hamlin to launch 23XI Racing in 2021.

Bob Jenkins formed Front Row Motorsports after falling in love with NASCAR as a teenager in East Tennessee and he's hoped to hand the team down to his four sons.

Joe Gibbs Racing is a family business, the daughter-in-law of the Hall of Fame NFL coach testified, and Richard Childress said his 60-year-old team is meant to go to his grandsons, both current Cup Series drivers.

And then there is NASCAR itself: Bill France Sr. founded the sport in 1948 and to this day it is privately owned by the Florida-based France family. His youngest son is chairman, his granddaughter vice chair and great-grandson an executive on NASCAR's board of directors.

It was core principles that Bill France passed down to his two sons that shaped the hardline stance Jim France took with teams as NASCAR chairman in negotiations for the 2025 revenue-sharing agreement.

The teams wanted charters - the equivalent of a franchise in other sports - to become permanent and not renewable. In NASCAR, a charter guarantees cars a spot in the 40-car field each

week, as well as specified financial terms, and Jim France never considered permanency an option.

Jim France testified Wednesday, the eighth day of the trial, that he relied on the core principles drilled into his head over dinner growing up in negotiations. His mother, credited with helping her husband build NASCAR from nothing, told her two sons to always pay their bills. Bill France Sr. advised them "do what you say you're going to do."

"I've just seen so much change over the years and things are changing at a fast pace and I don't know how to put something in place - I don't know how we could come to an agreement that covers forever," he testified.

He later tied it directly to his parents' advice. "I don't have a sightline for the future and I don't feel comfortable making a promise I can't keep forever," he testified.

That thinking aligned with Tuesday testimony from NASCAR Commissioner Steve Phelps, who gave NASCAR's version of the chaotic Sept. 6, 2024, final agreements presented to teams late that Friday afternoon with an end-of-day deadline to sign the 112-page document or forfeit their charters.

Phelps testified the delay in sending the final drafts was because France had promised Roger Penske, owner of Indianapolis Motor Speedway, IndyCar and teams in multiple racing series including NASCAR, that France would personally speak to Penske before the agreements were delivered. France tried to call Penske several times that day and Phelps testified Penske didn't answer.

It wasn't until after the two had finally spoken that the charters were sent to teams, at close to 5 p.m., with a midnight deadline.



Michael Jordan

Lens seeks to extend Ligue 1 lead over PSG

PARIS, Dec 12, (AP): Lens won its only French league title 27 years ago. But the northern club has confounded expectations this season and tops Ligue 1 ahead of defending champion Paris Saint-Germain.

Long known a coal-mining city, Lens has a passionate and loyal fanbase who ensure a passionate atmosphere at the 38,000-capacity Stade

Bollaert-Delelis, and they've been treated to good performances so far.

Led by the flair of goal-scoring winger Florian Thauvin, Lens is one point ahead of PSG heading into the 16th round.

Lens is at home on Sunday against a Nice side in total disarray after seven straight defeats.

Despite considerable backing from chemicals

giant Ineos, which took over six years ago, Nice still seems unable to find the right formula and some fans have turned on the players. PSG plays on Saturday and travels to face a Metz side which is last place after three straight defeats.

Third-placed Marseille has drifted five points off the lead and can ill afford to drop points at home to Monaco on Sunday.

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NEWS



Arsenal's Piero Hincapie, second left, goes up against Brugge's Nicolò Tresoldi, center, during the Champions League opening phase soccer match between Club Brugge and Arsenal in Bruges, Belgium. (AP)

Sports

City deepens Real crisis, Arsenal stays perfect

Bilbao holds PSG; Ajax storms back to beat Qarabag

MANCHESTER, England, Dec 11, (AP): The pressure was already on Real Madrid coach Xabi Alonso, and a 2-1 defeat to Manchester City in the Champions League on Wednesday raised further questions about his future.

Arsenal remains perfect in this season's competition and three points clear at the top of the standings after a 3-0 win against Club Brugge, while defending champion Paris Saint-Germain was held 0-0 at Athletic Bilbao.

Alonso had faced reports this week that he had lost control of the locker room, and speculation over his position is likely to be intense after the latest defeat. It's now just two wins in eight games for Madrid and back-to-back home losses.

There were jeers inside the Bernabeu at the final whistle.

