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Ambassadors laud Kuwait Amir on 2nd anniversary of accession

Wise and visionary leadership elevates Kuwait's global standing

Cold snap to grip Kuwait at 5°C

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18, (Agencies): The Meteorological Department forecasted that Kuwait is expected to experience scattered thunderstorms, which may be heavy at times, especially over southern and coastal areas, until the early hours of Friday morning.

Moderate northwesterly winds are expected to gradually strengthen, reaching speeds of up to 60 kilometers per hour, causing high sea waves.

The acting Director of the Meteorological Department, Dhirar Al-Ali, told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that weather maps and numerical models show that the country will be affected by a surface high-pressure extension from



Photo by Rezk Tawfiq

Heavy rain blurs the view of the iconic Kuwait Towers, seen through a car window, on Thursday evening.

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US, Kuwait celebrate strong diplomatic and defense ties

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Steven Butler, Chargé d'Affaires at the US Embassy in Kuwait, emphasized the strong and lasting partnership between the United States and Kuwait, and highlighted close cooperation in diplomatic, commercial, and defense sectors.

He stressed Kuwait's vital role as a major non-NATO ally, noting that the defense partnership significantly contributes to the security of both the US and the wider region, serving the national interests of both nations.

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Joint efforts sought to protect state land

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: The Municipal Council's fact-finding committee, which is tasked with investigating commercial encroachments on state-owned land, announced its decision to postpone the finalization of its agenda to allow for further discussions and coordination with relevant ministries, government departments, and other concerned bodies.

Continued on Page 5

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Ambassadors accredited to Kuwait expressed their deep appreciation and pride in the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, on the occasion of the second anniversary of his accession.

They conveyed their heartfelt congratulations and best wishes for His Highness's continued health and well-being, as well as for the lasting security, stability, and prosperity of Kuwait and its people.

The diplomats praised the political and developmental achievements realized under His Highness's leadership, noting that these accomplishments have strengthened Kuwait's regional and international standing and reinforced its proactive role in promoting stability, humanitarian efforts, and development.

Additionally, the ambassadors emphasized Kuwait's steadfast commitment to enhancing cooperative and friendly relations with countries around the world.

A Pivotal Player in Regional and Global Affairs

Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Tajikistan to Kuwait, Dr. Zubaydullo Zubaydzoda, extended warm congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad, and expressed hopes for his continued health and well-being, as well as for Kuwait's sustained progress and prosperity.

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Ambassador of Tajikistan



Ambassador of Bahrain



Ambassador of Russia



Ambassador of Morocco

Kuwait launches e-exams for prosecutors

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: With the aim of promoting equal opportunity and upholding the highest standards of integrity and transparency in selecting legal professionals, Minister of Justice,

Counselor Nasser Al-Sumait, issued a ministerial decree to form a new committee to select candidates for the "Junior Legal Researcher" position, which was announced on July 12, 2024.

The decree defines the evaluation criteria and sets the framework for preparing exam questions and answer keys, which the committee will develop in cooperation with the Kuwait Institute for Judicial and Legal Studies.

The committee will administer an electronic written exam worth 40 points, prepared in collaboration with the institute and in coordination with Kuwait University, and the exam will be graded automatically.

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A wise vision inspired by past glory, shaping tomorrow's ambitions

The second anniversary of His Highness the Amir

Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's

accession to power



Prayer Timings			
Fajr	05:11	Asr	14:34
Sunrise ..	06:36	Maghrib ..	16:53
Zohr	11:44	Isha	18:15

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:
By Day: Rather cold to cold and clouds and rain will decrease gradually with moderate to fresh strong at times northwesterly wind, with speeds of 20-60 km/h causing rising dust.

Weather			
By Night: Cold with light to moderate northwesterly wind, with speeds of 12-35 km/h with a chance for light fog forming over some areas.			
Station	Max Exp	Min Rec	
Kuwait City	15	11	

Kuwait Airport	15	11
Abdaly	15	09
Bubyan	15	05
Jahra	16	11
Failaka Island	14	08
Salmiyah	16	13
Salmy	13	06

All in Kuwait stand behind Amir’s rule

His Highness put country on right track: Al-Hajri

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Fahad Al-Muajil, Secretary-General of the Kuwaiti Diwanias, affirmed that this anniversary marks a significant milestone in Kuwait’s path toward political stability and developmental progress, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

He stressed that the two years of His Highness’s leadership have instilled a sense of reassurance and security, strengthened principles of justice and integrity, and enhanced the role of state institutions in serving citizens.

Al-Muajil described His Highness the Amir’s vision as clear, transparent, and hands-on, which has led to genuine reform, and emphasized that the Kuwaiti Diwanias unanimously support His Highness’s leadership.

Meanwhile, businessman Rashid Al-Hajri expressed his deep loyalty to His Highness the Amir, highlighting Kuwait’s balanced approach under his guidance, marked by firmness in governance, compassion in dealings, and wisdom in decision-making.

Al-Hajri highlighted His Highness the Amir’s prioritization of national unity, the strengthening of ties between leadership and citizens, and his commitment to the nation’s security and stability.

He praised efforts to consolidate the rule of law, which have enhanced public performance and developed oversight and service systems.

Meanwhile, the business community lauded the economic direction pursued under His Highness the Amir.

Businessman Saad Sartib Al-Shammari praised



Fahad Al-Muajil



Rashid Al-Hajri



Ali Al-Alami



Saad Al-Shammari

the economic approach, highlighting that prioritizing financial reform and creating an attractive investment environment are revitalizing the nation’s economic cycle.

He noted that recent policy decisions reflect a conscious political will to diversify income sources and streamline bureaucracy.

Al-Shammari emphasized the community’s appreciation for initiatives supporting youth employ-

ment and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), describing Kuwait as having a “historic opportunity” to establish a modern economic model.

Furthermore, businessman Rashid Al-Hajri highlighted tangible steps taken over the past two years to improve the business environment, streamline government procedures, and implement sustainable economic policies.

He pointed to Kuwait’s new direction toward greater openness, citing expanded opportunities in tourism and international visits as evidence of the country’s evolving economic arena.

Al-Hajri affirmed that His Highness the Amir’s foreign policy is based on balance, careful management of international relations, and a commitment to dialogue, which has reinforced Kuwait’s standing within the Gulf and the Arab world.

In addition, Ali Al-Alami, former Secretary-General of the Egyptian community, highlighted the positive impact on resident communities, and praised His Highness the Amir’s leadership for embodying Kuwait’s authentic values of hospitality and respect.

He emphasized that His Highness has placed “human beings at the heart of his national project,” noting that directives to improve public services and uphold human dignity have strengthened social stability.

Al-Alami also highlighted the consolidation of Kuwaiti-Egyptian relations, attributing this progress to His Highness the Amir’s vision for strengthening historical Arab ties.

All statements concluded with prayers for the protection of Kuwait, His Highness the Amir, and the continued prosperity, security, and well-being of the nation and its people.

KUWAIT BASKS IN WISE LEADERSHIP

Jahra Governor congratulates Amir on 2nd ’versary of power

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Jahra Governor Hamad Jassim Al-Habashi congratulated His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, on the second anniversary of his accession to the throne.

In a press release issued by Jahra Governorate, Governor Al-Habashi said, “On this national occasion, it is my honor, on my own behalf and on behalf of the people of Jahra Governorate, to extend our warmest congratulations and sincerest feelings of loyalty and devotion to His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (May God protect and preserve him), on the anniversary of his accession to the throne.

We pray to God Almighty to grant His Highness the Amir continued health and well-being, and to guide him in all that is good for Kuwait and its people.

This cherished anniversary marks a national milestone, reminding us of the meanings of belonging and pride in our wise leadership. It renews the confidence of the people of Kuwait in a steadfast approach based on wisdom, sound management, responsible decisiveness, and a forward-looking vision that has strengthened the stability of the state, preserved its achievements, enhanced its prestige, and steadily advanced the nation toward greater prosperity.

Reign

Under the reign of His Highness the Amir (May God protect him), the State of Kuwait has entered a pivotal phase marked by the consolidation of the rule of law, the strengthening of the state’s prestige, the enhancement of government performance, the support of comprehensive development initiatives, and the improvement of service quality. This reflects a leadership approach that balances the demands of the present with the needs of the future, and fulfills the aspirations of the Kuwaiti people.

In Jahra Governorate, as in all other governorates, citizens have witnessed the impact of this wise approach through attention to their needs, improved coordination and integration among government entities, and support for development and service projects. These efforts contribute to raising living standards, enhance quality of life, and highlight



Hamad Al-Habashi

the leadership’s commitment to achieving balanced development in all regions of the country.”

Governor Al-Habashi praised the distinguished and supportive role of His Highness the Crown Prince, Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah (May God protect him), highlighting his continuous support for the efforts of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait.

He also commended the Crown Prince’s active role in advancing the nation’s progress, strengthening its stability and prestige, and embodying the spirit of collective action and integration in leading the country.

On this occasion, Governor Al-Habashi renewed his pledge of allegiance to the wise leadership, stating, “We pledge to God and then to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait to continue fulfilling our national duty, working with utmost dedication to serve Kuwait and its people, contributing to the implementation of the wise leadership’s directives, and reinforcing the spirit of cooperation and responsibility, all in service of the public good and to strengthen the path of development.”

He concluded his message by saying, “We pray to God Almighty to protect Kuwait, its leadership, and its people, to perpetuate the blessings of security, safety, and stability, and to grant success to His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince in all endeavors that elevate the nation and preserve its glory, ensuring that Kuwait always remain an oasis of security, stability, growth, and prosperity.”

Penalty on hold if one admits nationality file tampering

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: The Directorate General of Nationality and Travel Documents of the Ministry of Interior announced an exemption from legal penalties for anyone who voluntarily reports any illegal additions to their nationality file or the nationality files of their family members until the end of this year, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In an official statement, the Directorate explained that this measure is part of the Ministry of Interior’s efforts to enhance transparency and correct legal situations related to nationality records. The initiative pro-

vides individuals with an opportunity to regularize their legal status, and encourages cooperation by proactively disclosing information. This contributes to protecting rights, ensuring the integrity of procedures, and enforcing the law within established legal frameworks.

The directorate affirmed that all reports will be handled with full confidentiality, professionalism, and responsibility, in accordance with legal procedures, ensuring the rights of all parties are preserved and serving the public interest.



Pride of a nation, strength of its people

stc Kuwait extends its congratulations, on the second anniversary of His Highness the Amir

Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, assuming to power.



diwaniya

ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Nations thrive in shielding human dignity and rights

“BY THE kind invitation of the National Human Rights Bureau, I had the honor of participating in a symbolic celebration of “International Human Rights Day,” which is observed each year on December 10. On this day, we reflect on the meaning of humanity, its dignity, and its rightful place as both the starting point and ultimate goal of every national, developmental, and civilizational endeavor.” Sustainability Expert Dr. **Sami Al-Adwani** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.



Dr. Sami Al-Adwani

“The slogan chosen for this year’s celebration was “Human Rights: A Shared Responsibility”, and it carries profound significance. Indeed, the responsibility of protecting human rights does not rest solely with the National Human Rights Bureau but it represents a collective commitment that must be embraced by society as a whole. The facts on the ground answer the following question more effectively than official data and statistics - To what extent have we succeeded in making humanity the focus and goal of development?”

“Experience has shown that the strength of nations does not rely solely on the size of their economies, but also on their ability to uphold the rights that preserve human dignity, freedom, and responsibility. Rights are not a gift to be granted but they are inherent and precede legislation. Systems are built upon them, and public policies are derived from them. A society that elevates human dignity to its highest level is one that does not fear criticism, is unafraid to review its decisions, and continuously develops its legal and administrative systems in a manner that reflects its civilized awareness.

“The representative of the National Human Rights Bureau emphasized that procedural paths are not rigid. He highlighted the small details that shape a person’s daily experience, such as feeling safe, having access to justice, enjoying fair opportunities in education and employment, and receiving support during vulnerable times without fear for the future. Human rights reform is not merely a top-down decision but it is a process that begins with family awareness, the conscience of the state, the responsibility of the media, the balance of institutions, and the transformation of laws into tangible practices and commitments.

“Recent experiences in countries in the region show that promoting human rights is no longer just an international expectation but it has become integral to societal security and sustainable development, and an important element in building trust between citizens and state institutions. Developing legislation, reviewing policies, and expanding community participation have become urgent priorities to ensure justice, transparency, and accountability.

“The strength of any society is measured by its ability to protect its most vulnerable groups, including women, children, people with disabilities, the elderly, and low-income workers. How a society treats these groups reflects its ethical values, demonstrates compassion, and indicates the maturity of its legislation. Protecting social groups is not an act of charity, nor is it seasonal. Rather, it is an expression of social justice that contributes to the stability of society as a whole and prevents the formation of divisions that could lead to tension within the community.

“I was honored to receive a kind invitation from the Ministry of Social Affairs a few weeks ago to participate in a dialogue workshop on groups in need of social protection, aimed at developing a participatory approach to comprehensive protection. While states bear the primary responsibility, the role of society and individuals should not be overlooked.

“Respect for rights begins with the behavior of citizens, their way of interacting with others, their awareness of the limits of their authority, and their responsibility in confronting hate speech or discrimination. Consequently, the responsibility for protecting human rights is shared among various institutions, including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Higher Education, non-governmental organizations, intellectuals, and community leaders.

“The future requires a qualitative shift from the concept of care to the concept of protection, which is central to sustainable development. We must move from adopting policies that respond to crises to policies that anticipate risks and prevent them. We must also transition from creating mechanisms that merely regulate human affairs to establishing systems that make individuals active partners in decision-making. I would like to express my gratitude to all those who commemorate International Human Rights Day and help us fulfill our duty and uphold our responsibilities.

“International Human Rights Day serves as a reminder that we can achieve our goals, no matter how long the journey. What is required is strong will, collective effort, and aligning the interests of the state with the principles of human dignity. Human dignity is a national project, a societal aspiration, and a right inherent to every human being. Human rights are not merely a document but they represent awareness, a guiding path, and a standard of life. The strength of nations is measured by their ability to place the human being at the center of all their endeavors.”

Also:

“These days commemorate the second anniversary of Kuwait’s new and hopeful era, a time marked by firm determination to safeguard the nation’s identity, which is a priority that the political leadership emphasized even before the Amir’s inaugural address,” Kuwaiti writer **Tariq Idrees** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

“This resolve was reaffirmed in His Highness the Amir’s speech, which stands as a national and historical document illuminating Kuwait’s path and its new era. The speech emphasized the importance of preventing any tampering with Law No. 15/1959, the unassailable constitutional safeguard of Kuwaiti citizenship. While opinions and stances on this matter have varied, the guiding principle remains the firm commitment to protecting the nation and preserving this vital issue. The goal is to uphold the path established by independence and the Constitution, nurtured by the founding fathers who strengthened the nation long before 1920.

“The descendants have upheld this pledge with unwavering determination, holding fast to their national will generation after generation. Today, they embrace a new era with the same steadfast commitment. We renew our pledge of allegiance to the leader of resolve and the new era - His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. We affirm our readiness to shoulder this responsibility, to serve as a sword in the hands of the supreme leadership, to speak the truth, make sound decisions, and serve as a steadfast support in preserving Kuwait’s Constitution and independence, grounded in the protection of its national identity. Indeed, national identity is the cornerstone of the democratic political system.

“Indeed, we all look forward to this auspicious promise of entering a new year under the blessed era of resolve. We all carry a torch to illuminate the path toward a brighter future for Kuwait, grounded in national stability and opening wide horizons for our children and grandchildren. This is a moment filled with pride, joy, and celebration. We renew our pledge of allegiance to the leaders of this march of resolve and enlightenment. His Highness the Amir Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince. We pray to God to protect them, Kuwait and its loyal people.”



“The Ministry of Interior, headed by the acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef, deserves commendation for seizing a farm in Al-Abdali that was being used to store and smuggle petroleum products (diesel) out of the country,” Syrian writer Dr. **Adnan Mahrez** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

“This action is part of the ministry’s ongoing security efforts to combat crimes that harm the national economy and to confront illegal practices, as stated in the Ministry of Interior’s announcement regarding the operation. By affirming that any land used for illegal activities or for purposes other than those for which it was designated will be confiscated, and that all legal measures will be taken against those involved by referring them to the competent authorities, the ministry underscores its firm role in combating violations and enforcing criminal penalties.

“Such practices harm the agricultural sector by diverting farmland and agricultural resources from their licensed purpose of agriculture and production, thereby undermining efforts to achieve self-sufficiency and food security. Agriculture is one of the most important economic activities in many countries, and the Kuwaiti government has given it considerable attention and support through the allocation of agricultural land, the provision of services to farmers, and the availability of suitable financing for agricultural projects.

“The government has also exerted significant efforts to supply production inputs and subsidize their prices, including providing fuel (diesel) at reduced rates to support producers. It is therefore essential to promote awareness among farmers about the proper use of these subsidies and resources



Dr. Adnan Mahrez

to increase local production and achieve self-sufficiency. Farmers should avoid engaging in illegal practices involving subsidized products or production inputs, and instead focus on harvesting and marketing their produce locally and, where possible, internationally.

“We commend the quick action taken by the Ministry of Interior to prevent any scheme or activity that could threaten public security particularly economic security. We salute the vigilance of the security forces and Ministry of Interior personnel who foiled the smuggling attempts, and delivered a decisive pre-emptive blow.

“Transparency in sharing the details of such operations and clarifying the potential damage they could cause helps build security and economic awareness among citizens and residents. The Ministry of Interior’s handling of the situation was characterized by professionalism and expertise, as highlighted by Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef, who praised the performance and efforts of the Border Security Sector personnel, and acknowledged their vital role in protecting the nation and maintaining its security.”

– Compiled by **Simi K. Kutty**



Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah receives in his office Ishbiliya Cooperative Society senior officials.

Gov: Continue good work to meet residents’ aspirations

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah received at his office on Wednesday the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Ishbiliya Cooperative Society, Dr. Awjan Al-Arada, Treasurer Khalid Al-Mutairi, and the cooperative society’s General Manager, Salah Al-Badi.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, the governor welcomed the guests, and commended the efforts of the cooperative society’s Board of

Directors and their role in developing cooperative work and improving the quality of services provided to residents of Ishbiliya. He urged them to continue their efforts to meet residents’ aspirations.

Governor Sheikh Athbi stressed the importance of continuing to implement community initiatives and tree-planting programs, affirming the governorate’s commitment to overcoming any obstacles faced by cooperative societies.

Drug-using kids taken to police

Positive impact of new law

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: **Less than 48 hours after the new drug law No. 159 /2025 came into effect, the Ministry of Interior and other state agencies started witnessing its positive impact on the ground, reports Al-Rai daily.**

Dozens of families rushed to report their children who use drugs, seeking treatment under the provisions of the new law and aiming to avoid severe penalties. This also helps clear their children’s records, and prevent them from the accumulation of criminal charges that could negatively affect their professional and social futures.

According to security sources, the Ministry of Interior is seeing immediate positive results from the awareness campaigns launched prior to the law’s implementation, with many citizens responding and reporting their drug-using children.

The first of the extensive security campaigns conducted by the Drug Control General Department (DCGD) after December 15 targeted suspicious locations in several areas, which resulted in the arrest of 13 individuals, including dealers and traffickers. Various quantities of narcotics were also seized from suspects of different nationalities, who were referred to the Narcotics Prosecution for legal action under the new law, which carries penalties of life imprisonment or, in some cases, the death penalty.

Also, DCGD received around 30 reports from families and relatives of drug users, who provided information about their children and their whereabouts. This enabled authorities to facilitate their arrest and referral to addiction treatment centers, allowing them to receive treatment, avoid penalties, and prevent criminal cases from being filed, thereby safeguarding their future.

The sources highlighted the significance of Article 61 of the new drug law, which allows drug users to voluntarily seek treatment at a hospital in complete confidentiality and without restrictions, with no prior record being registered in their file. They also highlighted Article 62, which requires the family of an addict, up to the third degree of kinship, to file a complaint with the Public Prosecutor’s Office regarding their addicted relative, after which the competent authorities will apprehend the individual and place them in an addiction treatment center for rehabilitation.

Salon worker admits she stole valuables of visitor

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Officers from Hawally Police Station arrested an employee of a salon for stealing gold and cash from a Gulf woman’s purse, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

According to security sources, the Operation Room of the Ministry of Interior received a report from a Gulf woman in her thirties stating that her wallet, along with a 24-karat gold ring and necklace of the Cartier brand, valued at KD 1,750, and KD 300 in cash, were missing from her purse. Revealing that the total value of the stolen items is KD 2,050, the complainant said she made the discovery while paying KD 70 for services at the salon.

She confirmed that she entered the salon with all her belongings, and indicated that the perpetrator was likely either a customer or an employee. As a result, a theft case was registered under number 177/2025 at Hawally Police Station.

The sources explained that the investigation was reopened and the victim’s statement was recorded again. She noted that the theft likely occurred during a facial steam and exfoliation session, when she had to relax and keep her eyes fully closed during the treatment.

Statement

The case file was then transferred to the Criminal Investigation Department, where the salon owner’s statement was recorded.

The salon owner confirmed that there were no surveillance cameras inside the salon, citing privacy concerns and the prohibition of cameras in establishments providing services to women.

She revealed that the salon employs at least 12 women, including hairdressers and cleaning staff, of various nationalities.

Detectives then re-interrogated the employee who had directly attended to the victim. She confirmed that she had provided the client with a steam and exfoliation session but denied any involvement in the theft, claiming she was performing other tasks at the time.

Further investigations and statements from other employees shifted suspicion to a colleague, who was re-interrogated and confessed.

She admitted that she had taken advantage of her colleague’s distraction and the victim’s closed eyes to open the bag and steal the items in seconds.

The accused stated that she then rushed to the salon’s restroom and hid the stolen gold jewelry in the toilet bowl, fearing a search of the other employees, before waiting for an opportunity to take the items to her apartment in Hawally.

Other Voices

Knock on wood

By **Ahmad alsarraf**

Knocking on wood is traditionally considered a way to ward off envy when hearing good or unbelievable news, particularly if it involves wealth or unexpected success.

This simple gesture is thought by many to act as a talisman against bad luck, and a way for protection from harm or misfortune.

In English-speaking countries, people usually say “Touch wood,” which is more common internationally than the phrase “Knock on wood” used in our countries.

Regardless of wording, the underlying purpose remains the same - to protect the person experiencing good fortune and prevent potential misfortune.

However, where did this mysterious superstition originate?

One of the most common explanations traces back to ancient pagan beliefs, particularly among the Celtic peoples of Europe. According to legend, certain sacred trees, such as oak and hazel, were considered



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dwelling places for holy spirits. Knocking on the trunks of these trees may have been a way to awaken the spirits and ask for their protection. However, there is no concrete evidence directly linking these ancient practices to the modern superstition.

Some also associate touching wood with Christian belief, since the cross of Jesus was made of wood. However, folklore experts note that these interpretations are speculative, as they are not mentioned in any medieval writings or sermons.

The most likely explanation is that the first recorded use of the phrase “touch wood” appeared in 1805. Since the 19th century, it has been linked to the English language through a British children’s game called “Tiggy Touchwood.”

Touching wood was believed to provide a safe hand, and prevent children from being knocked out of the game, which involved chasing one another.

From Britain, the practice spread to its colonies and beyond. The Oxford Dictionary of English Folklore supports this view.

The dictionary’s editors found no trace of this custom before the 19th century, and dismissed theories about tree spirits or the Christian cross as romantic inventions.

Over time, the superstition, along with the phrases “touch wood” or “knock on wood,” spread almost worldwide. In Turkey, people knock on wood twice or pull on one earlobe to ward off bad luck.

In Italy, the equivalent practice is “touching iron.” Even those who claim not to believe in superstitions often find themselves reaching for the nearest table, door frame, or desk after making or hearing an optimistic comment.

The persistence of this custom may reveal more about human psychology than ancient religion. Whether or not we imagine spirits in trees, performing a small action to protect ourselves or our loved ones from misfortune brings a sense of comfort.

Knocking on, touching, or grasping wood provides a charming, albeit slight, illusion of control in a world full of uncertainties.



