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His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

Congratulations pour in for HH the Amir on 2nd anniversary of assuming power

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Saturday received congratulatory letters from senior state leaders and officials marking the second anniversary of his assumption of office as Kuwait's 17th Amir on December 20, 2023. Each message conveyed distinct expressions of loyalty, appreciation and support for his role in guiding Kuwait's progress and strengthening its institutions.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah extended his warmest congratulations and heartfelt wishes for the Amir's continued health and success in leading Kuwait toward further prosperity, stability and sustainable development. He praised the achievements realized under the Amir's wise leadership and reaffirmed his full commitment to supporting comprehensive development and national progress plans that reflect the country's steady advancement.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah conveyed sincere congratulations and deep appreciation for the Amir's guidance in steering the government and state institutions. In his message, he expressed loyal sentiments and heartfelt hopes for Kuwait's continued security and welfare, emphasizing his dedication to implementing the Amir's vision for reform, good governance and national prosperity.

His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah sent a congratulatory letter expressing his profound respect and appreciation for the Amir's longstanding service to the nation. He wished His Highness continued health and success, and prayed that all efforts undertaken under the Amir's leadership would be crowned with success in serving Kuwait and its people.

His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah extended warm congratulations on this dear national

occasion, voicing his sincere thanks and deep appreciation for the Amir's wise leadership. He expressed heartfelt hopes for lasting security, stability and welfare for Kuwait, and reaffirmed his loyalty and readiness to support the Amir in advancing national interests.

His Highness Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah sent a congratulatory letter to His Highness the Amir. In reply, His Highness the Amir voiced sincere thanks and appreciation to him for such good sentiments and heartfelt hopes, and wishing perpetual security and welfare for the dear nation.

Chairman of the Kuwait National Guard Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah addressed a congratulatory message highlighting the Amir's prominent role in consolidating security and stability.

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Opinion

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

Dear government, debt is burden enough for a debtor!

KUWAIT has long been known as a nation that is compassionate towards its people and others alike.

Even in the darkest times, the country never abandoned its citizens, and ensured they received essential services to live with dignity. After liberation, Kuwait continued to help its people by alleviating hardships.

During the seven months of occupation and the Iraqi invasion, the national spirit prevailed. Solidarity among citizens reached its highest expression, serving as a lasting model for free nations. No individual placed personal interest above the nation's well-being, with numerous documented stories illustrating this selflessness.

Compassion remains a core part of Kuwaiti culture, both at home and abroad. For instance, although the issue of stateless residents (Bedoun) is still unresolved, they are granted certain basic rights and are employed in government and private sector jobs. Many non-Bedoun individuals facing crises have also received compassionate support, helping them rise from the depths of despair and return to Kuwait with dignity.

Therefore, despite the tragedy Kuwait endured during the invasion and occupation, the country did not abandon its charitable efforts worldwide. There are many notable examples, including the late Kuwaiti scholar Abdulrahman Al-Sumait, the late Abdullah Al-Nouri, and others who have left a lasting impact on Kuwait's global humanitarian legacy. These figures serve as models for extending a helping hand to the oppressed within Kuwait, ensuring that social balance is not disrupted.

Kuwait's rich history provides valuable experience in overcoming current crises. Many issues can be resolved through simple, practical measures, so that citizens do not feel abandoned, particularly those facing challenges that threaten family cohesion and disrupt family life. With this in mind, I direct my remarks to the government, which currently holds both executive and legislative authority.

Kuwait is currently facing a serious crisis that allows no room for slogans or unrealistic justifications. The problem I am referring to is the crisis of insolvent and struggling debtors, numbering over 200,000 citizens. These individuals are now trapped in a suffocating situation, particularly after

the implementation of arrest warrants for insolvent debtors. This measure has closed all doors for them, leaving many unable to leave their homes for fear of arrest or losing their means of livelihood.

Meanwhile, the state possesses ample funds that could be used to assist these citizens, alleviate their suffering, and ensure a basic level of dignity for their families.

Thanks to God, sovereign wealth continues to grow, and oil reserves remain abundant. Allocating 1.7 billion dinars to resolve the issue of insolvent debtors would not be a huge burden on the state.

It is true that the problem of loans is not unique to Kuwait, but many countries have adopted humane solutions because the goal is not merely debt collection but, above all, consideration of people's circumstances.

Accordingly, the legal principle states that a lender who was negligent in granting a loan bears greater responsibility than a borrower who sought assistance but lacked the capacity to repay. In many cases, the lender was fully aware of the borrower's financial limitations, yet still approved the loan and secured commitments that he knew the borrower would be unable to fulfill.

I have spoken about this issue on more than one occasion, emphasizing that fundamental constitutional rights prohibit depriving citizens of their liberty through administrative measures or solely due to an inability to repay a debt. The essence of any constitution lies in the preservation of dignity, freedom, and equality, as well as supporting individuals in meeting their basic needs. Imprisoning a debtor to force them to repay a loan is unacceptable, as it ultimately results in loss for both the debtor and the lender.

There are many avenues of compassion available if the government truly seeks to resolve this socio-economic crisis, particularly at a time when

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Woman, two children perish in Mubarak Al-Kabeer house fire

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: A Kuwaiti woman and two children died, while five others survived, in a fire that broke out early yesterday morning in a house in Mubarak Al-Kabeer.

In a press statement, the Kuwait Fire Force announced that crews from the

Qurain and Biraq fire stations rushed immediately to the location after receiving information about the house on fire, evacuated the house and extinguished the blaze.

Five individuals were rescued and taken to the nearest hospital for treatment. However, three others died, and

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NewsWatch

KUWAIT CITY: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Friday applauded the US decision to repeal sanctions on Syria that had been imposed according to Caesar Act and lauded role of the US President Donald Trump in this respect.

The ministry in a statement said this crucial step will back up Syria's economic recovery, efforts of the Syrian Government for rebuilding and development and boost its international economic cooperation and partnerships.

It renewed the State of Kuwait's support for Syria regarding its efforts to consolidate the country's security, stability and safeguard its territories and sovereignty. (KUNA)

Al-Soor Street shut until Dec 22 for repairs

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: The General Traffic Department announced the full closure of Al-Soor Street, from the intersection near Sheikh Jaber Cultural Center with Arabian Gulf Street to Sheraton Roundabout, from Friday, December 19, 2025, to Sunday, December 22, 2025, for es-

sential road maintenance, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Meanwhile, the General Traffic Department also announced the closure of the right shoulder, right lane, and middle lane on King Faisal Road (Route 50), from the intersection with Ibrahim Al-Muzain Street to the Fifth

Ring Road intersection towards Kuwait City.

The department stated that the closure will begin Friday evening and remain in effect until maintenance work is completed. Traffic will continue to flow on the left lane and the fast middle lane.

Kazakhstan showcases growth, investment prospects



Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to Kuwait, Yerzhan Yelekeyev, addresses the media.

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: The Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Kuwait held a press conference titled "Kazakhstan: A Land of Opportunities," attended by a representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The event highlighted Kazakhstan's current development priorities, economic and investment potential, and tourism opportunities, aiming to enhance communication with Kuwaiti media.

Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to Kuwait, Yerzhan Yelekeyev, provided a comprehensive overview of the country's economic and investment prospects, as well as its tourism assets, emphasizing that

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8 Alghanim Industries launches Barq EV charging network



NBK Wealth named the 9 'Best Private Bank in Kuwait' 2025 by The Banker

10 Gulf Bank signs partnership agreement with GUST to sponsor Engineering Club activities

Prayer Timings			
Fajr	05:12	Asr	14:35
Sunrise ..	06:37	Maghrib ..	16:53
Zohr	11:45	Isha	18:16

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:
By Day: Rather cold with light to moderate northwesterly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of 06-26 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear with a chance for fog forming at night.

Weather			
By Night: Cold and partly cloudy with light variable wind, with speeds of 08-22 km/h with a chance for fog forming over some areas.			
Station	Max Exp	Min Rec	
Kuwait City	16	09	

Kuwait Airport	17	08
Abdaly	18	06
Bubyan	15	05
Jahra	18	09
Failaka Island	15	07
Salmiyah	16	12
Salmiyah	18	04

Mubarak Port makes headway, deal soon

PM, top Kuwaiti, Chinese officials to attend ceremony

By Mohammad Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: The Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port project is moving closer to completion, marking a significant milestone that coincides with Kuwait's celebration of the second anniversary of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad's assumption of power.

Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan announced that the executive contract for the project's final phase is scheduled to be signed next week.

The signing ceremony will take place under the patronage and in the presence of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah, with the expected attendance of senior officials from the Chinese state-owned company affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Transport.

The announcement was made in a press release issued by the Ministry of Public Works following the 39th meeting of the Ministerial Committee for Monitoring the Implementation of Major Projects, chaired by Minister Al-Mashaan.

She stressed that national achievements



Dr. Al-Mashaan

within the framework of comprehensive development are progressing rapidly and steadily toward a promising future, guided by the wisdom of the political leadership.

Meanwhile, Assistant Foreign Minister for

Asian Affairs and Rapporteur of the ministerial committee, Ambassador Samih Hayat, stated that the meeting focused on reviewing reports and updates submitted by government agencies on the implementation of major development projects, particularly the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port project.

At the same time, government reports indicated a notable concentration of financial allocations within the 2025/2026 development plan, as three projects - South Sabah Al-Ahmad Residential City, the Kuwait International Airport expansion (Terminal 2), and Al-Mutlaa City - account for around 60 percent of the total estimated budget.

The cost of these three projects take up approximately KD 755.105 million from the total KD 1.258 billion allocated for 141 development projects.

The breakdown of these major allocations is as follows:

- South Sabah Al-Ahmad Residential City: KD 361.986 million
- Kuwait Airport expansion (Terminal 2): KD 212.800 million
- Al-Mutlaa City: KD 180.319 million

In total, the South Sabah Al-Ahmad, Al-Mutlaa, and airport expansion projects account for 60 percent of the financial allocations in the current development plan.

Pope Tawadros II congratulates Amir on 2nd anniversary of rule

By Bassam Al-Qassab
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, extended his heartfelt congratulations to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad, on the occasion of the second anniversary of his accession to power.

He expressed profound appreciation for the humanitarian and national role played by the State of Kuwait under His Highness's leadership, as well as for the deeply rooted values that define Kuwaiti society.

In a special statement, His Holiness explained that over the past two years, Kuwait has set a unique model in promoting stability, strengthening citizenship, justice, and coexistence. These values reflect the continuation of Kuwait's honorable history in supporting dialogue, peace, and humanitarian initiatives at both the Arab and international levels.

His Holiness also expressed his deep appreciation for His Highness the Amir, commending his wisdom, composure, and unwavering dedication to serving his country with sincerity and responsibility.

He highlighted that His Highness's sincere efforts in the fields of security, development, and reform reflect a leadership marked by integrity, with the nation's interests consistently placed above all else.

His Holiness said, "His Highness the Amir" contributions to strengthening the stability of the state and boosting national unity have been evident for many years, and their impact has grown since he assumed power, making Kuwait a model of wise governance and quiet, productive leadership."

He highlighted his personal and emotional connection to Kuwait, recalling that his historic visit in 2017 was a defining moment that left an indelible impression, adding that he experienced firsthand the warmth of Kuwaiti society, the generosity of its people, and their sincerity.

His Holiness affirmed that his admi-



Pope Tawadros II

ration for Kuwait had existed for many years, but that visit deepened his affection and strengthened his appreciation for the country, its leadership, and its people, while reinforcing the strong fraternal bonds between Egypt and Kuwait.

Reflecting on his second visit to Kuwait, which was eight years after the first, His Holiness said, "Kuwait is in my heart, and when circumstances allow, I will return, especially since this country has inspired in me a deep love. I am also honored to shake hands with His Highness the Amir, a man who loves his country and is committed to the progress and well-being of Kuwait and its people."

His Holiness highlighted the support enjoyed by the Egyptian community in Kuwait and the special care and respect extended to the Coptic Church, which reflects Kuwait's open spirit and its concern for all people without discrimination.

In conclusion, His Holiness Pope Tawadros prayed for His Highness the Amir, asking God to grant him health and long life, bless his efforts for the prosperity and welfare of Kuwait, protect its people, and perpetuate peace, harmony, and blessings upon the nation.

Eager to strengthen cooperation: Rasheed

UK, Kuwait ties historic, time-tested: new ambassador

By Fares Ghaleb
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: The British Ambassador to Kuwait, Qudsi Rasheed, has officially commenced his duties following the presentation of his credentials to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, marking the start of his diplomatic mission in the country.

In a video posted on the embassy's social media accounts, he expressed his honor in presenting his credentials to His Highness the Amir and his pride in assuming the role of the United Kingdom's Ambassador to Kuwait.

Ambassador Rasheed highlighted the UK's deep appreciation for the historical ties with Kuwait, and the long-standing friendship between the two nations.

He also commended Kuwait's rich culture, long-standing traditions, and its renowned spirit of generosity.

Ambassador Rasheed expressed his admiration for the Kuwaiti people and their leadership, as well as for the energy and



Rasheed

ambition of the Kuwaiti youth, which he said reflect a promising vision for the future.

He highlighted that the United Kingdom places great importance on its relations with Kuwait.

Ambassador Rasheed revealed his eagerness to work toward strengthening bilateral cooperation and building a shared future that benefits both countries and their peoples.

The British ambassador concluded his statement by expressing his gratitude to Kuwait for the warm welcome and generous hospitality, and shared his anticipation for the next phase of their partnership and the achievements it will bring.



KUNA photo
Kuwaiti Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah and her team at the gathering.

Support for Palestinians 'unwavering' Arab duty

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

AMMAN, Dec 20, (KUNA): The visiting Kuwaiti Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah, recently said support for the brothers in Palestine is an unwavering Arab duty and not only a humanitarian commitment.

The minister, speaking at the 45th session of the Council of Arab Social Ministers, stressed the necessity of boosting joint Arab efforts to set up more effective social and humanitarian programs to alleviate the impact of the crisis afflicting the Palestinian people.

At the local level, the State of Kuwait has dedicated ample concern for boosting social protection, supporting most in-need segments and maintaining social solidarity, minister Al-Huwailah said during the session.

Moreover, Kuwait has evolved social tasks, human development through updating legislations, supporting empowerment programs, developing social services and pursuing digital transformation in line with objectives of the sustainable development, she said.

The Kuwaiti experience at this level has expanded to provide humanitarian and relief aid to the brothers in the State of Palestine, the Republic of Yemen and several countries in need of help, the minister said, alluding in particular to the relief missions by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society.

Furthermore, the authorities have revamped legislations concerning people of special needs, seeking to shift from care to

empowerment, she said.

The elderly in Kuwait have been supported to use government digital platforms and get integrated into the social and community organizations, Al-Huwailah added.

The state aid has covered the most vulnerable segments in the form of rent payments and launching profitable businesses, she pointed out.

The 45th session of the Council of Arab Ministers for Social Affairs began Thursday in the Jordanian capital, Amman.

In her address, Jordan's Minister of Social Development Wafaa Bani Mustafa said the escalating challenges facing the Palestinian people, and the resulting severe social and humanitarian conditions, require comprehensive and multi-level social and humanitarian interventions.

She stressed the need to enhance coordination and integrated action within the framework of joint Arab cooperation to alleviate the suffering of the most vulnerable groups, particularly children, women, older persons, and persons with disabilities, while preserving human dignity and strengthening resilience and recovery in the State of Palestine.

She added that the difficult humanitarian and social conditions in several Arab countries affected by crises, conflicts, and worsening economic and humanitarian circumstances call for intensified joint efforts and closer cooperation with regional and international partners.

Such cooperation, she said, would ensure more effective social responses, reinforce social stability, and support recovery and development efforts.

Training in 'AI and Cloud' computing for gov't staff

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: The Civil Service Commission (CSC) announced the launch of a new training program designed to equip government employees with skills in Artificial Intelligence and cloud computing technologies.

This initiative is a collaboration with the Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT) and Google Cloud and is part of Kuwait's National Initiative for Digital Skills Development.

In a letter sent to the Ministry of Information, CSC explained that the program aims to enhance the digital capabilities of public sector employees and enable them to keep pace with rapid advancements in artificial intelligence and modern technology.

The training program, titled "Cloud Digital Leader," is designed to equip administrative and technical staff with essential knowledge of artificial intelligence technologies, data management, and cloud applications.

The program will help in benefiting from these technologies to enhance institutional performance and improve the quality of government services.

The training focuses on understanding artificial intelligence concepts and their practical applications in the government work environment, as well as introducing the fundamentals of cloud computing and its role in supporting digital transformation.

CSC stated that the program is free and accredited, with registration available through the digital training portal of CAIT, and it includes a free license to apply for the international exam to qualify for an accredited professional certificate.

It affirmed that this initiative represents a significant step in preparing national digital talent and supporting Kuwait's digital transformation plans.

Delay in plots allocation to public bodies queried

By Inaas Awad
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: Municipal Council member Munira Al-Amir has submitted queries to Kuwait Municipality's executive branch regarding compliance with the Municipal Council's decision issued on October 16, 2023, concerning the timeframe for allocating plots to public institutions for the establishment of development projects.

Al-Amir explained that state-owned properties are a key pillar in planning and development. However, several sites in previous periods were disrupted due to delays in handing over plots, which hindered the progress of development plans.

She stressed the importance of adhering to clear timeframes as an indicator of government entities' readiness and their ability to transform undeveloped land into operational projects.

Al-Amir requested detailed information from Kuwait Municipality, including an inventory of government lands for which allocation decisions were issued after October 16, 2023, plots handed over to beneficiaries in the past two years, and plots that were not delivered within the two-year deadline.

She also asked for the reasons behind any delays and the measures taken by Kuwait Municipality to address the issue.

Meanwhile, the Public Relations Department of Kuwait Municipality announced the launch of a field campaign by safety teams in all six governorates to ensure adherence to demolition regulations for all types of buildings, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

KD19m allocated for Surra facelift

By Mohammad Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: A contract worth KD 19 million has been signed for the maintenance and development of Al-Surra, as part of the ministry's comprehensive plan to upgrade infrastructure in various regions.

According to informed sources at the Ministry of Public Works, the ministry is preparing designs for development projects in multiple residential and administrative areas, including Shuwaikh Residential, Faiha, Nuza, and Abdullah Al-Salem Suburb, ahead of issuing tenders for their implementation.

Designs are also underway for infrastructure projects in all areas of Jahra Governor-

ate, as well as several areas in Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate, and other regions.

The development works include the construction and maintenance of sewage and rainwater drainage networks, street lighting, road repairs, and other infrastructure enhancements aimed at improving service efficiency and the quality of life for citizens and residents.

The sources emphasized that these projects are part of the ministry's strategic plan to ensure sustainable infrastructure development in line with urban expansion and population growth, with all works executed according to strict technical standards and monitored in the field to maintain quality and minimize traffic disruptions.

Other Voices

The role of Edison, Newton

By Ahmad alsarraf

ALTHOUGH Thomas Edison (1847–1931) obtained 2,332 patents worldwide, one of his biggest contributions to modern society that is often overlooked is the employee selection tests he developed.

Edison was not only a prolific inventor but also a businessman responsible for an industrial empire. This cultivated a more profit-driven, commercially minded approach, leading him to move away from the selflessness often associated with inventors.

In his quest to find exceptional employees capable of making effective business decisions, Edison created a questionnaire to evaluate the knowledge and character of job candidates. He began using this questionnaire in the late 19th century. Over time, the method and questions evolved to include scenarios not directly related to the job, for example, offering a candidate soup and asking whether they would add spices or salt before tasting it. Those who did were disqualified, as it indicated a tendency to act on assumptions.

In 1921, Edison introduced a knowledge test consisting of 140 diverse questions, tailored to each specific job position. All applicants were asked questions outside their area of expertise, such as - Where do we get plums? In which cities are hats and shoes made? Name three powerful poisons - and so on. A score of 90 percent was required to pass, and typically only a few succeeded. Among the 718 who took the initial test, Edison's son, an MIT student, failed, as did physicist Albert Einstein, who forgot the speed of sound.

Edison's strategy of questioning candidates to evaluate both character and skills continues to influence hiring practices even today after more than a century.

The greatest scientific contributions in human history are attributed to the British scientist Isaac Newton (1643–1727), who died nearly 300 years ago. Newton's groundbreaking discoveries illuminated human understanding and



alsarraf

paved the way for countless scientists. His theories, including the laws of motion and gravity, established the mathematical foundation for describing the movement of objects in classical physics.

Newton's laws are still taught and applied in fields such as engineering, mechanics, and astronomy, and likely will be for centuries to come. He formulated the law of universal gravitation, which unified the motion of objects on Earth with the motion of celestial bodies. He proved that the same force causing an apple to fall also governs the orbits of the Moon and planets, providing a unified view of the physical universe. His fundamental mathematical contributions to calculus were also of crucial importance.

Twenty-five years ago, Newton discovered that white light is composed of the colors of the spectrum through an experiment with a glass prism. His theory linked color directly to the nature of light itself. He also created the first practical reflecting telescope, paving the way for major advancements in astronomical observation.

Newton's famous book "Principia", published in 1687, was a major breakthrough for science and is regarded as one of the most important books in human history. His uniqueness lay in his rare ability to combine profound mathematical insight, physical imagination, and a completely new approach to understanding the universe and organizing scientific knowledge.

Newton achieved greatness in multiple fields. He presented a new vision of the universe as a stage governed by simple, precise laws expressible in equations, ending the reliance on supernatural or mythical explanations for the motion of celestial bodies. Very few scientists in history have been able to formulate a comprehensive theory of such breadth and accuracy, one that revolutionized physics, engineering, and astronomy.

His work had a profound impact on the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. Many historians and scientists believe that no other individual has contributed as much to the development of modern science as Newton, making him virtually unique in the history of human knowledge.

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Confab focuses on future of digital age crime

It is worth noting that the conference was organized by the Public Authority for Youth in cooperation with local and international institutions.

Bachelor homes power cut

Fashionista jailed 7 years for debauchery

Fishing hook hurts man: An unidentified man

Family outing ruined as toddler drowns in pool

Two Kuwaitis acquitted of perjury charges; no proof

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Capital Governorate photo
The Governor of the Capital, Sheikh Abdullah Salem Al-Ali, and a number of attendees at the closing ceremony of the national initiative ‘Water for Tomorrow.’

Capital Governor honors ‘Water for Tomorrow’ winners

Capital Governor Sheikh Abdullah Salem Al Ali honored the winners of the “Water for Tomorrow” competition for high school students, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The event, which was organized by the Capital Governorate, was held to recognize the creativity and outstanding efforts of the students in raising awareness about the importance of sustainability and water conservation.

The competition reflected the younger generation’s awareness of their role in preserving natural resources and supporting national initiatives in this field.

Kuwait University professor wins Best Presentation Award at POMS Africa ’25



KU photo
Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Shalfan (center) of Kuwait University receives the Best Presentation Award at the 2025 POMS Africa Conference, held at the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: The College of Business Administration in Kuwait University congratulated Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Shalfan, Assistant Professor in the Department of Information Systems and Operations Management at Kuwait University, for winning the Best Presentation Award at the 2025 Society for Production and Operations Management (POMS) Africa Conference, held from November 26-28, 2025.