"We know it's a tough moment for us, the coach and for," Madrid winger Rodrygo said. "Things are not going our way, and I wanted to show that we are behind our coach. He has been trying. I wanted to show that we are together and we need to be united to keep moving forward and achieve our goals."

Rodrygo had put Madrid in front in the 28th minute, but goals from Nico O'Reilly and Erling Haaland before halftime sealed victory for City.

Alonso looked frustrated on the sidelines as he watched his blunt attack waste chances to salvage something in the absence of the injured Kylian Mbappé, who was an unused substitute.

Vinicius Junior failed to hit the target with two chances from close range, and Jude Bellingham lifted another effort over the bar with only the goalkeeper to beat.

Asked if he was worried about his future, Alonso said: "I'm worried about our next match. The important thing here is Real Madrid. It's about the team, the players, and how I can help them. This isn't about me."

Bellingham said the squad was "100%" behind Alonso.



Manchester City's Rayan Cherki, left, vies for the ball with Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham during a Champions League opening phase soccer match between Real Madrid and Manchester City, in Madrid, Spain. (AP)

"The noise will not be helpful. So it's about us trying to figure it out inside the dressing room," Bellingham told TNT Sports.

Record 15-time European champion Madrid is seventh in the standings, with only the top eight teams automatically advancing to the round of 16.

"As a player inside the changing room, seeing what we've got in there, working with the coach every day, I think we have everything we need to turn it around," Bellingham said. "I've

got full faith that this season isn't over just because we've been on a bad run of form, and obviously, as players, it kills us, and we're going to try to turn it around."

Top of the Premier League and top of the Champions League, too, Arsenal swept aside Club Brugge to maintain its 100% record in Europe.

Noni Madueke scored twice, and Gabriel Martinelli got the other for Mikel Arteta's team, which has seen its lead in England's top flight

cut from six points to two in recent weeks.

There are no such concerns in Europe.

"Our mentality is our strength," Arteta said.

PSG couldn't find a winner in Bilbao, but with 13 points after six games, the French giant has already equaled the total amount it picked up in the league phase last season before going on to win the trophy.

Italian champion Napoli lost 2-0 at Benfica, while Weston McKennie was on target for Ju-

ventus in a 2-0 win at Pafos.

Both Napoli and Juventus have only won two of their six games in the league phase so far.

Alejandro Grimaldo made the difference again for Bayer Leverkusen, scoring in the 88th to rescue a 2-2 draw against Newcastle.

A hero of Leverkusen's surprise win at Man City last month, Grimaldo surged into the penalty area to level the score.

Leverkusen took an early lead when Bruno Guimaraes deflected Robert Andrich's header into his own net. Nick Woltemade won a penalty that Anthony Gordon converted in the 51st before 19-year-old midfielder Lewis Miley headed Newcastle in front.

Leverkusen coach Kasper Hjulmand missed the game for personal reasons, the club said an hour before kickoff.

Jeers rang out at full time at Borussia Dortmund after Norway's Bodo/Glimt sealed a 2-2 draw, equalizing twice after Julian Brandt's goals for Dortmund.

The result helps neither team, with Dortmund's chances of direct qualification for the round of 16 taking a dent. Bodo/Glimt has three draws but no wins in its debut Champions League season.

Ajax scored three goals late in the game to deny Qarabag a surprise win in one of the early kickoffs.

Four-time European champion Ajax twice trailed against its Azerbaijani opponent, but fought back to win 4-2 in Baku.

Qarabag has been one of the surprise packages in this season's competition and led after 10 minutes through Camilo Duran. Matheus Silva scored two minutes into the second half to make it 2-1 after Kasper Dolberg had leveled for Ajax.

But Ajax powered back with three goals in 11 minutes. Oscar Gloukh scored in the 79th and 90th, with Anton Gaai getting the other in the 82nd.

Copenhagen also scored late to win 3-2 at Villarreal.

Substitute Andreas Cornelius struck in the 90th to seal victory in a game where Copenhagen had twice been pegged back after taking the lead.

Kuwait edges Bahrain as Qatar and Saudi Arabia advance in Gulf U-23 Cup

DOHA, Dec 11, (KUNA): Kuwait secured a 2-1 victory over Bahrain on Thursday in the third round of the Gulf U-23 Cup in Doha, Qatar.