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ABEGS sets research framework for future-ready Gulf education

Call for stronger evidence-driven decision-making

By Inaas Awadh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: The Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS) concluded its Gulf Forum for Educational Researchers on December 14–15, held under the patronage of the Minister of Education Eng. Sayed Jalal Al-Tabtabaei, and in the presence of Director General of ABEGS Dr. Mohammed Al-Muqbil, along with undersecretaries of education from Gulf countries and a group of Gulf and international educational experts.

Dr. Mohammed Al-Shuraika, Director of ABEGS, announced that the conference, with its diverse sessions and panel discussions and with a select group of specialists and researchers, produced six important recommendations, which would support educational decision-making in the Gulf countries.

Dr. Al-Shuraika emphasized that implementing these recommendations would strengthen educational systems in the Gulf region, enhance the educational process, and develop the skills and capabilities of Gulf students.

He noted that the outcomes would equip students with advanced tools that keep pace with the evolving demands of modern times, including the global revolution in artificial intelligence, modern technologies, and culture of innovation.



Photo by Mohammad Morsi
Dr. Mohammed Al-Shuraika, Director of the Arab Center for Educational Research for the Gulf States.

The recommendations were as follows:

First - Strengthen the role of educational research in shaping educational policies.

This involves establishing clear institutional mechanisms within the ministries of Education in the GCC countries to integrate the results of educational research and empirical data into all stages of the educational decision-making process.

Second - Enhance the research capacities of educational researchers.

This includes designing and implementing specialized, continuous training programs for researchers in the ministries of Education in GCC countries, with the aim to improve their ability to apply scientific research methods and utilize findings to support educational policies, with a particular emphasis on developing skills in applied research methodologies.

Third - Support and activate professional

learning communities for educational researchers at both national and GCC levels.

This involves adopting the Communities of Practice (COMPs) model as an effective and sustainable framework to promote organized collaboration among educational researchers, facilitate the exchange of research experiences and expertise, and build shared cumulative knowledge. It also calls for creating supportive environments to enhance the work of these communities.

Fourth - Strengthen research ethics and data governance in educational studies.

This includes establishing clear regulatory and ethical frameworks to govern educational data in research for ensuring the protection of individual privacy, promoting transparency and accountability, and guaranteeing the responsible and secure use of educational data.

Fifth - Encourage applied research related to priority educational issues at the Gulf level.

This involves directing educational research efforts toward educational issues that are real and shared in Gulf countries, reflecting national and regional priorities in the development of education.

Sixth - Strengthen partnerships between research institutions and executive bodies.

This recommendation aims to expand and deepen effective and sustainable collaborations between educational research centers, universities, ministries of Education in the Gulf countries, and relevant regional and international organizations.

It also seeks to develop institutional cooperation frameworks that facilitate the exchange of expertise and knowledge, the implementation of joint research projects, and the adaptation of leading international practices to the Gulf context.



MoSA photo
The Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs heads the Kuwaiti delegation at the meeting.

Minister Al-Huwailah heads Kuwait delegation at GCC Ministerial meet

AMMAN, Dec 18, (KUNA): Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah on Wednesday headed Kuwait's delegation to the 49th Coordination Meeting of Ministers of Social Affairs and Development of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, held in the Jordanian capital, Amman.

The meeting discussed the agenda for the 49th Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs, scheduled for Thursday.

The participants commended the distinguished efforts exerted by the State of Kuwait during its presidency of the GCC

and its practical contributions to strengthening joint Gulf social work and advancing coordination and integration among the GCC countries, which positively impacted the development of priority social policies and programs.

They affirmed their full support for the Kingdom of Bahrain's presidency of the current session, wishing it success in building on past achievements and in strengthening Gulf cooperation to address shared social and developmental issues and fulfill the aspirations of the peoples of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states.

Project aims for real-time data

KD2m tender secured for smart meter communications network

By Mohammed Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: The Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) has awarded the tender for the development, management, and operation of the smart meter system and its communications network to the company that met all specifications and conditions, at a value of 2.022 million dinars.

The project is part of the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy's efforts to modernize infrastructure and implement the latest global technologies in this field.

According to sources from the ministry, the tender and award details have been referred to the State Audit Bureau for review and feedback. The project aims to develop the smart meter system, enhance data accuracy and reliability,

promote rationalized consumption, increase operational efficiency, and ensure rapid response to malfunctions. It also supports digital transformation and the adoption of international best practices in smart grid management.

The contract includes operating and maintaining the smart meter communication system, ensuring its integration with existing systems, and providing advanced technological solutions for real-time monitoring and data analysis.

This will improve the quality of service provided to consumers and is in line with the ministry's strategic plans, under the Customer Service Sector, to enhance services, promote sustainability, and promote reliance on modern technologies to meet the demands of population growth and urban development in Kuwait.

Other Voices

Closing the gap between digital presence and real-world impact

By Hala Bader Al Humaidhi

Confidence looks different in 2025. It's filtered, curated, and captioned – all for digital consumption. And what's emerging is a noticeable gap between the confidence on social media and the confidence we're seeing in the real world.

This is a conversation we're not having enough of in psychology circles. We're discussing anxiety. We're discussing digital addiction and FOMO culture, but we're not yet linking these back to the erosion of real-life confidence. Because online, people get to control the narrative. They can curate what they say (and don't say). They can show up and disappear whenever they want. They can delete that status, unlike that comment, and reply minutes, hours, even days late. They get to filter pictures, delete captions, and hide from the consequences of their digital actions. In the real world, though, people have to speak up. They have to communicate, debate, defend, and justify – all in real time. They can't just disappear whenever they want to. They can't just edit what they say and present it as brand-new information. They can't just filter, retweet, or repost that conversation because real life doesn't work that way. And this matters because a large chunk of people are getting bolder online but less confident offline. And we're not yet paying attention enough. Because that gap between social media confidence and real-life confidence will determine whether someone speaks up in a meeting, steps up to pitch to a room of investors or simply stands up for themselves in a heated argument.

It will determine the future CEO, the founder, the leader, the innovator, the entrepreneur, and the game changers of the next generation of leaders. Social media confidence is important, but it cannot replace real-life confidence. Because real-life confidence is the confidence people have to demonstrate when no one is liking, sharing, or swiping right. It's the confidence people have to demonstrate when no one is watching, supporting, or backing them from the sidelines. Because the further social media advances, the harder it gets for Generation Z and Alpha to separate the real from the fake. The confidence from the overconfidence. The articulating from the orating, and the growth from the stagnation and procrastination. Because social media can easily become a comfort zone. And anything that competes



Hala Bader Al Humaidhi

with the intentional development of confidence, leader presence, and voice will always undermine the future career prospects of that individual.

Confidence will always define how someone asserts themselves in their industry. And we need to dismantle the myth that just being visible online is enough. Because real-world confidence is about how someone walks, talks, moves, reacts, responds, and regulates under actual pressure – not just how many reels someone posted in the past month.

So, the next time someone assumes that social media confidence is enough, remind them that assertiveness online will never outperform real-world confidence. Instead of being built through experience, effort, and self-awareness, it becomes something to display rather than develop. True confidence is quiet. It is not about constant expression but consistent behavior. It is the ability to say no without guilt, to speak without fear of rejection, and to act without needing applause. It is built through self-reflection, emotional intelligence, and real-world interaction – not algorithms.

As societies continue to digitalize, the question is no longer whether social media affects confidence, but how well individuals are taught to separate appearance from reality.

Teaching emotional intelligence, communication skills, and self-awareness is no longer optional – it is essential. Bridging the gap between online confidence and real-life confidence starts with honesty. Confidence is not what we show on a screen; it is how we show up when no one is watching.

Kuwait eyes closer ties with India, Djibouti

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Paramita Tripathi on Thursday.

During the meeting, they discussed ways and means of promoting Kuwaiti-Indian relations across various fields and issues of mutual interest.

Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received Djibouti's Ambassador to Kuwait Issa Khaireh Robleh on Thursday.

During the meeting, they discussed ways and means of promoting Kuwaiti-Djibouti relations across various fields and issues of mutual interest.







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Qatari Ambassador lauds strong Kuwaiti support

Kuwait Amir congratulates Amir of Qatar on Nat’l Day

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent Thursday a cable of congratulations to the Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani on his country’s National Day.

In the cable, His Highness the Amir praised the outstanding achievements accomplished by Qatar across various fields and commended the depth of the longstanding historical and bilateral relations that bind the two countries and the people, affirming the keenness to strengthen these ties and enhance cooperations between Kuwait and Qatar in various fields.

His Highness the Amir also wished the Amir of Qatar good health and well-being, and more prosperity and progress to Qatar and its people

under the wise leadership of Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent Thursday a cable of congratulations to the Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani on his country’s National Day.

In the cable, His Highness the Crown Prince praised the outstanding achievements accomplished by Qatar across various fields and wished the Amir of Qatar good health and well-being, as well as continued prosperity and progress for Qatar and its people under the Amir’s wise leadership.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent Thursday a cable of congratulations to the Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani on

his country’s National Day.

Meanwhile, Qatari Ambassador in Kuwait Ali Al Mahmoud on Thursday commended firm fraternal relations between Qatar and Kuwait, along with political coordination and close cooperation covering various domains.

Speaking to KUNA marking the National Day of the State of Qatar, the ambassador lauded the unwavering support of the leadership, government and people of the State of Kuwait for Qatari mediation in regional and international issues.

He described this Kuwaiti backing as reflecting a joint Gulf vision based on wisdom and quiet diplomacy and promotion of regional security and stability.

He spoke highly of Kuwait’s relentless stances in solidarity with the State of Qatar, as well

as its condemnation of recent aggressions on Doha, hailing such positions as showing Gulf unity and regarding Qatar’s security and stability as an integral part of Kuwait’s security.

The Qatari ambassador pointed out both countries’ commitment to promoting bilateral cooperation through their joint committee, mutual visits and continued coordination in regional and international issues.

He underlined that bilateral economic and trade relations are continuously growing, with the energy sector constituting their core pillar, given that Qatar is a main supplier of liquefied natural gas to Kuwait.

On the National Day of Qatar, the Qatari diplomat said that his country marks this occasion on December 18 every year to celebrate the anniversary of the country’s foundation under

Sheikh Jassem bin Mohammad bin Thani.

Hailing the country’s comprehensive development achievements under the wise leadership of Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, he said Qatar’s foreign policy is based on constant principles centered on dialogue, preventive diplomacy and peaceful resolution of conflicts.

He boasted that his country is playing an effective role in the field of regional and international mediation, and supporting peace, stability and humanitarian action.

He concluded by stressing that Doha is carrying on its sustainable development approach and boosting its international status through balanced economic policies that have contributed to achieving leading positions in indicators of development, security and economic competitiveness.

Ambassadors laud

Ambassador Dr. Zubaydzoda highlighted that the National Day serves as a valuable occasion to honor His Highness the Amir’s legacy of wise leadership and dedicated service.

He praised Kuwait’s political and developmental achievements under His Highness’s reign, noting that these accomplishments have strengthened internal stability and elevated Kuwait’s role as a key regional and international player through a balanced diplomatic approach and forward-looking vision.

The Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Kuwait, Vladimir Zheltov, conveyed his heartfelt congratulations and best wishes to His Highness the Amir.

He commended Kuwait’s consistently balanced role on the regional and international stages, emphasizing Russia’s high regard for the country’s foreign policy. This policy, which is based on constructive dialogue, openness, and discreet diplomacy - qualities exemplified by His Highness the Amir over the past two years - has bolstered Kuwait’s international standing and reinforced its supportive role in regional security.

Ambassador Zheltov affirmed that Russian-Kuwaiti relations have long been marked by fruitful cooperation in various sectors and mutual respect.

The Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain, Salah Al-Malki, also congratulated His Highness the Amir on this significant national occasion for the State of Kuwait and its people, conveying his sincere best wishes.

Ambassador Al-Malki highlighted the deep-rooted fraternal ties between the Kingdom of Bahrain and the State of Kuwait, which are built on strong historical connections and genuine brotherly bonds.

He lauded the prudent policies of the State of Kuwait and the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir for contributing to regional security and stability, and promoting enhanced Gulf cooperation.

Progress and Prosperity

Moroccan Ambassador Ali Ibin Issa congratulated His Highness the Amir, offering best wishes and prayers for continued success, guidance, and support in his noble mission. He also wished the State of Kuwait and its people ongoing progress and prosperity.

The Moroccan Embassy reaffirmed its commitment to close collaboration with various Kuwaiti institutions to strengthen the fraternal ties between the two nations and enhance cooperation in all sectors for fulfilling the mutual aspirations of both brotherly countries.

The UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Dr. Matar Al-Neyadi conveyed his sincere congratulations and best wishes to His Highness the Amir and the State of Kuwait.

He expressed pride in the nation’s continued growth and prosperity under His Highness’s leadership.

Ambassador Dr. Al-Neyadi highlighted His Highness the Amir’s pivotal role in boosting Gulf cooperation and elevating Kuwait’s regional and international standing.

He affirmed that the historic UAE-Kuwaiti relationship is strong and advancing steadily, with bilateral cooperation continuing to expand in various sectors between the two fraternal nations.

Ambassador of the State of Qatar Ali Al-Mahmoud extended warm congratulations and best wishes to His Highness the Amir, praising his astute leadership and forward-looking vision.

He highlighted that this leadership has been pivotal in laying the foundations for modern Kuwait’s progress and enhancing its stature regionally and internationally.

Ambassador Al-Mahmoud expressed confidence that His Highness’s efforts will continue to drive greater development, sustained growth, and lasting prosperity for the State of Kuwait and its people.

Ambassador of Uzbekistan Ayubkhon Yunusov extended his sincere congratulations and best wishes to His Highness the Amir on the second anniversary of his accession, recognizing it as a significant national occasion for Kuwait and its people.

He emphasized Uzbekistan’s deep appreciation for His Highness the Amir’s wise leadership, and praised the stability and sound policy direction achieved under his reign, which has strengthened Kuwait’s comprehensive development and reinforced its regional and international standing.

Ambassador Yunusov also commended Kuwait’s significant humanitarian and developmental contributions globally, highlighting its support for projects in various countries, including



Yunusov

Uzbekistan, through specialized Kuwaiti institutions. These efforts exemplify the noble humanitarian principles that guide Kuwait’s foreign policy.

Wise Leadership

Ambassador of Albania to Kuwait Ilir Hysa lauded His Highness the Amir’s wise leadership, highlighting Kuwait’s balanced policies and clear vision.

He noted that these qualities have played a key role in strengthening stability, supporting sustainable development, and consolidating Kuwait’s standing regionally and internationally.



Hysa

Ambassador of Bulgaria to Kuwait Dimitar Dimitrov also extended his heartfelt congratulations to His Highness the Amir, and expressed deep appreciation for his wise leadership.

He praised the political stability and balanced approach under His Highness’s reign, emphasizing how these factors have promoted sustainable development and reinforced Kuwait’s regional and global position.

Ambassador of Lebanon to Kuwait Ghadi Khoury offered sincere congratulations and best wishes, emphasizing Lebanon’s pride in its historic and fraternal ties with Kuwait.



Dimitrov



Khoury

He commended His Highness the Amir’s balanced, moderate policies, highlighting Kuwait’s vital role in supporting regional stability, encouraging dialogue, and advancing Arab solidarity.

Ambassador of Sudan to Kuwait Awadelkarim Elrayah Balla extended heartfelt congratulations to His Highness and best wishes for continued health, well-being, and prosperity for the State of Kuwait on the occasion of the second anniversary of His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad’s accession.

Speaking on behalf of himself, the Sudanese government, and its people, he highlighted the significance of this national milestone.



Balla

Ambassador Balla stressed that the anniversary reflects Kuwait’s political stability and the Amir’s wise leadership, which is evident in his balanced approach, steadfast commitment to strengthening state institutions, preserving national unity, and enhancing Kuwait’s regional and international standing.

He also praised the Kuwaiti leadership’s remarkable responsibility and foresight over the past two years, noting that its effective handling of challenges has served the interests of the Kuwaiti people and reinforced the country’s path toward comprehensive development.

The Ambassador of Pakistan to Kuwait Dr. Zafar Iqbal congratulated His Highness the Amir and praised him for guiding Kuwait with wisdom and foresight since his accession.

He highlighted the Amir’s commitment to moderation, stability, and effective leadership in navigating complex regional and global challenges, and commended Kuwait’s balanced and constructive role on both the regional and international stages.

Ambassador Dr. Iqbal emphasized the depth of Pakistani-Kuwaiti relations, which extend beyond traditional diplomacy and are based on mutual trust, shared values, and a long history of cooperation.

He expressed gratitude for the care shown to the Pakistani community in Kuwait due to their significant contributions to Kuwaiti society.

The Palestinian Cause

The Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait, Rami Tahboub extended his warmest congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad, on behalf of President Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian community in Kuwait.



Iqbal



Tahboub

He said, “As we celebrate this great national occasion, I must highlight His Highness the Amir’s unwavering support for Palestine, its people, and its cause. This stance has been a constant theme in all his speeches since the day he assumed power. He has consistently called for the Palestinian people’s right to freedom, justice, and independence, and the establishment of an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital. He has also generously ensured that all necessary support is provided to the Palestinian people during the devastating war in Gaza and the West Bank.”

The Ambassador of Algeria to Kuwait, Omar Belhadj, extended his warm congratulations to His Highness, and expressed pride in the strong and distinguished fraternal ties between the two countries and their continuous growth in various fields.



Belhadj



Boudali

He also conveyed to His Highness the sincere wishes of his brother, President Abdelmajid Tebboune, to further strengthen these deep-rooted relations and expand them to wider, more comprehensive horizons, benefiting both brotherly nations.

Ambassador of Tunisia to Kuwait Mohamed Boudali extended his heartfelt congratulations to His Highness the Amir, on behalf of himself, the Tunisian government, and the Tunisian people. He wished His Highness continued health and well-being and expressed hope for further progress and prosperity for the sisterly State of Kuwait.

He described the past two years as a “national milestone” in Kuwait’s history, and commended the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir.

Ambassador Boudali noted that this leadership is grounded in reinforcing stability, strengthening the rule of law and institutions, safeguarding national unity, and advancing comprehensive development.

He also praised Kuwait’s ability, under His Highness’s guidance, to tackle regional and international challenges with responsibility and moderation, adding that this approach reflects Kuwait’s steadfast commitment to its national principles and its active role in Arab, Gulf, and international affairs.

Meanwhile, the Ambassador of the Philippines to Kuwait Jose Cabrera III described this national occasion as a significant milestone in Kuwait’s history.

He praised the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir, highlighting his insightful vision for strengthening

stability, advancing the reform process, and enhancing Kuwait’s regional and international standing.

The Ambassador of Oman to Kuwait Dr. Saleh Al-Kharusi also extended his warmest congratulations and best wishes to His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad, and the State of Kuwait.

He commended Kuwait’s achievements under the Amir’s wise leadership and sound guidance, and prayed for the continued security and stability of the nation.

Ambassador Dr. Al-Kharusi expressed hope for the ongoing growth and deepening of Omani-Kuwaiti relations under the guidance of the leadership of both countries.



Al-Kharusi

The Chargé d’Affaires at the Syrian Embassy in Kuwait Tamim Madani affirmed that under His Highness the Amir’s leadership, Kuwait continues to play a pioneering and active role both regionally and internationally. This role is guided by a wise approach that strengthens joint Arab action, promotes dialogue and diplomacy, and supports important causes of the Arab nation, particularly humanitarian and developmental initiatives.

He also praised the longstanding fraternal relations between Syria and Kuwait, built on mutual respect and cooperation, and expressed hope for further development of these ties to benefit both brotherly peoples and reinforce Arab solidarity.



Safaa

Ambassador of Yemen to Kuwait Dr. Ali bin Safaa highlighted that the second anniversary of His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad’s accession marks a significant national milestone, reflecting the progress and prosperity Kuwait has achieved over the past two years under his wise leadership.

He expressed Yemen’s deep appreciation for Kuwait’s continued development, stability, and its active humanitarian and pioneering role at both regional and international levels.

The ambassador also emphasized His Highness the Amir’s sincere and unwavering support for the Yemeni people, noting that it reflects the longstanding historical and fraternal ties between the brotherly nations of Kuwait and Yemen.

The Ambassador of the Central African Republic, Issane Daniel Marh-Zhooock, extended his sincere congratulations to His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad, on the second anniversary of his accession.

He affirmed that during this period, Kuwait has demonstrated its commitment to wise and stable policies based on respect for regional and international balances.

The Ambassador highlighted that the past two years have been marked by His Highness the Amir’s confident and visionary leadership, evident in the development of government administration, improvement of the investment climate, and modernization of legislation.

He stressed that his country regards Kuwait as a trusted partner and a respected voice on various international issues.

Ambassador Marh-Zhooock expressed keenness to enhance bilateral cooperation, particularly in economic, educational, and developmental sectors.

He affirmed that His Highness the Amir’s foreign policy, characterized by moderation and bridge-building, has earned Kuwait widespread respect in international forums.

US, Kuwait

Butler highlighted that under US President Donald Trump, the Middle East has become a priority, citing the President’s early foreign visit to the region as evidence of commitment to strengthening partnerships such as the one with Kuwait.

He affirmed that the two countries

are working together toward a more integrated, prosperous, and stable region, which benefits both nations and the entire region.

Reflecting on the relationships that form the foundation of their collaboration, Butler stressed that every individual involved plays a crucial role in deepening the ties between the United States and Kuwait.

He outlined several areas of collaboration, including education, cultural exchange, media cooperation, community engagement, and government/public service, noting that these partnerships help build mutual understanding and create tangible opportunities for both countries.

Butler praised the U.S. Embassy’s Public Affairs team for their dedication, creativity, and commitment to strengthening connections across various segments of Kuwaiti society, citing the gathering itself as an example of their ongoing efforts to bring people together throughout the year.

Looking ahead, Butler expressed excitement for the coming year, anticipating new opportunities for collaboration, exchange programs, innovative initiatives, and ways to support Kuwait’s next generation of leaders, innovators, and content creators.

Kuwait launches

Counselor Al-Sumait explained that, for the first time, the exam for applicants to the position of Public Prosecutor (C) will be conducted electronically at Kuwait University, with results available immediately upon completion. Candidates who score 25 out of 40 will be considered to have passed the written exam and will be scheduled for a personal interview without delay.

The selection committee is entirely composed of judges, with Counselor Bader Al-Musaed as Chairman, Counselor Talal Al-Matar as Vice-Chairman, and Counselors Najib Al-Majed, Abdullah Al-Qasimi, and Fahd Al-Ateeqi as members.

The minister affirmed that the committee enjoys complete independence for ensuring impartiality and transparency in the evaluation and selection process.

He highlighted the cooperation with the Kuwait Institute for Judicial and Legal Studies in preparing the exams, alongside coordination with Kuwait University to implement the electronic system, emphasizing that this system allows for a clear separation between the written exam and the personal interview phases.

Counselor Al-Sumait explained that implementing electronic exams reflects the state’s commitment to digital transformation and the modernization of the justice system. It also reflects the Ministry of Justice’s dedication to enhancing efficiency and upholding the highest standards of transparency and integrity in the selection of legal professionals. This initiative provides a fair and advanced testing environment, elevating professional performance and supporting national talent, with a positive impact on the quality of judicial work and the reinforcement of the rule of law.

The decision specifies that scoring will be distributed as 40 points for the written exam and 60 points for the personal interview. A passing score is 75 or above out of 100, with successful candidates ranked according to their highest scores.

Article Four of the decision requires that the written exam be designed to ensure the accuracy of its questions and their relevance to the job level. The Kuwait Institute of Judicial and Legal Studies, in coordination with Kuwait University, will determine the appropriate electronic platform for administering the exam and set the exam schedule, as decided by the committee.

The entire exam preparation process, at every stage, will remain strictly confidential. The committee will implement the necessary procedures and controls to prevent the circulation, leakage, or unauthorized access to the exam questions.

Counselor Al-Sumait reiterated that the exams will be graded electronically to ensure full transparency and allow for immediate results, and that the committee will also receive hard copies of the applicants’ answers.

He revealed that preparatory positions for judicial posts form the cornerstone of the judicial system.

The minister emphasized that implementing these controls represents a major advancement in the selection of legal professionals who will uphold the judiciary’s mission, ensure equality and equal opportunities, and provide citizens with a fair chance to compete.