According to a press release issued by Kuwait University, Dr. Al-Shalfan presented a research paper titled “Reputation, Pressure, and Unpaid Work: Understanding Unpaid Work on Digital Work Platforms.”

His presentation explored the operational structures of digital work platforms, coordination mechanisms between parties, the pressures resulting from reputation systems, and the resulting unpaid work, highlighting its impact on operational efficiency and performance sustainability.

POMS Africa 2025 is an international forum focused on the development of operations and production management. The conference, held at the Future Africa Campus at the University of Pretoria in South Africa, brings together leading researchers and experts to discuss the latest practices and challenges in Africa, while promoting scientific research and the exchange of expertise in management and sustainable innovation.

Social Affairs tightens volunteer work rules

Licensing mandatory through ‘Bader’

By Fares Ghaleb
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: The acting Assistant Undersecretary for Social Welfare and Development and Director General of Social Development at the Ministry of Social Affairs, Iman Al-Enezi, affirmed that organizing any volunteer activity or initiative in the State of Kuwait requires official registration and prior licensing through the “Bader” platform, which is the authorized channel for organizing and accrediting volunteer teams and initiatives.

In a press statement, Al-Enezi explained that this directive is in implementation of the instructions of the Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah, and in line with the ministry’s strategy to regulate volunteer work and enhance its societal impact. This ensures that volunteer activities are conducted within a clear and regulated legal framework, protects the rights of volunteers, and guarantees that charitable and humanitarian efforts effectively benefit the community.

The regulation of volunteer work is based on Ministerial Resolution No. 112/2025 concerning the executive regulations of Law No. 49/2024 on the establishment of the Unified Legal System for Volunteer Work in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The system aims to strengthen principles of governance and transparency, regulate volunteer practices, and protect all stakeholders.

Al-Enezi stressed that the legislation governing volunteer work, particularly Article 3



Iman-Al-Enezi, acting Assistant Undersecretary for Social Welfare and Development and Director General of Social Development at the Ministry of Social Affairs.

of the regulations, clearly addresses the issue of irregular practices, adding that forming volunteer teams, organizing campaigns, or engaging in volunteer work is only permitted after completing the approved licensing procedures.

She affirmed that any activity conducted outside this framework constitutes a clear violation of the law and its regulations.

Al-Enezi explained that the “Bader” platform is the official and approved channel for registering and accrediting volunteer teams and initiatives. Through this platform, activities are organized and monitored according to applicable legal controls, thereby enhancing public trust and directing volunteer efforts toward achieving a sustainable developmental impact that benefits Kuwaiti society.

Al-Enezi concluded by urging all those responsible for volunteer teams and initiatives to promptly register through the “Bader” platform and complete the licensing requirements in compliance with the law. This ensures they avoid any legal accountability while contributing to the establishment of a culture of organized and responsible volunteer work in the State of Kuwait.

Overpass linking 5th Ring Road to Damascus Street now open

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: The Public Authority for Roads and Transportation (PART), in coordination with the General Traffic Department, announced the opening of an overpass above the tunnel for traffic coming from the Fifth Ring Road northbound toward Damas-

cus Street, between Surra and Qurtuba, reports Al-Anba daily.

The opening ceremony was attended by the acting Director General of PART Eng. Khaled Dhawi Al-Osaimi, and the supervisory team early morning on Tuesday, December 16.

Upholding identity and heritage

Kuwait joins global community in honoring Arabic Language Day

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20, (KUNA): The State of Kuwait joined the world Thursday to celebrate the Arabic Language Day, spoken by nearly 450 million people and considered one of the five most widely spoken languages worldwide. This years celebration is held under the theme “Innovative Pathways for the Arabic Language: Policies and Practices for More Inclusive Linguistic Future”, aiming to highlight the role of education, media and technology in making Arabic more accessible and dynamic, while promoting linguistic equity.

Through this theme, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) emphasizes the importance of innovation and inclusiveness in shaping a more dynamic future for the Arabic language.

UNESCO hopes this approach will contribute to the scientific and cultural renaissance witnessed globally regarding Arabic language, in addition to developing Arabic grammatical and linguistic rules.

The world celebrates the Arabic Language Day on December 18 every year. It was in 1973 when the UN General Assembly adopted Arabic as the sixth official language of the organization, aiming to promote cultural and linguistic diversity among the peoples of the world.

On this occasion, local, regional and international institutions concerned with the Arabic language organize various activities aimed at teaching Arabic, encouraging reading and instilling a love of the language in younger generations.

Kuwait has made significant contributions through its government and private institutions to support the Arabic language, especially as Kuwait Constitution stipulates Arabic as the official language of the country. Kuwait has also been keen to support scientific and academic institutions in fulfilling their role in teaching, disseminating and strengthening the presence of Arabic over the past seven decades.

Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Kuwait University, Dr. Abdulmohsen Al-Tabtabae, told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) this day was a moment to celebrate a language that accompanies people in every moment of their lives.

Describing the language as the “the tongue of our identity, the soul of our culture, and the vessel of our daily thought,” Al-Tabtabae said this day is not the beginning or end of interest in the language, but rather a reminder that Arabic is present every day, alive in speech, writing and collective consciousness, and an opportunity to renew pride and affection for it.

He explained that the purpose of this day is to stir a sense of responsibility toward the language and motivate institutions and individuals to highlight the beauty of Arabic and its expressive power. It is also an opportunity to reaffirm its cultural and intellectual role, he added, stressing that Arabic was not seasonal but deeply rooted in all

aspects of life.

Regarding Kuwait University’s efforts to support Arabic, Dr. Al-Tabtabae said the university organizes annual cultural events and student initiatives, emphasizing its keenness on further promoting the Arabic language throughout the year by teaching, encouraging research in Arabic and hosting activities that strengthen its presence among students.

He added that the university supports this occasion by organizing lectures, seminars, training workshops, book exhibitions and competitions in oratory, writing and literary creativity, ensuring these efforts remain part of daily practice rather than a once-a-year event.

He called on academics to keep the Arabic language vibrant in students lives by offering engaging academic content, training them in writing and communication skills, encouraging research and innovation in Arabic, and supporting activities that demonstrate the languages beauty and ease of use.

Meanwhile, Dr. Abdullah Al-Harbi, Professor of Arabic Language at the Arab Open University in Kuwait, expressed pride in the Arabic language, describing it as a language that built a great civilization and contributed to advancement of science and letters, noting its enduring ability to give, renew and inspire.

He stated that Arabic Language Day was an important occasion to remind individuals, officials and students that Arabic was not merely a tool of communication, but a symbol of identity and belonging, as well as a rich cultural and civilizational asset.

On Kuwait’s contributions to supporting Arabic, he noted that they include scientific seminars and annual student competitions, adding that media and public activities remain the most influential, as they bring the language closer to people, showcase its aesthetics in modern ways and reach a wide audience.

He pointed out that Kuwait has a distinguished record in supporting Arabic language, contributing to the dissemination of knowledge and strengthening the languages status regionally and globally, in addition to its major role in translation efforts and the preservation of Arabic heritage.

This includes, he added, publishing valuable encyclopedias and books such as Taj Al-Arous Dictionary, as well as supporting linguistic projects in academic and cultural institutions, and pioneering language-technology initiatives. Dr. Al-Harbi called for celebrating this day at schools and universities, organizing cultural events, and launching awareness campaigns.



Dr. Al-Tabtabae

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Continued from Page 1

Dear government,

declining consumer spending is affecting the national economy and undermining commercial activity.

It was once said that the one who finds no helping hand is like someone crying out from afar, unheard because everyone is preoccupied with their own concerns.

Hence, it is the government’s responsibility to extend a helping hand to its citizens so that economic and commercial cycles can function properly and injustice is not inflicted upon them.

It must also be emphasized that no country in the world imprisons individuals for issuing a bounced cheque, nor do civil disputes justify travel bans or imprisonment for small borrowers.

State institutions should not be used as tools for debt collection on behalf of creditors who knowingly accepted financial risk. The burden of debt alone is sufficient enough for the debtor.

Kuwait inflation

The miscellaneous goods and services group recorded the highest rise at 6.1 percent.

Excluding the food and beverages category, Kuwait’s overall inflation rate increased by 1.6 percent year-on-year in September and 0.2 percent month-on-month.

In other news, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced on Thursday the conclusion of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) regular staff visit to Kuwait, saying the IMF experts expected that Kuwait’s real GDP would expand by 2.6 percent in 2025.

In a press release, the CBK said the IMF, in its concluding statement, also predicted that the GDP will “hit 3.8 percent in 2026, driven by the unwinding of OPEC+ production cuts and robust non-oil growth, then will stabilize just above 2.0 percent over the medium term.”

Non-oil GDP will expand by 2.7 percent in 2025 and 3.0 percent in 2026 on the back of a surge in investment, then will grow at its potential rate of 2.7 percent over the medium term, the CBK said quoting the IMF statement.

It stated that an incipient recovery is underway, with real GDP expanding by 1.7 percent (y-o-y) in 2025Q2, driven by robust non-oil growth of 3.1 percent (y-o-y).

It went to say that so far this year, headline consumer price index (CPI) inflation has continued to moderate, reaching 2.4 percent (y-o-y) in August.

The statement indicated that “headline CPI inflation will moderate to 2.3 percent in 2025 and 2.1 percent in 2026, then will stabilize just below 2.0 percent over the medium term.”

The mission referred that the current account surplus declined to 29.1 percent of GDP in 2024, due to lower oil exports.

However, higher non-oil exports and investment income helped cushion the impact. Official reserve assets stood at 8.3 months of projected imports at end-2024.

The external position was substantially weaker than the level implied by medium-term fundamentals and desirable policies in 2025, reflecting an excessive reliance on oil exports and inadequate public saving of oil revenue. External buffers are ample, the central bank pointed out.

The mission affirmed the improvement of Kuwait’s public budget despite the decline in oil revenues.

“The fiscal deficit of the budgetary central government narrowed to 2.2 percent of GDP in FY2024/25,” it showed.

“This reflected rationalization of the public sector wage bill from retirements, moderation of energy subsidies alongside international fuel prices, and mobilization of non-oil revenue by raising government service fees. At the general government level, the fiscal surplus widened to 27.7 percent of GDP in FY2024/25, also reflecting higher estimated sovereign wealth fund (SWF) investment income.”

The government resumed sovereign debt issuance after an almost decade long hiatus, issuing 4.6 percent of GDP in domestic bonds and 7.1 percent of GDP in external bonds as of end-October, it stated.

The fiscal deficit of the budgetary central government will increase to 8.7 percent of GDP about KD 4.2 billion (USD 13.7 billion) in FY2025/26 and 9.4 percent of GDP, estimated at KD 4.6 billion (about USD 15 billion) in FY2026/27, given higher spending and lower oil revenue, then will widen to 11.5 percent of GDP, KD 7.0 billion (about USD 22.8 billion), by FY2031/32, according to the statement.

Experts of the mission stressed that the stance of monetary policy remains appropriate, noting that “since September 2024, the CBK has cut its policy rate by 75 basis points.”

The policy rate remains above neutral, and is in line with achieving inflation control and non-oil output stabilization objectives, it elaborated. Under the baseline, monetary normalization should continue as inflation further moderates and the non-oil output gap closes.

The mission’s final communique also pointed to credit growth to the non-financial private sector, supporting non-oil growth. Nonperforming loans remain low and well provisioned for.

Furthermore, the mission said the economy is highly exposed to a variety of global risks through its oil dependence, in particular to commodity price volatility, a global growth slowdown or acceleration, and shifts in global financial conditions.

The materialization of these risks would be transmitted to Kuwait mainly via their impacts on oil prices and OPEC+ production. The main domestic risk is changes in the speed of

structural reforms and associated infrastructure project implementation to diversify the economy, it mentioned.

On economic reforms, the communique said Kuwait seeks to move from economy depends on oil to a dynamic and varied economy under their Vision 2035.

As the momentum of these reforms rose, starting with the enactment of the financing and liquidity law, they emphasized the need for a comprehensive package of fiscal and structural reforms.

“Fiscal reforms should reinforce long-term fiscal sustainability while incentivizing Kuwaitis to pursue jobs in the private sector. In parallel, structural reforms should unify the labor market and improve the business environment,” it said.

The experts pointed to the need to gradually eliminate the large energy subsidies by repricing electricity, water, and fuel bills for consumers so that they reach the average price levels in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

Regarding increasing non-oil revenue, they underlined the necessity that “the 15 percent CIT (Corporate Income Tax) should be extended to all domestic companies, while the GCC-wide excise tax and 5 percent VAT (Value Added Tax) should be introduced.”

Finally, they underlined that a “structural reform package should be implemented to unify the labor market and improve the business environment.”

Congratulations

He expressed his warmest congratulations and sincere appreciation, along with heartfelt hopes for the Amir’s continued health and success, and pledged ongoing support of the National Guard in backing the state and safeguarding its stability under the Amir’s leadership.

In his reply letters, His Highness the Amir expressed sincere thanks and appreciation to each of the officials for their kind words, loyal sentiments and earnest prayers for Kuwait’s progress. He affirmed that this anniversary renews collective determination to work together to achieve comprehensive development and sustainable growth, grounded in unity, cooperation, security and stability for the nation and its people.

Marking the occasion, the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah extended congratulations to His Highness the Amir on behalf of the Ministry of Interior and its personnel, lauding his role in advancing reforms, strengthening national identity, reinforcing the rule of law, and combating corruption. Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah renewed his pledge of loyalty to His Highness, affirming his unwavering commitment to defending the country and preserving its security, stability, and safety, while extending warm congratulations and wishes of continued prosperity for Kuwait under the Amir’s leadership.

Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya described the second anniversary of the Amir’s assumption of power as a “bright national beacon,” reflecting Kuwait’s steady and confident march towards greater security, development, and prosperity. He noted that this period has been marked by an all-encompassing national movement and sustained achievements at both the domestic and international levels, highlighting the Amir’s insightfulness and dedication to consolidating the state’s pillars and enhancing Kuwait’s regional and international standing.

Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait voiced pride in the Amir’s wise leadership in safeguarding the nation’s sovereignty and stability and strengthening its national unity. He recalled with appreciation the significant achievements and milestones realized during His Highness’s reign, which reflect his commitment to upholding the law, preserving constitutional gains, and striving for a brighter future that secures progress and prosperity for Kuwait and its people.

Minister of Education Dr. Jalal Al-Tabtabaei and all ministry staff offered their warmest congratulations and best wishes to His Highness the Amir on this dear occasion, emphasizing his special attention to education as the cornerstone of human development and the most enduring investment in the nation’s future. He affirmed the ministry’s full commitment to implementing the Amir’s vision by further developing the educational system and improving its outcomes, noting that this anniversary is a reminder of a wise leadership devoted to safeguarding state fundamentals and strengthening the rule of law.

Minister of Information and Culture and State Minister for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi said the second anniversary of the Amir’s assumption of power is a cherished national occasion that evokes deep feelings of loyalty and allegiance among the Kuwaiti people. He praised His Highness’s clear vision centered on serving the nation and its citizens, supporting comprehensive development, enhancing government performance, and empowering youth to be active partners in building Kuwait’s present and future.

Minister of Public Works Dr. Nora Al-Mashaan also congratulated His Highness the Amir, describing the anniversary as a source of pride for the Kuwaiti people for its profound symbolism and in recognition of the Amir’s prominent role in reinforcing the foundations of stability and progress at all levels. She lauded him as a model of wisdom, firm leadership, and balanced judgment, noting that Kuwait has witnessed numerous accomplishments over the past two years under his guidance.

Health Minister Dr. Ahmad Al-

Awadhi congratulated His Highness the Amir and hailed the achievements realized under his leadership, describing this period as a bright chapter in Kuwait’s modern history. He said the country has seen tangible progress across various sectors, reflecting the Amir’s wisdom and sound vision in steering the national development process.

Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, Acting Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic and Investment Affairs Dr. Sabeeh Al-Mukhaizeem expressed his warmest congratulations to His Highness, commending Kuwait’s accomplishments under his guidance. He wished the Amir continued health and success in steering Kuwait towards greater prosperity, stability, and sustainable development.

Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Dr. Mohammad Al-Wasmi extended his highest congratulations to His Highness the Amir, praising his distinguished record of service and his achievements in advancing the nation across various fields. He prayed for continued success for His Highness and for sustained development and prosperity for Kuwait throughout his reign.

Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Abdulatif Al-Meshari also addressed his congratulations to His Highness the Amir, renewing his allegiance and wishing him continued health and success in guiding the homeland towards greater progress. He underlined that Kuwait, under the Amir’s leadership, is moving steadily to boost reforms, strengthen stability, enhance public services, and uphold the sovereignty of law and national unity.

President of the Supreme Judicial Council and Head of the Court of Cassation Dr. Adel Boursali sent a congratulatory letter expressing the judiciary’s warmest congratulations and best wishes to His Highness the Amir, and commending the achievements realized under his wise leadership. Public Prosecutor Counselor Saad Al-Safran also praised the Amir’s role in upholding justice, consolidating the rule of law, and maintaining national stability, extending heartfelt congratulations on behalf of the Public Prosecution and wishing His Highness continued success in leading Kuwait toward further prosperity and development.

Woman, two

their bodies were transferred to the Forensic Medicine Department.

Investigation teams have begun work to determine the cause and circumstances of the fire.

‘No mercy’

Commerce and Industry to tighten control over real estate brokerage activities. The current phase involves strict enforcement of the law without leniency.

He revealed that the complaints included five that were reconsidered for further study, and six for which actions were already taken, ranging from rejection to escalating penalties under Ministerial Decree No. 164/2020 concerning the brokerage profession.

Haider affirmed that these penalties start with a warning, followed by a written undertaking, then withdrawal of the broker’s license for repeated violations or complaints, and finally, suspension of the license and removal from the broker registry.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is a modern, stable, and ambitious nation at the heart of Eurasia, open to partnership, investment, and tourism.

He explained that diplomatic relations between the two countries began in 1993 with the establishment of their first diplomatic missions. Despite the geographical distance, both countries have consistently supported each other on various political and economic matters.

The ambassador stressed that food security is a strategic priority for Kuwait and the GCC, and Kazakhstan is a key partner in this sector.

He proposed establishing a trade hub in Kuwait to consolidate Kazakh products and facilitate their re-export to regional markets.

Ambassador Yelekeyev also discussed sovereign investment opportunities, stressing that Kazakhstan offers a medium-risk, high-return investment environment compared to traditional markets.

He emphasized that investments in sectors such as agriculture and food security serve dual purposes, which are food security and profitability.

Referring to his recent meeting with His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad, Ambassador Yelekeyev explained that meeting, which lasted for 15 to 20 minutes, was cordial. The discussion focused on investment opportunities and the role of the Kuwait Investment Authority.

His Highness the Amir had underscored the importance of food security and encouraged the pursuit of viable investment initiatives.

His Highness the Amir had also expressed confidence in the ambassador’s economic expertise, and said, “Consider Kuwait your second home”, which the ambassador described as deeply moving.

On the tourism sector, Ambassador Yelekeyev highlighted the growing interest from the Gulf region in Kazakhstan, noting that in 2024, around 47,000 tourists from GCC countries visited the country, including 4,000 from Kuwait.

He emphasized that the number of Kuwaiti tourists increased fivefold between 2022 and 2024.

MoE okays job description cards under new structure

Al-Tabtabaei directs implementation

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: Minister of Education Jalal Al-Tabtabaei issued a ministerial decree to approve the job description cards for the Ministry of Education’s new organizational structure, based on Ministerial Decree No. 265/2025, issued on July 23, 2025, regarding amendments to the ministry’s organizational structure, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The decision stressed that all relevant directorates must incorporate

the approved organizational units into the Civil Service Commission’s (CSC) integrated systems



Al-Tabtabaei

officially available on the ministry’s website, following approval by CSC, allowing relevant entities

and complete the procedures for assigning all employees to their respective positions.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education announced that all approved job description cards are now

and employees to access and review them within the approved organizational frameworks.

It affirmed that Minister Al-Tabtabaei has tasked the Human Resources Department with taking the necessary steps to assign positions according to the new organizational structure and to ensure alignment between job titles and the defined tasks and responsibilities of each organizational unit.

The ministry stressed that the adoption of the job description cards is part of its ongoing efforts to develop the administrative structure and enhance the efficiency of institutional performance.

Celebrating Kuwait-Peru cultural ties

Peruvian Embassy hosts launch of Sheikha Al-Anoud’s new poetry book

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: The Embassy of the Republic of Peru hosted the launch of Sheikha Dr. Al-Anoud Al-Sabah’s new poetry collection, titled “A Road Without End”, published in both Arabic and Spanish.

The event was part of the celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries. It was held in the presence of several Latin American ambassadors, a representative from Kuwait’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the poet’s father, Sheikh Duaij Al-Sabah, her sister, and a number of guests who are interested in cultural and literary affairs.

In his speech, Peruvian Ambassador Carlos Enrique Tomás Jiménez Gil highlighted that the publication represents a significant contribution to cultural exchange between Peru and Kuwait, reflecting literature’s role as a bridge for rapprochement between peoples.

The event also included a panel discussion between Sheikha Dr. Al-Anoud and the Peruvian Consul in Kuwait, Pedro Jiménez, for exploring the themes and literary perspectives of the book. The collection includes 52 poems written between 2014 and 2025, covering themes from personal experiences and reflections on life to travel and nature, all influenced by Latin American literature.

The edition also features illustrations from the author’s personal notebooks, adding a visual dimension that complements the poetry.

Sheikha Dr. Al-Anoud explained



Peruvian Embassy photo
Sheikha Dr. Al-Anoud Al-Sabah unveils her new bilingual poetry collection, A Road Without End, at the Peruvian Embassy, celebrating 50 years of Kuwait-Peru diplomatic relations.

that the idea for the book originated from her early passion for the Spanish language, which began at the age of seventeen. This passion was further cultivated during her master’s studies in Spanish and Latin American literature at the University of Barcelona, as well as through academic courses at various institutions, including the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Also, her extensive travels to Latin America and Spain were a primary source of inspiration, during which she carefully recorded her experiences and impressions in special notebooks.

She revealed that the title of the collection resulted from a collaboration with the poet Pedro, developed

through joint literary experiences and projects.

Sheikha Dr. Al-Anoud emphasized that the work represents the culmination of a personal and literary journey spanning several years, reflecting the transformations she has experienced over the past decade.

Meanwhile, Deputy Ambassador of Peru, Pedro Javier Sedano, affirmed that the collection, “A Road Without End,” offers a profound human poetic experience, weaving memories and emotions that balance joy and nostalgia, and exploring the journey of self-discovery through multiple paths encompassing hope, love, friendship, happiness, and even oblivion.

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The start date for the following Tenders will be on Sunday, 21 Dec 2025 and closing date will be on Tuesday, 20 Jan 2026 @ 09:00 A.M.