Kuwait took an early lead in the first half with goals from Ahmad Boudai in the 15th minute and Montasir Suleiman in the 31st. Bahrain pulled one back in the 67th minute through Ali Al-Dosari, but Kuwait held on to claim the win.

Meanwhile, in the other Group A match, Qatar and Saudi Arabia played to a 1-1 draw, earning one point each. With these results, Qatar and Saudi Arabia advanced to the semifinals with seven points apiece, while Kuwait finished third with three points and Bahrain ended fourth without any points.

In the semifinals, the winner of Group A will face the runner-up of Group B, and the Group B winner will meet the Group A runner-up. The two semifinal winners will clash in the final at Stadium 974 in Doha.



Players challenge for the ball during Kuwait and Bahrain match in Doha. KUNA photo

The tournament features eight teams split into two groups. Group A includes Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, while Group B comprises Iraq, the UAE, Oman,

and Yemen. The Gulf U-23 Football Cup, the first edition organized under the Arab Gulf Cup Football Federation, began on December 4 and will run through December 16.

Best of the Rest

Myanmar earns gold medals in Chinlone: Myanmar's men's and women's Chinlone (caneball) teams won gold medals at the 2025 Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games) in Bangkok, Thailand, the state-owned daily The Global New Light of Myanmar reported on Thursday.

The women's team clinched the gold medal by defeating host Thailand 502-446. The men's team also secured gold, beating Thailand 574-501, the report said.

As of Dec. 10, Myanmar had earned two gold medals in Chinlone and more medals in other sports including sepak takraw, petanque, canoe sprint, taekwondo, and cricket events, it said. The 33rd SEA Games, hosted by Thailand, runs from December 9 to 20. (Xinhua)

Spain widens lead over US: Women's World Cup champion Spain widened its points lead atop the FIFA rankings Thursday over the second-placed United States.

Spain retained its UEFA Nations League title since the last rankings update in August, while the U.S. won four of five friendlies played in that time.

Spain won the Nations League final last week against Germany, which rose two places to No. 3 in the rankings.

European champion England stayed at No. 4 and No. 5 Sweden fell two spots.

Brazil and France swapped places at Nos. 6 and 7, respectively. Japan stayed at No. 8, North Korea went up one to No. 9, taking the place of Canada now at No. 10. (AP)

Cyprien Sarrazin returns to the slopes: French skier Cyprien Sarrazin is back gliding on snow after his serious head injury a year ago.

Sarrazin underwent surgery for bleeding near the brain after crashing during preparations for a World Cup downhill on the slope set to be used for the 2026 Winter Olympics.

He posted a video on Instagram on Thursday showing him skiing and enjoying the moment.

"The sensations were good ... nothing can compare to that! I was right to take my time," Sarrazin wrote. "I may not yet fully realize how far I've come so far ... probably because there's still a long way to go before I can ski again the way I'd like to, without knee pain. But hey! This is a more-than-positive first step."

Two months after the crash, Sarrazin told L'Équipe newspaper he wanted to resume skiing but maybe not as a professional racer. (AP)

Salah future in doubt at Liverpool

From drop threat to record lows: Wolves season hits new depths

MANCHESTER, England, Dec 11, (AP): The numbers just keep on getting worse for Wolverhampton Wanderers in a season that is threatening to set a new low in Premier League history.

Heading into the 16th round of the campaign, Wolves are still winless. Sitting bottom of the standings, relegation to the Championship looks inevitable and the job for recently hired coach Rob Edwards now appears to be a case of damage limitation.

Unwanted records are in sight, and on Saturday Wolves travel to first-place Arsenal.

With just two points from 15 games so far, Wolves are tracking toward a record-low points tally of five if they maintain that form for the rest of the season. That's less than half the lowest-ever Premier League total of 11 points by Derby County in the 2007-8 campaign.

"We've got to try to improve. We've got to try to find that belief," said Edwards this week, but a 4-1 home loss to Manchester United on Monday saw fans protest against the club's Chinese owners Fosun.

Some fans boycotted the first 15 minutes of the game and protested outside the stadium. There were further protests during the match as Wolves fell to an eighth-straight league loss.

The last win in the league was in April against a Leicester team on course for relegation. That was at the end of a six-game winning streak that helped Wolves avoid the drop last term, but it has been bad news ever since, with coach Vitor Pereira fired in November and Edwards so far failing to inspire a turnaround.