It is worth highlighting that the Minister of Justice had issued a decision on July 23 to cancel all actions of the committee responsible for selecting applicants for the position of “Junior Legal Researcher”, as they will qualify

for the position of “Public Prosecutor”, and its supporting team, established under Ministerial Resolutions No. 1602/2024 and 1603/2024, along with all related procedures and outcomes.

Joint efforts

Committee Chair Walid Al-Dagher issued a press statement in which he explained that the meeting focused on a detailed review of important field observations regarding the encroachments.

The discussions also included strategies for tackling the violations, implementing mechanisms to strengthen oversight, and enhancing the preparedness of specialized technical teams.

Al-Dagher affirmed the committee’s commitment to working diligently and decisively to protect state-owned land, emphasizing that all necessary legal measures will be taken to ensure compliance with the law and safeguard public funds.

He also outlined the scope of the committee’s work, noting that its current focus includes defining the geographical boundaries of the investigation according to Kuwait Municipality branches and governorates, and establishing a clear procedure for handling incoming complaints, observations, and official correspondence.

In addition, the committee is also reviewing reports from the engineering audit and follow-up departments, as well as the cleaning and road occupancy departments in all governorates, regarding encroachments and unlicensed commercial use of state property.

It is worth mentioning that representatives from the relevant ministries, agencies, and institutions attended the meeting.

They reviewed the procedures for tackling violations and the legal processes followed in cases of illegal use of state land. They collectively stressed the critical need for coordinated, joint efforts to ensure strict enforcement of the law and the protection of public resources.

Cold snap

the northwest, accompanied by a cold air mass, coinciding with a deep upper-level atmospheric low. This is expected to increase low and medium clouds, interspersed with some cumulonimbus clouds.

He explained that on Friday, the weather will be cool to cold during the day, with decreasing clouds and gradually lower chances of rain. Northwesterly winds will be moderate to active, occasionally strong, ranging from 20 to 60 kilometers per hour, causing dust. The expected maximum temperatures will range between 16 and 18 degrees Celsius, and the sea is forecasted to have moderate to high waves, between four and seven feet.

On Friday night, the weather will be cold, with northwesterly winds that are light to moderate, between 12 and 35 kilometers per hour, and a chance of light fog in some areas. The expected minimum temperatures will range between 6 and 8 degrees Celsius, and the sea will have light to moderate waves ranging between two and four feet.

On Saturday during the day, the weather will be cool, with northwesterly to variable winds that are light to moderate, at speeds of 6 to 28 kilometers per hour. The maximum temperatures are expected to range between 16 and 18 degrees Celsius, and the sea will have light to moderate waves between one and three feet.

Saturday night will be cold, with northwesterly to variable winds that are light to moderate, between 8 and 30 kilometers per hour. Some scattered clouds are expected, and the minimum temperatures will range between 5 and 7 degrees Celsius. The sea will be light to moderate, with waves between one and four feet.

In other news, Al-Ojairi Scientific Center announced that Sunday, December 21 will mark the beginning of the month of Rajab, based on precise astronomical calculations, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement, the center revealed that the new moon of Rajab will be born on Saturday at 4:44 am Kuwait time.

It explained that Sunday will coincide with the winter solstice, the longest night of the year. On this day, the sun is directly overhead at the Tropic of Capricorn and reaches its lowest point in the sky, creating the longest shadows at midday. This event marks the official start of winter in the Northern Hemisphere, with the longest nights and shortest days.

While the Northern Hemisphere experiences the winter solstice, the Southern Hemisphere will experience the summer solstice at the same time.

INTERNATIONAL

‘Share strike videos’

\$901b defense policy bill clears US Senate

WASHINGTON, Dec 18, (AP): The Senate gave final passage Wednesday to an annual military policy bill that will authorize \$901 billion in defense programs while pressuring Defense Secretary **Pete Hegseth** to provide lawmakers with video of strikes on alleged drug boats in international water near Venezuela.



Hegseth

The annual National Defense Authorization Act, which raises troop pay by 3.8%, gained bipartisan backing as it moved through Congress. It passed the Senate on a 77-20 vote before lawmakers planned to leave Washington for a holiday break. Two Republicans - Sens. Rand Paul and Mike Lee - and 18 Democrats voted against the bill.

The White House has indicated that it is in line with President Donald Trump’s national security priorities. However, the legislation, which ran over 3,000 pages, revealed some points of friction between Congress and the Pentagon as the Trump administration re-orientes its focus away from security in Europe and toward Central and South America.

The bill pushes back on recent moves by the Pentagon. It demands more information on boat strikes in the Caribbean, requires that the U.S. keep its troop levels in Europe at current levels and sends some military aid to Ukraine.

But overall, the bill represents a compromise between the parties. It implements many of Trump’s executive orders and proposals on eliminating diversity and inclusion efforts in the military and grants emergency military powers at the U.S. border with Mexico. It also enhances congressional oversight of the Department of Defense, repeals several years-old war authorizations and seeks to overhaul how the Pentagon purchases weapons as the U.S. tries to outpace China in developing the next generation of military technology.

“We’re about to pass, and the president will enthusiastically sign, the most sweeping upgrades to DoD’s business practices in 60 years,” said Sen. Roger Wicker, the Republican chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Still, the sprawling bill did face objections from both Democratic and Republican leadership on the Senate Commerce Committee and the head of the National Transportation Safety Board. That’s because the legislation could allow military aircraft to obtain a waiver to operate without broadcasting their precise location, as an Army helicopter had done before a midair collision with an airliner over Washington, D.C., in January that killed 67 people.

To address those concerns, the Senate advanced a bill to require all military and civilian aircraft to broadcast their locations. Republican Sen. Ted Cruz, the chair of the Senate Commerce Committee, said the tragedy might have been avoided had the Black Hawk been broadcasting its location before the crash.



A couple poses for a photo during a destination wedding in Cappadocia, Türkiye, Dec. 13, 2025. (AP)

Destination weddings fuel Turkish economy

ANKARA, Dec 18, (Xinhua): Türkiye’s appeal as a destination for foreign weddings generated an estimated 3 billion U.S. dollars in revenue last year, according to industry insiders.

From multi-day Indian celebrations along the Mediterranean coast to ceremonies set amid the landscapes of Cappadocia, the rise of destination weddings has positioned Türkiye as one of the region’s most sought-after locations for couples looking to combine their nuptials with travel, culture, and leisure.

Meltem Tepeler, president of the Türkiye International Events Association, said that foreign wedding travelers in Türkiye generated around 3 billion dollars in revenue in 2024.

“Wedding tourism has evolved into a structured and high-value segment of Türkiye’s tourism industry,” a major income generator for the nation’s economy, Tepeler told Xinhua.

“These are not short visits. Couples arrive with families and friends, stay for several days and spend across multiple sectors,” she said.

According to Tepeler, a single international wedding can attract anywhere from several dozen to several hundred guests to Türkiye, multiplying the economic impact compared with standard leisure tourism.

“Accommodation, catering, transportation, decoration, entertainment, photography and cultural activities all benefit,” she added.

Popularity

A key driver behind the growing popularity of destination weddings is Türkiye’s ability to offer a wide range of wedding venues within a single country. Well-known tourism hubs such as Istanbul continue to draw couples in search of historic splendor, with palaces, waterfront mansions, and luxury hotels overlooking the Bosphorus.

Beach destinations like Antalya and Bodrum have emerged as favored locations for large, multi-day celebrations. Resorts in these areas are well-prepared to host welcome gatherings, wedding ceremonies, and farewell events in one place, sparing guests the need for extensive travel.

In central Anatolia, Cappadocia is a distinctive option for couples seeking a more unconventional wedding experience. Renowned for its fairy chimneys, cave hotels, and dramatic landscapes, the region has become particularly popular for symbolic ceremonies and photo-driven events.

“Many couples want their wedding to look and feel completely different,” said Murat Ozguc, a tourism professional based in Cappadocia whose company organizes international weddings. “Here, the landscape becomes part of the ceremony.”

According to Ozguc, a large portion of foreign wedding travelers come from Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia.

Ercan Cek, a tourism representative from Antalya, said that wedding tourism also plays a key role in tackling seasonality in Türkiye’s tourism industry.

“Many weddings take place in spring and autumn, outside the peak summer season. This supports year-round employment and keeps hotels and service providers active for longer periods,” he said.

US leader defends tariff policies

Trump touts economic gains despite weak data, polls

WASHINGTON, Dec 18, (Xinhua): In a prime-time national address Wednesday night, U.S. President Donald Trump highlighted the economic achievements of the first year of his second term even as economic data and polls painted a less rosy picture.

In the roughly 20-minute speech, Trump lashed out at the previous administration’s policies and claimed that his leadership has restored U.S. strength and revitalized the economy.

“We are bringing our economy back from the brink of ruin,” Trump said, claiming that he is bringing high prices down “very fast.”

“There are more people working today than at any time in American history, and 100 percent of all jobs created since I took office have been in the private sector,” said Trump.

The president also defended his tariff poli-

cies, saying he has secured trillions of dollars in investment in the United States, and “much of this success has been accomplished by tariffs.”

Trump also lauded the massive tax and spending bill approved by Congress in early July. “Next year, you will also see the results of the largest tax cuts in American history that were really accomplished through our great, Big Beautiful Bill,” he said.

Despite Trump’s claims of success, economic data and public opinion polls suggest a less optimistic outlook.

The jobless rate jumped to 4.6 percent in November, a four-year high, according to data released Tuesday by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

This indicates that the Trump administration has “taken its eye off the most important goal, which is improving the economy,”

Brookings Institution Senior Fellow Darrell West told Xinhua.

“Unemployment is rising and inflation remains high. It is a bad combination for someone who campaigned on those issues and promised he would focus on them from day one,” West said.

Paul Krugman, a winner of the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, wrote in a blog published earlier Wednesday that “While it’s too soon to declare that we’re in a recession, the data are at least pre-recessionary: that is, the numbers are weak enough that we should be seriously worried that a recession is coming. And that’s a state of affairs completely at odds with Trump’s rose-colored -- spray-tanned? -- picture.”

In a recent report, NBC News noted that Trump’s approval has inched down in 2025 amid concern about the economy as “Ameri-

cans remain worried about inflation and costs after Trump’s campaign promises to ease those anxieties.”

American adults largely disapprove of Trump’s job performance, with his approval rating at 42 percent in the new poll, a drop of 3 points over the course of four polls since April.

A ReutersIpsos poll published Tuesday showed that Trump’s approval rating slips to 39 percent, down from 41 percent earlier in December and within a point of the 38 percent reading from mid-November, Trump’s lowest rating this year.

An opinion published on The Wall Street Journal on Tuesday argued that “Donald Trump’s affordability failures will cost him,” as the economy has gone from one of the president’s best issues with American voters to one of his worst.

Europe

Pope taps fellow Chicagoan: Pope Leo XIV on Thursday made his most important U.S. appointment to date, naming a fellow Chicagoan as the next archbishop of New York to lead one of the biggest U.S. archdioceses as it navigates relations with the Trump administration and its immigration crackdown.

Bishop Ronald Hicks, the current bishop of Joliet, Illinois, replaces the retiring Cardinal Timothy Dolan, a prominent conservative figure in the U.S. Catholic hierarchy. Hicks takes over after Dolan last week finalized a plan to establish a \$300 million fund to compensate victims of sexual abuse who had sued the archdiocese.

Dolan had submitted his resignation in February, as required when he turned 75. But the Vatican often waits to make important leadership changes in dioceses if there is lingering abuse litigation or other governance matters that need to be resolved by the outgoing bishop.

The handover, though, represents a significant new chapter for the U.S. Catholic Church, which is forging a new era with the Chicago-born Leo as the first American pope. Leo and the U.S. hierarchy have already shown willingness to challenge the Trump administration on immigration and other issues, and Hicks is seen as very much a Leo-style bishop.

Hicks, 58, grew up in South Holland, Illinois, a short distance from the suburban Chicago childhood home of Leo, the former Robert Prevost.

Like Prevost, who spent 20 years as a missionary in Peru, Hicks worked for five years in El Salvador heading a church-run orphanage program that operated in nine Latin American and Caribbean countries. (AP)



Germany charges teens: Germany’s federal prosecutor brought charges Thursday against eight suspects for their alleged membership in a “right-wing extremist terrorist” group that allegedly aimed to destabilize the country’s democratic system by carrying out attacks on migrants and political opponents.

The prosecutors also charged the seven alleged members and one supporter of the group, some of them teenagers, of attempted murder, conspiracy to commit murder, and grievous bodily harm.

Most of the youths were arrested in May, when they were accused of involvement with a group calling itself “Last Defense Wave.”

According to the federal prosecutor’s office, the group sees itself as the “final authority” for defending the “German nation.” It said the group was founded in May 2024 and that it planned or carried out arson and bomb attacks on asylum-seekers’ homes and left-wing institutions.

At the time, five suspects between 14 and 21 years old were arrested in the states of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Brandenburg, and Hesse. The police searched 13 properties there, as well as in Saxony and Thuringia. Three other suspects were already in custody at the time.

Due to the suspects’ age, some of them had to appear with their parents before the investigating judge at the federal court of justice in Karlsruhe. With the exception of one suspect, who was released in July, all others are in pretrial detention. (AP)



France probes ‘foreign interference’: France’s counterespionage agency is investigating a suspected cy-

berattack plot targeting an international passenger ferry, authorities said Wednesday.

A Latvian crew member is in custody facing charges of having acted for an unidentified foreign power, French officials said. But Interior Minister Laurent Nunez appeared to hint that Russia is suspected, saying: “At the moment, foreign interference very often comes from same country.”

France and other European allies of Ukraine allege that Russia is waging “hybrid warfare” against them, using sabotage, assassinations, cyberattacks, disinformation and other hostile acts that are often hard to quickly trace back to Moscow.

Intelligence shared by Italian authorities tipped off the General Directorate of Internal Security - France’s special counterespionage and counterterror intelligence service - that software sometimes used by cybercriminals may have infected computer systems aboard a ferry docked in the French Mediterranean port of Sète, the Paris prosecutor’s office said.

The so-called RAT software - which allows users to control computer systems remotely - could have been used to take control of the ferry’s computers, the prosecutor’s office said. Its statement did not name ferry.

Nunez told public broadcaster France Info that “individuals tried to gain access to a ship’s data-processing system.” He described it as “a very serious affair.” Asked if the suspected intention was to hijack the vessel, he said: “We don’t know.”

He added: “The investigators appear to be following a trail of interference ... foreign interference.”

Police on Friday arrested two of the ferry’s crew members - one Latvian, the other Bulgarian - who Italian authorities had identified as suspects, the prosecutor’s office said. The Bulgarian was subsequently released without charge after questioning.

The Latvian national is being held on a preliminary criminal conspiracy charge and two preliminary charges of hacking-related offenses with the goal of serving the interests of an unnamed foreign power, the prosecutor’s office said.

It said search raids were also carried out in Latvia. Latvian state police said they had no comment.

The ferry is now back in operation after being held in port for security checks to its computer system, the prosecutor’s office said. (AP)



A double-decker bus runs on Oxford Street decorated with lights in London, Britain, on Dec. 17, 2025. (Xinhua)



French President Emmanuel Macron speaks with the media as he arrives for the EU Summit in Brussels, Thursday, Dec. 18, 2025. (AP)

Belgium seeks shield from Russian retaliation as EU leaders weigh massive loan for Ukraine

BRUSSELS, Dec 18, (AP): Belgium insisted on Thursday that its European Union partners must provide ironclad guarantees that it will be protected from Russian retaliation before it would back a massive loan for Ukraine.

At a high-stakes EU summit in Brussels, the 27-nation bloc’s leaders are set to decide on whether to use tens of billions of euros in frozen Russian assets to underwrite a loan to meet Ukraine’s military and financial needs over the next two years.

The bulk of the assets - some 193 billion euros (\$227 billion) as of September - are held in the Brussels-based financial clearing house Euroclear. Russia’s Central Bank sued Euroclear last week.

“Give me a parachute and we’ll all jump together,” Prime Minister Bart De Wever told members of the Belgian parliament just before the summit began. “If we have confidence in the parachute that shouldn’t be a problem.”

Belgium fears that Russia will strike back and would prefer that the bloc

borrow the money on international markets. It wants frozen assets held in other European countries to be thrown into the pot as well, and for its partners to guarantee that Euroclear will have the funds it needs should it come under legal attack.

European officials say Russia is waging a campaign of sabotage and disruption across the continent. The Central Bank lawsuit ramped up pressure on Belgium and its European partners ahead of the summit.

Plan

The “reparations loan” plan would see the EU give 90 billion euros (\$106 billion) to Ukraine. Countries like the U.K., Canada and Norway would make up any shortfall.

Russia’s claim to the assets would still stand, but the assets would remain locked away at least until the Kremlin ends its war on Ukraine and pays for the massive damage it’s caused.

In mapping out the loan plan, the European Commission set up safeguards to protect Belgium, but De

Wever remains unconvinced.

“I have not yet seen a text that could satisfactorily address Belgium’s concerns,” he said. “I hope to see one today.”

De Wever insisted that Belgium remains “a faithful ally” of Ukraine and wants to continue to help.

Whatever method they use, the leaders have pledged to meet most of Ukraine’s needs in 2026 and 2027. The International Monetary Fund estimates that would amount to 137 billion euros (\$160 billion). The war-ravaged country is at risk of bankruptcy and needs the money by spring.

“We have to find a solution today,” European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told reporters. EU Council President António Costa, who is chairing the meeting, has vowed to keep leaders negotiating until an agreement is reached, even if it takes days.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said: “Now we have a simple choice. Either money today or blood tomorrow.” He insisted that “all European leaders have to rise to the occasion.”



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, left, shakes hands with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali during a bilateral meeting at the Ethiopian National Palace in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Tuesday, Dec. 16, 2025. (AP)

India, Ethiopia ink MoUs, boost strategic relations

ADDIS ABABA, Dec 18, (AP): The Indian prime minister called for a strategic relationship with Ethiopia Wednesday during his first visit to the country, one of Africa's most populous.

"The Global South is writing its own destiny, and India and Ethiopia share a vision for it," Prime Minister Narendra Modi told parliamentarians during a special address. "Our vision is of a world where the Global South rises not against anyone, but for everyone; a world where development is fair, where technology is accessible, and where sovereignty is respected," he added.

The leaders signed a number of memorandums of understanding and promised to cooperate on the training of United Nations peacekeepers, education, and the establishment of a data center at Ethiopia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They also pledged to help Ethiopia navigate its mounting international debt under the G20 Common Framework and to combat terrorism.

Modi was on Tuesday conferred with Ethiopia's highest civilian honor, the "Great Honor Nishan Ethiopia," by his Ethiopian counterpart, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. He was the first foreign head of state to receive the recognition.

"We will walk together as equals, build together as partners, and succeed together as friends," Modi said.

Ethiopia became a full-fledged member of the BRICS grouping of countries last year, joining nations such as Iran and Egypt, as it seeks new partnerships after emerging from a two-year civil war in its northern province of Tigray. India is set to host the 18th BRICS summit next year.

The Ethiopian government has been looking for new partners as its relationship with the United States wanes. Washington suspended Ethiopia's duty-free access to the American market in 2022, a move that affected its once-growing economy, and recently ended humanitarian assistance following the cancellation of USAID-funded programs.

Trump demands Venezuela pay for seized US oil assets after calling for 'blockade'

WASHINGTON, Dec 18, (AP): US President Donald Trump demanded that Venezuela return assets that it seized from U.S. oil companies years ago, justifying anew his announcement of a "blockade" against oil tankers traveling to or from the South American country that face American sanctions.

Trump cited the lost U.S. investments in Venezuela when asked about his newest tactic in a pressure campaign against leader Nicolás Maduro, suggesting his administration's moves are at least somewhat motivated by disputes over oil investments, along with accusations of drug trafficking. Some sanctioned tankers already are diverting away from Venezuela.

"We're not going to be letting anybody going through who shouldn't be going through," Trump told reporters. "You remember they took all of our energy rights. They took all of our oil not that long ago. And we want it back. They took it - they illegally took it."

U.S. oil companies dominated Venezuela's petroleum industry until the country's leaders moved to nationalize the sector, first in the 1970s and again in the 21st century under Maduro and his predecessor, Hugo Chávez. Compensation offered by Venezuela was deemed insufficient, and in 2014 an international arbitration panel ordered the country's socialist government to pay \$1.6 billion to ExxonMobil.

While Venezuela's oil has long dominated relations with the U.S., the Trump administration has focused on Maduro's links to drug traffickers, accusing his government of facilitating the shipment of dangerous drugs into the U.S. In his social media post Tuesday night, Trump said Venezuela was using using oil to fund drug trafficking and other crimes. U.S. forces



A cargo boat is docked below cranes at the seaport in La Guaira, Venezuela, Wednesday, Dec. 17, 2025. (AP)

last week seized an oil tanker off Venezuela's coast amid a massive military buildup that includes the Navy's most advanced aircraft carrier.

The military also has carried out a series of strikes on suspected drug boats in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean that have killed a total of at least 99 people, including four in a strike Wednesday. Those attacks have prompted questions from lawmakers and legal experts about their legal justification. Trump also has said he is considering strikes on land. Stephen Miller, Trump's deputy chief of staff, likened Venezuela's move to nationalize its oil industry to a heist.

"American sweat, ingenuity and toil created the oil industry in Venezuela," Miller wrote on social media Wednesday. "Its tyrannical expropriation was the largest recorded theft of American wealth and property. These pillaged assets were then used to fund terrorism and flood our streets with killers, mercenaries and drugs."

Venezuela first moved to nationalize its oil industry in the 1970s, a process that expanded under Chávez, who nationalized hundreds of private businesses and foreign-owned assets, including oil projects run by Exxon-Mobil and ConocoPhillips. That led to the arbitration panel's 2014 order.

"There is a case that can be made that Venezuela owes this money to Exxon. I don't think it's ever been paid," economist Philip Verleger said.

Trump blamed his predecessors for not taking a harder line against Venezuela over the asset seizures.

"They took it away because we had a president that maybe wasn't watching," Trump said Wednesday. "But they're not going to do that again. We want it back. They took our oil rights - we had a lot of oil there. As you know they threw our companies out, and we want it back."

Chevron has a waiver from the U.S. government for oil production in Venezuela, and the Texas-based oil giant

says its operations have not been disrupted.

Venezuela's debt to Chevron "has decreased substantially" since the company's license to resume exporting Venezuelan oil to the U.S. was first granted in 2022, said Francisco Monaldi, a Venezuelan oil expert at Rice University in Houston. He said the amount is not public.

There was no change Wednesday to the list of foreign terrorist organizations after Trump said in his post that the "Venezuelan Regime" has been designated as one.

Officials at several national security agencies were told not to take Trump's remarks about the designation literally and they should be treated as a figure of speech, according to a U.S. official involved in the discussions.

That official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe internal interagency communications, also stressed that the "blockade" Trump announced applies only to previously sanctioned vessels against which certain actions are already authorized, such as the seizure last week.

The State Department, which oversees the list, didn't respond to requests for clarification.

Trump's Justice Department in 2020 indicted Maduro on narcoterrorism charges and U.S. authorities have alleged that Venezuela's leaders have profited from drug trafficking. Last month, the Trump administration designated a group linked to Maduro - the Cartel de los Soles - as a terrorist organization.

Maduro called United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Wednesday for a conversation "regarding the current tensions in the region," U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said.

Move raises cross-Strait tensions

China denounces 'dangerous' \$11 bln US arms sale to Taiwan

BEIJING, Dec 18, (Agencies): The United States should immediately cease its dangerous act of arming Taiwan, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson **Guo Jiakun** said on Thursday when commenting on the U.S. approval of a massive package of arms sales to the Taiwan region.

The U.S. side has brazenly announced the plan to sell advanced weapons to Taiwan, which seriously violates the one-China principle and the three China-U.S. joint communiqués, Guo said at a regular news briefing.

The U.S. move severely undermines China's sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity. It seriously disrupts peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, and sends a gravely erroneous signal to the "Taiwan independence" separatist forces, Guo said.

The Trump administration has announced a massive package of arms sales to Taiwan valued at more than \$10 billion that includes medium-range missiles, howitzers and drones, drawing an angry response from China.

If approved by Congress, it would be the largest-ever U.S. weapons package to Taiwan, exceeding the total amount of \$8.4 billion in U.S. arms sales to Taiwan during the Biden administration.