S. NO.	TENDER NO.	MATERIALS CLOSING DATE	FEES (KD)	CLOSING DATE
1	046487	Light Poles and Fittings	25	20/1/2026
2	046488	Instrument Cables	35	20/1/2026
3	046489	S/F Marine, SBM	15	20/1/2026
4	046516	Insert Sleeves	50	20/1/2026
5	046508	Fire & Gas Detectors and Signaling Units	100	20/1/2026
6	046511	Flowmeters	15	20/1/2026
7	046513	Valves (Ball, Check and Gate)	5	20/1/2026
8	046517	Valves (Ball, Check and Gate)	15	20/1/2026
9	046518	Pipe Fittings	15	20/1/2026
10	046519	S/F Lufkin Pumps	5	20/1/2026



US President Donald Trump finishes his remarks at the Rocky Mount Events Center in Rocky Mount, N.C., Friday, Dec. 19, 2025. (AP)

Rocky Mount residents feel pinch of high prices, bills

Economic woes shadow Trump’s NC visit

ROCKY MOUNT, N.C., Dec 20, (AP): She had worked 22 days straight in her job as a technician at an engine plant to save up, and now Daijah Bryant could finally do what she was putting off: Christmas shopping. Bryant pushed her cart out of a Walmart in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, and loaded her sedan’s backseat with bags of gifts. While they would soon bring joy to her friends and family, it was difficult for the 26-year-old to feel good about the purchases. “Having to pay bills, if you happen to pay rent and try to do Christmas all at the same time, it is very, very hard,” she said with exasperation. Ahead of President Donald Trump’s Friday evening visit to Rocky Mount, some residents said they were feeling an economic squeeze that seems hard to escape. The uneasy feeling spans political affiliation in the town, which is split between two largely rural and somewhat impoverished counties, although some were more hopeful than others that there are signs of reprieve on the horizon. It was Trump’s second event this month aimed at championing his economic policies ahead of a consequential midterm election next year, both held in presidential battleground states. Similar to Trump’s earlier stop in Pennsylvania, Rocky Mount sits in a U.S. House district that has been historically competitive. But earlier this year, the Republican-controlled legislature redrew the boundaries for the eastern North Carolina district to favor their party as part of Trump’s push to have GOP-led states gerrymander their congressional districts to help his party retain its House majority for the last half of his term. Rocky Mount may be in a politically advantageous location, but the hardships its residents report mirror the tightening financial strains many Americans say they are feeling, with high prices for groceries, housing and utilities among their top concerns. Polls show persistently high prices have put Americans in a grumpy mood about the state of the economy, which a large majority say is performing poorly. Trump has insisted the economy is trending upward and the country will

see some relief in the new year and beyond. In some cases, he has dismissed affordability concerns and encouraged Americans to decrease their consumption. In his Friday night speech, he leaned into a persistent refrain: Democratic President Joe Biden alone was to blame for any economic distress Americans may be feeling, but things are getting better under his watch. He boasted that steps he’s taken—including generating billions of dollars of revenue through tariffs, pressing pharmaceutical giants to slash the prices of some medicines, and a so-called \$1776 “warrior dividend” for U.S. troops that is being paid through a provision in a tax cut extensions and expansions bill he signed into law in July—will have real impact on American’s pocketbooks. **Inherited** “I inherited the mess. I got the prices down and they are going down still further,” Trump said. He added, “Over the past 11 months, we have brought more positive change to Washington than any administration in the history of our country.” Crimson smokestacks tower over parts of downtown Rocky Mount, reminding the town’s roughly 54,000 residents of its roots as a once-booming tobacco market. Through the heart of downtown, graffiti-covered trains still lug along on the railroad tracks that made Rocky Mount a bustling locomotive hotspot in the last century. Those days seem long gone for some residents who have watched the town change over the decades. Rocky Mount has adapted by tapping into other industries such as manufacturing and biopharmaceuticals, but it’s also had to endure its fair share of challenges. Most recently, financial troubles in the city’s government have meant higher utility prices for residents. The city has been investing to try to revitalize its downtown, but progress has been slow. Long stretches of empty storefronts that once contained restaurants, furniture shops and drug stores line the streets. Most stores were closed Thursday morning, and not much foot traffic roamed the area. That’s left Lucy Slep, who co-owns

The Miner’s Emporium jewelry store with her husband, waiting for Trump’s promised “Golden Age of America.” The jewelry store has been in downtown Rocky Mount for nearly four decades, just about as long as the 64-year-old said she has lived in the area. But the deterioration of downtown Rocky Mount has spanned at least a decade, and Slep said she’s still hoping it will come back to life. “Every downtown in every little town is beautiful,” she said. “But without the businesses, it’s dead.” Slep’s store hasn’t escaped the challenges other Rocky Mount small businesses have endured. Instead of buying, more people have recently been selling their jewelry to the shop, Slep said. Customers have been scarce. About a week out from Christmas, the store—with handmade molded walls and ceilings resembling cave walls—sat empty aside from the rows of glass cases containing jewelry. It’s been hard, Slep said, but she and her husband are trying to make it through. “This year is just not a jewelry Christmas, for whatever reason,” she said. Slep is already looking ahead to next year for better times. She is confident that Trump’s economic policies—including upcoming tax cuts—will make a marked difference in people’s cost of living. In her eyes, the financial strains people are feeling are residual effects from the Biden administration that eventually will fade. Optimism about what’s to come under Trump’s economy might also depend on whether residents feel their economic conditions have changed drastically in the past year. Shiva Mraim, an engineer in Rocky Mount, said his family’s situation has not “become worse nor better.” He’s been encouraged by seeing lower gas prices. Bryant, the engine technician, feels a bit more disillusioned. She didn’t vote in the last election because she didn’t think either party could enact changes that would improve her life. Nearly a year into the Trump administration, Bryant is still waiting to see whether the president will deliver. “I can’t really say ... that change is coming,” she said. “I don’t think anything is going to change.”


Trump suspends green card lottery program that let Brown University, MIT shootings suspect into US

WASHINGTON, Dec 20, (AP): US President Donald Trump suspended the green card lottery program on Thursday that allowed the suspect in the Brown University and MIT shootings to come to the United States. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said in a post on the social platform X that, at Trump’s direction, she is ordering the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services to pause the program. “This heinous individual should never have been allowed in our country,” she said of the suspect, Portuguese national Claudio Neves Valente. Neves Valente, 48, is suspected in the shootings at Brown University that killed two students and wounded nine others, and the killing of an MIT professor. He was found dead Thursday evening from a self-inflicted gunshot wound, officials said. Neves Valente had studied at Brown on a student visa beginning in 2000, according to an affidavit from a Providence police detective. In 2017, he was issued a diversity immigrant visa and months later obtained legal permanent residence status, according to the af-

fidavit. It was not immediately clear where he was between taking a leave of absence from the school in 2001 and getting the visa in 2017. The diversity visa program makes up to 50,000 green cards available each year by lottery to people from countries that are little represented in the U.S., many of them in Africa. The lottery was created by Congress, and the move is almost certain to invite legal challenges. Kica Matos, National Immigration Law Center president, said in response to the decision that the administration is “shamelessly exploiting a national tragedy as cover to eliminate legal pathways for immigrants from non-white majority countries.” “This is a moment for elected officials and the American public to speak up on behalf of the tens of thousands of people from majority Black and brown countries, who will now be left in limbo as the legality of this move undoubtedly works its way through the courts,” she said in a statement. Nearly 20 million people applied for the 2025 visa lottery, with more than 131,000 selected when

including spouses with the winners. After winning, they must undergo vetting to win admission to the United States. Portuguese citizens won only 38 slots. Lottery winners are invited to apply for a green card. They are interviewed at consulates and subject to the same requirements and vetting as other green-card applicants. Trump has long opposed the diversity visa lottery. Noem’s announcement is the latest example of using tragedy to advance immigration policy goals. After an Afghan man was identified as the gunman in a fatal attack on National Guard members in November, Trump’s administration imposed sweeping rules against immigration from Afghanistan and other countries. While pursuing mass deportation, Trump has sought to limit or eliminate avenues to legal immigration. He has not been deterred if they are enshrined in law, like the diversity visa lottery, or the Constitution, as with a right to citizenship for anyone born on U.S. soil. The Supreme Court recently agreed to hear his challenge to birthright citizenship.

Europe



Salih

Salih named UN refugee chief: The United Nations General Assembly on Thursday elected former Iraqi President **Barham Salih** as the new UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Salih, born in 1960, served as president of Iraq from 2018 to 2022. He previously held posts including deputy prime minister of Iraq and prime minister of the Kurdistan regional government. He will take office on Jan. 1, 2026, to succeed Filippo Grandi as head of the Geneva-headquartered UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), with a five-year term. Grandi assumed office as UN High Commissioner for Refugees in January 2016. His 10-year term will end on Dec. 31, 2025. In a statement issued following his election, Salih said that at a time of record displacement and severe pressure on humanitarian resources, delivering on UNHCR’s mandate requires a renewed focus on impact, accountability, and efficiency. He said that UNHCR will build on the important reforms undertaken in recent years to strengthen operational effectiveness and value for money. (Xinhua)

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France facing budget uncertainty: A joint committee of French lawmakers from the National Assembly and the Senate failed on Friday to reach a compromise on the country’s 2026 budget, said the National Assembly on its social media X, highlighting deep divisions that mean France will not have a state budget in place by year end. “In accordance with the deadlines set by the Constitution and organic laws, the parliament will therefore not be able to vote on a budget for France before the end of the year,” French Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu announced on his X account. Lecornu said he would convene key political leaders to consult on the steps needed to protect the French people and identify conditions for a possible solution. He said earlier that the government would not invoke Article 49.3 of the Constitution, which allows legislation to be adopted without a parliamentary vote, as done in previous years. Lawmakers are now expected to pass a stopgap measure rolling over the 2025 budget into next year, before resuming work on a final 2026 budget in the new year. On Tuesday, parliament narrowly approved the social security budget bill, a key component of the government’s broader spending plans. France, the Eurozone’s second-largest economy, is under pressure to rein in its deficit and soaring debt, but efforts have been hampered by a political deadlock. Lecornu’s minority government has little room for maneuver in France’s fractious parliament, where budget battles have already ousted his two predecessors over cost-cutting measures in a little over one year. (Xinhua)

Kremlin’s military goals in Ukraine will be met: Putin

MOSCOW, Dec 20, (AP): President Vladimir Putin emphasized Friday that Moscow’s troops were advancing across the battlefield in Ukraine and voiced confidence the Kremlin would achieve its goals militarily if Kyiv doesn’t agree to Russia’s conditions in peace talks. Speaking at his tightly orchestrated annual news conference that lasted about 4 1/2 hours, Putin declared that Russian forces have “fully seized strategic initiative” and would make more gains by year’s end. In the early days of the conflict in 2022, Ukraine’s forces thwarted an attempt by Russia’s larger, better-equipped army, to capture the capital of Kyiv. But the fighting soon settled into grinding battles, and Moscow’s troops have made slow and steady progress over the years. Putin frequently touts this progress—even though it’s not the lightning advance many expected. “Our troops are advancing all across the line of contact, faster in some areas or slower in some others, but the enemy is retreating in all sectors,” Putin said at the live news conference, which is combined with a nationwide call-in show that offers Russians across the country the opportunity to ask questions of their leader. Putin, 73, has ruled the country for 25

years and uses the event to cement his power and air his views on domestic and global affairs during a broadcast that mixes criticism of the West with promises of more social payments. Although he is sometimes asked about his personal life, he gives scant details. This year, the news conference took place against the backdrop of a peace plan in Ukraine put forward by U.S. President Donald Trump. Despite the extensive diplomatic push, Washington’s efforts have run into sharply conflicting demands from Moscow and Kyiv. While the event has previously focused heavily on domestic questions—and has offered Putin a chance to expound on topics from the price of eggs to water cuts—Ukraine dominated it this year. Since it is highly choreographed, that could reflect the Kremlin’s desire to assuage the public after nearly four years of fighting. Putin praised Trump’s peace efforts and reaffirmed that Moscow was ready for a peaceful settlement that would address the “root causes” of the conflict, a reference to the Kremlin’s tough conditions for a deal. He said he has agreed to make “certain compromises” and “uneasy decisions” at the Alaska summit with Trump in August but didn’t elaborate.



Russian President Vladimir Putin listens to a journalist’s question during his annual news conference and call-in show at Gostinny Dvor, in Moscow, on Friday, Dec. 19, 2025. (AP)



Pope Leo XIV greets faithful as he arrives in St. Peter’s Square on the occasion of the last Jubilee audience, at the Vatican, Saturday, Dec. 20, 2025. (AP)

Pope taps Moth as new Westminster archbishop

ROME, Dec 20, (AP): Pope Leo XIV named a new archbishop of Westminster on Friday in another high-profile appointment that signals a generational shift in the English-speaking Catholic hierarchy. Leo tapped Bishop Richard Moth, 67, to replace the retiring Cardinal Vincent Nichols, 80, as the London-based archbishop of the largest British diocese in terms of Catholic population and priests. The appointment came a day after Leo named Bishop Ronald Hicks, 58, to succeed the retiring Cardinal Timothy Dolan as archbishop of New York, one of the biggest and most important archdioceses in the U.S. Dolan and Nichols had been two of the heavyweight English-speaking cardinals for more than a decade, both of them appointed to their high-profile jobs in 2009 by Pope Benedict XVI. Nichols would become more closely associated with Pope Francis, who made him a cardinal in 2014 and kept him on the job well beyond the normal retirement age for bishops of 75. Dolan, who is affiliated more with the conservative wing of the church, had submitted his resignation to Francis in February, as required by church law when he turned 75. Leo accepted it 10 months later, soon after Dolan finalized the creation of a \$300 million settlement fund for victims of clergy sexual abuse. Leo has indicated that he wants

to respect the 75-year-old retirement age norm more vigorously going forward, as a way to reinvigorate the church leadership, though he allowed that there could still be two-year extensions granted for cardinals. Leo made the comments last month in a speech to Italian bishops, saying the church has to “constantly renew itself” to confront today’s challenges. “We must prevent inertia from slowing necessary change, even for good intentions,” he said on Nov. 25. Moth was born in Chingola, Zambia, and has served as bishop of Arundel and Brighton since 2015. Prior to that, he was bishop to the British armed forces. He takes over at Westminster Cathedral, which is considered the mother church for Catholics in England and Wales. In another appointment announced Friday, Leo accepted the resignation of Bishop Gerald Barbarito, 75, as bishop of Palm Beach, Florida, and named as his replacement the Rev. Manuel de Jesús Rodríguez, currently pastor of the Our Lady of Sorrows church in the Queens borough of New York City. With 17,000 congregants in the mostly Hispanic neighborhood of Corona, the church is the largest parish in the Diocese of Brooklyn, which also oversees churches in Queens. It was particularly hard-hit during COVID-19, losing more than 100 of its parishioners.

Lone attacker’s planned violence ends in death after fall

Knife-wielding attacker kills 3 in Taipei

TAIPEI, Dec 20, (AP): Taiwanese authorities said Saturday the suspect who killed three people and injured 11 others in knife and smoke-grenade attacks in the island’s capital had planned the assaults and set fires at other locations earlier in the day.

The suspect, identified as a 27-year-old man named Chang Wen, fell to his death from a department store building in Taipei after the attack on Friday.

The assaults shocked Taiwan, where violent crime is rare, prompting authorities to step up security at crowded spots and big events, including its New Year’s Eve celebration that usually attracts many locals and tourists to an outdoor countdown.

Chang Jung-Hsin, director-general of the National Police Agency, said the suspect began a series of attacks at 3:40 p.m. local time, first setting fire to roads and causing damage to cars and motorbikes. He also set fire to where he lived.

The suspect later threw smoke grenades near two exits of the Taipei Main metro station and used a knife to fatally wound a person, Chang said. After the attack, the suspect took an underground path to return to the hotel where he was staying. Then he threw more smoke grenades and used his knife to kill another person outside the EsLite Spectrum Nanxi department store, the official said.

He also fatally wounded another person on the fourth floor of the department store building before he jumped from the fifth floor to his death, Chang said.

The official said the smoke grenades the assailant used could be purchased online and that the suspect visited the sites before the attack.

“The suspect planned an indiscriminate attack. He acted according to his plan,” Chang said, adding the initial investigation did not find that the suspect acted with anyone else.

Authorities were still investigating his motive. Chang said the suspect had voluntarily served in the military but was fired for drunk driving. The suspect was wanted from July after failing to report to military service, he added.

“The suspect hasn’t contacted his family for more than



Taiwan police cordon off the scene after a knife attack in Taipei, Taiwan, Friday, Dec. 19, 2025. (AP)

two years,” Chang said. “They said the suspect has been interested in guns and weapons since he was young.”

Six injured people were still in the hospital. Two were being treated in intensive care units, but their conditions were stable after surgeries, authorities said.

After receiving briefings from officials, Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te called for a thorough investigation into the incident, looking into the suspect’s background, motives, financial resources and whether he received help from others.

Tehreek-e-Insaf party denounces verdict

Pakistani court sentences former PM Khan and wife to 17 years

ISLAMABAD, Dec 20, (AP): A Pakistani court convicted and sentenced imprisoned former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his wife on Saturday to 17 years in prison after finding them guilty of retaining and selling state gifts, officials and his party said.

The couple pleaded not guilty when they were indicted last year. They were accused of selling the gifts, including jewelry from Saudi Arabia’s government, at prices far below their market value while he was in office. Prosecutors said Khan and his wife declared the value of the gifts at a little over \$10,000, far below their actual market value of \$285,521, allowing them to purchase the items at a reduced price. Under Pakistani law, for government officials and politicians to keep gifts received from foreign dignitaries, they must buy them at the assessed market value and declare any proceeds earned from selling them.

Khan’s opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party denounced the verdict in a statement, calling it “a black

chapter in history,” and said Khan was present in the court when the judge announced the verdict in the Adiala prison in the city of Rawalpindi.

Khan, 73, was ousted in a no-confidence vote in April 2022 and his party is in opposition in the parliament. He has been serving multiple prison terms since 2023 on corruption convictions and other charges that the former cricket star and his supporters have alleged are aimed at blocking his political career.

Security Council condemns drone attacks on UN peacekeepers

US gives top priority to truce in Sudan: Rubio

WASHINGTON, Dec 20, (Agencies): US Secretary of State Marco Rubio affirmed that Washington is exerting strenuous efforts to reach a humanitarian truce in Sudan, early January, that allows humanitarian organizations to urgently offer aid to civilians.

Speaking to reporters in a news conference, Rubio said “the immediate goal we have is a cessation of hostilities, a humanitarian truce going into the New Year that allows humanitarian organizations to be able to deliver aid to the people in great distress.”

“I mean, there are clearly both sides, you know, the South and the Rapid Support Forces, RSF, are have supporters from outside of Sudan’s borders that are involved, and we’ve been engaging with those countries there.”

“It’s not just countries that are providing them weaponry and equipment. It’s also countries that are providing transshipment, particularly to the RSF, to receive weapons, in some cases advanced weaponry.

“Our goal, the immediate goal we have is a cessation of hostilities, humanitarian truce going into the New Year that allows humanitarian organizations to be able to deliver aid to the people in great distress.

“Right now, that’s not possible. We are hearing, continue to see, reports of humanitarian convoys actually being struck on their way in, and so you can just imagine, what’s amazing to us is these convoys are struck and the rest of the convoy continues,” he noted.

“But what we said to everybody on it is that what’s happening there is horrifying. It’s atrocious that one day the story of what’s actually happened there is going to be known, and everyone involved is going to look bad. “And we have played the role we have played as a convening role in bringing the parties to the table.

“One of the challenges and frustrations in Sudan has been that one side or the other



File photo shows an injured Sudanese woman who fled el-Fasher city, after Sudan’s paramilitary forces killed hundreds of people in the western Darfur region, sitting in a tent at a camp in Tawila, Sudan, Oct. 31, 2025. (AP)

er will commit to certain things, and then they won’t live up to those commitments, that they’ll agree to anything and implement nothing.

“And obviously we hope that while that

truce is ongoing, we can focus on the other elements that led to this conflict and help to resolve some of those,” he concluded.

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council

on Friday strongly condemned last week’s drone attacks against a UN logistics base in Sudan, which killed six Bangladeshi peacekeepers and injured nine others.

In a press statement, members of the Security Council expressed deep condolences to the families of the fallen peacekeepers and to the government and people of Bangladesh, and wished a swift and full recovery to those injured.

The drone attacks occurred in Kadugli, South Kordofan state of Sudan, on Saturday.

The council members expressed grave concern that this deliberate assault on a UN logistics base and UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) peacekeepers represents an egregious disregard for international law, and poses serious threats to international peace and security.

They denounced in the strongest terms the targeting of UN peacekeepers and all attacks and provocations against UNISFA, and called for those responsible for such attacks to be held accountable without delay.

The council members reiterated that attacks against peacekeepers may constitute war crimes under international law and reminded all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law. They called on the United Nations to swiftly investigate these attacks with the support of UNISFA, and keep the relevant troop-contributing country informed of the progress.

They called on host authorities to take all appropriate steps to support the safety and security of all UN premises, personnel and peacekeepers, and urged Sudan and South Sudan to provide full support to UNISFA and its operations.

They underscored the need for further cooperation between Sudan and South Sudan for peace, security and stability in Abyei, which is a territory contested by the two countries.

Anger over activist’s death triggers violent attacks on media HQs

DHAKA, Dec 20, (AP): Angry protesters stormed the offices of Bangladesh’s two leading newspapers late Thursday after the death of a prominent activist in last year’s political uprising in Bangladesh. The crowds set fire to the buildings of the dailies, trapping journalists and other staff inside.

Hours later, the journalists and other staff were evacuated, and the fires were brought under control early Friday.

It was not clear why the protesters attacked the newspapers whose editors are known to be closely connected with the country’s interim leader, Nobel Peace Prize laureate **Muhammad Yunus**. Protests were organized in recent months outside the offices of the dailies by Islamists who blamed the newspapers for their alleged link with India.

Sharif Osman Hadi, a spokesperson for the Inqilab Moncho culture group, died in hospital in Singapore early Thursday evening after a weeklong battle for his life.

He was shot on the streets of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, last Friday while riding on a rickshaw. Two men on a motorbike followed Hadi and one shot him before they fled the scene. After days of treatment in Dhaka, Hadi was flown to Singapore in critical condition.

Authorities have said they identified the suspects and that the shooter had most probably fled to India - remarks that sparked a new diplomatic squabble with India and prompted New Delhi this week to summon Bangladesh’s envoy to express its condemnation.

Bangladesh also summoned the Indian envoy to Dhaka and sought clarification. Hadi was a fierce critic of both neighboring India and former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, whose 15-year rule of Bangladesh ended in last year’s uprising.

The Inqilab Moncho group, formed after the ouster of Hasina last year, has been organizing street protests and campaigns denouncing Hasina and India.

The country’s Islamists and other Hasina opponents have blamed her government for being subservient to India during her rule.

Hadi had planned to run as an independent candidate in a major constituency in Dhaka in the next national elections which the country’s interim government has announced for February.

Since Hasina’s ouster, the Inqilab Moncho group has promoted anti-Indian sentiment in the Muslim-majority country. Hasina now lives in self-imposed exile in India.



Yunus

Streets

Witnesses and media reports said hundreds of protesters took to the streets of Dhaka immediately after the news of Hadi’s death, rallying on Shahbagh Square near the Dhaka University campus where many chanted slogans such as Allahu Akbar, or God is great in Arabic. There were also similar protests elsewhere in the country.

Later, a group of protesters gathered outside the head office of the country’s leading Bengali-language Prothom Alo daily in Dhaka’s Karwan Bazar area. They then surged into the building, vandalized it and set fire to it, according to online portals of various leading media outlets.