But Wolves are still some way from the longest losing run in Premier League history. According to statistician Opta, Sunderland lost 20 games in succession - spanning two campaigns.

A streak of 15-straight losses in the 2002-3 campaign was the most in a single season and Sunderland went on to lose another five games when it returned to the top flight in 2005.

Wolves appear to be paying the price for a talent drain in recent years, which



Wolverhampton Wanderers' head coach Vitor Pereira reacts during the Premier League soccer match between Wolverhampton Wanderers and Manchester United in Wolverhampton, England. (AP)

has seen a series of top players sold.

Pedro Neto left for Chelsea last year. That was followed by the sales of Rayan Ait-Nouri to Manchester City and Matheus Cunha to Manchester United in the last transfer window. Matheus Nunes (City), Morgan Gibbs-White (Nottingham Forest) and Ruben Neves (Al-Hilal) have been other high-profile departures to weaken a team that had back-to-back seventh-place finishes in 2019 and 2020.

While Derby's record has stood for the best part of 20 years, Wolves' troubles point to a recent trend in England's top flight.

Southampton was relegated last year with the second-worst points total of 12 points. It took an unlikely draw against Man City in the third-to-last game of the season to avoid equaling Derby's total.

Sheffield United has the fourth-lowest points total - 16 - recorded in the 23-24 campaign.

Derby also has the record fewest wins in a Premier League season, with just one in that 2007-8 campaign.

Wolves are currently 13 points adrift of safety with a goal difference of -25, but defender Emmanuel Agba-

dou insisted this week: "We're not going to give up."

"We're going to try to give everything to at least finish our season well," he said.

Sunderland hosts Newcastle in a North East derby on Sunday, and Man City's trip to Crystal Palace will be a test for Pep Guardiola's team on the back of Wednesday's win at Real Madrid in the Champions League.

Palace beat City in last season's FA Cup final.

Liverpool hosts Brighton on Saturday. The defending champion is trying to get its season back on track after a run of just two wins in its last 10 league games.

Whether Mohamed Salah is on the field, on the bench or in the stands, focus will be on him when Liverpool plays Brighton at Anfield.

The Liverpool icon has cast doubt over his future after claiming he'd been "thrown under the bus" by the club. Salah had been dropped from the team for three straight games and responded with an explosive interview following last week's 3-3 draw with Leeds.

US to play Senegal on May 31 in pre-World Cup friendly in North Carolina

FAYETTEVILLE, Ga., Dec 11, (Agencies): The United States will play Senegal in a friendly on May 31 at Charlotte, North Carolina, in the Americans' next-to-last game before their World Cup opener.

The U.S. has four games remaining before co-hosting the World Cup with Mexico and Canada. The 14th-ranked Americans play No. 8 Belgium on March 28 and sixth-ranked Portugal three days later, both at Atlanta. After meeting 19th-ranked Senegal, the U.S. faces No. 9 Germany on June 6 at Chicago.

This will be the first meeting between the Americans and Senegal. The U.S. Soccer Federation announced the Senegal match on Thursday.

At the World Cup, the U.S. opens Group D against No. 39 Paraguay on

June 12 at Inglewood, California, faces 26th-ranked Australia seven days later at Seattle and closes the group stage back in Inglewood on June 25 against the winner of playoffs among Turkey (No. 25), Slovakia (45), Romania (47) and Kosovo (80).

Senegal starts Group I against No. 3 France on June 16 and 29th-ranked Norway six days later, both in East Rutherford, New Jersey. The Lions of Teranga finish the first round on June 26 in Toronto against Bolivia (76), Iraq (58) or Suriname (123).

Panama will step up its 2026 FIFA World Cup preparations with a friendly against Bolivia next month, the Panamanian Football Federation (FPF) said on

Wednesday.

The match will be played at IV Centenario Stadium in the southern Bolivian city of Tarija on January 18, the FPF said in a statement.

It will fall outside an official FIFA international window, meaning the fixture will mainly feature players from local clubs.

Panama has been drawn in the World Cup's Group L alongside Ghana, Croatia and England. Bolivia, meanwhile, will vie for one of two qualification spots at the FIFA inter-confederation playoffs in Mexico.

The South American side will meet Suriname on March 26, with the winner to face Iraq five days later for a place in the World Cup group stage.