The eight arms sales agreements announced Wednesday cover 82 high-mobility artillery rocket systems, or HIMARS, and 420 Army Tactical Missile Systems, or ATACMS - similar to what the U.S. had been providing Ukraine during the Biden administration to defend itself from Russia - worth more than \$4 billion. They also include 60 self-propelled howitzer systems and related equipment worth more than \$4 billion and drones valued at more than \$1 billion.

Other sales in the package include military software valued at more than \$1 billion, Javelin and TOW missiles worth more than \$700 million, helicopter spare parts worth \$96 million and refurbishment kits for Harpoon missiles worth \$91 million.

The eight sales agreements amount to \$11.15 billion, according to Taiwan's Defense Ministry.

The State Department said the sales serve "U.S. national, economic, and security interests by supporting the recipient's continuing efforts to modernize its armed forces and to maintain a credible defensive capability."



Guo

"The proposed sale(s) will help improve the security of the recipient and assist in maintaining political stability, military balance, and economic progress in the region," the statements said.

China's Foreign Ministry attacked the move, saying it would violate diplomatic agreements between China and the U.S.; gravely harm China's sovereignty, security and territorial integrity; and undermine regional stability.

"The 'Taiwan independence' forces on the island seek independence through force and resist reunification through force, squandering the hard-earned money of the people to purchase weapons at the cost of turning Taiwan into a powder keg," said Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun.

"This cannot save the doomed fate of 'Taiwan independence' but will only accelerate the push of the Taiwan Strait toward a dangerous situation of military confrontation and war. The U.S. support for 'Taiwan Independence' through arms will only end up backfiring. Using Taiwan to contain China will not succeed," he added.

Under federal law, the U.S. is obligated to assist Taiwan with its self-defense, a point that has become increasingly contentious with China, which has vowed to take Taiwan by force, if necessary.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry in a statement Thursday expressed gratitude to the U.S. over the arms sale, which it said would help Taiwan maintain "sufficient self-defense capabilities" and bring strong deterrent capabilities. Taiwan's bolstering of its defense "is the foundation for maintaining regional peace and stability," the ministry said.

Taiwan's Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung similarly thanked the U.S. for its "long-term support for regional security and Taiwan's self-defense capabilities," which he said are key for deterring a conflict in the Taiwan Strait, the body of water separating Taiwan from China's mainland.

The arms sale comes as Taiwan's government has pledged to raise defense spending to 3.3% of the island's gross domestic product next year and to reach 5% by 2030.

The boost came after Trump and the Pentagon requested that Taiwan spend as much as 10% of its GDP on its defense, a percentage well above what the U.S. or any of its major allies spend on defense. The demand has faced pushback from Taiwan's opposition KMT party and some of its population.



A student in costumes marches with colorful lanterns during the annual Lantern Parade at the University of the Philippines in Quezon City, the Philippines, Dec. 17, 2025. (Xinhua)

Subcontinent

India summons Bangladesh envoy: The Indian Ministry of External Affairs summoned Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Riaz Hamidullah to express profound concern at the deteriorating security environment in his country.

The High Commissioner's attention "was drawn, in particular, to the activities of some extremist elements who have announced plans to create a security situation around the Indian Mission in Dhaka," the Ministry said in a statement on Wednesday.

India also rejected what it termed "false narrative sought to be created by extremist elements regarding certain recent events in Bangladesh" and stated that it is unfortunate that the interim government has neither conducted a thorough investigation nor shared meaningful evidence with India regarding the incidents.

"India has close and friendly relations with the people of Bangladesh rooted in the liberation struggle and strengthened through various developmental and people-to-people initiatives.

"We are in favour of peace and stability in Bangladesh and have consistently called for free, fair, inclusive and credible elections, conducted in a peaceful atmosphere,"

the statement said.

India also appealed to the interim government to ensure the safety of Missions and Posts in Bangladesh in keeping with its diplomatic obligations.

Few days back, Bangladesh had summoned Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka Pranay Verma to convey concerns over allowing the former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina make incendiary statements. (KUNA)

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Pakistan extends airspace closure: Pakistan extended the closure of its airspace for Indian aircrafts for another month until January 23, 2026.

A Notam (notice to airmen), issued by Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) on Wednesday, said the restriction will remain in effect from today and applies to all Indian-owned, operated and leased aircraft, including military flights.

The decision continues with an existing restriction that has already been in place for the past eight months.

The Notam is applied on both Pakistani flight information regions Karachi and Lahore. The extension was notified a week before the previous one was set to expire on December 24.

Earlier in April, India and Pakistan closed their airspace to each other's airlines after tensions rose between the two neighboring countries following an attack on the Indian side of Kashmir killing around 26 people. (KUNA)

Australia's PM pledges new hate laws

Mourners grieve 10-year-old slain in Bondi Beach mass shooting

SYDNEY, Dec 18, (AP): Hundreds of mourners bearing bright bouquets and clutching each other in grief gathered at a funeral in Sydney on Thursday for a 10-year-old girl who was gunned down in an antisemitic massacre during a Hanukkah celebration at Bondi Beach.

Matilda, whose last name is being withheld at the request of her family, was enjoying a petting zoo at the festivities on Sunday just before she was killed along with 14 other people in a mass shooting targeting Jews. The suspects, a father and son, were inspired by the Islamic State group, Australian authorities have said.

Beaming photos of Matilda have become a focal point for Australia's grief at one of the worst hate-fueled attacks ever committed in the country. The massacre has prompted a national reckoning about antisemitism and questions about whether the country's leaders took seriously enough the threat to Australian Jews.

Matilda's parents, who arrived in Australia from Ukraine, "moved away from war-torn Eastern Europe to come here for a good life," Rabbi Dovid Slavin told The Associated Press as he entered the service.

"They did something that a parent is OK to do, take their child to a family event at Bondi beach," he added. "If it ended this way, it's something for collective responsibility for every adult in this country."

Speaking to reporters in Australia's capital Canberra at the same Matilda's service began, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese unveiled a tranche of legislative plans he said would curb radicalization and hate.

Among his proposals were measures to broaden the definition of hate speech offenses for preachers and leaders who promote violence, to bolster punishments for such crimes, to designate some groups as hateful, and to allow judges to consider hate as an aggravating factor in cases of online threats and harassment.

Officials would have greater powers to reject or cancel visas "for those who spread hate and division in this country, or would do so if they were allowed to come here," Albanese added. He didn't suggest a timeline for the reforms, citing their legal complexity.

"There have been organizations which any Australian would look at and say their behavior, their philosophy and what they are trying to do is about division and has no place in Australia," Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke told reporters.

"And yet for a generation, no government has been able to successfully take action against them because they

have fallen just below the legal threshold."

The announcement followed Albanese's pledge to tighten Australia's gun controls, which are already some of the toughest in the world. State leaders, too, have promised additional initiatives.



A woman carries balloons to the funeral of Bondi Beach mass shooting victim 10-year-old Matilda, whose last name is being withheld at the request of her family, in Sydney, Thursday, Dec. 18, 2025. (AP)

tives on firearms and stricter rules for protest gatherings.

Still, the fact that Albanese has not attended any of the victims' funerals so far - with local media reporting he has not been invited, despite the presence of other political leaders - hints at the fury among some Australian Jews feel toward the leader.

Albanese said measures his government has already enacted, including a ban in February on Nazi salutes, show that he has taken the threat of antisemitism seriously.

"I of course acknowledge that more could have been done and I accept my responsibility for the part in that as prime minister of Australia," Albanese said Thursday. "But what I also do is accept my responsibility to lead the nation and unite the nation."

Meanwhile, investigators continued to probe the suspected gunmen's links in Australia and their travel to the Philippines before the attack, said Krissy Barrett, the country's police chief. Authorities earlier divulged that the younger shooting suspect, Naveed Akram, 24, was investigated for six months by Australia's security services in 2019.

The older shooter, Sajid Akram, 50,

who was shot dead on Sunday, had amassed the guns used in the massacre legally. His gun license was granted in 2023, after his son came to the attention of authorities.

Philippine National Security Adviser Eduardo Año told The Associated Press on Thursday that there was no indication that the two received any training for the attack in the Philippines. He said that the suspected gunmen had stayed in a budget hotel in downtown Davao city for the whole of their visit in November.

Año, a former military chief of staff, said in a statement that "the duration of their stay would not have allowed for any meaningful or structured training."

Naveed Akram is being treated at a Sydney hospital and was charged Wednesday with 59 offences, including murder and committing a terrorist act. He has not entered a plea and many details of the case against him are suppressed by a judge.

Health authorities said Thursday that 16 other people are being treated in hospitals across Sydney. Two are in critical condition, with the status of one having deteriorated to critical that morning.

Kuwait oil price down to \$58.92 pb

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18, (KUNA): The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by 21 cents to USD 58.92 per barrel (pb) on Wednesday, compared to USD 59.13 pb the previous day, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation on Thursday.

In global markets, Brent Crude rose by 76 cents to USD 59.68 pb and West Texas Intermediate also went down by 67 cents to USD 55.94 pb.

Business

The DCO’s 2nd International Digital Cooperation Forum to take place in Kuwait to advance inclusive prosperity in the age of AI

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: The Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO) today announced that the 2nd International Digital Cooperation Forum (IDCF) held in strategic partnership with ZainTECH, will take place in the State of Kuwait on February 4-5, 2026, convening ministers, policy leaders, CEOs, tech pioneers, entrepreneurs, civil society leaders and representatives from more than 60 countries to strengthen global cooperation on the future of AI and the digital economy.

The IDCF serves as an annual multi-stakeholder global platform to foster connections, showcase innovation, and drive action at a time when artificial intelligence and digital technologies are reshaping economic growth, governance, and social inclusion.

Held alongside the DCO’s 5th General Assembly, the second edition of the IDCF will convene under the theme “Inclusive Prosperity in the Age of AI,” reflecting a shared commitment to ensuring artificial intelligence delivers equitable, scalable, and human-centric outcomes.

With a flagship partnership agreed with ZainTECH, a leading MEA-based ICT digital solutions provider, the IDCF aims to explore actionable solutions to the most pressing issues shaping the global digital agenda, across six thematic pillars:

- Digital prosperity and inclusive growth, enabling cross-border trade and commerce.
- Trust, safety, and responsible technology, including AI ethics, security, and online integrity.
- Infrastructure for a borderless future, exploring semiconductor sovereignty and interoperability.
- Skills, jobs, and capital addressing workforce transitions in the AI era.
- Inclusive access and digital equity, ensuring access and affordability across genders, communities, and economies.



- With ZainTECH as a strategic partner, global leaders from 60 countries will convene 4-5 February 2026 to strengthen global cooperation on the future of AI and the digital economy
 - Forum to underscore Kuwait’s growing prominence on the global digital map
- Global tech governance cooperation.
- Deemah AlYahya, Secretary-General of the Digital Cooperation Organization said, “The International Digital Cooperation Forum reflects

our firm belief that digital prosperity can only be achieved through deep and meaningful collaboration. As technology accelerates change across economies and societies, governments cannot shape effective digital policies in isolation. The private sector is a central stakeholder in the digital economy and a primary driver of innovation, investment, and scalable solutions.”

AlYahya added, “At the DCO, we strongly believe that involving industry leaders in policy dialogue is essential to building frameworks that are practical, future-ready, and trusted. Partnerships with innovators such as ZainTECH demonstrate how public-private cooperation can ensure that digital transformation remains inclusive, resilient, and focused on delivering real value for people, businesses, and economies worldwide.”

Commenting on the partnership, Bader Al Kharafi, Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO, commented, “As a regional and purpose driven TechCo dedicated to driving positive and inclusive change, we firmly believe in championing the power of entrepreneurship and digitalization in this Age of AI. Through this collaboration with the DCO and IDCF, both Zain and ZainTECH are playing pivotal roles in fostering innovation and advancing the region’s socio-economic growth.”

Al Kharafi added, “Hosting this prominent event in Kuwait further underscores the country’s growing prominence on the global digital map. We look forward to working closely with the DCO to strengthen international digital cooperation within Kuwait and across the wider region.”

The Digital Cooperation Organization calls everyone across the global digital ecosystem to register their interest in attending and participating in the 2nd International Digital Cooperation Forum, and to explore partnership opportunities through the official forum website: <https://idcf.dco.org/>.

Boursa Kuwait closes positive on Thursday

General index at 8,921 points

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait closed Thursday’s trading session on a positive note, with the general market index rising 9.46 points, or 0.11 percent, to reach 8,921 points.

Overall trading activity reached 330.7 million shares across 20,351 cash transactions, with a total value of KD 108.8 million (around USD 331.8 million).

The main market index advanced 28.36 points, or 0.35 percent, to close at 8,216.94 points. Trading in

this segment involved 136.8 million shares through 9,974 deals worth KD 24 million (approximately USD 73.2 million).

The premier market index also recorded gains, edging up 5.32 points, or 0.06 percent, to end at 9,536.45 points. About 193.8 million shares changed hands in 10,377 transactions totaling KD 84.7 million (USD 258.3 million).

Meanwhile, the Main 50 Index climbed 44.77 points, or 0.52 percent, to settle at 8,593.22 points, with 71.9 million shares traded in 5,065 deals valued at KD 14.11 million (around USD 43 million).

In collaboration with INJAZ Kuwait

Gulf Bank organizes Australian University students to learn about ‘Best Practices in Treasury Management’

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: As part of its commitment to supporting and empowering youth, Gulf Bank hosted students from the Australian University during a special field visit that included an interactive session delivered by Bader Tareq Al-Kharafi from the Treasury Department. The session focused on best practices in treasury management.

This visit, organized in collaboration with INJAZ Kuwait, reflects Gulf Bank’s belief in the importance of investing in young talent and providing them with a genuine opportunity to gain insight into the banking work environment. Such initiatives contribute to broadening students’ perspectives, developing their skills, and professionally preparing them for their future careers.

Driven by its belief in the value of investing in youth, the Bank is keen to provide opportunities that help develop students’ practical skills, refine their academic knowledge, and align both with labor market requirements. Gulf Bank places great emphasis on empowering young people, whom it considers the cornerstone of the future of the banking sector and the national economy.

Gulf Bank continuously seeks to strengthen its cooperation with universities and educational institutions through field visits, training programs, interactive workshops, and introductory sessions delivered by



A group photo of the students, with Bader Tareq Al-Kharafi in the center.

a select group of its employees and experts. These initiatives provide students with a realistic experience within the banking work environment and help them better understand the various specializations in the financial and banking sector.

In this context, Gulf Bank takes pride in its strategic partnership with INJAZ Kuwait, which reflects its long-standing commitment to supporting youth and equipping them with the knowledge and practical skills needed to enter the job market with confidence and competence.

This collaboration aims to offer high-quality educational and training programs, including field visits, workshops, and interactive sessions, giving students the opportunity for direct exposure to the banking environment and to learn about various financial and administrative specializations. It also helps bridge academic learning with practical application and fosters a spirit of initiative and innovation among youth.

It is worth noting that Gulf Bank is a main sponsor of the “Company Program” organized annually by INJAZ Kuwait, which aims to encourage high school and university students to enter the world of entrepreneurship, teach them how to establish business ventures, and equip them with leadership and management skills.

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia sign MoU to boost non-oil exports

RIYADH, Dec 18, (KUNA): Kuwait’s Public Authority for Industry (PAI) and the Saudi Export Development Authority (SEDA) signed on Wednesday a MoU under which they will jointly promote the non-oil exports of both countries.

The document was inked by PAI’s acting Director General Shamlan Al-Jeheidli, on behalf of

Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel, and SEDA CEO Abdulrahman Al-Thukair on the sidelines of Saudi Made Exhibition being held in Riyadh between December 15 and 17.

It falls in the framework of the joint efforts of both countries to enhance the economic and trade cooperation and enhance their non-oil exports.

Highlighting 5 decades of growth

KIBS marks milestone with staff recognition ceremony

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Kuwait Institute of Banking Studies (KIBS) celebrated its 55th anniversary during a special staff event held at the Dar Hamad event halls, where employees gathered to mark five decades of growth, collaboration, and institutional impact. The celebration also included honoring employees who have completed between 10 and 19 years of service, in recognition of their team spirit, resilience, and KIBS’ culture of collective achievement.

For more than half a century, KIBS has served as a developmental engine for Kuwait’s financial and banking sector, evolving from a local training institution into a regional platform for capability-building. Today, it brings together leading international experts, sector-wide partnerships, and a diverse suite of professional learning programs designed to enhance sector readiness, operational efficiency, and leadership strength.

KIBS’ Capacity Building strategy focuses on strengthening the financial sector’s readiness through specialized learning pathways, leadership development programs, and national upskilling initiatives.

By delivering internationally accredited certifications, sector-specific training in risk, compliance, fintech, and digital banking, KIBS continues to elevate professional standards across Kuwait’s financial workforce. This commitment extends internally as well, as KIBS invests in developing its own workforce to ensure every team member is equipped to contribute to the institute’s transformative vision empowering local talent, enhancing institutional capability, and building a future ready banking sector.

About the Kuwait Institute of Banking Studies

For over five decades, KIBS has played a fundamental role in developing Kuwait’s banking and financial sectors. Its expertise has supported knowledge transfer and innovation, and its offerings have expanded to include a wide range of programs and services such as professional certifications, executive development, training across various fields, assessments and examinations, e-learning solutions, and publications on business and financial research

To explore the KIBS training programs, please visit the KIBS website.

Ahmed Al Murad becomes HSBC Kuwait’s first Kuwaiti CEO

HSBC Kuwait celebrates 2 decades of growth

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: HSBC has marked 20 years of doing business in Kuwait and announced the appointment of Ahmed Al Murad as Chief Executive Officer, succeeding Samer Alabed. The bank celebrated its two decades in the country at a client event held under the patronage of His Excellency Dr. Subaih Al-Mukhaizeem, Minister of Finance, Kuwait.

Al Murad becomes the first Kuwaiti national to lead HSBC in Kuwait and brings almost two decades of experience in financial services. Ahmed has extensive international banking experience, the last 11 years of which have been with HSBC in a series of leadership roles across corporate, institutional and commercial banking.

Commenting on the bank’s anniversary, His Excellency Dr. Sobeeh A. A. Al Mukhaizim, Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy & Acting Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investments, said: “Over the past two decades, HSBC has played an important role in supporting Kuwait’s financial sector, facilitating international trade, and connecting Kuwaiti businesses with global opportunities. As we look to the future, Kuwait remains committed to advancing its economic transformation under the guidance Vision 2035. Financial institutions such as HSBC are essential partners in this journey. Bringing global best practices, innovative financial solutions, and deep market knowledge, will strengthen our economic foundations and broaden the horizons for our investors, entrepreneurs, and industries.”

Since commencing operations in 2005, HSBC has been committed to playing a central role in connecting Kuwait to global markets and contributing to the development of the country’s financial sector and economy.

Selim Kervanci, Chief Executive Officer, Middle East North Africa and Türkiye (MENAT), HSBC Bank Middle East Limited, said: “Celebrating 20 years in Kuwait is a testament to our commitment to supporting the



HSBC celebrates 20 years in Kuwait.

country’s growth and connecting its people and businesses to opportunities around the world. We are proud of the partnerships we’ve built and the positive impact we’ve made together. As we mark this milestone, I am delighted to announce the appointment of Ahmed Al Murad as our first Kuwaiti CEO, a significant step that reflects our dedication to nurturing local talent and deepening our roots in the community.

I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to Samer Al Abed for his outstanding leadership and contributions. Looking ahead, HSBC remains dedicated to driving innovation and helping our clients achieve their ambitions in an ever-evolving global landscape.”

The event brought together the Central Bank of Kuwait Governor Mr. Basel Al Haroun, Sheikh Abdulla Sabah Al Humoud Al Sabah, Deputy Director General for Investment Operations KDIPA as well as senior officials, clients, investors and partners, underscoring HSBC’s long-term commitment to Kuwait.

“It is a privilege to take on this role at such a significant moment for HSBC in Kuwait. I look forward to leading the bank through the next phase of its growth and helping our customers achieve their ambitions for the future.” Ahmed Al Murad said.

Boosting Asia, Europe connectivity

Kuwait Airways expands code-share with SriLankan Airlines

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: In a move to consolidate its global network of destinations and provide diverse travel options to its valued customers, Kuwait Airways has announced the strengthening of its code share agreement with SriLankan Airlines.

The agreement will strengthen cooperation by including the Kuwait Airways' code on SriLankan Airlines' flights operating to several key destinations in Asia, namely Malé and Gan in the Maldives, Singapore, and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

This will provide Kuwait Airways passengers seamless access to popular tourism and business hubs within the company's network.

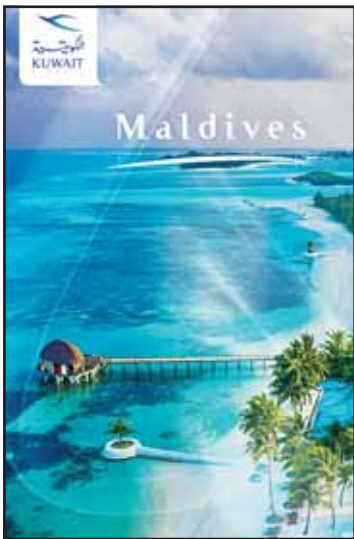
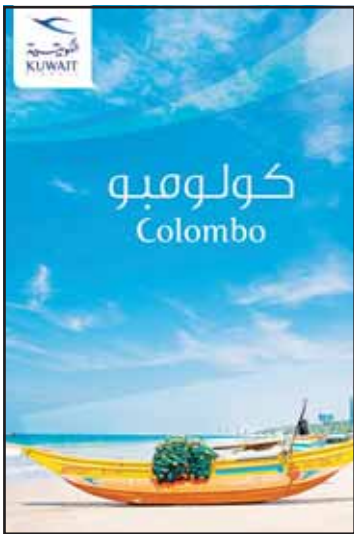
Likewise, SriLankan Airlines will include its code on numerous destinations operated by Kuwait Airways including London, United Kingdom, Rome, Italy, as well as Tbilisi, Georgia, and Baku, Azerbaijan, providing SriLankan Airlines' customers with a new gateway to Europe via Kuwait.

On this occasion, Kuwait Airways Chairman, Captain Abdulmohsen Salem Al-Fagaan, stated, "SriLankan Airlines is an important strategic partner for Kuwait Airways. This cooperation reflects our commitment as the national carrier of the State of Kuwait to providing a diverse network of destinations. Our goal is to provide our valued customers with a seamless, integrated travel experience."

Al-Fagaan added that this initiative aligns with Kuwait Airways' vision to reinforce Kuwait's position as a vital hub linking East and West. He also noted that Kuwait Airways launched its scheduled flights to Colombo, Sri Lanka in October, as part of its winter campaign, operating four flights per week.

Al-Fagaan pointed out that Kuwait Airways will enable passengers to make reservations via the Customer Service Call Center (171) and the company's various sales offices, in addition to the company's website and electronic application.

Al-Fagaan expressed his sincere hope that the agreement would contribute to attracting new segments of travelers, whether travelling for tourism or business, by offering flexible options through unified booking systems and streamlined travel procedures. He explained that the agreement is part of a broader strategy by Kuwait Airways to strengthen its global alliances in support of its future expansion plans, while delivering value-added services to customers across various markets.



Al-Fagaan:
■ This initiative aligns with the company's vision to reinforce Kuwait's position as a vital hub linking East and West.

Strengthening social responsibility with Sama Academy partnership

KFH promotes Arabic language through social initiatives

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: In line with its social responsibility role and commitment to its employees and their families, Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has organized a wide range of activities under the three-year strategic partnership with Sama Academy. The initiative, the first-of-its-kind in the banking sector, has strengthened the Bank's social responsibility efforts, reflecting its continuous commitment to delivering added value programs to the community while emphasizing cultural identity.

As the first Islamic bank in Kuwait and the world second-largest Islamic bank, KFH's considers the social role as an integral pillar of its business model. Guided by this approach, KFH contributes to Kuwait's broader development agenda and serves all segments of society.

KFH's community and humanitarian partnerships span key areas with direct impact on everyday life, including education, healthcare, youth empowerment, support for people with special needs, social and humanitarian initiatives, and the empowerment of students, entrepreneurs, innovators, and young graduates.

The Bank also remains committed to promoting sustainability, expanding green financing products, and strengthening financial inclusion.



KFH marks World Arabic Language Day with youth activities.