A few hundred yards away, another group of protesters pushed into the premises of the country’s leading English-language Daily Star and set fire to the building, according to footage from Kaler Kantha, another mainstream newspaper.

Soldiers and paramilitary border guards deployed outside the two buildings but did not take any action to disperse the protesters. Security officials tried to convince them to leave peacefully as firefighters arrived at the scene outside the Daily Star building.

The blaze trapped the newspaper’s staff working inside the building late Thursday. One of the Daily Star’s journalists, Zyma Islam, wrote on Facebook that she was inside the building.

“I can’t breathe anymore. There’s too much smoke,” she said. By early Friday, the fire was brought under control.

Both dailies stopped updating their online editions after the attacks and they did not publish broadsheets on Friday.

The protesters Thursday night also targeted Chhayanaut, a leading cultural institution widely respected by liberals, in Dhaka’s Dhanmondi neighborhood.

Dozens of protesters were still at Shahbagh Friday morning and vowed to continue the protests.

Hadi’s body would be brought to Dhaka from Singapore on Friday evening, authorities said.

The attack on Hadi is still being investigated, but the shooting has set off tensions. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have recently expressed concerns over violations of human rights in Bangladesh.

Yunus, who took over three days after Hasina’s ouster in August 2024, promised in a televised address to the nation late Thursday to punish Hadi’s killers.

He announced that Saturday would be a day of mourning and urged the citizens to stay calm.

Yunus’ critics and Hasina’s former Awami League party have blamed the interim government for the rise of Islamists in Bangladesh, a parliamentary democracy with a history of political violence.

From horror to healing

Bondi Beach reopens to tears, silence and solidarity

SYDNEY, Dec 20, (AP): In the first full day of opening since a mass shooting driven by antisemitism killed 15 people at Australia’s famed Bondi Beach on Sunday, thousands of people returned to the waterfront Friday to commemorate the losses and try to heal through a sense of community.

In a hastily organized event, people gathered shoulder to shoulder on Bondi’s pristine crescent of sand and then formed an enormous circle in the ocean in an expression of solidarity among Sydney’s residents and support for the Jewish community.

Police reopened parts of the beach Thursday, sparking a return to one of the country’s beloved landmarks five days after two shooters attacked a Hanukkah celebration at a park near the shore, killing 15 people.

With questions emerging about whether Australian Jews were sufficiently protected from the threat of attack, and fears of a backlash against Muslims, armed police officers stood guard outside synagogues and mosques in Sydney on Friday.

Strangers embraced and wept during the morning commemoration. Some people stood in prayer near fluttering remains of crime scene tape and the shoes abandoned as people fled the horror of the shooting. Those who joined the circle in the ocean observed a minute’s silence for the dead, the wounded and those who rushed into danger to save them. Life also began returning to normal on the sand and boardwalk, where people jogged, walked dogs and sipped coffee in the hum of everyday life at Bondi Beach.

In a country where mass shootings are rare and most people pride themselves

on an ability to get along, Australians have been stricken and bewildered by the attack. Many looked to cope as they always have, by rising at dawn, donning swimsuits, grabbing surfboards and making their way to the beach.

Some of the beachgoers expressed a fervent wish that Australia’s relaxed and friendly way of life would continue undisturbed.

“I’ve grown up here my whole life,” 22-year-old swimmer Jack Hobbs said. “Today was a reminder of the amazing people where we live and what this community’s built on.”

In the days after the attack, Australians have celebrated those who helped in the aftermath or threw themselves into harm’s way to save lives. In a land repeatedly tested by wildfires, floods and other natural disasters, resilience is forged through pulling together in tough times.

Many have embraced the stories of heroism that emerged after the shooting. Ahmed al Ahmed, an Australian Muslim store owner who was born in Syria, tackled and disarmed one of the two gunmen before he was shot and wounded by the other.

“It was a nice day, everyone enjoying celebrating with their kids,” al Ahmed said from his hospital bed in a video posted to social media Friday. “They deserve to enjoy and it’s their right.”

His message was “to stand together, all human beings,” he said.

Australia is “the best country in the world,” al Ahmed said. He raised a fist and, in a faint voice, pronounced a phrase engendering national pride among Australians everywhere: “Aussie, Aussie, Aussie.”



Lifesavers embrace as they observe three minutes of silence to pay their respects to the victims of the Dec. 14 shootings at Bondi Beach in Sydney, Saturday, Dec. 20, 2025. (AP)

Kuwait oil price down to \$59.24 pb

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20, (KUNA): The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by 31 cents to USD 59.24 per barrel (pb) on Friday, compared to USD 59.55 pb the previous day, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Saturday.

In global markets, Brent Crude rose by 65 cents to USD 60.47 pb and West Texas Intermediate also went up by 51 cents to USD 56.66 pb.

Other Voices

Is Q8 replacing KPC?

By Kamel Al-Harami
Independent Oil Analyst

Recent reports announced the formation of a new petroleum company under the name “Q8 International” with functions and responsibilities similar to those of the current Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC). This suggests that the new company will take over most of the roles currently handled by KPC.

However, the newly established company will not be involved in marine operations, such as owning oil tankers or other sea-based activities, leaving the Kuwait Oil Tanker Company (KOTC) unaffected.

The new company will also take on additional responsibilities, including entering the field of new energy development, specifically the replacement of hydrocarbons, under its umbrella. Despite these additions, the overall functions of Q8 International will largely mirror those of the existing KPC.

The main question being raised is - what will happen to the current KPC? The corporation is already managing ten subsidiary companies, and it is unclear whether this new company will require a complete reorganization or simply operate with additional functions.

A major concern is staffing, whether new employees will be recruited or current staff will be transferred. The new company cannot realistically start with new recruits while also absorbing existing staff, as KPC and its subsidiaries are already overstaffed.

This, however, reflects the reality, as job opportunities are limited, with many new graduates hesitant or concerned about joining private companies.

Alternatively, the new company could take a more aggressive approach by restructuring KPC's operations, reducing its ten subsidiary petroleum companies and privatizing non-core functions. Its focus would then be on its main activities of exploration, crude oil production, and the sale of refined products.

Gas station operations could be fully transferred to private local companies, as is currently the case, while the Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) should continue to operate under strict monitoring and regulatory oversight.

It is time to revitalize the oil sector. This includes closely monitoring and evaluating KPC's experience, assessing its successes, failures, and overall scale. It may also be time to consider privatizing some of its functions, which were originally fully or partially privately owned, and achieved notable results under government regulations. Two main industries previously privately owned were oil tankers and petrochemical companies, while KNPC's refining operations included 40% private ownership.

Replacing KPC with Q8 should involve a major overhaul of the oil sector. This presents an opportunity to reassess certain local operations, such as downstream activities at service stations and aviation refueling services. It should bring fresh, innovative ideas and updated approaches to the industry.

Q8, welcome back to Kuwait after an absence of more than 40 years.



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Al-Harami

Al-Eidan confirms new appointments

KOC announces limited organizational changes

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: Kuwait Oil Company CEO Ahmed Al-Eidan announced limited organizational changes in a circular issued on December 18.

The circular stated the appointment of Adnan Mohammed Al-Sabti as Senior Specialist, reporting to the Director of the Training and Career Development Group, and Adel

Mishaan Attia as Senior Specialist, reporting to the Director of the Planning Group.

In the Medical Group at Al-Ahmedi Hospital, under the Department of Supporting Medical Services, Qais Yaqoub Al-Doub was named Head of the Health Information Systems and Management Team, reporting to the Head of the Department of Supporting Medical Services.

These changes will take effect on Sunday, December 21, 2025.

KPI holds founding assembly for new KD 1.1 bln company

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: The founding assembly of Kuwait Petroleum International's new company was held on December 17, at the oil sector complex to approve incorporation procedures and appoint the members of the new board of directors.

Kuwait Petroleum International (KPI) had earlier announced that the new company is a closed Kuwaiti shareholding company, fully owned by Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), with a capital of KD 1.129 billion.

In this context, Shafi Taleb Al-Ajmi, CEO of KPI, described the establishment as “a strategic milestone”, highlighting the company's commitment to relocating its assets and operations to Kuwait and embarking on a new phase of growth and opera-

tional integration.

He explained that this will strengthen KPI's local presence and support the implementation of its long-term strategy in the energy sector. The incorporation coincides with the publication of the company's articles of association in the official gazette and its registration in the commercial register, paving the way for the commencement of fuel station operations in the country starting in early 2026.

The new company will operate from its headquarters in Salhiya Complex in Kuwait City and will focus on carrying out strategic activities including the oil and gas industry, the establishment and operation of fuel and electric charging stations, and the development of alternative energy solutions, in line with national trends in the energy sector.

Strengthening regional presence with new Egypt destination

Kuwait Airways to launch operations to Sphinx in Jan

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: The national carrier is expanding its network to offer travellers more convenient and flexible travel options.

In a further step reflecting its continued commitment to expanding its route network and enhancing travel options for its customers, Kuwait Airways has announced the launch of its scheduled direct flights to Sphinx International Airport in the Arab Republic of Egypt, effective 15 January 2026, with three flights per week operating on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays.

This launch forms part of the national carrier's annual operational plan, which aims to provide both seasonal and year-round travel options that meet the aspirations of various traveller segments. Sphinx Airport enjoys a strategic location in the

heart of Cairo, in close proximity to the Grand Egyptian Museum, the Pyramids, and several universities, making it an ideal choice for tourists, students, and business travellers.

Kuwait Airways continues to expand its network by introducing new destinations that are carefully selected based on comprehensive operational and economic studies, in response to growing travel demand. The company recently announced the launch of several distinctive destinations, including Madrid and Málaga in Spain, as well as Colombo in Sri Lanka, scheduled to commence in June 2026, as part of its vision to offer diverse tourist and cultural travel experiences across its expanding network.

The company affirmed its commitment to the

continuous development of its operational systems, the enhancement of service quality, and the improvement of the overall passenger experience, thereby reinforcing Kuwait Airways' position at the forefront of regional airlines in terms of flexibility, reliability, and excellence.

Established in 1954, Kuwait Airways today operates a modern fleet of the latest Boeing and Airbus aircraft, equipped with advanced global technologies, state-of-the-art inflight entertainment systems, and modern seating. Supported by a highly qualified and experienced national workforce, the company reflects its commitment as the national carrier to delivering a travel experience that meets the aspirations of its customers and aligns with the highest international standards.

Business

Barq to roll out 20 fast-charging locations across Kuwait in 2026

Alghanim Industries launches Barq EV charging network

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: Alghanim Industries (Kutayba Alghanim Group) announced the launch of Barq, a new business specializing in developing and operating charging infrastructure for electric vehicles and plug-in hybrid vehicles in Kuwait. This initiative aligns with the group's commitment to supporting the transition toward more sustainable mobility solutions and meeting the rapidly growing demand for electric vehicles in the local market.

The launch of Barq is a key pillar of broader efforts at Alghanim Industries to develop an integrated ecosystem for new energy vehicles (NEV) in Kuwait, encompassing a diverse range of options, infrastructure development, and long-term operations. Further supporting this mission is the Group's expansive portfolio of vehicles in the local market.

During its initial phase, Barq will operate at its first location at Shuwaikh Industrial area in Kuwait, and will rapidly scale the network, expanding to more than 20 high-traffic locations across the country within the first half of 2026.

An integrated digital back end system and mobile app

Barq offers smart digital mobile applications on Apple iOS and Android OS that allow users to easily monitor the charging of their vehicles in real time, check charger availability and usage, and track session duration at each site.

Furthermore all chargers are connected to a centralized operating system providing real time operational data, enabling remote management, software updates and customer support, ensuring service continuity and ease of use across all locations.

Advanced chargers for a diverse range of vehicles

Barq's network features ultra-fast



Barq, the ultra-fast EV charging operator, bringing Kuwait one step closer to a future of sustainable transportation.

- Launching Kuwait's fastest electric vehicle chargers in the first phase
- Expanding to over 20 charging locations in the first half of 2026
- Ultra-fast chargers with up to 400kW power supporting simultaneous charging of two EVs
- A comprehensive network supporting EV and PHEV vehicles
- A smart, connected digital ecosystem enabling ease of use and real-time support
- Reliable global supplier tested in Kuwait's summer conditions

400-kilowatt (kW) chargers - the fastest public chargers currently available in Kuwait.

These chargers can charge a battery from 10% to 90% in under 30 minutes and support simultaneous charging of two vehicles at maximum power, subject to vehicle type and state of charge. Charging speeds vary by vehicle and battery state of charge, with higher power delivery when the battery level is low.

In addition to its ultra-fast chargers, Barq also provides a compact 50 kW option, suitable for locations where users may be spending extended periods of time, such as shopping malls,

parks and public facilities.

A Convenient user experience

Barq carefully selects charging locations to ensure easy access and customer convenience. At the first operational site in Shuwaikh, users can charge their vehicles while taking a relaxing coffee break at Costa Coffee, or do some shopping at Safat Home and Xcite, returning shortly to find their vehicle is ready to go.

World class operational reliability

Ahead of its launch and considering climate conditions in Kuwait including

extreme heat during the summer months, Barq has opted to utilize chargers from Alpitronic, a global leader in electric chargers from Italy, following rigorous local testing that ensured operational reliability across all seasons.

Alpitronic is the first in its field to develop and utilize silicon carbide technology, achieving operational efficiency of up to 97.5%. It is trusted by leading networks and OEMs in Europe, the United States, and the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, for its unmatched reliability.

Its regional HQ in Riyadh provides fast, reliable support for the Kuwait market.

Reaffirming its leadership in advanced banking services

Warba receives Mastercard's 'Highest Spend Per Card on Credit Card' Award

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: Warba Bank received Mastercard's prestigious “Highest Spend Per Card on Credit Card” Award in recognition of its outstanding performance in issuing credit cards and the exceptionally high spend per card. The recognition stands as a testament to the strong confidence of high-net-worth and premium customers in Warba Bank's innovative payment and card solutions.

The award further strengthens Warba Bank's position as a leading bank in Kuwait providing Islamic banking services. The Bank continues to expand its portfolio of innovative products and services to meet the needs of all customer segments, offering high-value benefits and advanced solutions as part of a strategy that integrates cutting-edge digital technologies with Shariah-compliant standards. The strategy ensures customers receive an exceptional banking experience that places them at the heart of every service and enables them to fulfill their financial needs.

Commenting on this achievement, Mr. Ahmed Faisal Al-Qatami, Chief Retail Banking Officer at Warba Bank, said: “The award supports Warba Bank's ongoing commitment to delivering quality services that reinforce its market position and places it among the leading banks offering unique experiences, particularly those tailored to the needs of premium customers. The achievement also demonstrates that our strategy which focuses on quality and innovation is delivering tangible results as well as our vision ‘Let's Own Tomorrow’, ensuring our customers have access to the best financial tools to build their future with confidence.”

Al-Qatami added that Warba's strong partnership with Mastercard was key to achieving this milestone, enabling the Bank to leverage the latest innovations in electronic payment technologies and deliver advanced solutions that meet customer needs in a rapidly evolving global banking environment. He noted that this collaboration ensures Warba Bank's cards serve as a gateway to a world of global benefits and secure payment solutions.

He further emphasized that Warba Bank stood out over the years as it provides the strongest cashback programs in Kuwait, allowing credit cardholders to earn cashback of up to 6%, with an annual cap of KD 6,000, specifically designed to align with the diverse spending patterns of high-net-worth customers. This program, he explained, reaffirms the Bank's commitment to delivering real



Mastercard honors Warba Bank for outstanding credit card performance.

and sustainable value that enhances the appeal of its cards and reinforces its philosophy of rewarding customer loyalty. Warba has also launched summer campaigns to promote the use of international cards during the travel season, offering cashback of up to 10% on overseas spending.

Al-Qatami continued: “Achieving the highest spend per card confirms our success in attracting a segment of customers that seeks excellence and genuine added value when using credit cards. This year's award crowns our efforts towards excellence and adds to last year's award presented by Mastercard for holding the highest growth in credit card activation on digital wallets across Kuwait. This further cements Warba Bank's position as a leader in innovation that translates into tangible economic value for its customers. Through our vision, we remain committed to offering competitive advantages that meet the expectations of the most discerning of customers in our market, and continue to follow our philosophy of being proactive in investing in the experience we build for our customers.”

In parallel with this achievement, the Bank continues to invest in ongoing enhancements to its digital services, particularly through the development of its mobile app, which provides customers with a seamless and comprehensive digital experience for managing their cards, tracking transactions and engaging with the Bank's offers in a secure and real-time manner. These efforts reinforce Warba Bank's standing among leaders in delivering innovative digital banking solutions that elevate customer experience and provide full control over personal financial resources.

Warba Bank has achieved remarkable success in a short period, securing a leading position in Islamic digital banking services. It is also among the local banks with the largest number of shareholders, bringing it closer to all segments of society. This achievement further reinforces the Bank's standing as a trusted financial partner that combines innovation with social responsibility in delivering best-in-class financial products and services.



At the prestigious Global Private Banking Awards ceremony

NBK Wealth named the ‘Best Private Bank in Kuwait’ 2025 by The Banker

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: NBK Wealth Group has been awarded Best Private Bank in Kuwait 2025 by The Banker magazine at the prestigious Global Private Banking Awards ceremony, marking a new achievement in the company’s record of success.

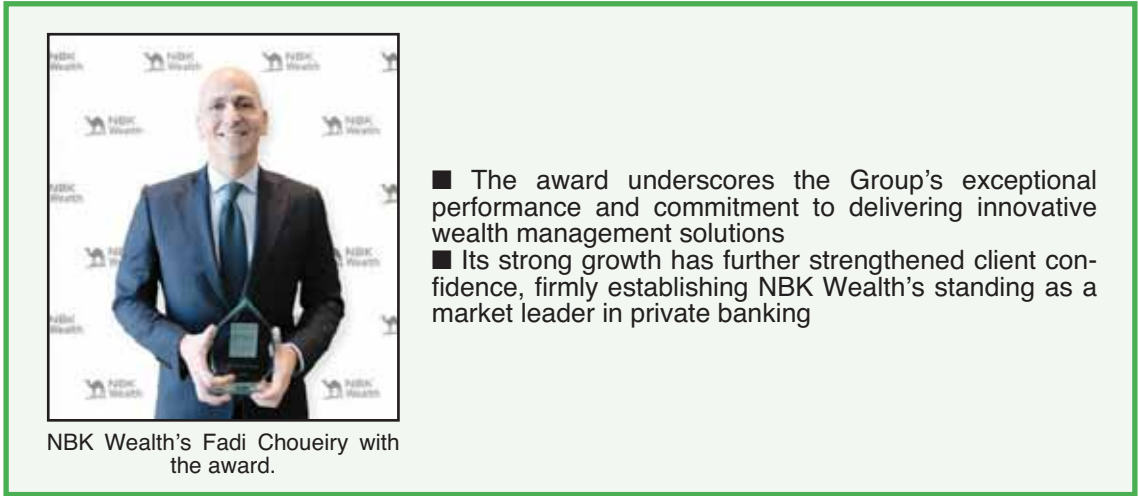
The Banker announced the winners across multiple regional categories, based on a rigorous and comprehensive evaluation process conducted by an independent judging panel of 23 international banking industry experts.

The award reaffirms NBK Wealth Group’s leadership in private banking, highlighting its unwavering commitment to innovation and its distinctive ability to serve high-net-worth clients by anticipating their evolving aspirations and delivering forward-looking, bespoke solutions.

NBK Wealth received this prestigious recognition based on a comprehensive set of criteria, most notably its strong financial performance and sustained growth, assessed through key performance indicators such as the expansion of assets under management, profitability, and operational efficiency. The award also reflects the Group’s innovation in developing and delivering cutting-edge products and services tailored to evolving client needs, including private debt strategies, structured deposits, and specialized investment portfolio management solutions.

The evaluation also covered client experience, encompassing the quality and consistency of services, the ability to understand and respond to diverse client needs, and the development of bespoke strategies that foster long-term relationships. It further assessed digital transformation and technology, with emphasis on the adoption of advanced digital solutions to streamline operations, enhance efficiency, and deliver a seamless, innovative private banking experience.

Sustainability and responsible investment also formed a key part of the assessment, reflecting their growing significance in the global financial landscape. The evaluation further considered geographical reach and institutional strength, measured by the scale of operations, regional and international footprint, and the depth of



strategic partnerships that reinforce the Group’s ability to serve its clients effectively.

A Proven Track Record of Excellence and Market Leadership

The award reflects the strength of the NBK Wealth Group’s brand name, the largest wealth management group in the local and regional markets, drawing its credibility from NBK Group’s longstanding market leadership, global presence, and distinguished record of achievements and international recognition in the banking sector.

NBK Wealth Group has distinguished itself through strong growth, strategic initiatives, and continuous technological advancement, with assets under management surpassing USD 41 billion by the end of 2024, a testament to the confidence and trust clients place in the Group.”

NBK Wealth has further diversified its investment portfolio across multiple asset classes, while broadening

its range of offerings to encompass wealth management, financial planning, investment management, and advisory services. In addition, it has introduced innovative and specialized products tailored to evolving market needs, a strategy that has not only attracted new clients but also reinforced the Group’s position as a leading force in wealth management.

Moreover, the Group has placed strong emphasis on serving the needs of high-net-worth clients, achieving notable growth in assets under management while delivering tailored solutions.

It has also forged strategic partnerships, including with J.P. Morgan Asset Management, to offer clients a diversified suite of carefully selected investment opportunities, further strengthening its ability to provide comprehensive and integrated wealth management solutions.

NBK Wealth has enabled clients to seek to achieve their financial goals with greater efficiency by embedding digital innovation at the core of its strategy. Leveraging advanced technologies, the Group has enhanced custom-

er experience, streamlined operations, and significantly boosted productivity, while maintaining its focus on delivering high-quality, personalized wealth management solutions.

The Group has further strengthened client engagement through innovative initiatives, most notably the publication of specialized analytical reports through NBK Wealth Insights. These efforts have reinforced the Group’s position as a leading provider of comprehensive and integrated investment solutions.

NBK Wealth Group is committed not only to seek to grow the wealth of its clients but also to positioning itself as the first and most trusted choice in wealth management. At the same time, it seeks to build a lasting legacy for its clients across generations, exemplified by the launch of “Generation W”, a program designed to engage the second generation of clients by equipping them with the principles of investing and wealth management.

NBK Wealth stands as a cornerstone of NBK Group and one of the Middle East’s leading wealth management institutions. With a wide geographic presence across 9 cities in 5 countries, it offers a comprehensive suite of services and a client-centric approach focused on delivering tailored solutions that address the distinct financial objectives of high-net-worth individuals and institutional clients.

The Global Private Banking Awards, established in 2009, are among the most prestigious accolades in the industry. They honor financial institutions that demonstrate outstanding performance in wealth management, following a rigorous evaluation process that combines both qualitative and quantitative criteria.

NBK Wealth is a brand registered under the name of National Bank of Kuwait S.A.K.P (“NBK”), for use by the Asset Management business of, among other NBK group entities, Watani Investment Company K.S.C.C. , a leading investment firm and its affiliates worldwide, combined with the Private Banking services of NBK worldwide, which is one of the largest and oldest financial institutions in the region.

Government debt rises to 14% of GDP after Eurobond issuance

Upbeat economic data readings persist signaling growth momentum going into 2026

By National Bank of Kuwait

The economic environment continues to improve, reflected in strong credit growth, rising real estate activity, higher project awards, and above-trend PMI readings.

This momentum should push non-oil GDP growth to a five-year high in 2026 of 3.3%. Overall GDP is forecast at an upwardly-revised 4.5% in 2026, boosted by rising oil output in line with OPEC+ policy moves despite a now confirmed pause in output hikes in Q1 26.

The fiscal deficit is expected to widen to 4.9% of GDP this year on lower oil prices, before narrowing slightly in FY26/27 as oil production rises, non-oil revenues expand and the government keeps firm control of spending.

Public debt issues have slowed through Q4, but bumper issuance in June-October raised KD5.5 billion, enough to finance more than two years of deficits based upon our projections.

Expanded financing options as well as progress on broader fiscal reforms and faster economic growth helped trigger a credit rating upgrade by S&P in November, moving Kuwait back up to the ‘high investment grade’ tier and a further sign that confidence in the economic outlook is improving.

Latest developments

• Oil prices have trended lower, slipping below \$60/bbl recently. The price of Kuwait Export Crude dropped to \$59.3/bbl in December, its lowest level since 2021, on ongoing market oversupply worries in the context of softening oil demand and a fading geopolitical risk premium linked to efforts by the US administration to broker a ceasefire in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

OPEC-8, having fully unwound the first tranche of voluntary cuts of 2.2 mb/d in just six months, commenced unwinding the second tranche of cuts worth 1.6 mb/d in Q4, albeit at a slower pace (+137 kb/d per month).

In November, however, OPEC announced that output hikes would be paused during Q1 2026 due to “seasonality”.

For Kuwait, crude production stood at 2.55 mb/d in October (+37 kb/d m/m) and is on track to increase to 2.58 mb/d in December.

• The economy expanded at a faster pace in Q2 2025, with GDP growth accelerating to 1.7% y/y from 1% in Q1, according to preliminary official estimates.

Driving growth was increased activity in the nonoil sector, which reached 3.1% from 2% in Q1 2025, helped by robust gains in the construction (12.6%), telecommunications (8%) and real estate sectors (7.2%), though this was slightly offset by contractions in wholesale & retail trade (-5.1%) and electricity & water (-1.9%).

Meanwhile, oil sector GDP finally expanded after 8 consecutive quarters of contraction, after OPEC-8 including Kuwait unwound their output cuts more rapidly.

• Non-oil private sector activity strengthened in November, with the PMI rising to a four-month high of 53.4.

Growth in both output and new orders improved for the second month in a row, ranging in the mid-50s. Employment improved, but not substantially. Both output and input price inflation picked up, with the former at its highest since mid-2024.

• Consumer spending trends remained weak in Q3, according to the proxy gauge represented by local bank card transaction figures.

According to the data published by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK), negative annual growth in the value of card transactions persisted for a third consecutive quarter (-6.7% y/y). Q3’s reading was also more negative than Q2’s, bucking the moderation (q/q) seen in that quarter, and likely reflects cautiousness on the part of consumers over income, employment, and general macroeconomic prospects.

Firm control of public spending by the government, including through ongoing wage growth restraint, may have also been a factor.

• CPI inflation ticked up to 2.5% y/y in September from 2.4% in August amid faster increases in the prices of food & beverages, transport, and services & miscellaneous goods.

While price growth in most core CPI components eased, the core inflation rate edged up to 2.1% y/y, driven by the return of the transport sector to inflation territory and higher precious metals prices pushing up jewelry costs.

• Real estate sales recorded a sixth straight month of double-digit annual growth in November.

Sales in November stood at KD390 million, up 21% y/y, although slightly down on October (-3% m/m).

Annual gains in November were led primarily by the residential sector, which logged sales of KD172 million

		2023	2024	2025f	2026f
Nominal GDP	\$ billion	165	160	156	159
Real GDP	% y/y	-1.7	-2.6	2.3	4.5
- Oil sector	% y/y	-4.2	-6.9	2.4	5.7
- Non-oil sector	% y/y	1.0	1.8	2.3	3.3
Fiscal balance*	% of GDP	-3.1	-2.2	-4.9	-4.0
Public debt*	% of GDP	3.0	2.9	13.5	16.2
Current acc. balance	% of GDP	31.1	29.1	27.4	25.1
Inflation (avg.)	% y/y	3.6	2.9	2.4	2.4
Oil price (KEC, avg.)	\$/bbl	84	81	71	65
Oil production (avg.)	mb/d	2.59	2.41	2.47	2.61

Source: Official sources, NBK estimates; *fiscal year

(+20% y/y), a 30-month high, and the commercial sector (+49% y/y to KD93m).

The investment sector posted a smaller gain of 7.1% y/y to KD125 million.

• Project awards in 2025 year-to-date have surpassed 2024’s full-year figure, according to MEED Projects figures. The total value of awards so far in 2025 has reached KD2.9 billion, exceeding last year’s multi-year high figure of KD2.7 billion.

It could even top KD4 billion if the Mubarak Al-Kabeer contract is signed before year-end. The power & water and the oil & gas sectors have accounted for the bulk of the awards.

• The government successfully issued a large Eurobond in September.

This marked its return to the international debt markets after an 8-year hiatus, with three dollar-denominated bond sales (tenors of 3, 5 and 10 years) totaling \$11.25 billion.

The issue has pushed total borrowing this year from both domestic and international markets to KD5.7 billion (the latest being KD0.2 billion in December), an amount sufficient to cover at least two years’ worth of deficits by our projections.

The capital will help boost liquidity to implement Vision 2035-related projects, including the latest CAPT-approved Mubarak Al-Kabeer port. This will take outstanding public debt to nearly 14% of GDP in the current fiscal year (FY2025/26), a still-low level by international standards.

• Rating agency S&P Global raised Kuwait’s credit rating to “AA-” with a stable outlook, the first upgrade since 2011 and a partial reversal of Covid-linked downgrades in 2020-21.

The move comes on the back of an increase in fiscal reform momentum, particularly the approval of the financing & liquidity law, which has significantly eased liquidity constraints while the government presses ahead with its medium-term fiscal consolidation and non-oil revenue augmentation plans.

S&P also noted the state’s sizable financial assets – the liquid components of which are projected to average over 500% of GDP over 2025-28 – that provide a significant buffer given their expectation of widening fiscal deficits (to 7% of GDP) and increasing debt levels (to 24% of GDP) over this period.

A further catalyst was faster economic growth linked to both an unwinding of OPEC+ related cuts and large investment spending by both the government and the private sector.

• Domestic credit continues to grow at a solid pace, rising by 1.4% m/m in October amid soaring lending to banks and financial institutions (+26% m/m; +46% YTD).

On a YTD basis, domestic credit increased by 7.5% (+8.3% y/y). The recovery in household credit continued while lending to businesses remained firm in October.

Meanwhile, resident deposits rose 3.5% y/y as strong growth in both private and public sector deposits coun-

tered a 14% drop in government deposits.

• The Central Bank of Kuwait followed the US Fed in cutting interest rates in December.

The CBK reduced its key discount rate by 25 bps to 3.5% after the Fed cut its benchmark rate by the same amount.

This was the third local rate reduction in the current easing cycle and brings the cumulative cut to 75 bps since September 2024 when the Fed started the process. Over the same period, the Fed and some other central banks in the GCC have lowered rates by a total of 175 bps.

Forecast

Growth to accelerate to above 4% in 2026 GDP will return to positive growth this year (+2.3%) after two consecutive years of oil-led declines and accelerate further in 2026 on higher output in both the oil and the non-oil sectors.

We have revised up our 2026 growth forecast to 4.5% from our previous estimate of 4.1%, nearly double 2025’s expected outcome of 2.3%.

This is due primarily to higher crude output in line with OPEC-8’s confirmation that it will unwind a second tranche of members’ voluntary production cuts, from 2024.

Factoring in a pause in OPEC’s resupply schedule for Q1 2026 amid seasonally weaker oil demand, this will lift Kuwait’s crude production by an average of 141 kb/d next year (on top of a 59 kb/d hike this year) and take average output to its highest level since 2022 at 2.61 mb/d.

For oil prices, we have maintained our forecast of \$65/bbl on average for 2026, down from an expected \$69/bbl in 2025 amid expectations of excess global supply.

However, our 2026 forecast is towards the higher end of the consensus reflecting our belief that (i) global oil supply growth will be less robust than the market is anticipating and (ii) global oil consumption will be more resilient than expected amid lower oil prices and more accommodative monetary policies.

Meanwhile, non-oil sector growth is forecast at 3.3% in 2026 from a projected 2.3% in 2025, slightly higher than our previous estimate to account for the better readings we have observed so far in 2025 among the non-oil indicators we track, such as the PMIs, bank credit, real estate and projects activity.

We think these trends reflect both cyclical forces – growth recovering from a period of under performance in previous years – and higher investment amid a push by the government to speed up execution of key development projects such as the Al-Zour North IWPP and Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port.

We expect this stronger investment trend to persist not just into next year but also over the medium term, helping to address the infrastructure gap versus some GCC peers. Next year’s non-oil growth should also get a boost from a pick-up in oil refining output after relative under performance in 9M 2025.

On the other side, government efforts to rein in the

fiscal deficit and the ongoing softness in consumer spending, will continue to affect the outlook. The decline in card spending through 2025 – partly payback from a period of super-strong growth post-pandemic and partly a reflection of tighter control of government wage spending – should fade next year, but we do not expect a sharp improvement once this adjustment is over.

One upside risk to non-oil growth is the expected passage of the housing finance (‘mortgage’) law over coming months (it was submitted to the cabinet for approval in September), which would trigger higher household borrowing and related consumer spending.

However, the full impact of the law once approved will be felt more over time than right away, given the parallel requirement for a major infrastructure rollout.

The law is one part of the government’s plan to promote private sector growth and diversify the economy away from oil under the Vision 2035 agenda.

Ongoing fiscal deficits, consolidation proceeding

The fiscal deficit is forecast to widen from 2.2% of GDP in FY24/25 (KD1.1 bn) to 4.9% (KD2.5 bn) in FY25/26. This would be the tenth deficit in the last eleven years. The wider deficit reflects lower oil receipts.

However, the underlying position has been helped by various government consolidation measures over the past year such as repricing government fees and services, hiking fines and penalties and the introduction of a 15% minimum top-up tax on multinationals from January 2025 in line with the OECD BEPS program. Together these could eventually be worth about 0.8% of GDP.

Moreover, spending in the FY25/26 budget was unchanged from the previous year at KD24.5bn (a real terms cut). Improving fiscal sustainability will be a multi-year event, meaning another tight spending round and more revenue-boosting measures in FY26/27. We factor in spending growth of only 1% per year this year and next, consistent with the government’s push for efficiencies and savings across the public sector, and potentially some subsidy cuts.

However, within the overall total we see scope for higher capex, which was cut by a cumulative 35% in the past four budgets to help address the deficit. On the revenue side, excise taxes on tobacco and sugary drinks and VAT at 5% could yield 1-2% of GDP (versus non-oil receipts of 6% this year), but the timeline for implementation is unclear and they make no impact on our year-ahead forecasts. Tight fiscal policy would inevitably weigh on demand and spending in the economy but together with higher (volumetric) oil exports will cut the fiscal deficit to 4.0% of GDP (KD2.1 bn) in FY26/27, despite lower oil prices.

Passage of the public debt law in April (following an eight-year hiatus) provides increased flexibility in financing any future deficits and eases pressure on liquid reserve draw downs at the General Reserve Fund, about which officials have warned in recent years. Some KD5.7 billion in debt was issued between June and December, exceeding our expectations, including one heavily oversubscribed Eurobond (\$11.3bn). This is more than sufficient to fully finance the next two years of deficits based upon our forecasts, potentially triggering a slower pace of issuance ahead. Having risen from 2.9% in 2024 to 14% now, the government’s debt-to-GDP ratio is likely to rise less quickly in 2026 and remain very low by international standards.

Inflation seen steady, interest rates easing

We see CPI inflation broadly steady at 2.4% in 2026 (average), amid subdued consumer spending and trend-level non-oil activity. There could be some upside price risk in 2026 from possible subsidy cuts, hikes in indirect taxes or higher rents.

The CBK lowered its key discount rate 25 bps to 3.5% in December (-75 bps cumulatively since September 2024), in line with the US Fed and local economic conditions. Futures markets currently expect 50-75 bps in cuts by the Fed in 2026.

Reforms would unlock faster economic growth

Longer term, unlocking sustainably faster rates of non-oil economic growth will require a range of structural reforms (such as to the business climate, the labor market and public sector efficiency) and higher rates of investment – areas where Kuwait has lagged its Gulf peers in recent years amid political and bureaucratic constraints.

The government formed in May 2024 has been more active on laws and economic reforms (especially fiscal policy) than its predecessors but will look to build on this with a more rapid implementation of its fiscal and economic agenda in 2026.

What's On

SPOTLIGHT



Got a birthday or event?
Share your story and snapshots with Arab Times!
Email your write-up and photos to
arabtimes@arabtimesonline.com
We'll feature it on our What's On page!

Students show strong interest in Gulf Bank's Red Youth Account & Red Plus Card

Gulf Bank signs partnership agreement with GUST to sponsor Engineering Club activities

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: As part of its ongoing commitment to engaging with youth and supporting student-led initiatives, Gulf Bank has signed a strategic partnership agreement with the Engineering Club at Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST). The agreement covers the sponsorship of the Club's various activities and events for a period of one year, in addition to providing training opportunities for outstanding students, contributing to the development of their academic and practical skills.

In this context, Gulf Bank is participating in the "Winter Engineering Week," organized by the Engineering Club at GUST and running for a full week starting December 21. The event features the participation of a number of small and medium-sized enterprises and retail outlets, reflecting the Bank's support for entrepreneurship and its commitment to strengthening youth participation in economic and community activities.

Commenting on the occasion, Gulf Bank Chief Marketing Officer, Najla Aleisa, stated that supporting youth and small and medium-sized enterprises represents a core pillar of the Bank's strategy. She emphasized Gulf Bank's dedication to strengthening partnerships with educational institutions and student organizations to empower young people, prepare them for the labor market, and enhance their financial literacy at early stages of their academic journey.

Gulf Bank ensured a strong presence at the university through an interactive booth designed to introduce students to the benefits of the red youth account and the red Plus prepaid card. The initiative also aimed to encourage students to adopt an active and balanced lifestyle that combines financial awareness with a modern way of living.



Najla Aleisa signs the agreement with the head of the Engineering Club.

The Bank's booth witnessed strong interest from students keen to learn more about Gulf Bank's banking solutions, particularly the red youth account and the red Plus prepaid card, both of which are specifically designed for university students. These offerings provide a range of benefits that help students manage their financial resources efficiently from the start of their academic journey.

These solutions aim to equip young people with essential financial skills through tools that support expense tracking, budgeting, and informed financial decision-making. Students expressed significant interest in the features offered by the account and

prepaid card, including card control, exclusive offers, rewards on purchases, and invitations to selected events that enhance their lifestyle and align with their aspirations.

The red youth account represents a cornerstone of Gulf Bank's youth-focused strategy, offering benefits that go beyond traditional banking services by integrating rewards, entertainment, and educational experiences. This approach encourages responsible financial behavior in line with the



A group photo of the Gulf Bank and GUST team.

expectations of the digital generation. Meanwhile, the red Plus prepaid card provides a safe and easy-to-use payment solution, offering young customers a practical financial experience within a structured and secure framework.

During its participation, Gulf Bank also supported the "Let's Be Aware" campaign, aimed at raising financial awareness among students, enhancing their understanding of banking rights and responsibilities, and educating

them on ways to avoid financial fraud. Gulf Bank's participation in this initiative forms part of its comprehensive strategy to support youth and build long-term relationships by understanding their evolving needs and offering products and services that support their future aspirations. Through direct engagement with students within their educational environment, the Bank continues to reinforce its role as a trusted partner in their academic and professional journey.



Group photo during the event.

Highlighting unity & celebration

AmCham Kuwait organizes 'Joint Winter Social Brunch'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: The Joint Winter Social Brunch was a collaborative celebration, bringing together diverse communities in the spirit of connection, inclusiveness, and festive goodwill, at the Al Thuraya ballroom of the JW Marriott Hotel, Kuwait City.

The afternoon began with a delightful buffet brunch, while the Gingerbread House decoration station offered a creative and interactive experience for children.

Vivian Almehdari, Membership and Initiatives Manager at AmCham Kuwait, extended a heartfelt welcome to all attendees: "We are honored by the presence of several esteemed diplomatic missions. A warm welcome to the Ambassadors from the Canadian and Georgian embassies, as well as representatives from the United States Embassy. Your support and partnership mean so much to us."

Vivian also acknowledged the contributions of the Council's valued partners who made the event possible, including:

- British Business Forum Kuwait
- British Ladies Society Kuwait
- Canadian Petroleum Professionals Kuwait
- Canadian Women's Network Kuwait
- CasaItalia Kuwait
- German Business Council Kuwait
- Lean In Kuwait City
- Lebanese Business Council Kuwait
- Portuguese Business Council Kuwait

A group photo with the heads of these organizations captured the celebratory spirit

of the afternoon.

The event continued with event sponsor recognitions with Platinum Sponsor, KRH, Silver Sponsor, Saudi Arabian Chevron, and Airline Sponsor, Jazeera Airways. Tokens of appreciation were presented while guests enjoyed a series of photo opportunities.

Children's activities were a highlight, with a lively kids' raffle and the much-anticipated arrival of Santa Claus, allowing children with their families to take photos and celebrate the holiday season. The raffle for the kids were provided by Alshaya and IKEA.

The adult raffle followed, featuring exciting prizes generously provided by Al Mulla Exchange, Armani/Fiori, Index Precast Co., Italia Nuova Medical, and Jazeera Airways. Winners were celebrated on stage with photos and applause.

In her closing remarks, Vivian thanked the activity sponsors, Canadian Women's Network and Hyatt Regency, for their contributions to the Gingerbread House and cookie decorating activities, as well as the volunteers who helped make the day a success.

"Thank you all for being here. We hope you enjoyed the afternoon filled with good food, laughter, and festive cheer. Happy holidays and see you next year!"

The Joint Winter Social brought together business leaders, families, and partners for an afternoon that perfectly blended networking, fun, and the spirit of the season.

Over 300 Bangladeshi expats donate blood

Bangladesh Embassy & UN-Habitat host blood donation drive in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: On 19 December 2025, as part of the celebration of the 54th anniversary of Victory Day of Bangladesh and the 'Youth Festival-2025', a blood donation programme was organized at Kuwait Central Blood Bank, Jabriya by the joint initiative of the Bangladesh Embassy, Kuwait and UN HABITAT, Kuwait.

His Excellency Ambassador of Bangladesh to Kuwait, Major General Syed Tareq Hussain, OSP, awc, psc, and the Head of UN HABITAT, Kuwait, Dr. Amira Al Hassan jointly declared the auspicious inauguration of the blood donation programme.

The ambassadors of Afghanistan, Bhutan, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar attended this inauguration of blood donation campaign.

Moreover, Bangladeshi expatriate donors living in Kuwait, journalists from various print and electronic media, and embassy officials were also present at the blood donation programme.

In his welcome remarks, H.E the Ambassador Major General Syed Tareq Hussain, OSP, awc, psc recollected that on 16 December 1971, Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation through the supreme sacrifices of millions of our martyrs and the indomitable courage of our freedom fighters.

Victory Day is not only a remembrance of our glorious past; it is the reaffirmation of our enduring values-freedom, human dignity, solidarity and compassion. This blood donation campaign is a living expression of those values of our victory day.

In his remarks, the Ambassador of Bangladesh also mentioned that the blood donation campaign is also organized as part of the celebration of Bangladesh Youth Festival-2025 with the major participation of Bangladeshi youth expatriates living in Kuwait since the young people of Bangladesh are the driving force of the future of Bangladesh and abroad.

Therefore, the 'Youth Festival-2025' is celebrated with great enthusiasm through this blood donation programme to encourage the young generation of expatriate Bangladeshis in Kuwait to get involved in various sports, social and cultural activities.

H.E the Ambassador of Bangladesh thanked UN-HABITAT and Ms. Amira Al Hasan for this initiative. H.E. the Ambassador of Bangladesh also expressed his sincere appreciation



The Embassy of Bangladesh and UN-Habitat jointly organize a Blood Donation Campaign with participation from the Bangladeshi expatriates living in Kuwait.

to the Government of the State of Kuwait and the authorities of the Central Blood Bank of Kuwait for their generous cooperation and support.

In her speech, Dr. Amira Al-Hassan, Head of the UN-Habitat Mission to the State of Kuwait stated that UN-Habitat supports and encourages such humanitarian and community initiatives, given their pivotal role in strengthening social cohesion and consolidating a culture of community participation. She also explained that the campaign falls within the mandate of UN-Habitat's work

towards resilient and sustainable cities, which is organized under the Global Initiative for resilient Cities.

She emphasized that such initiatives contribute to strengthening communities' ability to address health and social challenges. She also thanked the Embassy of Bangladesh and Bangladeshi expatriates living in Kuwait for this noble initiative of blood donation.

The blood donation programme was initiated by the blood donation by the Ambassador of Cambodia and about 300 Bangladeshi expatriates donated blood throughout the day.

LuLu Hypermarket unwraps Toy Fest 2025 with 'Big Savings & Bigger Smiles'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: LuLu Hypermarket invites families across Kuwait to celebrate the festive season in grand style with Toy Fest 2025, a vibrant and immersive retail experience designed to delight children and adults alike. Running from 17 December to 23 December, the festival transforms LuLu Hypermarkets into joyful playgrounds filled with toys, games, and unforgettable holiday moments, making it the perfect destination for family shopping and festive fun.

The celebration officially kicked off at the LuLu Hypermarket Egaila outlet on 19 December with a lively inauguration ceremony led by popular influencer Shouq bint Abdullah, alongside Mr. Sakeer Hussain, Regional Director - LuLu Hypermarket Kuwait, and other senior management representatives. The colorful launch event drew large crowds of enthusiastic families and children, reflecting the excitement and



anticipation surrounding this much-awaited seasonal celebration.

Toy Fest 2025 brings exceptional value to shoppers, offering discounts of up to 60 percent on a wide selection of leading international toy brands, as well as special promotions on gaming

consoles, accessories, and children's entertainment products. The festival provides an ideal opportunity for parents to shop smart for the holidays, and surprise children with the latest toys and games at unbeatable prices.

Adding to the excitement is the

dedicated Toy Expo, where shoppers can explore trending, innovative, and newly launched toys showcased in an engaging and interactive setup. Young visitors can take part in live spot games, hands-on activities, and fun competitions, along with oppor-

tunities to win exciting freebies and giveaways, creating a lively and festive atmosphere.

With incredible savings, interactive entertainment, and a cheerful holiday ambience, LuLu Hypermarket's Toy Fest 2025 promises to make this fes-

tive season truly special for families across Kuwait. The event turns every store visit into a celebration of play, joy, and togetherness, reinforcing LuLu Hypermarket's commitment to delivering memorable shopping experiences for the entire community.



Photos during the campaign.

Film draws praise for ‘amazing’ and ‘truly immersive’ visual effects

New ‘Avatar’ opens in China, testing Hollywood box office pull

BEIJING, Dec 20, (Xinhua): While “Zootopia 2” continues to shatter box-office records across China, James Cameron’s epic sci-fi film “Avatar: Fire and Ash” opened Friday in the Chinese mainland alongside its North American release.