KFH also organizes dedicated events for employees' children, most notably the Arabic Language initiative, with the participation of more than 100 children. The summer program additionally includes the Story Writing Contest and Start Early program.

It is worth noting that the world marks World Arabic Language Day on 18 December each year. On this date in 1973, the United Nations adopted Arabic as one of its six official languages.

Highlighting KD 145 million in development financing

Kuwait Fund, Mauritania explore new development projects

NOUAKCHOTT, Dec 18: The Minister of Economic Affairs and Development of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, Dr. Mr. Abdallah Ould Sleiman Ould Cheikh Sidiya, received the Acting Director-General of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, Mr. Waleed Shamlan Ahmad Al-Bahar, in the presence of the Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to Mauritania, His Excellency Mr. Abdah Maq'ad Al-Dosari, at the Ministry's headquarters in Nouakchott.

The meeting discussed ways to strengthen and develop the ongoing partnership between the Kuwait Fund and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. Both sides reviewed prospects for enhancing economic and development cooperation, with a focus on accelerating the financing of new development projects, particularly in infrastructure sectors, given their direct impact on improving citizens' living standards and supporting comprehensive development efforts.

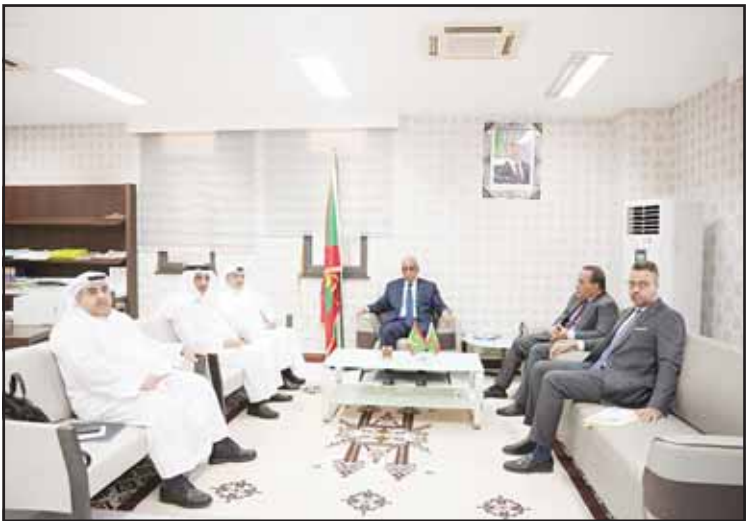


Photo during the meeting.

The discussions highlighted the long-standing record of cooperation between the two parties, with cumulative financing provided by the Fund from 1975 to 2025 amounting to approximately KWD 145 million, including KWD 2.63 million in grants, while the remaining amount was extended as concessional loans to support the implementation of development projects across various sectors.

The meeting also reviewed current projects and future initiatives planned for financing, aimed at continuing support for development efforts and strengthening the strategic partnership between the two sides.

Attending the meeting were the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Development, Mr. Mr. Yacoub Ould Ahmed Aicha, and the Director-General of Financing and Economic Cooperation, Mr. Mohamed Salem Ould Nany.

This meeting reaffirms the strong ties between the State of Kuwait and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and underscores the Kuwait Fund's commitment to supporting sustainable development programs and projects that serve the interests of the Mauritanian people.





The Board of Directors and the family of Kuwait Financial Centre “Markaz”

extend their heartfelt congratulations to

His Highness the Amir

Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

on the occasion of the second anniversary of assuming power as the Amir of the State of Kuwait

May Allah guide his path in leading and protecting our beloved Kuwait



Consumer prices decelerated unexpectedly in Nov, rising 2.7% from a year earlier

US jobless claim applications fell by 13,000 last week as layoffs remain low

WASHINGTON, Dec 18, (AP): U.S. applications for unemployment benefits fell by 13,000 last week, remaining in the same historically healthy range of the past few years even as concerns grow about the health of the labor market.

The number of Americans applying for jobless claims for the week ending Dec. 13 declined by 13,000 to 224,000 from the previous week's 237,000, the Labor Department reported Thursday. That's more than analysts' forecast of 200,000 new applications.

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.

Earlier this week, the government reported that the U.S. gained a decent 64,000 jobs in November but lost 105,000 in October as federal workers departed after cutbacks by the Trump administration.

The unemployment rate rose to 4.6% last month, the highest since 2021.

The November job gains were higher than the 40,000 economists had forecast. The October job losses were caused by a 162,000 drop in federal workers, many of whom resigned at the end of fiscal year 2025 on Sept. 30 under pressure from billionaire Elon Musk's purge of U.S. government payrolls.

Labor Department revisions also knocked 33,000 jobs off August and September payrolls.

Hiring has clearly lost momentum, hobbled by uncertainty over President Donald Trump's tariffs and the lingering effects of the high interest rates the

Fed engineered in 2022 and 2023 to rein in an outburst of pandemic-induced inflation. Since March, job creation has fallen to an average 35,000 a month, compared to 71,000 in the year ended in March.

Last week, the Federal Reserve trimmed its benchmark lending rate by a quarter-point, 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. Powell said that recent job figures could be revised lower by as much as 60,000, which would mean employers have actually been shedding an average of about 25,000 jobs a month since the spring.

Companies that have recently announced job cuts include UPS, General Motors, Amazon and Verizon, but those workforce reductions can take months to show up in the government's data.

The Labor Department's report Thursday also showed that the four-week average of claims, which evens out some of the week-to-week volatility, rose by 500 to 217,500.

The total number of Americans filing for jobless benefits for the previous week ending Dec. 6 rose by 67,000 to 1.9 million, the government said.

Also:
WASHINGTON: U.S. inflation decelerated unexpectedly last month, the gov-

ECB holds interest rates steady as Eurozone growth strengthens

Europe faces mixed monetary moves

FRANKFURT, Dec 18, (AP): The European Central Bank left interest rates unchanged Thursday for the fourth meeting in a row as the economy in the 20 countries that use the euro increasingly looks strong enough to get by without the stimulus of lower borrowing costs for businesses and consumers.

The bank's rate-setting council left the benchmark deposit rate unchanged at 2%, where it has been since a rate cut in June. Economists now think the rate could stay there for months - and possibly into 2027.

That's because the ECB remains poised between inflation that's just a bit too persistent and growth that's underwhelming but steady after a trade deal with the US remove some of the uncertainty that had held back business planning. Higher rates fight inflation while cuts support growth.

The bank said in a statement following the decision that economic growth "is expected to be stronger" than in the bank's last projections in September, while inflation in services businesses was declining more slowly, even as overall inflation was expected to stabilize at the bank's 2% target.

Surveys of purchasing managers by S&P Global slipped slightly for December but still showed business activity expanding as the year comes to an end, reinforcing expectations that the 20 countries using the euro currency will continue to see growth of around 0.3% per quarter over the previous quarter, said Adrian Pretejohn, Europe economist at Capital Economics.

That outcome is better than feared during turbulent trade negotiations



President of European Central Bank Christine Lagarde addresses the media during a press conference after an ECB's governing council meeting in Frankfurt, Germany, Thursday, Dec. 18, 2025. (AP)

with the United States over the summer, which finally settled with a 15% tariff, or import tax, imposed on European goods by U.S. President Donald Trump.

That is not great for European exporters. But Trump had threatened higher rates and the deal struck with the European Union's executive commission appears to have removed uncertainty and made it easier for businesses to make decisions.

So the economy can get by without the added boost from a cut, analysts say.

"The haze of economic uncertainty has somewhat lifted, especially regard-

ing trade," economist Lorenzo Coddogno said.

On top of that, inflationary pressures remain too high for the ECB to contemplate a cut.

The headline rate of 2.1% for annual inflation in November is roughly in line with the bank's goal of 2%, thanks in part to a drop in volatile energy prices. But inflation was higher at 3.5% in the services sector, which encompasses much of the economy from hairdressers and hotels to concert tickets and medical services.

While the ECB stood pat, the Bank of England on Thursday cut its key interest rate for the first time in four

months as stubbornly high inflation starts to ease. Policymakers voted 5-4 to reduce the base rate by a quarter of a percentage point to 3.75% on Thursday. Consumer price inflation slowed to 3.2% in the 12 months through November, from 3.6% a month earlier.

Central bank rate cuts can support growth because they strongly influence borrowing rates throughout the economy, lowering credit costs and promoting credit sensitive purchases such as new homes by consumers or new production facilities by businesses. Higher rates have the opposite effect and are used to contain inflation by dampening demand for goods.

First rate cut in four months

BoE cuts interest rate amid easing inflation

LONDON, Dec 18, (AP): The Bank of England on Thursday cut its key interest rate for the first time in four months as stubbornly high inflation that has plagued British consumers and businesses starts to ease.

The central bank's policymakers voted 5-4 to reduce the base rate by a quarter of a percentage point to 3.75% on Thursday, the lowest since February 2023.

The move came a day after the Office for National Statistics reported that consumer price inflation slowed to 3.2% in the 12 months through November, from 3.6% a month earlier.

The figure was below the Bank of England's forecast of 3.4%. That gave policymakers room to cut

interest rates in an effort to bolster Britain's stagnant economy. Statistics released earlier this week showed a weakening jobs market, with the number of job vacancies declining and the unemployment rate rising to 5.1%, the highest since January 2021.

"Unemployment, underemployment and flows from employment to unemployment have all risen," Bank of England Gov. Andrew Bailey said in a statement. "While I do not yet see conclusive evidence of a sharper downturn in the labor market, we should be vigilant."

Even so, the bank's Monetary Policy Committee was divided on whether to cut interest rates, with four members remaining focused on the fight against inflation, which is still well above the Bank of Eng-

land's 2% target. British consumer prices are also rising faster than in other parts of Europe and North America. The inflation rate in the 20 European countries that use the euro currency remained at 2.1% in November. The U.S. inflation rate was 3.0% in September, the latest figures released because of the government shutdown.

Lower interest rates help spur economic growth by reducing borrowing costs, which can lead to increased spending by consumers and boost investment by businesses. But that can also fuel higher prices.

Central bankers have to weigh those competing forces, trying to prevent inflation from eroding the value of earnings and savings without putting an unnecessary brake on economic growth.

India signs deal with Oman as it tries to counter US tariffs by accelerating free trade agreements

NEW DELHI, Dec 18, (AP): India signed a comprehensive economic partnership agreement with Oman on Thursday as part of its broader strategy to offset the impact of steep U.S. import tariffs and widen export destinations during growing global trade uncertainties.

This is the second free trade agreement signed by New Delhi in the past six months, the first one being inked with the United Kingdom in May.

The India-Oman agreement was signed in Muscat in the presence of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Oman's head of state, Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

The deal aims to boost bilateral trade and push India's exports of engineering goods, textiles, leather, pharmaceuticals and agricultural products. It will provide Indian goods zero-duty market access on 98.08% of Oman's tariff lines, India's Trade Ministry said in a statement.

India has offered Oman tariff liberalization on 77.79% of its tariff lines, which will cover nearly 95% of New Delhi's imports from Muscat, the ministry said.

In recent months, India has accelerated a push to finalize several free trade agreements, or FTAs. The country is in advanced talks with the European Union, New Zealand and Chile, among other countries.

FTAs are a central pillar of India's economic strategy as it seeks deeper integration into global supply chains, stronger export growth and sustained job creation. By lowering tariffs and setting predictable trade rules, the pacts would help Indian businesses remain competitive and expand access to newer markets.

With global trade increasingly shaped by tariff disputes and geopolitical tensions, India is betting that a wider network of trade agreements will help cushion external shocks and anchor its export ambitions.

The stepped-up negotiations come as Indian exporters face pressure from higher U.S. import tariffs of 50%, which went into effect in August. While the two coun-

tries have been negotiating a bilateral trade agreement, the tariffs have weighed on sectors such as textiles, auto components, metals and labor-intensive manufacturing.

"India is clearly using FTAs as a strategic tool to diversify export markets and soften the impact of steep and uncertain U.S. tariffs," trade analyst Ajay Srivastava said.

In all, India has 15 free trade agreements covering 26 countries and six preferential trade agreements, with another 26 nations while negotiating with more than 50 other partners, Srivastava said.

Once the ongoing talks conclude, India will have trade agreements with virtually all major global economies except China, he said.

India signed comprehensive economic cooperation and trade agreements with the United Arab Emirates and Australia in recent years, lifting bilateral trade with both countries. In May, Britain and India announced that they had agreed on a hard-wrought FTA that will slash tariffs on products including Scotch whisky and English gin shipped to India, and Indian food and spices sent to the U.K.

The recent agreements have reinforced the case for faster negotiations and clearer frameworks for business, officials said.

"India is negotiating several FTAs" at a time of challenges in global trade, Trade Secretary Rajesh Agarwal told reporters this week. "I see positive progress on several of these, next year."

But challenges remain as Indian negotiators face pressure to protect small farmers and domestic industries, even as trading partners push for greater market access. India and the U.S. hoped to have the first tranche of a bilateral trade agreement by the fall, but it hasn't come through, because ties have been strained following India's unabated purchase of discounted Russian crude oil. Washington says the purchases help fund Moscow's war machine in the ongoing invasion of Ukraine.

ernment said in a report that was delayed by the government shutdown.

The Labor Department reported Thursday that its consumer price index was up 2.7% in November from a year earlier.

The report was delayed eight days by the federal government's 43-day shutdown, which also prevented the Labor Department from compiling overall numbers for consumer prices and core inflation in October. Thursday's report gave investors, businesses and policymakers their first look at CPI since the September numbers were released on Oct. 24.

Consumers prices had risen 3% in September from a year earlier, and forecasters had expected the November CPI to match that year-over-year increase.

U.S. inflation has remained stubbornly above the Federal Reserve's 2% target, partly because of President Donald Trump's decision to impose double-digit taxes on imports from almost every country on earth along with targeted tariffs on specific products like steel, aluminum and autos.

The president's tariffs have so far proved less inflationary than economists feared. But they do put upward pressure on prices and complicate matters for Fed, which is trying to decide whether to keep cutting its benchmark interest rate to support a sputtering job market or whether to hold off until inflationary pressures ease. The central bank last week decided to reduce the rate for the third time this year, but Fed officials signaled that they expect just one cut in 2026.

'Save more and stress less'

Experts share top tips to cut holiday spending

NEW YORK, Dec 18, (AP): The holiday season means time with family and new memories, but it can also mean lots of spending - sometimes too much.

From gifts to travel plans to grocery shopping, costs can pile up and become overwhelming, especially in a difficult economic environment. Holiday shopping can bring joy, but it's important to stick to a budget and avoid going into debt, said shopping expert Trae Bodge.

"I'm really emphasizing that shoppers look for ways to save as much as possible this season. So we don't bring that debt into the next year," Bodge added.

Here are some expert recommendations to make the most out of your budget this holiday season:

Planning your gifts as far in advance as possible can be a great way to save money, since it gives you more time to compare and shop around, said Kiersti Torok, a social media content creator known on Instagram and TikTok as Torok Coupon Hunter.

Torok plans her shopping months in advance. She buys the chocolate and candy for her children's Christmas stockings right after Halloween, when they're on sale. And it's not too early to think about next year - her Christmas decorations are always bought on clearance, especially after Christmas.

"If you wait until two, maybe three, days after Christmas. Things will start to hit 75% off. And that's when I shop for my kid's birthdays, because they're in July," Torok said.

Recommend

When you're looking to buy a gift, Bodge recommends comparing prices with other stores, looking for coupons, and signing up for emails from your favorite stores. That way, you can buy the item when it's at its lowest price.

"I'm always looking for maybe a coupon code, so I can save a certain percentage off. Or I can earn cash back or get a free shipping offer. I really believe in those tools and use them every single time I shop," Bodge said.

To find deals more easily, Bodge recommends installing browser extensions on your computer. Some of her favorites are PayPal Honey and Rakuten.

Lately, Bodge has also noticed the increasing use of artificial intelligence to both find holiday gift ideas and sales. However, AI search engines are not very good at finding up-to-date deals, she said. Bodge recommends that you search for deals on the store's website or on sites like RetailMeNot.

If you can't find an item on sale, find a coupon, or wait to see if you can find it cheaper somewhere else.

If you're the host of your family's holiday celebration, you might be rushing between going to the grocery store, cooking a large meal and decorating your house. But, it's best if you don't let the holiday rush distract you from saving on groceries. Coupons are a great way to reduce costs so you can keep your meals on budget, and possibly use that money for other expenses. Most grocery stores offer coupons, either in paper form, on their website, or in their apps.

Couponing can be time-consuming, but the tradeoff can be saving hundreds of dollars on groceries, according to Torok. If you're trying couponing for the first time, she recommends

taking small steps.

"If you're looking to save money and you never couponed before, my biggest advice is to pick your favorite store you're most comfortable with and download their app," Torok said.

Once you feel comfortable using coupons with your preferred store, Torok recommends that you start comparing prices with other stores near you. This way you can shop for the best deals and save money.

If you're looking to maximize your savings, she also recommends taking advantage of websites that give you cash back on your grocery shopping. Examples include Top Cash Back and Ibotta.

Tactic

When preparing for your big holiday meal, a useful tactic to save is to buy in bulk and then freeze it for when you need it, recommended Alli Powell, grocery shopping expert.

"Anything that you can stock up on and freeze at a (lower) price point, then take it out of the freezer to use later, it'll be such a benefit. This is something I try to do year-round," said Powell, who hosts Grocery Getting Girl, a blog and Instagram page dedicated to budget-friendly grocery shopping.

Large grocery stores typically offer sales around Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's, and this can be a perfect opportunity to buy in bulk and put it away for another time, Powell said.

Proceed with caution when it comes to acquiring store credits cards or making purchases using buy now, pay later. If you're shopping in person this holiday season, you'll likely be offered a store credit card at checkout, often paired with a large discount on your current purchase.

Bodge recommends that you only get a store credit card if you know you can pay it off in full each month and have good credit card habits.

"If there's a retailer that you shop with regularly and you are responsible with your credit cards, opening a credit card can be very beneficial," Bodge said.

If you decide to acquire a store credit card, it's important that you know how much interest will be charged. Store credit cards, like traditional credit cards, affect your credit score.

Purchases

Similarly, making purchases using buy now, pay later is only recommended when you are sure you can afford to make all the payments on time. Buy now, pay later loans were not previously reported to the three major credit reporting bureaus, but consumers will soon see the them impact their FICO credit scores.

A common mistake when making travel plans is to not allow yourself much flexibility on your flights, said Kyle Potter, editor of Thrifty Traveler, a travel and flight deal website. To save money on your travel, first book the flights and then the rest of the accommodations, that way you can allow yourself to be as flexible as possible with the dates of your flights.

"Start with the flights first, because that gives you the freedom to shift your travel dates by even just a day. Especially over the holidays," Potter said.

Potter recommends that you track prices and set alarms for flights on Google Flights.

'Inferior offer carried significant risks and costs'

Warner Bros recommends investors reject Paramount's offer in favor of Netflix's

NEW YORK, Dec 18, (AP): Warner Bros. Discovery is recommending its shareholders reject an unsolicited buy-out offer from Paramount Skydance in favor of a rival bid from Netflix it said will better serve their interests and the entertainment company's audiences.

The Warner board said in a letter to shareholders on Wednesday that Paramount's "inferior" offer carried "significant risks and costs," in large part because it relies heavily on borrowed money - whereas the Netflix offer is backed by a company worth more than \$400 billion.

Warner, which owns the Warner Bros. Pictures movie studio and HBO, agreed earlier this month to a cash-and-stock offer from Netflix valued at \$72 billion. As part of that deal, Warner would first spin off its cable TV assets, including CNN and Discovery. Days later, Paramount made a hostile, all-cash offer for all of Warner's properties valued at \$77.9 billion.

With the fate of marquee movie-making and streaming services on the line, a Warner deal with either com-

pany would face intense scrutiny from U.S. regulators.

Paramount has argued that its offer - coming from a smaller company - would face an easier road with regulators. Warner's board disputed that claim in its letter to shareholders, who ultimately have the power to decide which offer to accept.

Netflix offered Warner shareholders \$23.25 in cash, plus \$4.50 in Netflix shares, for each share of Warner. Paramount is offering \$30 in cash for each share of Warner.

Warner's stock price fell more than 1% Wednesday to \$28.52 per share. Shares of Paramount fell 5.4%, while those of Netflix rose 2.5%.

An acquisition by Netflix would be completed only after Warner finalizes its previously announced separation of its cable operations.

Paramount urged Warner shareholders on Wednesday to tell the company they prefer Paramount's "superior offer."

"We will continue to move forward to deliver this transaction, which is in



Vehicles enter Paramount Pictures in Los Angeles. (AP)

the best interest of (Warner) shareholders, consumers, and the creative industries," Paramount CEO and Chairman David Ellison said.

Paramount has claimed it made six different bids that Warner leadership rejected before announcing its deal with Netflix on Dec. 5.

Critics of Netflix's deal say that combining the massive streaming company with Warner's HBO Max would give it overwhelming market dominance, whereas the Paramount-streaming service is far smaller.

"This is something that we've heard for a long time - including when we started the streaming business," Netflix co-CEOs Greg Peters and Ted Sarandos said in a filing through Warner Bros. "Our stance then and now is the same - we see this as a win for the entertainment industry, not the end of it."

Warner shareholders have until Jan. 8 to vote on Paramount's offer.

Bids from both Netflix and Paramount have raised alarm for what they could mean for film and TV production. While Netflix has agreed to uphold Warner's contractual obligations for releasing films in theaters, critics fear the streaming giant will ultimately favor online releases. Paramount and Warner Bros. are two of the biggest studios left in Hollywood.

A combination of Paramount and Warner would bring CBS and CNN

under the same roof. That could raise questions about news media consolidation and shifts in editorial control - as seen at CBS News leading up to and following Skydance's \$8 billion purchase of Paramount, which it completed in August.

President Donald Trump has been vocal about his plans to play a role in regulatory approval.

Trump has said Netflix's deal "could be a problem" because of the potential for an outsized control of the market. The Republican president has a close relationship with Oracle's billionaire founder Larry Ellison - the father of Paramount's CEO.

Affinity Partners, an investment firm run by Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, previously said it would invest in the Paramount deal. But on Tuesday, the firm announced it would be dropping out.

The sovereign wealth funds of Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi and Qatar are backing Paramount's bid, a detail some analysts say should be drawing more scrutiny.

Obituary

'A life well lived'

'Buck Rogers' star Gerard dies at 82

WASHINGTON, Dec 18 (AP): Gil Gerard, who played television's hunky sci-fi hero William "Buck" Rogers soon after the Star Wars franchise took hold in the late 1970s, has died. He was 82.

Gerard died Tuesday in hospice as a result of a rare, aggressive form of cancer, said his manager, Tina Presley Borek. His wife, Janet Gerard, posted a posthumous Facebook message he left behind for fans that read in part:

"Don't waste your time on anything that doesn't thrill you or bring you love. See you out somewhere in the cosmos."

Gerard starred in NBC's campy "Buck Rogers in the 25th Century," which ran for two seasons from 1979 to 1981. A theatrical film based on the series also delighted youngsters and their parents alike. It was Rogers' second turn on TV after a show in the 1950s, a radio series and a 1939 film serial.

The story was based on Philip Francis Nowlan's serialized 1928 pulp novella "Armageddon 2419 A.D." Nowlan's character was named Anthony Rogers. The name was changed when the story began running in newspapers as a comic strip.

"My life has been an amazing journey," Gerard wrote in his social media post. "The opportunities I've had, the people I've met and the love I have given and received have made my 82 years on the planet deeply satisfying."

As the TV story goes, Rogers was a 20th century NASA pilot who was placed in frozen animation when his ship was hit by a meteor storm. He pops awake 500 years later in the year 2491. He gazes upon a futuristic, domed Earth with all its threats, including aliens, space pilots and the evil Draconians.

He had helpers: The robot sidekick Twiki and a beautiful space pilot Wilma Deering, played by Erin Gray.

A native of Little Rock, Arkansas, Gerard worked steadily in TV commercials. He was featured in a number of other TV shows and movies, including starring roles in the 1982 TV movie "Hear No Evil" as Dragon and the short-lived "Sidekicks" in 1986.

In 1992, he hosted the reality series "Code 3," following firefighters responding to emergency calls around the U.S. There were many guest appearances in the 1990s, including on "Days of Our Lives."