Following “Avatar” (2009) and “Avatar: The Way of Water” (2022), the third installment in one of the most lucrative film franchises globally now joins a year-end release slate largely led by domestic titles in the world’s second-largest film market.

As of 5 p.m. on its first screening day, “Avatar: Fire and Ash” had garnered over 90.39 million yuan (12.81 million U.S. dollars) in ticket sales, including preview screenings.

The 198-minute epic, premiering in China on Dec. 8 and holding nationwide previews, wowed audiences with its breathtaking glasses-free 3D visuals.

One viewer, surnamed Wang from Guiyang, capital of southwest China’s Guizhou Province, gave the film a perfect score, praising its visual effects as “amazing” and “truly immersive.” However, not all feedback was positive. Another moviegoer from Guiyang, surnamed Jian, said, “The visual spectacle doesn’t pack the same punch as the previous installments, and the plot feels somewhat repetitive.” With ticket prices ranging from 40 to 90 yuan, analysts consider the film’s performance in China crucial for achieving its global box-office targets and for gauging Hollywood’s appeal to Chinese audiences.



This image released by Disney shows a scene from ‘Avatar: Fire and Ash.’ (AP)

Despite strong anticipation, few would expect the new episode to match the record-setting performance of “Avatar” (2009) in China. Released in 2010 in the mainland,

it became China’s top-grossing title that year with 1.34 billion yuan in ticket sales.

The 2022 sequel earned 1.7 billion yuan in China but

fell short of replicating that earlier success. By then, China’s top box-office benchmark had been raised to 5.78 billion yuan by the 2021 domestic blockbuster “The Battle at Lake Changjin.”

China’s film market power in focus

Industry watchers say Hollywood productions, hampered by predictable plots and cultural detachment, have struggled in recent years to attract Chinese audiences, who are increasingly drawn to the more diverse and culturally resonant stories offered by China’s booming film industry.

Between 2020 and 2024, China’s top three box-office hits each year were exclusively domestic films.

In early 2025, the homegrown animated blockbuster “Ne Zha 2” underscored the global appeal of Chinese cinema, becoming the first film to earn more than 1 billion U.S. dollars in a single market and the first non-Hollywood title to join the coveted billion-dollar club. With a global gross of 15.9 billion yuan, it secured a place among the five highest-grossing films in world cinema history.

Data from the China Film Administration shows the country’s box office in 2025 had exceeded 50 billion yuan by mid-December, with domestic films capturing an impressive 81.9 percent of total earnings.

However, the rise of Chinese cinema does not signal a decline in Hollywood’s appeal.

Stereotypes persist

Hollywood dreams soar for South Korean actors

SEOUL, South Korea, Dec 20, (AP): When actor Amy Baik was cast in a South Korean commercial last year, she thought she had landed a promising gig.

But after filming wrapped, she was shocked to learn that both the director and advertiser had cut her scenes - not because of her performance, but because she lacked a facial feature prized in South Korean beauty standards.

“The reason was that I don’t have double eyelids,” said Baik, 26.

“After receiving that feedback, I started to reconsider what kind of appearance Korea wants,” she said, adding it “made me wonder how I can survive as an actor in South Korea.”

That experience pushed her toward a different market. The global success of “Parasite,” “Minari” and “Squid Game” has opened doors for South Korean performers in Hollywood - and spawned a cottage industry of consultants helping actors navigate American casting.

“Hollywood’s the dream (...) the ultimate pinnacle of acting accolades,” said Julia Kim, a Korean American casting director who worked on “Minari,” Amazon Prime’s “Butterfly” and “KPop Demon Hunters.”

While established stars like Park Hae-soo and Lee Byung-hun have both South Korean and American representation, most aspiring Korean actors lack such connections. That gap is what talent agencies like Los Angeles-based Upstage Entertainment are trying to bridge.

Alison Dumbell, a co-founder of Upstage with experience in Bollywood and Los Angeles, said she has noticed more demands for “characters that are specifically Korean” than generic “East Asian” ones from Western producers. She attributes that shift partly to the global popularity of South Korean entertainment.

Persists

Still, stereotypes persist. “The one that irritates me is the nerdy tech programmer,” Dumbell said. “Sometimes I just won’t even submit my actor for that because I know that they’re much more nuanced as actors.”

For most South Korean actors without connections or know-how, Hollywood is still uncharted territory.

Kim, who typically casts high-profile stars and works with local casting directors for co-productions, also finds actors via social media. “I usually put out an open call on my Instagram,” she said.

But for actors without major agency backing, the right contacts are hard to find. The American and Korean industries operate differently, and U.S. casting information rarely reaches those outside established networks.

Kim said South Korean talent faces a steep learning curve. “I would get questions - should I change my Korean name to a Western name? Do I pay to get an agent? Can I look into the camera when I’m doing an audition?” she said. Even name consistency is an issue: Kim recalled a K-pop artist turned actor whose name appeared five different ways online.

Technical standards also differ. Actor Misun Youm noted American audition tapes require clean white backgrounds, while “in Korea, it doesn’t matter.”

Headshots diverge too: South Korean profiles feature modellike images, while American headshots match character types.

“In Korea, you shoot profile photos like a fashion magazine model,” said veteran actor Shin Ju-hwan, who goes by Julian Shin. He played a masked soldier in second and third seasons of “Squid Game,” and stars in “Taxi Driver” Season 3.

Shin found Upstage by chance - his wife, a producer, discovered them on LinkedIn.

His Hollywood dream was partly motivated by colleagues at his former agency - Han Yeri in “Minari” and Jung Ho-yeon in “Squid Game.”

“Even though I wasn’t a main character - I was just a ‘soldier’ - people who saw even that brief appearance started leaving comments on my Instagram,” Shin said. “The impact of that show was truly unparalleled.”



South Korean actor Julian Shin talks to The Associated Press about his career and efforts to break into Hollywood in Seoul. (AP)

Film



This image released by Neon shows Wagner Moura in a scene from ‘The Secret Agent.’ (AP)

‘No country develops without culture, without identity’

‘The Secret Agent’ mirrors Brazil’s film upswing

SAO PAULO, Dec 20, (AP): “The Secret Agent,” a Brazilian feature shortlisted for the Oscars, is all about ordinary people. It follows an unassuming scientist and widowed father who becomes a target of Brazil’s military dictatorship in the 1970s - not because he is an activist or revolutionary, but because he stands up to a business owner with ties to the regime.

“He’s in danger simply for being who he is, for holding the values he holds,” star Wagner Moura told The Associated Press in a recent interview. “That’s how authoritarianism works everywhere.”

Directed by Kleber Mendonça Filho, “The Secret Agent” has been hailed by critics as one of the year’s best films and arrives amid a renewed international interest in Brazilian cinema. Expanding in U.S. theaters Friday, the film is backed by major wins at the Cannes Film Festival for both Mendonça Filho (best director) and Moura (best actor).

Earlier this month, the 2 1/2-hour thriller earned Golden Globe nominations for best drama, best non-English film and best actor in a drama. And it is on the shortlist for best international feature film at the 2026 Academy Awards.

“The Secret Agent” arrives at a strong moment for Brazilian cinema following the success of “I’m Still Here,” which won this year’s Oscar for best international feature and a Golden Globe for lead actor Fernanda Torres.

In Brazil, expectations for “The Secret Agent” are high. Moura said the widespread enthusiasm around the film - and the public’s engagement with Brazilian artists - has made him “incredibly happy.”

“No country develops without culture, without identity,” he said. “You’re watching a Brazilian film, seeing a part of Brazil and its history. That matters.”

Set in 1977, at the height of Brazil’s dictatorship, “The Secret Agent” opens with a black-and-white montage of the era’s national symbols, from movie classics to hit soap operas.

Mendonça Filho anchors the story in a precise time and place: Carnival in Recife, the filmmaker’s hometown in northeastern Brazil. As the center of his cinematic universe, the city is the set for confronting a country that still struggles to reckon with its past.

“We’ve all consumed incredible things from so many places - from Akira Kurosawa in Japan to Elvis Presley in the American South,” Mendonça Filho said. “I am Brazilian, and my film is Brazilian. If it’s good, it will be universal.”

Living undercover and under the alias Marcelo, Armando spends his days scouring archives for clues about his mother’s past and planning to flee the country with his young son. As his quiet quest unfolds, the streets outside explode with Carnival revelry - a festival so embedded in Brazilian life that even the police chief appears rumpled from the

celebrations, confetti still clinging to his hair.

Mendonça Filho blends political suspense with urban legends from the period, touching on themes that extend beyond the dictatorship itself, including corruption, state violence and institutional complicity.

One pivotal sequence unfolds inside a movie theater, a nod to the director’s lifelong cinephilia. As fictional audiences spill out of screenings of “Jaws” and “The Omen,” shaken by fictional threats, the country itself is living under real terror.

Over the past decade, Brazilian cinema has increasingly revisited the military dictatorship, which ruled from 1964 to 1985. Alongside “The Secret Agent” and “I’m Still Here,” filmmakers have returned to the period in works such as “Marighella,” directed by Moura, about the legendary guerrilla leader who took up arms against the regime.

Many of these films were made or released in the past decade, amid the rise of Brazil’s far right. Its most prominent figure was former President Jair Bolsonaro, a retired army captain who praised officers accused of torture and minimized state crimes committed during the dictatorship.

Mendonça Filho is among the filmmakers who have taken on the task of confronting national memory.

“The military is a trauma that was never truly examined,” he said. “You can’t just say, ‘Move on, forget it.’ A crust forms over it. The same thing happens to an entire nation.”

As “The Secret Agent” arrived in Brazilian theaters on Nov. 6, history was unfolding in real time.

That same month, Bolsonaro was arrested and began serving a 27-year prison sentence for attempting to overturn the 2022 election after losing to President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. For the first time, high-ranking military officers were also imprisoned for their role in the attempted coup.

“Today, I’m much more optimistic about Brazil as a democracy,” Mendonça Filho said. “For the first time, we’re holding military officers accountable - and sending to prison a president who did nothing but harm the country.”

Few stories in “The Secret Agent” are as striking as that of Tânia Maria, 78, who plays Dona Sebastiana.

A Brazilian artisan, Maria lived an ordinary life until age 72, when she was cast as an extra in Mendonça Filho’s 2019 film “Bacurau.” Since then, she has appeared in six films that have yet to be released.

The director said he never forgot her presence - “a birdlike bearing, a voice shaped by 60 years of cigarettes and a razor-sharp sense of humor.” He later wrote the role of Dona Sebastiana specifically for her.

The character, who shelters political fugitives including Armando, stands out. When she walks toward the camera in a flowered dress, cigarette in hand, the film briefly belongs to her.

Lawrence and Winslet lead holiday streams

NEW YORK, Dec 20, (AP): Jennifer Lawrence playing a new mother whose behavior becomes increasingly erratic in “Die My Love” and three more “Stranger Things” episodes are some of the new television, films, music and games headed to a device near you.

Also among the streaming offerings worth your time this week, as selected by The Associated Press’ entertainment journalists: Disney Parks Magical Christmas Day Parade featuring Gwen Stefani and Nicole Scherzinger, the Chinese animated epic “Ne Zha II” and Simu Liu starring as an intelligence analyst whose brain has been hacked in Peacock’s “The Copenhagen Test.”

Jennifer Lawrence plays a new mother whose behavior becomes increasingly erratic in Lynne Ramsay’s “Die My Love,” streaming on Mubi on Dec. 23. Robert Pattinson plays her husband in this story adapted from Ariana Harwicz’s novel. In his review for The Associated Press, Film Writer Jake Coyle wrote called it “a jagged, go-for-broke psychodrama” raging with a “primal punk spirit.” He added, “there’s plenty to admire in Ramsay’s

uncompromising and delirious portrait of marital hell, particularly in the bracingly raw performance of Lawrence.”

The Chinese animated epic “Ne Zha II,” which is the highest grossing animated movie of all time with over \$2.2 billion in ticket sales, is coming to HBO Max on Wednesday. The film tells the story of a rebellious little child, Ne Zha, born as the reincarnation of a demon to mortal parents, who is out to prove his fate is not predetermined. Michelle Yeoh lent her voice to the English language dub, which she said “immerses you into our culture.” The first film is available to stream on Netflix, but it’s possible to just dive right into the sequel.

If you like holiday movies with a side of tears, “Goodbye June,” streaming on Netflix on Christmas Eve, might just be the ticket. Kate Winslet directs and stars in this family drama about four adult children (Winslet, Andrea Riseborough, Johnny Flynn, Toni Collette) coming to terms with the fact that their mother, June (Helen Mirren), is dying. In my review, I wrote that it was an admira-

bly solid, if generic, drama that’s elevated by a distinguished cast and moments of humor, grace and insight.

Speaking of holiday viewing, it’s also worth noting that Prime Video is getting two of the year’s biggest movies: “A Minecraft Movie,” on Monday, and “Sinners,” on Friday, Dec. 26.

AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr

It’s wholesome holiday fun for the whole family! Kicking off at 10 a.m. ET on ABC and streaming at 11 a.m. ET on Disney+, Hulu and the Disney YouTube channel on Christmas Day, music fans can tune into the annual Disney Parks Magical Christmas Day Parade. It’s not just for the kids: The special will feature musical performances from Gwen Stefani, Coco Jones, Iam Tongi, Lady A, Nicole Scherzinger, Mariah the Scientist and Bebe Rexha.

AP Music Writer Maria Sherman

Make your Christmas stranger. The next

block of installments of “Stranger Things” - that’s episodes 5-7 - drop like a present as the fifth and final season continues. When we last checked out Hawkins, Vecna was deep into a dastardly plan, Demogorgons were menacing and Will Byers was coming into his own powers. The very last episodes will stream on New Year’s Eve.

Simu Liu stars as an intelligence analyst whose brain has been hacked in Peacock’s new espionage thriller, “The Copenhagen Test.” In addition to Liu, the series’ regulars include Melissa Barrera, Sinclair Daniel, Brian d’Arcy James, Mark O’Brien and Kathleen Chalfant. All episodes debut on Dec. 27.

“Members Only: Palm Beach” is a new Netflix reality show that follows the exclusive, high-end social scene of one of Florida’s most affluent areas, as experienced by five women who are part of the community. “There’s a lot more beneath the sunshine than anyone expects, because nobody goes lower than high society,” Taja Aibitol, one of the stars, explains. It premieres on Dec. 29.

AP Entertainment Writer Mark Kennedy

Music

Unforgettable evening of classical Concertos

Virtuoso performances light up KMA Concert of Masters



Welcoming with Hoffmeister' Concerto on Viola – Dmitri Krasnikov, Ms. Inna (piano)



KMA Master Team warmly applauded Mr. Dmitri, Mr Alex, Mr. Viktor, Ms. Inna. Ms Kinga & Mr Kamil



'Concerto d'Aranjuez' – on guitar Alexandr Kovalev with Ms. Inna on piano



'The Phantom of The Opera – singing by Kinga Masternak & Kamil Derylo with Inna Agibalova on piano

By Cezary Owerkowicz
Special to the Arab Times

A concert is the live performance of music in front of an audience, while a salon can refer to an elegant room in a house where guests are received. Fits like a glove!

Kuwait Music Academy (KMA) is engaged in teaching music. But, all types of music come alive when somebody performs them. This is the reason why we teach our students from the very beginning how to perform in front of people. The best way to teach this is by example: Bear witness. In English they say: What use is used to, age remembers. Or: As the twig is bent, so is the tree inclined.

Bear Witness!

Moreover, young people should not only believe, but also see that their guides are masters. Hence, the history of concerts began in schools. The first closed concerts emerged only in the

late 17th century in universities like Oxford and Cambridge. The first open concert was performed by one of the finest violinists of his day, John Banister, in 1672 at his musical school in Whitefriars, London – as advertised in the London Gazette on Dec 30, 1672, announcing the “Musical Performance by Excellent Masters.”

353 Years Later: Concert of Concertos

Concert is also the name of a musical form. It comes from the Latin ‘concertare’ (to contend, dispute) and ‘consortium’ (society, participation).

KMA presented the Concert of Masters last Friday in Salwa.

Centuries ago, the guests were welcomed by a Court-Master (in German: ‘Hof-Meister’). Coincidentally, this is also the title of Austrian composer Franz Anton Hoffmeister (1754-1812). Since his studies in Vienna, he had already been one of the most popular and highly respected musicians of his

time. His concert tours took him as far as London. As a multi-instrumentalist, he composed dozens of great concertos. He also founded the oldest music publishing company, still in existence today – Edition Peters.

The Viola Concerto in D, which gained prominence, showcased Hoffmeister’s skill in exploiting the full range of the viola. The piece was presented by Dmitri Krasnikov, a virtuoso remembered since the Viola Bouquet Concert in February.

Dmitri Krasnikov on viola and the excellent clarinetist Viktor Shramko performed the Double Concerto by Max Bruch (1838-1920). The late Romantic German composer wrote a symphony at the age of 14 and presented his first opera at the age of 20. His exquisite First Violin Concerto became a staple of the violin repertoire.

Seen by the Eyes of the Soul

The next piece, ‘Guitar Concerto

d’Aranjuez’, by the blind Spanish maestro, Joaquín Rodrigo (1901-1999), had been an eternal world hit since its premiere. Unable to see the world around him from early childhood, he turned inward, and his acute sensitivity to sound shaped his unique musical voice. The concerto premiered in 1940, just after the death of his beloved daughter, the serious illness of his wife, and the tragedy of the cruel civil war in his homeland. It is a lament over tragic fate, yet it remains dignified and beautiful. This moving musical poem about fate was presented by talented guitar virtuoso Alexandr Kovalev.

Life to the End on the Stage

Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826) was a classicist and Romantic composer. He spent his childhood ‘on the road’ in a travelling opera company created by his parents, which shaped his interests. In his teenage years, he composed four operas as a result of

studying with his father and Michael Haydn (his brother). He was also the cousin of Mozart, who married Constanze Weber, the daughter of his uncle and a singer.

He composed 14 operas throughout his short life, but the first four were lost. The most famous is ‘The Freeshooter’ (1821), a cornerstone of German Romantic opera. Successful throughout Europe, the opera was soon presented in four theatres in London. As a result of this success, the Royal Opera in 1825 commissioned from him the opera ‘Oberon’. Again, it was a resounding success. However, as he had been sickly since childhood, he passed away just after the prestigious Royal premiere in the spring of 1826 in London. His Clarinet Concerto was presented by the awesome, Viktor Shramko (also conductor of the KMA Orchestra).

Promise of a Real Blast

The second half of the Masters Con-

cert was a blast. Two of our leading vocalists, soprano Kinga Masternak and Kamil Derylo, performed a revue of world hits. It included the songs of George and Ira Gershwin (from ‘Lady Be Good’, ‘Porgy and Bess’, ‘Girl Crazy’, and the movie, ‘The Man I Love’).

At the end, they performed duets from the mega-pop musical by Andrew Lloyd Webber, ‘The Phantom of the Opera,’ prompting the grateful audience to demand for encores!

All the concert masters received full support, with the accompaniment of the steadfast pianist, Inna Agibalova.

KMA Concert Salon will hold the Winter Concert series in January and an Argentinian Tango event in spring (among others).

Please follow KMA to obtain information, such as when to join the Music Salon, as Music, like tango, needs two: the musician and the listener.

Stage



Michael Edwards, better known as Eddie the Eagle, left, playing Professor Crackpot, receives applaud as he performs with fellow actors in the pantomime 'Beauty and the Beast' at Watersmeet Theatre in Rickmansworth, England. (AP)

Stage jitters replace fear of falling

Eddie the Eagle dazzles in latest performance

GLOUCESTER, England, Dec 20, (AP): Waiting in the wings on opening night of “Beauty and the Beast,” Michael Edwards felt the nerve-wracking jitters he experienced four decades earlier staring through thick glasses down a perilously steep ski jump.

The athlete-turned-performer better known as “Eddie the Eagle” was no stranger to fear, but this was different: he was about to face a theater packed with children.

In ski jumping, he might break his neck; here he only risked tripping over his lines and failing to win laughs.

Edwards has added acting to the bustling business of being Eddie the Eagle, feathering his nest and stretching his celebrity far longer than his brief flight as Britain’s first Olympic ski jumper won him fame despite finishing last in the 1988 Calgary Games.

There is almost nothing he hasn’t done since he entered the spotlight. He has recorded songs, danced on ice, dressed twice as a chicken (eagle suits are scarce), been interviewed in an Amsterdam brothel, filmed car and spectacle commercials, and spoken for hours at a time about what he knows best: how he landed here.

“I’m always very, very grateful that I got christened Eddie The Eagle and it’s amazing that I’m talking about it 38 years later,” he told The Associated Press. “I’m hoping that I encourage other people to get out there, get off their bum and go for their dream.”

It didn’t appear early on that Edwards was headed for fame.

He grew up - and still lives - on the edge of the Cotswolds, in western England where snow is rare and the hills would never be mistaken for mountains. His father expected his son to follow him into plastering - as he did after his father and grandfather.

But an adolescent Edwards had different designs after a school trip to the Italian Alps sparked a passion for ski-

ing. He became a fixture at Gloucester Ski Centre, where a bristly plastic surface shorter than three football fields offers year-round skiing.

He became a good downhiller, but didn’t make the British ski team for the 1984 Sarajevo Olympics. Undeterred, he set his sights higher after realizing Britain had no ski jumpers.

Edwards went to Lake Placid, New York, where he rummaged for skis and gear, including a helmet with no strap that he secured with string and oversized boots he padded out with five pairs of socks.

At 22, he was learning what the world’s best jumpers began mastering as children.

“It was like a crash course. And, yeah, I did take huge risks,” he said. “When I finished ski jumping, I was just as scared to do my last jump as I was to do my first. You never get used to it.”

Short on cash and lacking sponsors, he scrounged food from trash bins, slept in barns, a car and even a mental hospital in Finland - not to mention medical hospitals.

“It would be easier to name the bones I haven’t broken,” he quipped.

He fractured his skull twice - while wearing a helmet - broke his jaw, smashed his collarbone in five places, broke three ribs and damaged a kidney and a knee. It didn’t stop him.

He worked up to bigger jumps and competed internationally. Despite efforts by British sports federations to prevent him competing, he eventually jumped far enough to represent Great Britain at the Olympics.

Edwards arrived in Calgary to a sign welcoming “Eddie the Eagle” - unaware it was for him.

Reporters loved his enthusiastic underdog determination and physical appearance. He was hefty by ski jumping standards, had a lantern jaw, wispy moustache and eyes that bulged behind thick lenses in his pink-rimmed aviator-

style glasses.

Few outside the ski jumping world remember the winner, “Flying Finn” Matti Nykänen, who soared over 120 meters and swept all events.

The most famous remains the man who finished last - 19 meters behind his nearest competitor, but setting a new British record of 71 meters (77 yards).

Edwards flapped his arms madly after landing and the crowd of 85,000 went wild.

He returned to a hero’s welcome, escorted by police through throngs at London’s Heathrow Airport.

“My feet didn’t touch the ground for, oh gosh, about three and a half, four years,” he said. “I was traveling all over the world opening shopping centers, golf courses, hotels, fun rides, doing lots of TV shows and radio shows, meeting film stars, TV stars, musicians, bands, famous people, royalty, all over world and it was amazing.”

The ski jumping world was less enamored and made sure there will never be another ski jumper like Edwards.

“We have thousands of Eddie Edwards in Norway,” groused Torbjorn Yggeseeth, the ski jump technical director for the International Ski and Snowboard Federation (FIS), the sport’s regulatory body. “But we never let them jump.”

What’s known as the “Eddie the Eagle rule” set a minimum distance beyond his reach and ended Edwards’ jumping ambitions.

As promotional opportunities evaporated, Edwards returned to plastering.

Then a winning turn on Splash! a reality diving contest, helped revive his second career in 2013. Three years later, the biopic “Eddie the Eagle” starring Taron Egerton as Edwards and Hugh Jackman as his coach allowed him to retire his trowel.

He now earns 3,000 to 12,000 pounds (\$4,000-16,000) for talks several days a week, helping him recover from finan-

cial setbacks.

Much of the small fortune he earned from his first wave of fame vanished because a trust fund required to maintain his amateur status was poorly managed, he said. An emotionally taxing divorce in 2016 with the mother of his two daughters drained more savings.

The “Beauty and the Beast” adaptation at the Watersmeet Theatre in Rickmansworth, outside London, is his second foray into pantomime.

Panto, as it’s known, is a uniquely British take on classic fairytales at Christmastime that blends music, dance, slapstick, cross-dressing, jokes for kids and bawdy humor for their parents and often stars minor celebrities alongside aspiring actors.

Zany plot twists sneak in references to Edwards’ fame even though half the audience wasn’t old enough to have even seen the movie when it came out - never mind watching him in the Olympics.

“Jump” by Van Halen plays as his character, Professor Crackpot, the bumbling father of Belle, enters the stage toting his latest invention - jet-propelled skis.

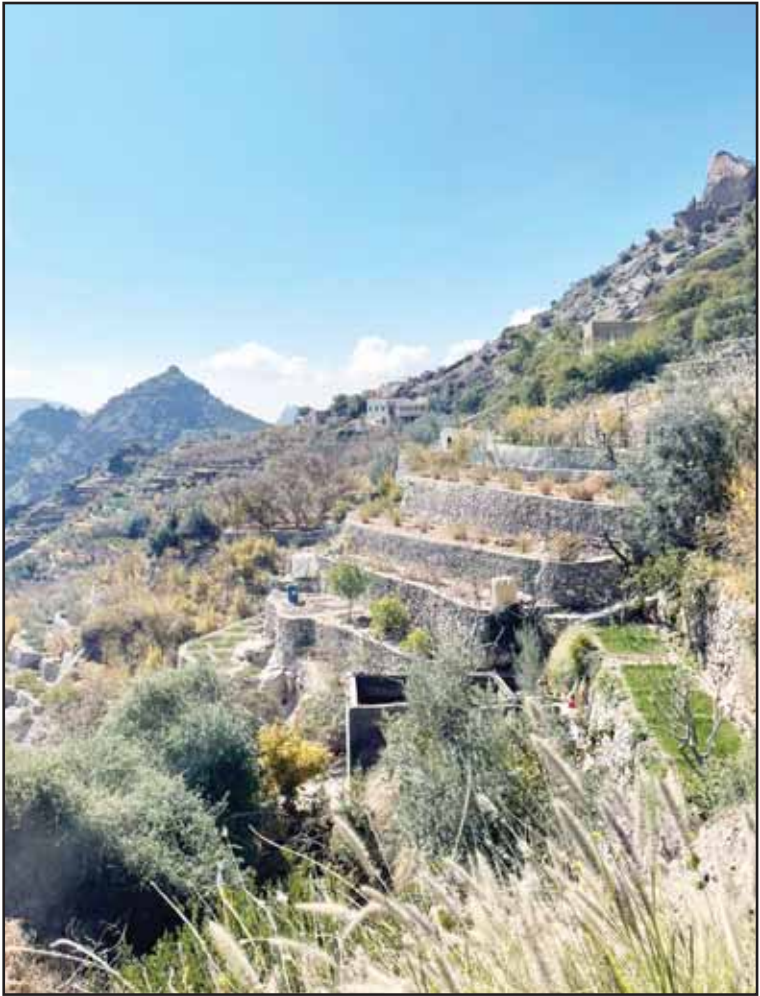
At 62, Edwards’ once-blond hair is shaved, his moustache is missing, his underbite has been surgically corrected and his glasses are gone - his nearsightedness corrected with implanted lenses.

A recurring gag has children in the audience shout, “on your head,” when he fumbles in search of his gigantic eye-glasses.

He later skis on stage in a replica of his baby blue ski suit from Calgary. He tucks into a downhill position to outrun Santa’s sleigh bearing down from a video projected behind him. Edwards flies off a jump, sticks the landing and is presented with a gold medal.

The scene served no plot point, but recognized what Edwards is best known for: taking a leap and landing on his feet. It’s a crowd pleaser.

Oman’s cultivated mountains’ terraces turn into tourist attraction



Fertile terraces cascading down the slopes of Al-Akhdar mountain. KUNA photos

MUSCAT, Dec 20, (KUNA): Across mountains’ slopes, terraced orchards are a testament to the Omanis’ skills of coping with rugged terrain; a beautiful panorama depicting co-existence between the human being and the nature.

Omanis have for a long time terraced the mountainous slopes, growing fruitful trees and vegetables de-

spite water scarcity.

They have built water canals to water the trees and orchards that decorate the slopes in patterns.

Tourists nowadays are lured by these terraces that show how farming communities managed to alter the steep landscape to make a living from cultivation.

Sweden’s experience in using innovative alternatives opens wide doors to a smoke-free future

Sweden has provided a pioneering model in the pursuit of a smoke-free future, by adopting a harm reduction strategy and encouraging the use of less harmful nicotine alternatives. While many countries are still struggling to reduce smoking rates, Sweden is close to becoming the first “smoke-free” country as defined by the World Health Organization, meaning that less than 5% of the adult population smokes.

This shift was not born of the moment, but rather the result of a gradual decline in smoking rates over two decades, driven by continuous awareness campaigns and, most importantly, the availability of less harmful alternatives such as traditional snus and tobacco-free nicotine pouches, which have been widely popular, emphasizing that the way nicotine is consumed plays a crucial role in health effects, not nicotine itself.

This approach has contributed to tangible health outcomes in Sweden, where smoking rates have fallen by 55% over the past decade, resulting in a 38% reduction in the mortality rate among men from tobacco consumption in Sweden compared to the average rate of tobacco-related deaths in neighboring European countries, as well as a 41% reduction in the rate of Lung cancer. Sweden is the only European country that allows nicotine pouches to be commercialized and used, and about 18% of the population consumes them, reflecting a shift in public attitude towards less harmful products.

Can the experience be replicated?

Despite cultural and legislative differences, the Swedish experience offers a model that can be studied and applied. Rather than being satisfied with prevention policies, Sweden has adopted a realistic approach that balances awareness and the provision of alternatives, based on high societal awareness, trust in health institutions and a regulated market.

What sets the experiment apart is not only the decline in the number of adult smokers, but the way it was achieved. Instead of relying on bans, it has opened the door to less harmful alternatives, foremost among them nicotine pocuhes, which are



an effective tool to reduce cigarette use. It should be noted here that these products are not considered risk-free and contain nicotine, which is addictive, but it is not considered the main cause of smoking-related diseases.

With public health systems around the world increasingly challenged, Sweden’s experience stands out as practical evidence that change is possible when there is societal awareness and policy innovation. Rather than just warning about the dangers of smoking, Sweden has chosen to empower

individuals to make more informed decisions by providing less harmful alternatives. This approach, although not completely eliminates risks, reduces them significantly, which could be a starting point for other countries looking for realistic and sustainable solutions for the problem of chronic smoking.

Everyone around the world agrees that quitting smoking is always the best option any smoker can take. However, some argue that the use of alternative tobacco products such as e-cigarettes, heated tobacco, and

nicotine pouches can help large numbers of adult smokers who do not quit smoking reduce its harm.

Sweden’s experience opens a global debate about realistic policies to reduce the harms of tobacco. While opinions differ on alternatives, innovation and flexibility in legislation remain key elements in the face of one of the most harmful habits of modern times.

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Family roles redefined

More baby care rooms open to dads in China

SHENZHEN, Dec. 20, (Xinhua): In a gradual revolution of public parenting spaces, a new facility -- the “Father-and-Baby Room” is popping up in shopping malls across Chinese cities, signaling a shift toward a more equitable distribution of childcare responsibilities.

At a shopping center in the south Chinese metropolis of Shenzhen, the “super daddy zone” is easily identifiable by a glowing blue bottle logo.

Soundproof magnetic doors ensure privacy, while illustrated guides on the walls demonstrate how to prepare formula and hold an infant. Fathers are often spotted pushing strollers to take care of their babies in this space.

Nearby, a “Men’s Parenting Room” sits beside a “Women’s Parenting Room” at another mall in Shenzhen, both equally equipped with diaper-changing stations, sinks with hot and cold water, and formula-preparing areas.

“To meet customers’ needs, we’ve set up such baby care rooms for both dads and moms on two different floors. It encourages fathers to be more involved in taking care of the baby,” a mall staff member explained.

The key difference from traditional mother-and-baby rooms is the omission of private breastfeeding cubicles, focusing just on care, feeding, and rest functions. A more inclusive and practical trend, however, is merging the two into gender-neutral “family nursing rooms.”

Some establishments have re-branded the previous “Mother-and-Baby Rooms” as simply “Nursing Rooms,” with clear zoning to separate breastfeeding areas from open washing and changing spaces. This allows fathers to assist with childcare while respecting the privacy of nursing mothers.

Liu Xiao, a father who just changed his one-year-old daughter’s diaper in one such room, expressed his approval for this space. “These facilities are very user-friendly and convenient. They actually influence our choice of where to shop,” he said. “I believe the traditional idea that ‘men work outside, women manage the home’ is fading. Fathers should join in parenting. My daughter is very attached to me, and I find it very re-



This undated file photo shows the logo of a baby care room for dads at a shopping center in Shenzhen, south China’s Guangdong Province. (Xinhua)

warding.”

This evolution mirrors profound changes in Chinese families’ parenting concepts, said Ming Liang, executive director of the Department of Urbanization of China Development Institute, adding that such changes have reshaped fathers’ role in parenting and pushed society toward a more balanced model of shared parenting.

Traditionally, public parenting facilities in China were almost exclusively “Mother-and-Baby Rooms,” designed to protect the privacy of breastfeeding women, often accompanied by “No Men Allowed” signs.

However, as societal norms shift and family structures evolve, fathers are taking a more active role in child-rearing, particularly among the “post-90s” and “post-95s” generations who are now the primary childbearing demographic. This growing desire for shared responsibility has clashed with the reality of available facilities, according to Ming.

Experts believe that the emergence of father-and-baby rooms fills this gap. Building a fertility-friendly society requires multi-dimensional support policies to ease family burdens and promote shared parenting.

The transition from “Mother-and-Baby” to “Father-and-Baby” or just “Nursing” rooms signifies more than a name change. It marks a profound step in social progress, said Ming.

The Conversation

Inflammation emerges as a key cardiovascular factor

How C-reactive protein surpassed ‘bad’ cholesterol as leading heart risk marker

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



By Mary J. Scourboutakos
Macon & Joan Brock Virginia Health Sciences at Old Dominion University

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States.

Since researchers first established the link between diet, cholesterol and heart disease in the 1950s, risk for heart disease has been partly assessed based on a patient’s cholesterol levels, which can be routinely measured via blood work at the doctor’s office.

However, accumulating evidence over the past two decades demonstrates that a biomarker called C-reactive protein - which signals the presence of low-grade inflammation - is a better predictor of risk for heart disease than cholesterol.

As a result, in September 2025, the American College of Cardiology published new recommendations for universal screening of C-reactive protein levels in all patients, alongside measuring cholesterol levels.

C-reactive protein is created by the liver in response to infections, tissue damage, chronic inflammatory states from conditions like autoimmune diseases, and metabolic disturbances like obesity and diabetes. Essentially, it is a marker of inflammation - meaning immune system activation - in the body.

C-reactive protein can be easily measured with blood work at the doctor’s office. A low C-reactive protein level - under 1 milligram per deciliter - signifies minimal inflammation in the body, which is protective against heart disease. An elevated C-reactive protein level of greater than 3 milligrams per deciliter, signifies increased levels of inflammation and thus increased risk for heart disease. About 52% of Americans have an elevated level of C-reactive protein in their blood.



Blood vessel damage from fatty and high-sugar diets leads to inflammation, which can be detected by measuring C-reactive protein. (AP)

Research shows that C-reactive protein is a better predictive marker for heart attacks and strokes than “bad,” or LDL cholesterol, short for low-density lipoprotein, as well as another commonly measured genetically inherited biomarker called lipoprotein(a). One study found that C-reactive protein can predict heart disease just as well as blood pressure can.

Inflammation plays a crucial role at every stage in the development and buildup of fatty plaque in the arteries, which causes a condition called atherosclerosis that can lead to heart attacks and strokes.

From the moment a blood vessel is damaged, be it from high blood sugar or cigarette smoke, immune cells immediately infiltrate the area. Those immune cells subsequently engulf cholesterol particles that are typically floating around in the blood stream to form a fatty plaque that resides in the wall of the vessel.

This process continues for decades until eventually, one day, immune mediators rupture the cap that encloses the plaque. This triggers the formation of a blood clot that obstructs blood flow, starves

bad cholesterol is packaged into, as opposed to the total mass of bad cholesterol that’s floating around. More particles means higher risk.

That is why a blood test known as apolipoprotein B, which measures the number of cholesterol particles, is a better predictor of risk for heart disease than measurements of total amounts of bad cholesterol.

Like cholesterol and C-reactive protein, apolipoprotein B is also influenced by lifestyle factors like exercise, weight loss and diet. Nutrients like fiber, nuts and omega-3 fatty acids are associated with a decreased number of cholesterol particles, while increased sugar intake is associated with a larger number of cholesterol particles.

Furthermore, lipoprotein(a), a protein that lives in the wall surrounding cholesterol particles, is another marker that can predict heart disease more accurately than cholesterol levels. This is because the presence of lipoprotein(a) makes cholesterol particles sticky, so to speak, and thus more likely to get trapped in an atherosclerotic plaque.

However, unlike other risk factors, lipoprotein(a) levels are purely genetic, thus not influenced by lifestyle, and need only be measured once in a lifetime.

Ultimately, heart disease is the product of many risk factors and their interactions over a lifetime.

Therefore, preventing heart disease is way more complicated than simply eating a cholesterol-free diet, as once thought.

Knowing your LDL cholesterol level alongside your C-reactive protein, apolipoprotein B and lipoprotein (a) levels paints a comprehensive picture of risk that can hopefully help motivate long-term commitment to the fundamentals of heart disease prevention. These include eating well, exercising consistently, getting adequate sleep, managing stress productively, maintaining healthy weight and, if applicable, quitting smoking. (AP)

Jake suffers broken jaw but vows to keep fighting

Joshua ends Paul hype with sixth-round knockout

MIAMI, Dec 20, (AP): Anthony Joshua knocked out Jake Paul in the sixth round of their heavyweight fight on Friday night.

The two-time heavyweight champion displayed why he is one of the sport's elite punchers when he dropped the fading Paul twice in the fifth round.

Sensing the YouTuber was finished, Joshua rocked him with a right uppercut early in the sixth. The native of England then floored Paul with a combination to the head.

Although Paul (12-2) reached his feet again, Joshua (29-4, 26 KOs) finally crushed Paul's upset dream when he dropped him a fourth time with a right to the head. Referee Christopher Young counted Paul out at 1:31 of the round in front of a capacity crowd of 19,600 at the Kaseya Center.

"It took a little bit longer than expected but the right hand finally found its destination," Joshua said. "Jake Paul's done really well tonight. I'm going to give him his props. He got up time and time again. I give Jake the respect for trying and trying. He came up against a real fighter tonight."

Paul later reported that his jaw was broken in two spots.

With the victory, Joshua now can angle to reclaim the heavyweight title he lost against Oleksandr Usyk. Joshua also has talked about a long discussed match with countryman and former champion, Tyson Fury. However, Fury is currently retired following consecutive losses to Usyk in 2024.

It was Joshua's first bout since Daniel Dubois knocked him out in five rounds in Sept. 2024.



Anthony Joshua, right, punches Jake Paul during their heavyweight boxing match in Miami, Fla. (AP)

Joshua methodically established pace against Paul from the opening round as neither fighter engaged early. Midway through the round, Paul threw an overhand right that Joshua blocked with his glove. In the closing seconds, Joshua scored with a right to the head near the ropes.

In the second, Joshua began utilizing his 6-inch reach advantage by leading with a left jab.

Paul scored with a short right to the head early in the fourth. Later in the round, Paul twice fell to the canvas awkwardly as he again attempted to cut distance during close exchanges.

"I gave it my all," Paul said. "Anthony is a great fighter and I got my (rear end) kicked but that what this sport is all about. But I'm going to come back and keep winning."

Paul weighed 216 pounds and Joshua weighed 243 for the bout.

The 28-year-old Paul, who began his career in Jan. 2020, originally had targeted an exhibition in Miami with lightweight champion Gervonta Davis last month. But Davis encountered legal problems that scrapped the event. Paul quickly pivoted and landed the bout against Joshua in the same venue.

Celebrities in the crowd included golf champion Rory McIlroy, New York Mets slugger Juan Soto, Barstool Sports founder Dave Portnoy and retired NFL receivers Michael Irvin and Brandon Marshall.

In an undercard bout between retired UFC champions, 50-year-old Anderson Silva scored a second-round TKO against Tyron Woodley.

ATP tightens player safety rules

Wawrinka confirms '26 as final year on tour



In this file photo, Stan Wawrinka, of Switzerland, plays a backhand return to Lorenzo Sonego, of Italy, during a first-round match at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

BERN, Dec 20, (AP): Three-time major winner Stan Wawrinka says 2026 will be his last year on tour.

Since Wawrinka turned pro in 2002, the Swiss has won 16 tour singles titles. He beat the No. 1-ranked player in the finals of the 2014 Australian Open (Rafael Nadal), 2015 French Open (Novak Djokovic) and 2016 U.S. Open (Djokovic).

"One last push," Wawrinka wrote on social media on Friday.

"Every book needs an ending. It's time to write the final chapter of my career as a professional tennis player. 2026 will be my last year on tour."

Wawrinka and Roger Federer won the 2008 Beijing Olympics doubles gold medal and helped Switzerland win its only Davis Cup in 2014.

He is one of only three players to beat Nadal, Djokovic, Federer and Andy Murray at the Grand Slams.

The 40-year-old claimed his last singles trophy in 2017. He starts his final season in Perth at the United Cup from Jan. 2.

□ □ □

The ATP last set out a new safeguarding policy Friday which aims to ensure players and staff feel safe from abuse on tour and know how to report inappropriate behavior.

In a move which mirrors work done by the WTA in women's tennis, the ATP's code of conduct sets out how investigations should be conducted and a range of potential punishments, from reprimands up to permanently revoking access to its tournaments.

The ATP also says it will launch training for players, coaches and staff throughout next year.

"Everyone involved in our events - from players and their teams to staff and volunteers - deserves to feel safe, respected, and valued," chief executive Eno Polo said in a statement. "This program helps make that a reality. By introducing clear protections against abuse, we're strengthening the culture of tennis and aligning our sport with global standards of governance and care."

The code of conduct covers areas like bullying, sexual harassment and violence, as well as behavior which could constitute an "abuse of trust" in a professional relationship.

It also commits players, coaches and tour personnel to report any concerns about abusive behavior and to tell the ATP's safeguarding director if they are facing investigations from police or social services about "any behavior constituting either a criminal offence or a safeguarding concern."

Friday's launch of the safeguarding program brings more structure to the tour's approach, which was previously in the spotlight when the ATP commissioned an investigation in 2021 into German player Alexander Zverev. The ATP said in 2023 that the investigation found "insufficient evidence" to substantiate domestic abuse allegations against Zverev, a three-time Grand Slam runner-up, who denied wrongdoing.

□ □ □

Chinese tennis player Pang Renlong has been banned for 12 years and fined \$110,000 for a match-fixing spree involving 22 matches in a five-month period.

The International Tennis Integrity Agency said Friday that the 25-year-old Pang admitted to fixing five of his own matches in lower-level events and making "corrupt approaches" to players in 11 more matches, six of which were also fixed.

The match-fixing happened from May through September 2024, the ITIA said. During that period, Pang played in various ITF tournaments in Turkey, Hong Kong and mainland China and lost in qualifying for one ATP Challenger event, the Jinan Open in China.

The ITIA didn't list the fixed matches linked to Pang, whose career-high ranking was 1,316th last year. His suspension is due to run through 2036, including time already spent under a provisional suspension. Of his \$110,000 fine, \$70,000 was suspended.

He is banned from playing in, coaching at or attending any event organized by major tennis bodies or national federations.

Last week, the ITIA announced French player Quentin Folliot was suspended 20 years for match-fixing and recruiting other players "on behalf of a match-fixing syndicate." He was the sixth player banned over allegations of involvement with the group.

England's Ashes hopes 'dented' by Lyon magic

Australia on course for series win

ADELAIDE, Australia, Dec 20, (AP): Nathan Lyon severely dented England's desperate Ashes survival bid with three quick blows: vice-captain Harry Brook, bowled; captain Ben Stokes, bowled; leading scorer Zak Crawley, stumped.

Just as England was starting to gain confidence Saturday chasing what needed to be a world-record 435 to keep the Ashes series alive, Lyon returned to the Australian attack.

Crawley (85) and Brook (30) had combined in a 68-run stand to revive England's innings from 109-3 to 177-3 after Australia skipper Pat Cummins took out the top order.

Then Lyon, who moved to No. 2 on Australia's all-time list of wicket-takers in the first innings, started a new spell in the evening session.

On his second ball Lyon dismissed a cavalier Brook, who reached too far and completely missed an extravagant reverse sweep. The 38-year-old spinner quickly took three wickets for eight runs in a sequence that ripped through the middle order and suddenly England was 194-6.

Stokes, England's totemic leader, was out trying to defend against Lyon but missed a turning ball that rattled his off stump. Crawley, batting patiently in pursuit of a sixth Test century, was deceived by a drifting Lyon delivery and stumped by Alex Carey.

At stumps on Day 4, England was 207-6 and needing 228 runs for an improbable victory in the third test.

Australia, which hasn't lost an Ashes test at home since 2010-11, needed four wickets to clinch the five-match series with two tests to spare.

Crawley said England had been outplayed by Australia.

"Obviously we've been slightly short of our best but credit has to go



Australia's Pat Cummins bats during play on day four of the third Ashes cricket test between England and Australia in Adelaide, Australia. (AP)

them, they haven't allowed us to be at our best," Crawley said. "It's disappointing, we came here to win the Ashes and we're staring down the barrel now."

After losing the first two tests in Perth and Brisbane, England needs a win in Adelaide to have any hope of reclaiming the Ashes. Australia needs only a draw to retain the old urn.

"We'll reflect on today and make plans for tomorrow," Australia wicketkeeper Carey said in a post-match TV interview, trying to play down his team's strong position.