Gerard and Gray were together again in 2007 for the TV film "Nuclear Hurricane." They also returned to the Buck Rogers universe as Rogers' parents in the pilot episode of James Cawley's "Buck Rogers Begins" internet video series in 2009.

Gerard spoke openly about addictions to drugs, alcohol and compulsive overeating. He was the subject of a one-hour documentary, "Action Hero Makeover," in 2007 after his weight ballooned to 350 pounds.

Done by Adrienne Crow, then a longtime companion, for the Discovery Health Channel, the film documented his progress after gastric bypass surgery.



In this file photo, actor Gil Gerard poses in Los Angeles, Ca. (AP)

Film



From left, Abdallah Sada, Alaa Alasad, Mohammad Siam, Israel Banuelos, Bassam Alasad, Mohammad Nizar, director Zain Duraie, Clara Khoury, George Christopoulos, Glenn Gainor, Ghalia Hatamleh and Lara Ab attend the screening of the film 'Sink' during the Red Sea International Film Festival in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. (AP)

Ameen emerges as one of standout voices at this year's Red Sea Film Festival

Arab female directors push boundaries in Jeddah

JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia, Dec 18, (AP): Arab female film directors have helped change the landscape of Arab cinema in recent years, presenting stories that haven't been told before.

Four influential female directors took part in this year's Red Sea Film Festival in Jeddah, paving the way for more diverse narratives in Arab cinema.

The festival, bringing together 38 directors, showcases Saudi Arabia's heavy investment in film, gaming and sports as part of its broader transformation efforts. Some rights groups have criticized these actions, saying they serve to draw away attention from the kingdom's human rights record, including its high rate of executions and restrictions on free expression.

Palestinian American filmmaker Cherien Dabis premiered her new film "All That's Left of You," a multigenerational story tracing one family's experience from the 1948 Nakba, Arabic for catastrophe, the mass expulsion of Palestinians before and during the Arab-Israeli war that followed Israel's establishment, to 2022. The film deals with themes of Palestinian displacement and personal loss.

"It tells the story of one family over three generations and how they survive the Nakba in 1948 and the ongoing occupation," she said. "It gives people context for how we got to where we are today and shows how much Palestinians have had to endure throughout the decades."

Dabis, born and raised in the United States to Palestinian-Jordanian parents, said her passion

and inspiration to become a filmmaker grew from a lack of authentic Arab and Palestinian representation in Western media. "I became aware that I wanted to go into storytelling in order to tell our authentic stories, because I couldn't find us anywhere," she said.

She said growing up in the U.S. offered better opportunities for a career in cinema than the Arab world, but the racism her family faced reinforced her desire to challenge harmful stereotypes. "My experience in the diaspora is really what compelled me to become a storyteller," she said.

And she still struggled to be taken seriously, feeling pressure to adopt a more authoritative, even masculine tone to counter assumptions about women directors. "There is this image of women filmmakers as overly emotional or unable to command a set," she said. "A lot of us felt we had to overcome these unfair ideas."

Her film "All That's Left of You" won the Silver Yusr Feature Film award, which comes with a \$30,000 prize, at the Red Sea Film Festival.

Saudi filmmaker Shahad Ameen emerged as one of the standout voices at this year's festival. Her latest film, "Hijra," won the Yusr Jury Prize, marking another milestone in her career.

"Hijra" tells the story of three women - a grandmother and her two granddaughters - on a journey from Taif to Mecca to perform Hajj, the Islamic pilgrimage. When one of the granddaughters suddenly disappears in the desert, the film follows the search for her across southern Saudi Arabia.

Ameen traces her passion for filmmaking back to her childhood, inspired by the historical television dramas that once dominated Arab screens. "I felt that as Arabs, we need to make our voices heard by ourselves, not have someone else speak on our behalf," she said.

Ameen said the changes unfolding in Saudi Arabia and the growth of the Red Sea Film Festival have directly shaped her journey in filmmaking. "Ten years ago, we couldn't have dreamed of this," she said, calling the festival a turning point for cinema in the kingdom.

She said filmmaking remains an uncertain path for Arab women, demanding constant perseverance with no guarantees of success. "Every film is a new beginning," she said, noting that directors must repeatedly convince investors, festivals and audiences of their vision.

Amira Diab's journey into filmmaking wasn't traditional. A former financial investment professional based in Manhattan, she found her calling after watching "Omar," the Oscar-nominated film by Palestinian director Hany Abu-Assad - who would later become her husband. The film, and their connection, pulled her into the world of cinema.

Diab went on to study film production in Los Angeles, working with Abu-Assad as a producer. She directed two short films and collaborated with her husband on a series. One of her breakout moments came with the short film "As a Husband," part of the Netflix anthology "Love, Life, and What's Between."

The film resonated deeply with audiences

for capturing the emotional duality of life in the Palestinian territories. "People told me they saw so much of themselves in it. It's how life is in Palestine - joy turns into mourning, then back into joy. But there's always a glimmer of hope," she said.

Diab's feature film "Wedding Rehearsal" began as a story rooted in the Palestinian territories but evolved to take place in Egypt - a decision she felt expanded the story's cultural reach. "Egypt has such a rich, diverse social fabric," she said.

"And I worked with amazing people like Nelly Karim and Sherif Salama. Egypt really embraced me."

Even though she has experience in Hollywood, Diab remains committed to telling Arab stories centered on women's voices. "Of course women see the world differently. That's why our voices matter," she explained. "But it doesn't mean men can't write about women - it just means that certain emotional details only women can fully bring to the screen."

Zain Duraie said her love with filmmaking began as a 10-year-old watching "Titanic" with her father in Amman, Jordan. She found herself captivated not by the love story, but by how the ship sank - how the film was made. That spark turned into a passion nurtured by school theater and later refined at the Toronto Film School.

At the Red Sea International Film Festival, Zain premiered her first feature film, "Sink," about a mother struggling with her mentally ill son, a subject often overlooked in Arab cinema.

SpongeBob is back in madcap 'Search for SquarePants'

NEW YORK, Dec 18, (AP): SpongeBob SquarePants just wants to be a big guy. For our bubble blowing, Bikini Bottom resident (voiced by Tom Kenny), that means reaching the coveted height of 36 clams tall so that he can finally ride the big roller coaster at Captain Booty Beard's Fun Park.

In the new feature-length movie, "The SpongeBob Movie: Search for SquarePants," he wakes up to discover, with the help of his loyal pet Gary the Snail, that he has finally made it. But, as many kids before him have learned the hard way, being tall enough to ride the big roller coaster is not always the same as being ready to ride the big roller coaster. Cue the "O Fortuna" needle drop.

This installment has more madness up its sleeves than a terrifying roller coaster. A little lie from SpongeBob, that he promised he'd wait to ride it with his boss Mr. Krabs (Clancy Brown), has unintended consequences. Soon Mr. Krabs is regaling SpongeBob with his own story from his seafaring days about earning a coveted swashbuckler certificate (which includes proving ones "intestinal fortitude") by defeating The Flying Dutchman. And SpongeBob, determined to

not be just a bubble blowing baby boy, is set off on his own odyssey that takes him and his jolly starfish sidekick Patrick (Bill Fagerbakke) on a madcap adventure to the underworld with the ghost of The Flying Dutchman (Mark Hamill) and his lackey Barb (Regina Hall). SpongeBob, as earnest as ever, believes he's there to prove his swashbuckling mettle. The Flying Dutchman has other plans.

This underworld is a wild, colorful place (the words surreal tiki bar have been thrown around) where sirens lure you in with smooth jazz (far too tempting for Squidward, voiced again by Rodger Bumpass), where two monstrous creatures start spontaneously kissing one another instead of killing the intruders and where guardian skeletons can be brought down with laughter. Just wait until you see how SpongeBob and Patrick decide they've passed the "intestinal fortitude" test.

"Search for SquarePants" was directed by Derek Drymon and written by Pam Brady and Matt Lieberman. Drymon is an animation veteran, who worked with SpongeBob creator Stephen Hillenburg on the development of his signature series.



This image released by Paramount Animation and Nickelodeon shows the characters Barb, voiced by Regina Hall, from left, Flying Dutchman, voiced by Mark Hamill, Patrick Star, voiced by Bill Fagerbakke, and SpongeBob SquarePants, voiced by Tom Kenny, in a scene from 'The SpongeBob Movie: Search For SquarePants.' (AP)

Human space where children can reflect their daily realities

Gaza children depict war and hopes of brighter future through artworks

GAZA, Dec. 18, (Xinhua): In a modest hall at the Maghazi refugee camp in central Gaza, visitors paused before a collection of artworks created by children affected by war and displacement, each piece revealing striking emotional depth.

The exhibition, titled “The Path Back Home,” opened Monday and runs for three days, featuring about 100 works by children aged six to 14. Organized by the Gaza-based Tamer Institute for Community Education, the exhibition presents artworks produced during workshops held across Gaza, particularly in displacement camps and temporary shelters, since the outbreak of the Gaza war in October 2003.

Subjects of the displayed artworks range from the aftermath of bombings and ruined neighborhoods to moments of pain and loss, as well as dreams of a more secure future.

Mohammed Zaqzouq, one of the organizers, said the contrast in themes reflects the inner struggle children face between memories of war and their longing for a normal life. He noted that the art workshops were designed to provide a safe space where children could express their experiences through creativity.

“This is not a traditional art exhibition, but a psychological and human space where children can reflect their daily realities,” he told Xinhua.

He added that the exhibition’s title highlights the central role of “home” in a child’s sense of identity. “Through their drawings, children depict not only physi-

cal homes, but also memories, meaning, and a sense of self,” Zaqzouq said.

Many of the participating children have been displaced at least once, with some forced to flee multiple times and now living in overcrowded shelters with limited access to basic services.

Rana Ahmed, 10, displaced with her family in Gaza City, said participating in the drawing offered an outlet for feelings she could not express in words. “It felt as if the paintings were speaking for me,” she said.

Eight-year-old Salma Ibrahim, the youngest participant, said painting her house and a tree helped her share her emotions. “Seeing people look at my work made me feel our voices were being heard,” she said.

Ali Ahmed, 12, also from Gaza City, who has been displaced multiple times and lost his home, drew a house near the beach with his family living together inside. He told Xinhua that seeing the collection helped him understand that other children shared similar experiences.

“The paintings made me see what happened differently and reminded me that there is still hope for a normal life,” he said.

Tahani Al-Jamal, a visitor of the exhibition, said the drawings honestly reflect the harsh realities children face, including violence, hunger, and deprivation.

Through their paintings, the children communicate their suffering and hopes, offering a perspective on war that extends beyond statistics and reports, Zaqzouq said.



A clown performs for children in Maghazi refugee camp in central Gaza. (Xinhua)

Obituary

‘Intrepid, fearless’

Arnett, who reported on Vietnam, Gulf wars dies

LOS ANGELES, Dec 18, (AP): Peter Arnett, the Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter who spent decades dodging bullets and bombs to bring the world eyewitness accounts of war from the rice paddies of Vietnam to the deserts of Iraq, has died. He was 91.

Arnett, who won the 1966 Pulitzer Prize for international reporting for his Vietnam War coverage for The Associated Press, died Wednesday in Newport Beach and was surrounded by friends and family, said his son Andrew Arnett. He had been suffering from prostate cancer.

“Peter Arnett was one of the greatest war correspondents of his generation - intrepid, fearless, and a beautiful writer and storyteller. His reporting in print and on camera will remain a legacy for aspiring journalists and historians for generations to come,” said Edith Lederer, who was a fellow AP war correspondent in Vietnam in 1972-73 and is now AP’s chief correspondent at the United Nations.

As a wire-service correspondent, Arnett was known mostly to fellow journalists when he reported in Vietnam from 1962 until the war’s end in 1975. He became something of a household name in 1991, however, after he broadcast live updates for CNN from Iraq during the first Gulf War.

While almost all Western reporters had fled Baghdad in the days before the U.S.-led attack, Arnett stayed. As missiles began raining on the city, he broadcast a live account by cellphone from his hotel room.

“There was an explosion right near me, you may have heard,” he said in a calm, New Zealand-accented voice moments after the loud boom of a missile strike rattled across the airwaves. As he continued to speak air-raid sirens blared in the background.

“I think that took out the telecommunications center,” he said of another explosion. “They are hitting the center of the city.”

It was not the first time Arnett had gotten dangerously close to the action.

In January 1966, he joined a battalion of U.S. soldiers seeking to rout North Vietnamese snipers and was standing next to the battalion commander when an officer paused to read a map.

“As the colonel peered at it, I heard four loud shots as bullets tore through the map and into his chest, a few inches from my face,” Arnett recalled during a talk to the American Library Association in 2013. “He sank to the ground at my feet.”

He would begin the fallen soldier’s obituary like this: “He was the son of a general, a West Pointer and a battalion commander. But Lt. Colonel George Eyster was to die like a rifleman. It may have been the colonel’s leaves of rank on his collar, or the map he held in his hand, or just a wayward chance that the Viet Cong sniper chose Eyster from the five of us standing in that dusty jungle path.”

Arnett had arrived in Vietnam just a year after joining AP as its Indonesia correspondent. That job would be short-lived after he reported Indonesia’s economy was in shambles and the country’s enraged leadership threw him out. His expulsion marked only the first of several controversies in which he would find himself embroiled, while also forging an historic career.

At the AP’s Saigon bureau in 1962, Arnett found himself surrounded by a formidable roster of journalists, including bureau chief Malcolm Browne and photo editor Horst Faas, who between them would win three Pulitzer Prizes.

He credited Browne in particular with teaching him many of the survival tricks that would keep him alive in war zones over the next 40 years. Among them: Never stand near a medic or radio operator because they’re among the first the enemy will shoot at. And if you hear a gunshot coming from the other side, don’t look around to see who fired it because the next one will likely hit you.



Associated Press correspondent Peter Arnett stands with gear that he carries out in field while covering the Vietnamese army in Saigon, Vietnam. (AP)

Film



This image released by Focus Features shows Kate Hudson, left, and Hugh Jackman in a scene from ‘Song Sung Blue.’ (AP)

Jackman nails the songs, but not the story

‘Song Sung Blue’ hits all the wrong notes

LOS ANGELES, Dec 18, (AP): The story of Mike and Claire Sardina - a struggling husband-and-wife Neil Diamond tribute act from Milwaukee - was never the stuff of Hollywood movies. Unfortunately, it’s been made into one.

Hugh Jackman and Kate Hudson are slumming to play the slightly batty couple in the big-hearted but misguided “Song Sung Blue,” a baffling adaptation of a very moving 2008 documentary.

Director and writer Craig Brewer isn’t certain where the through line of the movie really is so he explores working-class pressures, adds a rom-com, swerves into tragedy and drug addiction and then lets Jackman and Hudson sunnily perform some 20-odd songs, turning “Song Sung Blue” into a melodrama-meets-holiday-sing-along.

Hollywood should have stayed away. The original documentary by Greg Kohs -

who gets a producer credit this time - was about two artists who, despite facing foreclosure notices and insurance denials, still showed up for gigs, chasing that showbiz high, even when one suffered an amputation. The couple and their blended family came across as somewhat delusional but sweet and their tragedies seemed almost preordained. It was a small story.

Jackman and Hudson try to lose themselves in these parts. He walks around in sagging tighty-whities, with dirty fingernails and a missing tooth, and she works hard to be drab. The filmmakers ape many of the signatures of the documentary, like the sight of airplanes rumbling over the Sardinas’ house. In too many ways, “Song Sung Blue” feels like an act of karaoke.

Like Brewer’s previous “Dolemite Is My Name,” the new movie surrounds the main actors with a kindly support crew, like the guitar player played nicely by Michael Imperioli and managers portrayed by Fisher Stevens and Jim Belushi. Ella Anderson does excellent work as Claire’s angsty daughter, and look for a fun moment when an actor playing Pearl Jam’s Eddie Vedder takes the stage to share “Forever in Blue Jeans.”

The songs are excellently handled. Brewer is, after all, the director of “Hustle & Flow,” too. Hudson radiates as she sings, while Jackman absolutely nails Diamond’s sound and stance. If you came to hear “Sweet Caroline,” you’ll leave with a deeper respect for a songwriter who also wrote such gems as “Play Me” and “Holly Holy.”

It’s just that the overly long song performances are always smiling, exuberant affairs in what has to be considered a story of tragedy and they don’t fit tonally. Of course, music was the Sardinas’ happy place - their onstage names were Light-

ning & Thunder - but the blissful deliveries seem more like cheesy holiday movie fodder than studs in a well-constructed movie.

Some unnecessary Hollywood touches - an overcooked scene with a defibrillator and the ridiculous, non-factual way we lose Mike - stick out poorly. The filmmakers also never really explore the world of musical impersonation during a time when authenticity was becoming the coin of the realm. It doesn’t know what to do about heroes who are deeply campy, using wind machines in a biker bar. Overall, it’s just not so good, so good.

“Song Sung Blue,” a Focus Feature release that hits theaters on Christmas Day, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for thematic material, some strong language, some sexual material and brief drug use. Running time: 133 minutes. One and a half stars out of four.

‘We are thrilled to enter into a multifaceted global partnership’

Oscars to move to YouTube in 2029, leaving longtime home of ABC

LOS ANGELES, Dec 18, (AP): In a seismic shift for one of television’s marquee events, the Academy Awards will depart ABC and begin streaming on YouTube beginning in 2029, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced.

ABC will continue to broadcast the annual ceremony through 2028. That year will mark the 100th Oscars.

But starting in 2029, YouTube will retain global rights to streaming the Oscars through 2033. YouTube will effectively be the home to all things Oscars, including red-carpet coverage, the Governors Awards and the Oscar nominations announcement.

“We are thrilled to enter into the multifaceted global partnership with YouTube to be the future home of the Oscars and our year-round Academy programming,” said academy chief executive Bill Kramer and academy president Lynette Howell Taylor. “The Academy is an international organization, and this partnership will allow us to expand access to the work of the Academy to the largest worldwide audience possible - which will be beneficial for our Academy members and the film community.”

While major award shows have added streaming partnerships, the YouTube deal marks the first of the big four - the Oscars, Grammys, Emmys and Tonys - to completely jettison broadcast television. It puts one of the most watched non-NFL broadcasts in the hands of Google.



Oscar statuettes appear backstage at the Oscars at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles. (AP)

YouTube boasts some 2 billion viewers.

The Academy Awards will stream for free worldwide on YouTube, in addition to YouTube TV subscribers. It will be available with audio tracks in many languages, in addition to closed captioning.

Financial terms were not disclosed.

“The Oscars are one of our essential cultural institutions, honoring excellence in storytelling and artistry,” said Neal Mohan, chief executive of YouTube. “Partner-

ing with the academy to bring this celebration of art and entertainment to viewers all over the world will inspire a new generation of creativity and film lovers while staying true to the Oscars’ storied legacy.”

The Walt Disney Co.-owned ABC has been the broadcast home to the Oscars for almost its entire history. NBC first televised the Oscars in 1953, but ABC picked up the rights in 1961. Aside from a period between 1971 and 1975, when NBC again aired the show, the Oscars have been on ABC.

“ABC has been the proud home to The Oscars for more than half a century,” the network said in a statement. “We look forward to the next three telecasts, including the show’s centennial celebration in 2028, and wish the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences continued success.”

The 2025 Academy Awards were watched by 19.7 million viewers on ABC, a slight increase from the year before. That remains one of the biggest TV broadcasts of the year, though less than half of Oscar ratings at their peak. In 1999, more than 55 million watched James Cameron’s “Titanic” win best picture.

The film academy, in choosing YouTube over other options such as Netflix or NBC Universal/Peacock, selected a platform with a wide-ranging and massive audience but one without as much of an established production infrastructure.

i-EBM speeds up analysis and creates tailored treatment plans

Chinese researchers inject AI power to evidence-based medicine

LANZHOU, Dec. 18, (Xinhua): Chinese researchers are integrating the growing power of AI into the Digital Intelligent Evidence-Based Medicine (i-EBM), creating a more dynamic, precise and efficient approach to medical evidence.

“As a new modern medical paradigm, i-EBM features three dimensions -- multi-source data integration, intelligent evidence analysis, and individualized decision support,” said Ge Long, a professor at the School of Public Health of Lanzhou University and leader of the study.

“The burgeoning AI technologies are more active in processing massive data and transforming them into reference treatment plans, enabling the traditional evidence-based medicine (EBM) to advance in the AI era,” Ge added.

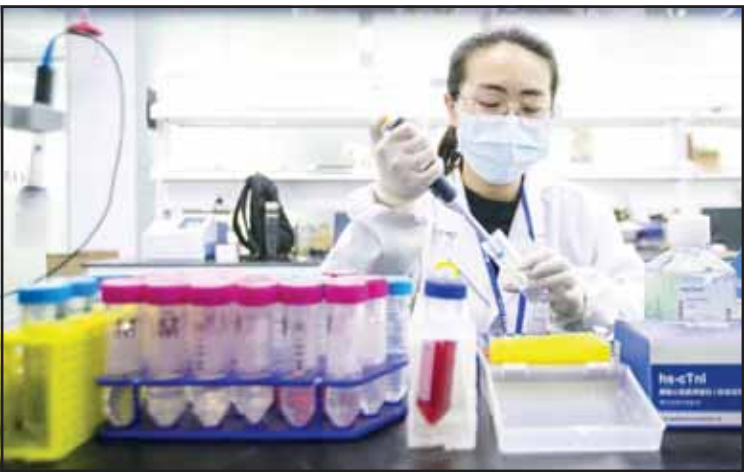
Published in the journal Chinese Science Bulletin, the study is led by Ge’s colleagues in collaboration with evidence-based medicine scholars.

EBM, a cornerstone of modern medical decision-making, combines the best research evidence, clinical judgment and patients’ concerns. For decades, it has continued to significantly enhance the scientific understanding behind medical decisions.

“However, the limitations of EBM, such as the time lag, isolated evidence, and insufficient individualized consideration to each patient, have caused troubles in today’s complex medical environment,” Ge said.

“In the AI era, i-EBM is not a disruptive force to the traditional EBM model, but rather an inevitable evolution, which is targeted at an in-depth collaboration between machine intelligence and human expertise,” Ge added.

I-EBM builds a unified digital intelligence foundation by integrating high-quality scientific research evidence, biomedical knowledge systems, and multimodal real-world data including electronic medical records and medical images, among others. On this basis, it combines with AI technologies,



A researcher in a Chinese laboratory uses a pipette to process samples as part of the development of AI-driven intelligent evidence-based medicine (i-EBM), combining clinical data and advanced technologies for more precise medical decisions. (Xinhua)

individualized diagnosis and treatment suggestions to assist doctors in making precise decisions.

“Of course, in the initial stage, what i-EBM can offer is the standardized

plans, which can serve as a reference for doctors,” Ge said.

“Theoretically speaking, EBM considers information of various aspects. However, in practice, it is difficult for clinicians to search, sequence, and analyze such a large amount of information,” Ge said.

I-EBM is pushing the limits of traditional EBM. By means of AI technologies such as knowledge graphs, it can build deep cross-domain connections across scientific research data, clinical medical records, medical images, and environmental meteorology information -- tasks that were previously carried out manually with a great degree of difficulty.

Moreover, AI can greatly reduce repetitive work. In just a few hours, or in some cases even minutes, they can complete the literature screening and evidence update that used to take months to finish.

According to Ge, the new system can assist with data integration, pattern recognition and causal analysis in complex research of the traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) to help reveal the internal laws of TCM evidence and optimize its evaluation system.

By now, the study team has applied their study achievements by developing multiple digital and intelligent products in fields such as the medication guide of Chinese patent medicine, facilitating medical research and practice.

The team has also cooperated with medical institutions to carry out research and application of i-EBM in childhood pneumonia treatment. I-EBM integrates imaging, laboratory and clinical data to build a multimodal database and facilitate more scientific diagnosis and treatment plans.

“The era of AI is coming. We will further our i-EBM research to support the improvement of medical standards, promote equal access to medical care, so as to play a role in improving people’s health and well-being,” Ge said.



A member of a Chinese medical team provides free clinical services at an orphanage in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, on Dec. 13, 2025. (Xinhua)

Healing hands across continents

Chinese doctors bring care, hope to Tanzanian orphans

DAR ES SALAAM, Dec 18, (Xinhua): For Samiri, a 12-year-old Tanzanian orphan, it was his first time seeing ultrasound machines and stethoscopes, as friendly Chinese doctors spoke softly through translators.