Of Lyon's impact, Carey added: "He toiled away all day, finally got some reward."

Cummins rattled the top order in three spells, dismissing Ben Duckett (4) and Ollie Pope (17), both caught by Marnus Labuschagne, on either side of the lunch interval. Then he had Joe Root, the No. 1-ranked batter in test cricket, caught behind for 39.

It was the 13th time Cummins has dismissed the former England captain in test cricket. And it was an all-too familiar setup - Cummins repeatedly putting the ball on a perfect length before getting Root to dabble at a ball that shaped in and seamed away.

Even his Australian teammates late in the afternoon were mildly taunting Lyon, who said in a TV interview earlier this month he was "filthy" at being dropped for the second test in Brisbane. Chirps of "C'mon Big Fil. C'mon Filthy" echoed around the stumps as fielders encouraged the veteran spin bowler.

Lyon hadn't taken a wicket in 27 overs and had figures of 0-50 from 10.1 overs in the second innings Saturday before he dramatically swung the momentum.

For much of Day 4, England was playing the better cricket.

Australia resumed at 271-4 in its second innings, a lead of 356, with Head unbeaten on 142 and Carey on 52.

Head's dismissal for 170 triggered a lower-order collapse, with the last six wickets falling for 38 in 11 overs. The Australians were all out for 349, a lead of 434.

Head's 162-run stand with Carey ended when he pulled a short ball from Josh Tongue (4-70) high and deep into the outfield.

Brad eyes Daytona 500 comeback

Keselowski undergoes surgery after ski injury

CHARLOTTE, N.C., Dec 20, (AP): NASCAR driver Brad Keselowski, a former series champion who is now co-owner of RFK Racing, broke his right leg while on a ski trip, the team announced Friday.

Keselowski underwent surgery Thursday and doctors have told him to expect a quick recovery that will have him back for the season-opening Daytona 500 in February. He is winless in 16 starts in the showcase race as he enters the final years of his driving career.

"Life has a way of reminding you to slow down," Keselowski posted on social media with photos of him in the hospital surrounded by his wife and children, an image of the break, and video of him using a walker. "Grateful for my family by my side, an excellent medical team, and the ability to take a few steps forward today. Focused on Daytona. Bonus - I'm now bionic!"

Keselowski did not reveal the extent of his injury, or what bones are broken.

Keselowski, who turns 42 just days before the Feb. 15 "Great American Race," is entering his 17th full season of racing at the top Cup Series level. He spent the bulk of his career at Team Penske but purchased a stake in Roush Fenway Racing in 2022 and became an owner/driver of the rebranded team.

The organization is reeling from Thursday's fatal plane crash that killed longtime Roush driver Greg Biffle and six others, including his wife and two children. Biffle had retired by the time Keselowski joined the team.

"First and foremost, our hearts remain heavy with the news of yesterday's tragic events," the team said. "The RFK Racing family, as well as the NASCAR community, as a whole, continues to keep those close to The Biffle Family and all those affected in our thoughts. Albeit untimely, we feel that in the interest of transparency we share RFK Racing co-owner and driver Brad Keselowski suffered a broken



In this file photo, Brad Keselowski is introduced to fans prior to a NASCAR Cup Series auto race at Charlotte Motor Speedway in Concord, N.C. (AP)

leg while on a ski trip with his family Thursday."

The team called the surgery "routine" and said doctors expect a "a quick and full recovery."

Keselowski broke his ankle in 2011 when he crashed during a test session

and won a Cup Series race at Pocono just days later.

"I'm grateful to the medical team who took great care of me and for the support system around me," Keselowski said in a statement. "I'm motivated to get back to full strength as quickly as possible and will work relentlessly to be ready for Daytona."

Keselowski won the 2012 Cup Series championship for Penske and has 36 career victories at NASCAR's top level. He won the Xfinity Series title in 2010 and 39 races in NASCAR's second-tier series. He has won one points-paying race since leaving Penske as he works to help rebuild RFK into the once-proud organization founded by Hall of Fame team owner Jack Roush.

Chase Elliott, NASCAR's most popular driver, missed six races in the 2023 season when he broke his leg in a snowboarding crash early in the season. Kyle Busch missed 11 races when he broke his leg in a crash at Daytona in 2015 but recovered to win the Cup championship that year.

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Asia dominates halfpipe in Olympic warm-up event

COPPER MOUNTAIN, Colo., Dec 20, (AP): Chloe Kim sat out with an injury. Shaun White has been retired for four years. Without them, the world got a peek at what snowboarding on the halfpipe looks like heading into the Winter Olympics: It is now a sport dominated by Japanese, with other Asian stars in the mix.

Japan's Ryusei Yamada and Korea's Gaon Choi won the men's and women's World Cup events Friday at Copper Mountain on a blustery day that fea-

tured only one American on either podium: 18-year-old Bea Kim, who took third in the women's contest, ahead of Japan's Sena Tomita.

America's Chloe Kim competed in qualifying Wednesday but suffered an undisclosed injury in the lead-up to the final and sat out. U.S. Ski and Snowboard didn't provide details about the injury. This was the only pre-Olympic event Kim had signed up for, and how missing this final might impact her upcoming schedule remains to be seen.

The two-time Olympic gold medalist is the only U.S. halfpipe rider already qualified for Milan Cortina, as the American team looks for someone to join her as the sport's headline now that White, the three-time Olympic champion, has retired.

Without Kim in the lineup, the women's contest played out like what's expected to be a pretty good battle for second in Italy come February.

Choi's win comes one week after her victory at Secret Garden in China. She was one of the few to try a

1080-degree jump and the only one to land one as part of a clean run over the 16 trips the eight healthy women in the contest took down the halfpipe.

Nobody really tries doing what Kim pulled off four years ago in China to win her gold - spinning all four ways on her jumps down the halfpipe. She blew away the field then.

Most in this sport where nobody shows all their cards this early in an Olympic season are convinced she has probably gotten better since.

Aims to develop talent via professional tournaments

Kuwait SFL president Al-Ansari launches 2025-2026 Season



Photos from the event

By Fares Ghaleb
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: Omar Al-Ansari, President of the Kuwait Amateur Football League (SFL), affirmed that the league is entering its seventh consecutive year by officially launching the 2025-2026 amateur season. He affirmed that the league aims to discover and develop Kuwaiti sporting talent through professionally organized tournaments. Al-Ansari revealed that the sports season, which concluded two days ago, is held annually from November to April and has four main tourna-

ments. Al-Ansari highlighted the league’s ongoing collaboration with civil society organizations, media outlets, and private sector companies, which strengthens community partnerships and supports the sustainability of sports activities, adding that the season’s closing ceremony witnessed intense competition and a high level of skill among participants. He expressed his gratitude to the organizers of the SFL, the Ziyara Sports Center, and Circle Plus Company for their sponsorship and support, highlighting that participation was open to everyone in a uniquely competitive sporting atmosphere.

Al-Ansari explained that over 20 teams participated in this season, bringing the total number of teams competing in the league over seven consecutive seasons to more than 120, each supported by a full roster of players, coaches, administrators, and technical staff. These numbers reflect the league’s continued success and growth. He also revealed plans to launch tournaments for younger age groups, including 6-10 and 10-14 year olds, as well as competitions in other sports such as padel and swimming, along with the ongoing football tournaments, all within a comprehensive framework for sports organization.

Al-Arabi moves closer to leader Kuwait Club

Al-Fahaheel celebrates historic win

By Hassan Mosa
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: Al-Arabi tightened the race at the top of the Zain Premier League by defeating traditional rival Qadsia 2-1 in a thrilling ninth-round clash, reclaiming second place with 17 points. The loss dropped Qadsia to third place with 14 points, while Al-Arabi benefited from Kuwait’s 1-1 draw with Al-Salmiya, narrowing the gap to just three points behind the leader. Under the guidance of national coach Nasser Al-Shatti, Al-Arabi secured a crucial victory, boosting their title hopes after trailing by five points prior to the round. Al-Shatti recently returned to the club following the dismissal of



A battle for possession unfolds between Al-Fahaheel and Al-Tadhamon players.

Portuguese coach Marco Felis in November. League leader Kuwait Club, with 20 points, maintained its unbeaten record after a late equalizer against Al-Salmiya, who initially took the lead in the first third of the match. Kuwait Club continues

to march toward their 21st league title and fifth consecutive championship. Meanwhile, Qadsia faces ongoing instability, suffering its third straight defeat, which significantly diminishes their chances of claiming a title it has not won in nine

seasons, now sitting six points behind the leader. Al-Salmiya, despite drawing with the top team, dropped to sixth place with 12 points, while Al-Shabab capitalized on the situation, securing a hard-fought 2-1 victory over Al-Jahra to rise to fourth place with 13 points. Al-Fahaheel marked a historic moment by defeating Al-Tadamun 1-0 in their first match at the new Naif Al-Dabbous Stadium, climbing to fifth place with 13 points. Struggling teams Al-Jahra (7 points) and Al-Tadamun (5 points) continue to face challenges as the season progresses, but plenty of matches remain to reshape the standings. With league action concluding, Kuwait Club and Al-Arabi have turned their focus to the 2024-2025 Amir Cup final, set to take place the day after tomorrow at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium. Fans can expect a highly competitive showdown between the league’s top teams.

Kuwait handball team returns home ahead of Croatia camp

CAIRO, Dec 20: Kuwait’s national handball team fell 26-21 to Egypt in a friendly match at Dr. Hassan Mostafa Hall in 6th of October City. The game was part of preparations for the Asian Championship, set to take place in Kuwait on January 15. Led by Icelandic coach Aron Kristjansson and his assistant, Danish coach Heine Jensen, the team focused on tactical plays and decentralized positioning for some players. Kuwaiti athletes showed strong performance, especially in following the coaching staff’s instructions. The Blues return to Kuwait today, ahead

of the final preparation phase, which includes a training camp in Croatia starting December 26. During the camp, the team will play several friendly matches to fine-tune their strategy. Kristjansson emphasized that the squad includes promising and talented players, urging them to double their efforts to achieve the team’s goals in the upcoming continental championship. He added, “We are carefully monitoring players in local competitions to select the best, and we hope to avoid injuries, which have affected both the senior and youth teams.”



Kuwait player fires a shot at goal.

African Nations League launched as Africa Cup moves to 4-yr cycle

CAIRO, Dec 20: Kuwait’s national handball team fell 26-21 to Egypt in a friendly match at Dr. Hassan Mostafa Hall in 6th of October City. The game was part of preparations for the Asian Championship, set to take place in Kuwait on January 15. Led by Icelandic coach Aron Kristjansson and his assistant, Danish coach Heine Jensen, the team focused on tactical plays and decentralized positioning for some players. Kuwaiti athletes showed strong performance, especially in following the coaching staff’s instructions. The Blues return to Kuwait today,

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Al-Arabi eyes win against Al-Sulaibkhat

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: Qadsia looks to bounce back from its opening-round loss to Kuwait Club when it faces Burgan at 5:30 PM today. Later, Al-Arabi will aim to extend its winning streak as it takes on Al-Sulaibkhat at 7:30 PM. Both matches are part of the third round of the preliminary stage, held at the Union Hall in Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex. In the first clash, Qadsia, under Coach Nasser, seeks to recover from a 3-2 defeat to Kuwait in the previous round, taking advantage of Burgan’s struggles as the team currently sits in eighth place. Burgan, meanwhile, is eager to claim its first victory to improve its league standing. In the second match, Al-Arabi hopes to maintain its strong form

and overcome Sulaibkhat to continue its successful run this season. Sulaibkhat, however, aims for its third win to climb the rankings and secure second place. The third round opened with Kuwait Club defeating Al-Shabab 3-0, with set scores of 25-19, 25-16, 25-16, consolidating its position at the top of the standings with 8 points. Current league standings: 1st: Kuwait Club – 8 points 2nd: Al-Arabi – 6 points 3rd: Al-Sulaibkhat – 6 points 4th: Qadsia – 4 points 5th: Yarmouk – 3 points 6th: Al-Shabab – 3 points 7th: Kazma – 2 points 8th: Burgan – 1 point 9th: Al-Sahel – 0 points 10th: Al-Nasr – 0 points



Players vie for the ball

Vonn third in World Cup Downhill won by Huetter

VAL D’ISERE, France, Dec 20, (AP): Lindsey Vonn has come so far one year into her remarkable comeback for the Milan Cortina Olympics that third place in a World Cup downhill Saturday left her with regrets. Entering the Olympic season at age 41, with a right knee strengthened by titanium implants, Vonn’s first four results in an intense nine-day spell now read: win, runner-up, fourth and third. A mistake on the bottom half of the course Saturday cost Vonn a half-second, she suggested, in a downhill where she finished 0.35 behind Cornelia Huetter’s winning time on an overcast day. “If you would have asked me last year, you know, if I would be happy with a podium, I would say abso-(expletive)-lutely,” Vonn said. Recall there were no podium finishes in the first 12 World Cup races of her comeback that began exactly one year ago, nor at two world championships races in February. Still, Vonn’s goals have been raised since March by a season-ending second place in a World Cup super-G at Sun Valley, and her even



stronger start to this season. “I know that I’m fast. There’s a lot to be happy about,” said the United States star, who extended her lead in the season-long downhill standings after three of the scheduled nine races. However, she acknowledged after Saturday’s run: “I was mad at myself for making a mistake. There’s a mistake here, a mistake there and that’s why I’m not winning.” “With the light I didn’t quite see the terrain and lost my balance, and it cost me probably half a second or more,” said Vonn, who threw her arms out wide and looked anguished

on seeing she was behind early leader Kira Weidle-Winkelmann’s time. “But when you’re going fast anything can happen.” Racing immediately after Vonn, Huetter was consistently a little faster after the first time split and touched 126 kph (78 mph). She finished 0.26 seconds ahead of Weidle-Winkelmann and 0.35 clear of Vonn. Vonn later congratulated Huetter with smiles and a hug when the 33-year-old Austrian was in the course-side leader’s box. “I’m super proud,” said Huetter, recalling a poor training run Friday when “I was so bad, I was so slow. I don’t know why. Maybe I need some pressure inside of me.” A big threat to Huetter on an overcast day with tricky visibility on the 2.8-kilometer (1¾-mile) O.K. course was 2018 Olympic champion Sofia Goggia. Goggia, wearing the No. 14 start bib, was fastest through halfway then had to stand almost straight up to correct her balance coming out of a turn. She was pushed wide into rougher snow to make the next gate.

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NEWS



Werder Bremen's Marco Friedl, left, and Augsburg's Marius Wolf challenge for the ball during the German Bundesliga soccer match between FC Augsburg and Werder Bremen in Augsburg, Germany. (AP)

Sports

Bashar reaffirms commitment to Amir's vision for Kuwaiti sports

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: Bashar Abdullah, Acting Director General of the Public Authority for Sports, extended his heartfelt congratulations to His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, on the occasion of the second anniversary of his accession to power, reiterating loyalty and dedication to Kuwait's wise leadership.

He highlighted that under His Highness's guidance, Kuwaiti sports have received unprecedented support and attention, positively impacting various sectors, empowering youth, and strengthening the role of sports as a strategic pillar for national development. Bashar stated, "The Public Authority for Sports remains fully committed to realizing His Highness's vision for an inclusive and

integrated sports sector, reflecting the spirit of national service and enhancing Kuwait's stature both regionally and internationally." He concluded with his best wishes: "May Kuwait continues to enjoy security and stability, may His Highness be blessed with health and wellness, and may his leadership guide the country toward continued progress and prosperity for its people."



Bashar Abdullah, Acting Director General of the Public Authority for Sports.

Al-Turkit wins first Asian Junior Tennis Championship in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 20: The inaugural Kuwait Asian Junior Tennis Championship for under-14 players concluded recently. Organized by the Kuwait Tennis Federation and held under the supervision of the Asian Tennis Federation, the tournament began on December 13 and featured young talents from across Asia and the Gulf region. The winners were officially crowned by Abdulredha Al-Gharib, Chairman of the Federation, and Mishari Abdulredha, Treasurer. In the singles final, Mohammed Al-Turkit defeated Faisal Al-Mutawa in straight sets, 2-0, securing the championship. Al-Gharib congratulated Al-Turkit on his victory and earning 50 ranking points from the Asian Tennis Federation. He also thanked the Public Authority for Sports and all who contributed to the tournament's success. "The Federation places great emphasis on this age group, which forms the foundation of our national teams," Al-Gharib said. "We aim for Kuwait's top young players to reach the top of the Asian rankings and become among the continent's top ten." The championship was overseen by a team of referees from the Kuwait Tennis Federation, led by international referee Asil Ahmed Al-Shaheen, who served as chief referee.



Winners pose with officials after the closing ceremony.

Chelsea fights back to earn dramatic draw at Newcastle

Woltemade scores early double

LONDON, Dec 20, (AP): Chelsea recovered from conceding two early goals to Nick Woltemade to draw 2-2 with Newcastle in the Premier League on Saturday, with Joao Pedro's equalizer coming off a rare assist from a goalkeeper.

Robert Sanchez smashed a long clearance up to Pedro, who headed the ball forward and ended up collecting it himself after Fabian Schar slipped. Pedro slotted a fin-

ish underneath Newcastle goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale to earn Chelsea a point in the 66th minute. Woltemade put Chelsea 2-0 up by scoring from close range in the fourth minute and then glancing home a cross from Anthony Gordon in the 20th. For the tall Germany striker, it marked a huge contrast in emotions to last weekend - when he scored an own-goal to consign Newcastle to a derby loss at fierce rival Sunderland. "I wanted to give a good performance today and I think I did," Woltemade said. "I just want to say

thank you to the fans for still being good with me." Reece James launched Chelsea's fightback by curling a free kick in off the post in the 49th. Fourth-place Chelsea trimmed its gap to Arsenal to seven points ahead of the leader's match at Everton later Saturday, but has won only one of its last five games in the league. Newcastle, one of England's representatives in the Champions League this season, is languishing in midtable after one win in its last four games - and that was against next-to-last Burnley.



Newcastle's Sandro Tonali, right, and Chelsea's Cole Palmer, left, challenge for the ball during the English Premier League soccer match between Newcastle United and FC Chelsea in Newcastle, England. (AP)

Wembanyama leads Spurs to win against Hawks with 26-point performance

Timberwolves hand Thunder after Edwards takes over down the stretch

MINNEAPOLIS, Dec 20, (AP): Anthony Edwards returned from a three-game injury absence with 26 points and 12 rebounds, hitting the go-ahead 3-pointer with 38.5 seconds left to lead the Minnesota Timberwolves past the Oklahoma City Thunder 112-107 on Friday night. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 35 points and seven assists for the Thunder (25-3), who lost for the second time in three games after starting 24-1 on the heels of their NBA championship last season. Julius Randle had 19 points on just 3-for-15 shooting, but his missed free throw after a make with 53 seconds remaining allowed the Wolves to keep the ball down by two and set up Edwards for his clutch shot. Edwards, who's been managing soreness in his right foot, then grabbed a defensive rebound to set up two free throws by Randle and stole the ball from Gilgeous-Alexander on the ensuing possession to seal the victory. Donte DiVincenzo and Naz Reid each scored 15 points and Rudy Gobert had 14 rebounds for the Wolves (18-10), who lost in five games to the Thunder in the Western Conference finals last spring. Spurs 126, Hawks 98. In Atlanta, Victor Wembanyama scored 26 points, Devin Vassell added 18, and the San Antonio Spurs spoiled the first of a five-game home stretch for Atlanta with a win over the Hawks. The win was the Spurs' 20th of the season - a feat the team did not reach until Jan. 23 last season. In his fourth game since returning from a calf injury that kept him sidelined for 12 games, Wembanyama added 12 rebounds, three assists, two blocks and a steal. It was the center's first double-double since San Antonio's Nov. 14 loss to Golden State. Vassell was 4 of 9 beyond the three-point arc. Bulls 136, Cavaliers 125. In Cleveland, Matas Buzelis and Nikola Vucevic each scored 24 points as the Chicago Bulls pulled away in the fourth quarter for victory over the reeling Cleveland Cavaliers. Vucevic, who also grabbed 15 rebounds, had 11 points and six boards in the fourth quarter as the Bulls won consecutive games for the first time since Nov. 19. Seven players scored in double figures for Chicago. Josh Giddey had 17 points and Tre Jones added 16 off the bench. Darius Garland scored a season-high 35 for Cleveland, which was missing All-Star guard Donovan Mitchell due to illness. All-Star forward Evan

Mobley will be sidelined for at least another week with a calf injury. Rookie guard Tyrese Proctor scored 16 points in his first NBA start, and Nae'Qwan Tomlin had 15 off the bench. The Cavaliers have dropped three straight and four of five. They've also lost five of their last six home games. 76ers 116, Knicks 107. In New York, Tyrese Maxey scored 30 points, VJ Edgecombe had 23 and the Philadelphia 76ers became just the second visiting team to win at Madison Square Garden this season, beating the New York Knicks. Andre Drummond, starting with Joel Embiid out because of an illness and right knee injury management, had 14 points and 13 rebounds. The center was 3 for 4 from 3-point range. The 76ers snapped the Knicks' six-game winning streak by outscoring them 28-20 in the fourth quarter, when Maxey scored 11 points and Jalen Brunson missed all five of his shots and was scoreless. Brunson finished with 22 points, nine assists and six rebounds, but shot 7 for 22 a night after making the go-ahead 3-pointer with 4.4 seconds left in a victory at Indiana. Karl-Anthony Towns also scored 22 points and grabbed 11 rebounds. In their first home game since winning the NBA Cup on Tuesday, the Knicks fell to 13-2 at home. They had been off to their best start at MSG since 1992-93. They celebrated the Cup title before the game, though they have chosen not to hang a banner to commemorate it, as previous champions the Lakers and Bucks did. The Knicks wasted Mitchell Robinson's best game of the season. The center had season highs of 21 points and 16 rebounds and was a stunning 7 for 8 at the free-throw line after he came into the game 6 for 27 (22.2%) for the season. Celtics 129, Heat 116. In Boston, Derrick White scored a season-high 33 points and tied a career-high with nine 3-pointers to help the Boston Celtics pull away in the second half for a win over the Miami Heat. Jaylen Brown added 30 points, nine rebounds and seven assists to help the Celtics snap a two-game losing skid. Anfernee Simons finished with 14 points. The Celtics took control in the fourth quarter, using a 20-7 run to open a 112-96 lead. It grew to 19 points. Boston connected on 21 3-pointers on the night. Kel'el Ware had 24 points and 14 rebounds for Miami, which has lost six of its last seven. Norman Powell added 18 points. Bam Adebayo finished with 16 points and 10 rebounds. The Heat had 102 field goal attempts and connected on 19 3s but shot just 39% from the field overall. Miami dropped to 5-9 on the road this season. Rookie Kaspas Jakucionis added 17 and had five 3-pointers in his first career start. Miami had only 10 players available with Tyler Herro out for the fifth time in six games with a toe injury, and Andrew Wiggins (lower back pain), Nikola Jovic (elbow), Davion Mitchell (sprained left ankle) and Pelle Larsson (sprained left ankle) all sidelined as well. The game was tied 58-58 at halftime, with White leading all scorers with 19 points.



Minnesota Timberwolves guard Anthony Edwards (5) goes up for a shot as Oklahoma City Thunder guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander defends during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Minneapolis. (AP)