The Ashura Orphanage Center, in Tanzania’s Dar es Salaam, hosts 73 orphans -- 40 males and 33 females, aged between 4 and 20. Members of the Chinese medical teams from mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar came to give them comprehensive medical check-ups, for free, on a humid weekend.

The children’s initial nervousness quickly gave way to excitement. Laughter echoed through the courtyard of the center.

Some clutched new schoolbags brought by the medical team close to their chests, others smiled shyly as doctors knelt to meet them at eye level.

For a few hours, the orphanage became more than a shelter. It became a place of healing, reassurance, and renewed hope.

“These children have already seen more hardship than many adults,” Ummukulthum Mohamed Kawili, the center’s assistant manager, said quietly, watching a young boy emerge from an examination table clutching a small toy given by a Chinese doctor. “What they need most is care, not only food and shelter, but also the feeling that they are seen and valued.”

Through sponsorship from various partners, the center strives to provide education and basic supplies, including food, shelter, medication, and clothing. Yet access to healthcare remains one of the most difficult challenges, Kawili said.

“These doctors have come here to provide treatment free of charge,” she said. “Their kindness has no boundaries.”

For the children, the experience was both comforting and empowering.

Samiri, who had complained of recurring eye pain, smiled broadly after his screening. “The doctor was very kind,” he said. “He gave me medicine and told me my eyes would be okay.”

Nearby, younger children compared colorful stickers and waved enthusiastically at the doctors, their earlier fears long forgotten.

The free clinic was part of the “Warm Children’s Hearts” initiative, a China-Africa joint action organized by the Chinese Embassy in Tanzania, involving 24 members from Chinese medical teams from mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar.

“We try to bring what is most needed, like medical services, medicine, and daily necessities,” said Zhang Kai, head of the Chinese medical team in the mainland.

Bao Zengtao, head of the Chinese medical team in Zanzibar, said the outreach was designed with children’s specific needs in mind. “This activity is focused on the health of local children, especially through outreach.”

At the center, pediatricians, cardiologists, eye doctors, ear specialists, and public health experts examined children patiently.

Eye screenings were a particular priority, given the region’s strong sunlight, while ultrasound equipment was used to screen for parasitic diseases, including schistosomiasis.

“We are very concerned about eye diseases among children here,” Bao explained. “That is why our eye doctors brought professional devices to screen early. We also have public health experts using ultrasound to check for parasitic infections. If any child feels uncomfortable, they can tell us immediately.”

The clinic ran for over four hours, from late morning to afternoon, and the Chinese doctors worked with focus and patience.

For the children, the presence of so many doctors felt reassuring.

Older teenagers asked thoughtful questions about their health, while younger ones marveled at the machines and listened intently to instructions.

Each examination ended with medical advice and a smile, and for younger children, a small gift.

In addition to medical care, the children received food, study stools, toys, schoolbags, and stationery, items that sparked visible joy.

Some children immediately opened their bags to show friends, while others carefully set them aside.

Kawili said the support went beyond material value.

“The free clinical services and the donations have once again cemented the bond between China and Tanzania,” she said. “Our children will remember this day for a long time.”

At the Ijango Zaidia Orphanage Center, where similar activities were held, Chinese Ambassador to Tanzania Chen Mingjian reflected on the meaning of returning to a familiar place.

The Conversation

Shaping lives and communities in ways that often go unseen

Unpaid caregiving might appear small and personal, yet its ethical value is undeniable

The Conversation is an independent and non-profit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts.

By Jen Zamzow

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As child care costs outpace wages, more families are facing difficult decisions about whether to scale back work in order to care for loved ones. Caregiving remains the top reason women ages 25-54 leave the workforce.

And it’s not just parents who struggle. Nearly 60 million Americans provide care for an adult family member, and two-thirds say they have trouble balancing their jobs with their caregiving responsibilities. Nearly 1 in 4 working caregivers reported either missing work or being less productive because of their care duties.

When the demands become too much to juggle, some people quit their jobs, cut back on their hours or turn down promotions in order to provide unpaid care. For many households, that’s a financial strain; others save money that way. But even so, the decision can feel heavy - like leaving behind a sense of purpose that extends beyond the family.

These choices force deeper questions: What counts as meaningful work? What do we owe to others, and what’s reasonable to expect of any one person?

For many people, work and family are central to identity and how they hope to make a difference in the world. Men and women struggling with whether to step back from a career may wonder whether doing so is the best use of skills or training. Do we owe the world something “bigger”? As much as we care about loved ones, caregiving can feel too small and personal to matter.

As someone who writes and teaches about ethics and social policy, I believe philosophy can help people see these decisions more clearly. Ethics doesn’t give tidy answers or eliminate the tension between work and care, but it can help us understand their moral value.

Today, American culture often measures moral worth in terms of results and impact - where doing good means doing more. In this context, stepping back from a professional career to care for a loved one can feel like a failure of ambition or responsibility.

If ambition is measured by observable progress, caregiving is especially vulnerable to being misread as “leaning out.” Many of the daily tasks of caregiving - feeding, bathing, dressing and driving to appointments - can seem inconsequential. The end result of much of this work is invisible: You wind up in the same place you were before. For all the work that goes into sustaining life, there aren’t many “impressive outcomes” to point to.

In fact, one of care’s most important benefits lies in preventing outcomes: avoiding injuries, medication errors, hospital admissions, developmental delays, cognitive decline, loneliness, depression and so on. These “nonevents” are easy to overlook. In public health, this is sometimes referred to as the “preparedness paradox”: The better prevention works, the less visible its effects.

Appreciating the full value of care means considering what would happen without it. If the answer is that there would be more risk, more crises or more downstream costs, then



Work and family are both central to many people’s sense of identity and how they hope to make a difference. (AP)

care is making a difference. Health care ethicists, for example, use this kind of counterfactual reasoning to evaluate harm and benefit, asking how a patient would have fared without an intervention. Caregiving that reduces vulnerability and prevents suffering is a genuine moral achievement.

Still, helping a handful of people can look minor compared to careers measured by reach or scale. Good care requires a level of presence and attentiveness that just can’t be scaled. But that isn’t a failure. “Smallness” is actually part of the point: Care is personal - and “personal” doesn’t mean morally trivial.

In fact, there’s a rich philosophical tradition that puts meeting the needs of the people we’re responsible for at the very heart of moral life. Relationships are core to who we are. In care ethicists’ view, attachments to other people are not distractions from morality but expressions of what it means to live a good human life.

Close relationships make special claims on us. Ties with particular people carry moral weight, not just emotions - they give genuine reasons to act. As philosopher Samuel Scheffler notes, it makes little sense to say we value a relationship if we don’t think it places any demands on us. Caring about another person’s needs is part of what it means to care about them.

Attending to a loved one’s needs and interests honors those special claims and imbues care tasks with extra meaning - showing someone that we believe they’re worth our time and attention. Caring for loved ones might be modest in reach, but making another person feel truly seen and valued can make a deep impact.

Even if care isn’t “too small” to matter, it might still seem too personal to matter much to the wider world. But while care is certainly personal, it’s also socially significant.

As care ethicists like Joan Tronto and Eva Kittay argue, caring for particular people reveals something universal about the human condition: Everyone is dependent and sustained by care at different points in our lives. Former first lady Rosalynn Carter captured it simply:

“There are only four kinds of people in the world - those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers and those who will need caregivers.”

Understanding dependency as a shared human condition helps explain why care is foundational to collective well-being. Unpaid caregiving in the U.S. is worth an estimated US\$1.1 trillion annually, making it one of the largest sources of social support.

However, care has value beyond its economic impact. Care makes family, community and civic life possible, with benefits that reach well beyond the household. As economist Nancy Folbre writes in “The Invisible Heart”: “Parents who raise happy, healthy, and successful children create an especially important public good” - one that will benefit employers, neighbors and fellow citizens.

Treating care as a private matter rather than a shared social good has consequences. It places the moral and practical weight of caregiving on individual families - most often on women. I believe this narrow view unfairly shifts responsibility and also distorts value, limiting society’s sense of what matters.

Policy changes could ease the strain on caregivers but wouldn’t remove the personal choices families face every day. Even in a more supportive system, I believe Americans would need ways of thinking about work and care that give a fuller account of their value. Caregiving’s broader public benefits are diffuse and hard to measure. But recognizing that care sustains not only families but communities too is a reminder that paid work and unpaid care are not opposites. They are both ways to contribute to the common good.

Of course, loved ones’ needs can often be met without career changes. But when families need to make tough choices, it helps to have a fuller picture. Care ethics is not a demand for perfect caregiving or self-sacrifice; it’s an argument that care matters and that people deserve support as they respond to real limits. Stepping back from work to care doesn’t have to mean stepping back from contributing to the world - it changes where contribution happens. (AP)

New flu strain hits Europe early

OSLO, Dec 18, (Xinhua): Influenza is spreading across the World Health Organization (WHO) European Region earlier than usual this winter, with a newly dominant A(H3N2) strain putting added pressure on health systems in some countries, the WHO Regional Office for Europe said on Wednesday.

The agency said the influenza season has started about four weeks earlier than in previous seasons. At least 27 of the 38 countries reporting data are seeing high or very high influenza activity. In Ireland, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia and the United Kingdom, more than half of patients tested for influenza-like illness were positive for influenza.

“The flu comes around every winter, but this year is a little different,” said Hans Henri P. Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe.

He said a new strain, A(H3N2) subclade K, is driving infections, while noting there is no evidence it causes

more severe disease. The WHO said the variant now accounts for up to 90 percent of all confirmed influenza cases in the region.

The WHO said early data from the United Kingdom indicate the current seasonal influenza vaccine reduces the risk of severe health outcomes from A(H3N2), even if vaccination may not prevent infection.

It reiterated that vaccination remains the most important preventive step to avoid severe illness, particularly for higher-risk groups such as older people, people with underlying conditions, pregnant women and children. Health workers were also listed as a priority group.

Cases are expected to continue rising until the season peaks, likely in late December or early January, the WHO said, adding that most people will recover on their own, but those with severe symptoms or other medical conditions should seek medical care.

Study links MECFS to biological changes

SYDNEY, Dec 18, (Xinhua): New Australian research has identified simultaneous abnormalities across multiple biological systems in people with myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (MECFS), supporting the idea that MECFS is a medical condition and not a psychological disorder.

The study, led by researchers from Macquarie University, compared whole blood samples from 61 people meeting clinical diagnostic criteria for MECFS, with samples from healthy age- and sex-matched volunteers, a university media release said Wednesday.

Key findings of this multimodal study, published in Cell Reports Medicine, include changes in markers of cellular energy metabolism, in the proportions and maturity of circulating immune cells, and in plasma proteins associated with blood vessel dysfunction in people with MECFS, it said.

White blood cells from MECFS patients showed evidence of “energy stress” in the form of higher levels of adenosine monophosphate and adenosine diphosphate, indicating reduced generation of adenosine triphosphate, the key energy

source within cells, it added.

Profiling of immune cell populations revealed a trend toward less mature subsets of T-lymphocyte subsets, dendritic cells and natural killer cells in people with MECFS, researchers said, adding that plasma analysis showed these people had higher levels of proteins associated with activation of the endothelium and remodelling of vessel walls and lower levels of circulating immunoglobulin-related proteins.

“Our findings provide further insights into the clinical and biological complexity of MECFS,” said study senior author Richard Schloeffel, clinical senior lecturer in the Macquarie Medical School and an experienced general practitioner.

“A model like this, if clinically validated, has the potential to reduce diagnostic delays and improve patient quality of life, alleviating the prolonged suffering and economic burden faced by patients with MECFS,” Schloeffel said.

The study team identified seven biological variables strongly associated with MECFS, highlighting potential interactions between areas of dysfunction that contribute to the clinical manifestations of MECFS.

Starc hits half-century

Lyon reaches milestone as England struggles on day 2

ADELAIDE, Australia, Dec 18, (AP): Nathan Lyon took two wickets to surpass Glenn McGrath at No. 2 on Australia's all-time bowling list, and returning skipper Pat Cummins took his first wickets of the series as a relentless bowling attack kept England in trouble in the third Ashes test.

Australia resumed Day 2 at 326-8 and was out for 371 with Mitchell Starc posting a half-century before Jo-fra Archer finished off the tailenders to return 5-53, his fourth five-wicket haul in test cricket.

By stumps England had struggled to 213 for eight, still 158 behind.

England was coasting at 37-0 in reply until Cummins struck. Lyon then took two wickets in his first over as England lost three wickets in 15 balls.

It was a struggle the rest of the day for England, which needs to bat long to revive its chances in this five-test series on an Adelaide Oval pitch that traditionally favors batting.

The Australian bowlers and fielders spent most of the day in the field in temperatures hitting 40C (104F), but most of the heat was on England skip-

per Ben Stokes.

He spent around four hours at the crease, getting hit on the helmet and the body and appearing to struggle with cramping. His mood wasn't helped by more contentious outcomes from the Decision Review System technology.

But his defiant, unbeaten 45 from 151 balls and his unbroken 45-run stand with No. 10 Archer (30) at least helped England's innings go into another day.

Cummins was recovering from a back injury when he missed the wins in Perth and Brisbane which gave Australia a 2-0 series lead. In his first spell on return, he dismissed opener Zak Crawley (9) to trigger a top-order slide.

Lyon was introduced for the 10th over and the 38-year-old offspinner had immediate success with two wickets in four balls to remove Ollie Pope (3) and Ben Duckett (29) as England slumped to 42-3.

Pope's wicket allowed him to equal retired paceman McGrath's career haul of 563.

Lyon soon bowled Duckett with a drifting delivery that took out off-



Australia's Mitchell Starc bats during play on day two of the third Ashes cricket test between England and Australia in Adelaide, Australia. (AP)

stump. TV coverage showed McGrath in a stadium commentary booth pretending to throw a chair around in mock annoyance.

Only Shane Warne - with 708 wick-

ets in 145 tests from 1992-2007 - is above Lyon on the Australia's list of test wicket-takers.

"It's pretty humbling," Lyon said. "It is an extremely special moment."

It was a huge comeback for Lyon, who only bowled two overs in Perth and was omitted from the lineup that won the second test in Brisbane.

He bowled 22 overs for figures of 2-51. Cummins had 3-54 and Scott Boland returned 2-31.

England needs victory in Adelaide to have any chance of reclaiming the Ashes, and is relying on a big performance from Stokes.

He weathered all kinds of pressure after going to the crease at 71-4 when Cummins dismissed Joe Root. Stokes was hit on the side of the helmet by a 145 kph (90 mph) Starc bouncer. A thick inside edge onto his thigh had him hopping around on 41, too.

"Ben obviously scrapped hard," England's assistant coach Marcus Trescothick said. "It's almost like he focuses his best when ... it's really tricky and tough and it's conditions or situations that other people don't succeed in."

Cameron Green struck on his third delivery to end a 56-run fifth-wicket stand, getting the edge of Harry Brook's bat with a ball that moved

away.

Brook scored 45 before he was out in the 37th over, adding just one run after getting a reprieve when he was given out caught behind off Lyon's bowling but successfully reviewed the decision with the TV umpire.

There were more DRS dramas, on top of the contentious review on Wednesday that gave Australia's Alex Carey a reprieve on 72 on the way to his first Ashes century.

Jamie Smith was on 16 when he appeared to glove a catch to Usman Khawaja in the slips. On-field umpires referred the catch to the TV umpire, who ruled it didn't hit the glove or the bat before clipping Smith's helmet and deemed it was not out. The Australians were in disbelief, with one player saying: "Snicko needs to be sacked."

The next call went against England when Cummins got a thin edge from the toe of Smith's bat as it carried to Carey. The on-field umpire gave it out, a decision confirmed by the TV umpire despite a seemingly indecisive spike as the ball went past the bat.

Jackson drops 28 points as Grizzlies tame Wolves



Minnesota Timberwolves guard Donte Divincenzo (0) works toward the basket as Memphis Grizzlies forward Santi Aldama (7) defends during the first half of an NBA basketball game, Wednesday, Dec. 17, 2025, in Minneapolis. (AP)

Bulls roll past Cavaliers

MINNEAPOLIS, Dec 18, (AP): Jaren Jackson Jr. had 28 points and 12 rebounds to lead a balanced scoring attack and the Memphis Grizzlies beat the Minnesota Timberwolves 116-110.

Jock Landale added 20 points and 10 rebounds for the Grizzlies, who've won four of five and seven of nine. Jaylen Wells had 17 points, Cedric Coward 13, and Kentavious Caldwell-Pope 12. Santi Aldama grabbed 11 rebounds.

Julius Randle scored 21 points for the Timberwolves. Donte DiVincenzo had 19 points and 11 rebounds and Rudy Gobert added 16 points and 16 boards, but Minnesota lost for just the second time in nine games. Naz Reid also had 16 points.

Both teams played without their top scorer. Minnesota's Anthony Edwards missed his third straight game with a right foot injury, and Ja Morant was out for the Grizzlies with a left ankle sprain sustained in Monday's 121-103 win at the Clippers.

Memphis was also without Cam Spencer, who

missed the game for personal reasons. The guard had a career-high 27 points in the win in Los Angeles.

With the Grizzlies leading 106-103, Landale made his career-high fourth 3-pointer and, after Reid's miss for Minnesota, Jackson, who had a season-high 31 points Monday, added a floater with 47 seconds left to secure the win.

Down 76-67 midway through the third quarter, six Grizzlies scored in a 14-2 run, capped by 3-pointers from Landale, Caldwell-Pope and Jackson around Landale's follow shot for an 81-76 lead.

A three-point play by Reid got Minnesota within 96-94 with 7:10 to play, but another 3 by Landale with 3:22 left made it a five-point Memphis lead.

Memphis forward Brandon Clarke scored six points and had three rebounds in his first game since March 19 due to knee injuries, including arthroscopic surgery in September to relieve right knee synovitis.

In Chicago, Josh Giddey scored 23 points as part of his sixth triple-double this season, Coby White added 25 and the hot-shooting Chicago Bulls beat the Cleveland Cavaliers 127-111.

Giddey had 11 rebounds and 11 assists. He also matched a career high with five 3-pointers. Nikola

Vucevic added 20 points and nine rebounds in the opener of the home-and-home series.

The Bulls shot 56.2% overall and made 14 of 36 3-pointers on the way to a rather convincing win after losing eight of nine. They led by 15 in the third quarter and went on a run in the fourth to break the game back open on the way to a rare win over Cleveland. They had dropped 12 of 13 against the Cavaliers.

Donovan Mitchell led Cleveland with 32 points, but the Cavaliers fell to 15-13 with their seventh loss in 10 games, the latest troubling performance for a team considered a favorite in the Eastern Conference. They didn't sustain their 13th loss last season until March 19.

Jaylon Tyson scored 21. Darius Garland added 15 points and six assists.

The Bulls led 106-97 midway through the fourth when Vucevic nailed a 3 to spark an 11-3 run. He also had a layup and a tip-in during that stretch. Giddey broke for a layup, and White added two free throws to make it 117-100 with 4:59 remaining.

Bulls guard Ayo Dosunmu missed his third consecutive game because of a sprained right thumb. The Chicago product is fourth on the team in scoring at 15.2 points per game.

Sunderland decimated by loss of six

Salah and Mbeumo lead list of EPL players heading to AFCON

MANCHESTER, England, Dec 18, (AP): Mohamed Salah has gone for up to a month, costing Liverpool its all-time leading goal-scorer in the Premier League.

Manchester United has lost its most potent attacking force in Bryan Mbeumo, along with two more key figures.

They're nothing compared to Sunderland, a promoted team punching above its weight in England's top flight. It has been decimated by the loss of six players.

The Africa Cup of Nations is taking a toll on the Premier League, with some of its biggest stars heading off to the tournament situated right in the middle of the season.

It is unfortunate that AFCON can be cast as a nuisance for many clubs in Europe - though international soccer in general can be viewed like that when pitted against club ambitions of winning titles. But at least the World Cup, European Championship or Copa America are staged during the off-season of Europe's top leagues.

AFCON is traditionally held in January-February but has been brought forward this year - from Sunday to Jan. 18 - meaning less disruption for leagues in Spain, Germany and France, which have winter breaks of varying periods in December-January.

The Premier League, however, plays through the Christmas and New Year holidays, with the added strain of the FA Cup thrown into one of the busiest periods of the campaign.

The likes of Liverpool and United should have deep enough squads to cope with the loss of key players such as Salah and Mbeumo. But it could have a major impact on Sunderland, which is just two points off the top four after an outstanding start to the season.

Arthur Masuaku, Noah Sadiki, Bertrand Traore, Habib Diarra, Chemsidine Talbi and Reinildo Mandava are all taking part in the Africa Cup in Morocco. Sunderland is an outlier with so many going to the tournament but for Crystal Palace the loss of just one player - Ismaila Sarr - is potentially significant, given his importance to the team. Likewise, Brighton is losing key midfielder Carlos Baleba.

Burnley, second to bottom in the standings, is losing three players and so is Fulham.

Notably, at the top of the table, Arsenal has no players in the AFCON, likewise title-challenging Aston Villa and Chelsea, which could be telling over the next month.

Brentford: Dango Ouattara (Burkina Faso), Frank Onyeka (Nigeria)

Brighton: Carlos Baleba (Cameroon)

Burnley: Axel Tuanzebe (DR Congo), Hannibal Mejbri (Tunisia), Lyle Foster (South Africa)



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah applauds supporters after the English Premier League soccer match between Liverpool and Brighton and Hove Albion in Liverpool, England. (AP)

Crystal Palace: Ismaila Sarr (Senegal)

Everton: Idrissa Gana Gueye (Senegal), Iliman Ndiaye (Senegal)

Fulham: Calvin Bassey (Nigeria), Samuel Chukwueze (Nigeria), Alex Iwobi (Nigeria)

Liverpool: Mohamed Salah (Egypt)

Manchester City: Rayan Ait-Nouri (Algeria), Omar Marmoush (Egypt)

Manchester United: Bryan Mbeumo (Cameroon), Amad Diallo (Ivory Coast), Noussair Mazraoui (Morocco)

Nottingham Forest: Willy Boly (Ivory Coast), Ibrahim Sangare (Ivory Coast)

Sunderland: Arthur Masuaku (DR Congo), Noah Sadiki (DR Congo), Bertrand Traore (Burkina Faso), Habib Diarra (Senegal), Chemsidine Talbi (Morocco), Reinildo Mandava (Mozambique)

Tottenham Hotspur: Yves Bissouma (Mali), Pape Matar Sarr (Senegal)

West Ham United: Aaron Wan-Bissaka (DR Congo), El Hadji Malik Diouf (Senegal)

Wolverhampton Wanderers: Emmanuel Agbadou (Ivory Coast), Tawanda Chirewa (Zimbabwe)

On Saturday, first-place Arsenal travels to Everton, while City in second is at home against West Ham. Liverpool will look to win back-to-back league games for the first time since September when the defending champion heads to Tottenham.

Aston Villa and United meet on Sunday.

Hugo Ekitike has scored four goals in his last two league games. With Salah off to the AFCON, Liverpool's other forwards can establish themselves without the noise that has surrounded the Anfield icon in recent weeks when his future has been placed in doubt.

Former Ecuador defender killed in Guayaquil attack

QUITO, Ecuador, Dec 18, (AP): Ecuadorian police said on Wednesday that Mario Pineida, a 33-year-old Barcelona de Guayaquil defender and former national team player, was shot dead in an apparent attack as violence escalates in the Andean nation.

Another person who police did not identify was also killed in the incident, and a third was wounded.

Ecuador's Interior Ministry confirmed Pineida's death without providing details. Barcelona de Guayaquil said in a statement its fans are saddened by Pineida's death.

Pineida played eight games for Ecuador but was not involved in the team qualifying for the 2026 World Cup. His last game for Ecuador was at the 2021 Copa América, as a late substitute in a group-stage game against Brazil. He also went to the 2017 edition.

Pineida started his professional career at Independiente del Valle, where he played from 2010 to 2015. He then moved to the club of the coastal city of Guayaquil in 2016 and won two league titles there. The defender also had a brief spell at Brazil's Fluminense in 2022.

Ecuadorian media reported the incident took place in the region of Sa-

manes in the north end of Guayaquil, which lies 265 kilometers (165 miles) southwest of the capital Quito.

Ecuador is expected to have its most violent year on record with more than 9,000 homicides, according to the Ecuadorian Observatory of Organized Crime. That figure was at 7,063 violent deaths last year and a then-record 8,248 in 2023.

President Daniel Noboa has pledged to fight criminal organizations that have expanded their operations in Ecuadorian territory in connection with international drug cartels.

In November, a 16-year-old footballer of Independiente del Valle died from a stray bullet, also in Guayaquil. Two months earlier, Maicol Valencia and Leandro Yépez, both players of Exapromo Costa, and Jonathan González, of 22 de Junio died from gunshot wounds.



Mario Pineida

Botafogo fires Carlo Ancelotti's son

Suárez to play another season with Inter Miami

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla., Dec 18, (AP): Luis Suárez will play alongside Lionel Messi at Inter Miami for another season.

The Uruguayan striker, who will turn 39 in January, signed a contract to play the 2026 season with the reigning MLS champions, Inter Miami announced. Financial terms were not disclosed.

Suárez will join back-to-back MLS MVP Messi for the opening of the team's new stadium located near Miami International Airport. It will be Suárez's third season with Inter Miami.

The former Barcelona, Liverpool, Atlético Madrid and Ajax player scored 17 goals with 17 assists in 50 appearances across all competitions this past season but had a reduced role in the last four matches of the MLS Cup playoffs and did not play in the 3-1 victory against the Vancouver Whitecaps in the final.

The veteran joined Inter Miami ahead

of the 2024 season and helped the club clinch its first Supporters' Shield title. He led the team in goals with 25 across all competitions, and his 20 regular-season goals were second most among all players in MLS in 2024 (tied with Messi).

Inter Miami has seen a bit of roster shuffling since the end of the season, with veterans Jordi Alba and Sergio Busquets retiring. The club's roster for next season continued taking shape last week, when it announced the signing of defender Ian Fray to an extension that runs through the 2028-29 season.

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Brazilian club Botafogo fired the son of Brazil's national team coach Carlo Ancelotti just five months after he had signed as its manager in his first full-time coaching job.

The 36-year-old Davide Ancelotti was let go after Botafogo failed to de-

fend its Copa Libertadores and Brazilian league titles.

The Rio de Janeiro club finished the Brazilian league in sixth place, 16 points behind champions Flamengo, and was knocked out by Ecuador's Liga de Quito in the round of 16 of the latest Copa Libertadores.

Botafogo said in a statement the decision was made after meetings earlier in the day. It did not announce any successor for the job.

Davide Ancelotti joined the club after Botafogo owner John Textor fired Renato Paiva following the team's round-of-16 elimination at the Club World Cup in July.

□ □ □

Veteran defender Thiago Silva ended his stay at Fluminense and reportedly wants a move back to Europe to revive his hopes of playing for Brazil at the World Cup.



Sheikh Khaled Al-Badr Al-Sabah, President of the Kuwaiti and Asian Aquatics Federations

Sheikh Al-Badr congratulates Amir on second year of accession

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Sheikh Khaled Al-Badr Al-Sabah, President of the Kuwaiti and Asian Aquatics Federations, extended his heartfelt congratulations and best wishes—on his own behalf and on behalf of the Board of Directors and all those involved in aquatic sports—to His Highness the Amir of the State of

Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, on the second anniversary of His Highness assuming power. Al-Badr affirmed that the aquatic sports community in Kuwait renews its pledge of loyalty to His Highness, praying to Almighty God to safeguard Kuwait, its leadership and its people, and

to ensure that the country remains a land of safety and stability under His Highness’ wise leadership. He noted that His Highness’ ongoing directives emphasizing care for athletes have placed a great responsibility on those leading the sports sector to translate these noble visions into practical action

on the ground, particularly in addressing youth issues. He urged all stakeholders to intensify their efforts and dedication to achieve the shared goal of elevating and advancing Kuwait. Al-Badr expressed confidence that everyone will rise to the expectations of the political leadership, which has consistently

stressed the importance of fulfilling the ambitions and hopes of young people. He added that the Federation’s Board of Directors has always worked—and will continue to work—in a spirit of teamwork to develop aquatic sports and raise their level, under the generous patronage of His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait.

Bahrain proves trusted host

Fifth Arab Masters Tennis kicks off in Manama



Arab Tennis Federation and players pose for a group photo.

MANAMA, Dec 18: The fifth edition of the Arab Masters Tennis kicked off in Manama, Bahrain. Organized by the Arab Tennis Federation under the leadership of Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber, in collaboration with the Bahrain Tennis Federation, the tournament is sponsored by the National Bank of Kuwait, KGL, Kuwait Airways, and KDD. The event brings together top Arab players ranked in the ATP and ITF Junior circuits.

Arab Tennis Federation Secretary General Ali Al-Mutairi highlighted the significance of hosting the championship in Bahrain for the second

consecutive year at the Public Security Officers Club courts. He praised the tournament’s ongoing success, attributing it to the strong collaboration among all parties involved. Al-Mutairi also expressed gratitude to the sponsors and commended the Bahrain Tennis Federation, led by Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Khalifa, and the management of the Public Security Officers Club. He further thanked beIN Sports for its consistent media coverage. Walid Sami, Secretary General of the Arab and Egyptian Tennis Federations, noted that

Bahrain hosting the championship again reflects the Arab Tennis Federation’s confidence in the kingdom’s organizational capabilities. Fouad Al-Rowaie, Secretary General of the Bahrain Tennis Federation, welcomed all participants in both the Elite and junior categories. He emphasized the federation’s commitment to ensuring comfort and full support for the players, aiming to deliver a distinguished tournament that reflects the prestige of the Arab Elite Tennis Championship and contributes to the success of the accompanying Junior Championship.

Al-Marzouq sponsors elite equestrian races

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Mohammed Jassim Al-Marzouq, owner of Ajmal Stud, highlighted his deep passion for breeding purebred Arabian horses, particularly those with Egyptian bloodlines, renowned for their exceptional reputation worldwide.

Ajmal Stud will sponsor the eighth gathering of Arabian horse races featuring Egyptian-blooded horses at the Shooting and Equestrian Club next Monday, taking place at the club’s racetrack.

Al-Marzouq noted that enthusiasts of this equestrian tradition are committed to supporting and preserving this type of horse racing. The 2025-2026 sports season has seen substantial backing, including the organization of 25 trophies in club races, with total prizes exceeding 55,000 Kuwaiti dinars – encouraging participants to continue excelling in this remarkable sport.

He expressed gratitude to everyone who contributed to the initiative’s success, including the club management and the Higher Racing Authority for their approval. Al-Marzouq wished all participants the best and affirmed that Ajmal Stud will continue its annual support of horse racing. The previous seven gatherings at the Shooting Club have seen victories in races for purebred



Mohammed Jassim Al-Marzouq, owner of Ajmal Stud

Arabian horses with Egyptian bloodlines by horses such as Sahab, Shamikh Al-Asimi, Thamer Al-Shaqran, Lazzaz Al-Amiriya, Khitaf Al-Nawader, Shamikh Al-Asimi, and Kuhail Al-Ghanaim. These horses won cups sponsored by notable studs including Al-Raya Stud (Alaa Hamad Al-Roumi), Al-Muriyat Stud (Nawaf Jassim Al-Shihab), Al-Durra Stud (Faisal Hamoud Al-Ahmad), Al-Athbah Stud (Dr. Jarallah Ali Al-Mari), Al-Rehab Stud (Suleiman Mohammed Al-Qanai), Al-Shaya Stud (Abdul Latif Ahmed Al-Shaya), and Al-Adiyat Stud (Mahmoud Al-Zubaid).

Africa Cup of Nations highlights Morocco’s soccer power goals

Dress rehearsal for World Cup in 2030

RABAT, Morocco, Dec 18, (AP): Staging the Africa Cup of Nations from Sunday is another major step in Morocco’s road to becoming a global soccer power and a dry run as a co-host for the 2030 World Cup.

Three years after reaching the semifinals of the 2022 World Cup, the North African kingdom will host 24 teams from across the continent and welcome spectators to nine new or renovated stadiums in six cities.

It’s only the second time Morocco has hosted the biennial tournament, but it comes at a time when it regularly stages other African nations’ “home” games for World Cup qualifiers, and after it secured the rights to host five Under-17 Women’s World Cups in a row. It also hosted the Women’s Africa Cup of Nations in July. Officials have framed this Africa Cup as a high-visibility dress rehearsal for the World Cup in 2030, when Morocco will be one of the main co-hosts alongside Spain and Portugal. Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay will also host a game each. Morocco harbors high hopes of



In this file photo, Morocco’s Bilal El Khannous celebrates at the end of the match his team victory during the World Cup quarterfinal soccer match between Morocco and Portugal, at Al Thumama Stadium in Doha, Qatar. (AP)

staging the final in Hassan II Stadium, set to be the largest soccer arena in the world with a capacity of 115,000 after its planned completion in 2028. The new national stadium is arguably the highlight of one of the most aggressive infrastructure buildouts in African sporting history. Morocco has pursued rapid development in other sectors as well, with airports updated, high-speed rail lines expanded and major tourism investments to welcome visitors to cities like Marrakech and Tangier. The Royal Moroccan Football Federation has also invested in youth development and coaching to raise standards across the game, in-

cluding the lavish new Mohammed VI Football Complex near Rabat, where the senior team is based for the Africa Cup. Morocco’s most promising young stars are being provided with all of the facilities they need to thrive. It’s already paying off. Morocco’s run to the semifinals of the 2022 World Cup was the first by any African or Arab side. The country also won the Under-20 World Cup in October. “It’s not dreaming, we have legitimate ambitions,” Fouzi Lekjaa, the president of the Royal Moroccan Football Federation, told French sports paper L’Equipe in July. Lekjaa, who also oversees budget issues in the Moroccan prime minis-

ter’s cabinet, sees sport as a lever of economic development. King Mohammed VI said in October that the two categories of development were not at odds or in competition with each other. The tournament also comes as Morocco works to cement its role as a regional power. As part of the country’s “Atlantic Initiative,” it has worked to deepen ties with landlocked countries in West and Central Africa, expanding the footprint of its banking and telecom industries and providing those without a coastline access to newly built ports. Morocco has offered tourist visas to spectators attending the Africa Cup, even as it has moved in recent years to curb migration from some of the countries whose teams are participating. Visa requirements for people from Ivory Coast, for example, were reinstated last year for reasons including to curb irregular attempts at migration. Morocco has long been seen as an easier way to reach Europe - it shares a border with the EU through the Spanish territories of Ceuta and Melilla on the North African coast, and Spain’s Canary Islands are about 100 kilometers (60 miles) away. The kingdom has faced criticism from migrant rights groups for clearing encampments, moving migrants to remote areas far from Europe’s borders and other aggressive enforcement measures. The final on Jan. 18 in Rabat will be at Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium, which opened in September.

Top defense against top attack

Villarreal’s title dreams on the line against Barca

BARCELONA, Spain, Dec 18, (AP): Villarreal has quietly mounted a potential dark horse title campaign through most of the first half of La Liga. Now it has a chance to make it official when the “Yellow Submarine” hosts Barcelona on Sunday. The team coached by Marcelino García Toral is in third place at eight points behind leader Barcelona and four behind second-placed Real Madrid. But it has played two fewer games than the powerhouses so it could easily be in an even stronger position. Villarreal has disappointed in the Champions League and was eliminated from the Copa

del Rey by a lower-division side this week. But La Liga is a different story. Villarreal is on a six-game winning run and its only two losses have come at Madrid and Atletico Madrid. The game will pit the league’s top defense in Villarreal with 13 goals allowed against the league’s top attack. Barcelona has poured in 49 goals and more than made up for a sometimes shaky defense by outscoring its opponents. Barcelona will look to both quash thoughts of a challenge by Villarreal and close 2025 on a high note this weekend. An eighth consecutive league victory for

Lamine Yamal and company would also keep the pressure on a Madrid side which is struggling. Madrid hosts Sevilla on Saturday with coach Xabi Alonso in need of a convincing victory before they have the two-week winter break to ponder the team’s future. Madrid needed a last-minute save by goalkeeper Andriy Lunin to avoid a potential embarrassment against a third-tier club in the Copa del Rey on Wednesday. That came after a lackluster win at Alaves in the Spanish league and back-to-back losses at home to Manchester City in the Champions League and Celta Vigo in La Liga.

Al-Yarmouk takes on Al-Nasr

Kuwait Club eyes victory over Al-Shabab in volleyball league

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Kuwait Club looks to extend its winning streak in the volleyball league when it faces Al-Shabab today at 7:30 PM in the third round. Earlier, Al-Nasr will take on Al-Yarmouk at 5:30 PM. Both matches will be held at the Union Hall in the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Indoor Sports Complex. Kuwait Club leads the league with 5 points, while Al-Shabab sits sixth with 3 points.

Kuwait Club is expected to have a relatively straightforward match, aiming for another victory given the clear technical advantage over Al-Shabab, despite the latter’s recent impressive performances. In the first match, fifth-placed

Al-Yarmouk, also with 3 points, will look to secure its second consecutive win against last-placed Al-Nasr, who are still seeking their first points. Under the league format, teams first compete in a preliminary round in a single division. The top six teams then advance to the Premier Division, contested across three groups, with the title going to the team with the most wins. The team finishing first in the preliminary round gains an advantage as the top seed in the next stage. Teams ranked seventh to tenth, along with the youth team, compete in Division One, also divided into three sections.

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NEWS



PSG's Nuno Mendes, left, fights for the ball with Flamengo's Guillermo Varela during the FIFA Intercontinental Cup final soccer match between Flamengo and Paris Saint-Germain in Doha, Qatar. (AP)

Sports

Safonov the hero as PSG wins Intercontinental Cup

Flamengo falls short in shootout drama

DOHA, Qatar, Dec 18, (AP): Matvei Safonov made four straight penalty saves in a shootout to help Paris Saint-Germain beat Flamengo in the Intercontinental Cup final on and win a sixth trophy of 2025.

The Russian goalkeeper was thrown in the air by his teammates after his exploits in the shootout that was won 2-1 by PSG after a 1-1 draw after extra time.

It completed a trophy-laden 12 months for the French team, which had already won the Trophée des Champions, the French league, the French Cup, the Champions League and the UEFA Super Cup - also on penalties against Tottenham in August.

Khvicha Kvaratskhelia gave PSG the lead in the 38th minute before Marquinhos conceded a penalty converted by Jorginho in the 62nd minute for Flamengo, which was looking to win a second Intercontinental Cup title after 1981.

Flamengo captured the Copa Libertadores and the Brazilian championship titles in recent weeks.

It was a first global title for PSG.

Safonov, PSG's backup goalkeeper, hadn't played a single minute for the team until summer signing Lucas Chevalier sustained an ankle injury at the end of November.

Chevalier was fit enough to make the bench against Flamengo, but Safonov kept his place and ended up being the shootout hero after successive saves from Saul Niguez, Pedro, Leo Pereira and Luiz Araujo.

Of nine penalties taken, only three were scored - Flamengo's first by Samuel Lino and then Vitinha and Nuno Mendes for PSG.

Ousmane Dembele, crowned as the best men's player of 2025 at the FIFA awards on Tuesday, was one of two players to fail to score from the spot for PSG.

PSG's success maintained a run of victories for European teams in the final of the Intercontinental Cup, which was played for more than 40 years until 2004 before it was rebranded as the Club World Cup.

FIFA brought back the Intercontinental Cup last year after revamping the Club World Cup as a 32-team summer tournament which had its inaugural edition this year - with PSG losing in the final to Chelsea.

The last non-European team to win either the Club World Cup or the re-branded Intercontinental Cup was Corinthians in 2012.

Despite the loss, Flamengo still returns from the Intercontinental Cup with two trophies - awarded by FIFA for winning inter-confederational matches to get to the final.



PSG's Marquinhos lifts the trophy after winning the FIFA Intercontinental Cup final soccer match between Flamengo and Paris Saint-Germain in Doha, Qatar. (AP)

Flamengo beat Cruz Azul in what was classed by organizers as the "Derby of the Americas." Then the Brazilian champions beat Pyramids 2-0 in what was essentially a playoff to get to the final and won the "Challenger Cup."

The Intercontinental Cup contained the six teams that won the continental title in each of FIFA's confederations. PSG, as the Champions League winner in Europe, went directly to the final.

Each nat'l federation to receive \$1.5 million for preparation costs

World Cup winner to get \$50m from richer prize pool, half of Chelsea's payday at Club World Cup

MANCHESTER, England, Dec 18, (AP): The winner of the 2026 World Cup will receive \$50 million from a \$655 million prize pool, FIFA said in announcing record financial rewards for teams in a tournament with ticket prices that have sparked outcries.

The champion's figure is up from \$42 million won by Argentina in 2022 and \$38 million gained by France in 2018 but less than half of what Chelsea earned for winning the much less-hyped Club World Cup this year.

The total prize fund for the World Cup, staged in the United States, Canada and Mexico from June 11 to July 19, is up 48.9% from the \$440 million for the 2022 tournament in Qatar.

The 2026 total will be nearly six times the \$110 million in prize money for the 2023 Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand. FIFA president Gianni Infantino in 2023 set a target of equal prize money for men and women at their next World Cups - the next women's tournament is scheduled for 2027 in Brazil.

The Club World Cup, controversially expanded from seven teams to 32 and shoehorned into the soccer calendar last summer, had a total prize fund of \$1 billion. Chelsea won the tournament of up to \$125 million for a tournament that faced fierce resistance from players and leagues and drew sparse crowds for some matches.

FIFA has a different distribution



In this file photo, FIFA President Gianni Infantino, right, awards President Donald Trump with the FIFA Peace Prize during the draw for the 2026 soccer World Cup at the Kennedy Center in Washington. (AP)

model for the national team and club tournaments, with the disparity in prize money reflecting factors such as clubs with higher wage costs than national teams.

Beyond prize money, further funds are put toward development of soccer globally.

Infantino said the World Cup will be "groundbreaking in terms of its financial contribution to the global football community."

In Europe, the Champions League also has a much bigger top prize than the European Championship for national teams. The maximum winnings for last year's Euros were 28.5 million euros (\$33.5 million). Real Madrid picked up around \$154 million for winning the Champions League in the same year. Both competitions are run by European soccer's governing body UEFA.

FIFA approved the prize money

for the World Cup at a meeting of its council in Doha. In March it projected revenue for its current four-year cycle through 2026 at \$13 billion, up from \$7.5 billion for 2019-22.

Each of the 48 national federations at the expanded 2026 World Cup will receive \$1.5 million for preparation costs and \$9 million for participating in the group stage, the same as for the 2022 tournament.

Teams advancing to the new round of 32 get \$11 million and those reaching the round of 16 receive \$15 million. Nations reaching the quarterfinals are paid \$19 million, the fourth-place team \$27 million, the third-place team \$29 million and the final loser \$33 million.

Including participation fees, FIFA will distribute \$727 million to the 48 federations.

Each federation decides what to pay its players. The French sports daily L'Equipe reported France players were in line for a bonus of \$586,000 by their federation if they won the trophy in 2022. France was ultimately beaten by Argentina in the final.

The U.S. Soccer Federation's 2022 collective bargaining agreements with the unions for its men's and women's national teams call for prize money for men in 2026 and women in 2027 to be pooled together, and 80% of the money to be distributed among the players.

'It's a crazy number'

Odermatt wins foggy downhill to match Tomba's 50 in Cup races



Switzerland's Marco Odermatt speeds down the course during an alpine ski, men's World Cup downhill, in Val Gardena, Italy. (AP)

VAL GARDENA, Italy, Dec 18, (AP): Marco Odermatt found moments of clarity on a foggy day in the Italian Dolomites to race to victory in a World Cup downhill on Thursday.

A 50th career World Cup win for the Swiss generational talent - matching Italian slalom great Alberto Tomba on the all-time men's list - came 50 days before the opening ceremony of the Milan Cortina Olympics where Odermatt shapes to be a star.

"It's a crazy number," Odermatt said. "I had an incredible season start with a fifth victory already. But I'm not a guy who looks too far ahead."

Odermatt rode the bumps and rolls on a shortened version of the Saslong course to finish 0.15 seconds faster than Franco von Allmen, the reigning world champion. Italian veteran Dominik Paris was third, trailing by 0.19.

Sunshine lit the bottom half of the course where Odermatt, wearing bib No. 14, was decisively fast to win a race that started 75 minutes late because of fog shrouding the top of the course.

There was a short delay for fog minutes after No. 6 starter Von Allmen set the fastest time and touched 129 kph (80 mph).

Odermatt acknowledged seeing his Swiss teammate's time was "tough to beat. I started a little bit faster and those hundredths were exactly the difference."

There was a longer stoppage for fog once the top-ranked racer

ers completed their runs, then the race was interrupted again when No. 45 starter Fredrik Moeller had to be airlifted from the course. He crashed hard on his back while setting a fast time that matched Odermatt.

Minutes later, using the improving light, No. 47 starter Nils Alaphand threatened a shock by leading at halfway. He placed fifth, just 0.27 back.

Victory extended Odermatt's already big lead in the overall standings chasing a fifth straight title. He also won the season-opening downhill two weeks ago at Beaver Creek, Colorado.

A 1-2 result for Switzerland's top speed racers is routine in World Cup downhills. Odermatt twice won last season with Von Allmen as runner-up, including at Val Gardena, and Odermatt was second in each of Von Allmen's two World Cup wins.

Odermatt reached 50 World Cup wins at age 28 and tied Tomba for fourth on the all-time men's list.

Ingmar Stenmark, the Swedish slalom and giant slalom great from the 1970s and '80s, leads the men with 86 wins. The wins record was extended to 105 by Mikaela Shiffrin winning a slalom on Tuesday at Courchevel, France.

Thursday's race replaced a downhill canceled by the weather this month at Beaver Creek. Val Gardena stages a super-G on Friday then the classic Saslong race on Saturday over the full downhill distance.

Newly-hired coach is already facing calls to be fired

Celtic wobbles open door for Hearts in title race

GLASGOW, Dec 18, (AP): The newly hired coach is already facing calls to be fired. The chairman has resigned, citing "abuse and threats." Three directors are said to have been assaulted.

Celtic, the long-time king of Scottish soccer, is embroiled in chaos in what is shaping up to be the most turbulent campaign in Scotland in a generation.

It's not just Scotland's national team - heading to a men's World Cup for the first time since 1998 - that is upsetting the odds this season.

Get this: Neither Celtic nor fierce Glasgow rival Rangers will be top of the Scottish Premiership on Christmas Day and that hasn't happened since 1993.

That honor will go to Hearts, which holds a six-point lead and is taking advantage of one misstep after another by the so-called "Old Firm" powers to launch an unexpected tilt for the title. Celtic is in second place and Rangers three points further back in third place.

It is an unusual position for Celtic, which has been Scottish champion for 13 of the last 14 years but is imploding this season. Celtic might soon be on its third coach of the season.

Wilfried Nancy left Columbus Crew



Celtic manager Wilfried Nancy watches before the Europa League soccer match between Celtic and Roma in Glasgow, Scotland. (AP)

last month to replace Brendan Rodgers, who resigned as manager in October, but has lost his first four matches in charge - including the Scottish League Cup final on Sunday.

The last time Celtic lost four straight games was in 1978.

Nancy has also been mocked in some sections of the Scottish media for using a small tactics board on the sideline during matches.

The Frenchman was named coach of the year in Major League Soccer in 2024 but his final few months in the United

States were underwhelming, with the Crew finishing seventh in the regular season and winning just three of their last 12 games in all competitions.

Celtic fans chanted the name of Martin O'Neill, who won seven out of eight matches as interim manager before Nancy's arrival, during the 2-1 loss at Dundee United on Wednesday.

Celtic hosts Aberdeen on Sunday and a fifth defeat in a row will leave the club's board with a decision to make - as if it hasn't enough on its plate already.

Celtic's board has been in the headlines, not least after a coruscating assessment of Rodgers' tenure by major shareholder Dermot Desmond on the day the Northern Irishman quit.

Desmond described Rodgers' conduct as "divisive, misleading, and self-serving" and said he "contributed to a toxic atmosphere around the club." That highlighted the mess Celtic was in, and the resignation on Tuesday of chairman Peter Lawwell added to it. Lawwell, who has been in the post for three years after 18 years as chief executive, cited "abuse and threats" as the reason for his impending departure at the end of the month.