



Amir congratulates Kuwait Club on Cup victory
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Merry Christmas to all

Kuwait slams ‘brakes’ on energy drinks nationwide

Home Healthcare Assistant profession officially added in Kuwait

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: In a move to strengthen the healthcare system and promote safe consumption habits, Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi issued a decree prohibiting the sale and distribution of energy drinks in educational institutions at all levels, including public and private schools, universities, and government institutions and agencies.

Article 1 of the decree regulates the distribution of energy drinks based on specific controls, including restricting their sale to individuals aged 18 and above, limiting daily consumption to two cans, and ensuring that the caffeine content of each can does not exceed 80 mg per 250 ml serving. The decree also requires producers and importers to place clear and prominent health warnings on packaging and bans all advertising and sponsorship related to energy drinks. The decree prohibits the sale of energy drinks in restaurants, cafes, grocery stores, food trucks, self-service kiosks, and through takeout and delivery platforms, as well as in sports clubs, in line with its objectives of protecting public health and promoting environments that encourage healthy behavior.

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2026 could see gold hit \$5,000 an ounce

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Gold cemented its status as a financial asset and a hedge against major economic crises in 2025, recording a historic increase of approximately 65.3 percent, with the price per ounce surpassing USD 4,400 for the first time in history. Global forecasts indicate that gold prices are expected to continue rising in 2026, potentially reaching around USD 5,000 by the end of the last quarter.

Two experts explained that 2025 marked a significant milestone in gold's history, not only in terms of price growth but also due to sustained record global demand. By the end of the third quarter, the global volume of gold traded reached approximately 1.31 tons, with a trading value exceeding USD 146 billion. The local market in Kuwait benefited from this global momentum.



Al-Mousawi

According to gold expert Alamdar Al-Mousawi, the movement of gold prices in 2025 was not random or solely driven by speculation, but resulted from historical accumulation and precise technical and economic analysis, which was clearly reflected in both global markets and Kuwait's local market.

He explained that gold, which has long been considered a safe haven during times of turmoil and crisis, entered a deliberate upward trajectory since the beginning of 2025. Gold prices have risen from around USD 2,620 per ounce in January to record highs exceeding USD 4,400 in recent days, fueled by geopolitical tensions, global inflationary pressures, and fluctuations in Central Bank policies, particularly those of the U.S. Federal Reserve.

These price peaks do not mark the end of the upward wave. According to technical analysis, they have formed strong support levels, reinforcing the long-term upward trend and providing the market with a new price base for future growth.

Regarding future expectations, Al-Mousawi said 2026 could witness gold reaching unprecedented levels at certain stages if current supporting factors continue, including global political tensions, sovereign debt crises, and ongoing economic uncertainty.

He emphasized that investing in gold is no longer a matter of luck, but relies on careful analysis of historical trends, technical analysis, and linking prices with economic and political events, noting that gold is currently entering a new phase of global revaluation.

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Families and parishioners alike unite at the Holy Family Co-Cathedral in Kuwait City on Dec 24, to celebrate Christmas Eve Mass, embracing faith, hope, and the festive spirit.
Photo by Rezk Tawfik

Public-private partnerships get major overhaul

Economic zones set to transform Kuwait

By Mohammed Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The 2025/2026 Development Plan report highlighted the need for nine draft laws to support the Dynamic Private Sector Enhancement Program, one of the nine major programs within the Development Plan, which includes 18 projects, divided equally between eight strategic and eight enabling projects.

Among the most prominent draft laws awaiting approval are proposals to establish a Public Electricity and Water Authority, as well as legislation to create postal and fixed-line telephone and international telecommunications companies.

The 18 projects under this program are considered some of the most significant development projects, including the Zour North Power Plant (Phases Two and Three), the Khairan Power Plant (Phase One), and the establishment of economic zones.

The total budget allocated for these projects in the current fiscal year, including estimated investments, amounts to KD 126.184 million.

The report detailed the legislative requirements, which include:

- a draft law amending Law No. 116/2014 on public-private partnerships
- amendments to Law No. 100/2015 establishing the Public Authority for

Youth

■ a draft law to establish the Kuwait Technical Entrepreneurship Complex Free Zone

■ amendments to the Industry Law

■ amendments to Kuwait Import Law No. 43/1964

■ a draft law to establish a Public Authority for Electricity and Water

■ a draft law to establish a Postal Company

■ a draft law to establish a Fixed-Line Telephone and International Communications Company

■ a draft law amending certain provisions of Law No. 37/2010 concerning regulation of privatization programs and processes.



HORIZON TALK

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

The driver said, ‘I discovered after my master’s death that it was he who used to work for me’

Schopenhauer said, “True wealth is learning to let go of the surplus.”

We live in an age of 70 percent surplus.

Recognize the value of what we have, rather than worrying about the money we leave behind.

It is not important who owns the money. What matters is who benefits from it.

The important thing is to reach your destination, not watching your speedometer explode.

Life was not created for our days to be a stage for a show.

Empty rooms reflect our lives, which are often overflowing with things.

A heart consumed by battles becomes barren land.

Stay humble, even if you are powerful, rich, or famous.

3

Rare pottery, coins unearthed after 12-year excavation

Zour refinery at full capacity

Failaka dig reveals early Christian-Islamic coexistence

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24, (KUNA): The National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) announced on Wednesday the discovery of significant archaeological finds at Al-Qusur Monastery in the center of Failaka Island, including pottery inscribed with Syriac writings and evidence dating to the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods.

The Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Antiquities and Museums Mohammad bin Redha told KUNA that the joint Kuwaiti-French mission uncovered large architectural remains, early examples of artificial basalt, and pottery bearing Syriac script, indicating the presence of a Christian community that likely followed Eastern Syriac traditions.

Excavations, ongoing since 2011, have documented a monastic settlement dating from the mid-7th to mid-9th centuries CE. Professor Hassan Ashkanani of Kuwait University described the discovery as a landmark for Failaka Island, shedding light on the transition from the Christian period to early Islam.

The finds include Syriac and Persian inscriptions on ostraca, coins, an ornate perfume bottle, and food-processing installations, offering rare insight into daily, economic, and religious life on the island more than 1,200 years ago.

French mission supervisor Dr. Julie Bonneric said the site includes a monastery with a large church, refectory, and extensive food-preparation complex, highlighting evidence of Christian-Islamic coexistence during the early Islamic era.

She added that the current excavation season-the 12th-began on Nov. 17, 2025, and focuses on the monastery's earliest phase and the daily lives of its monks.

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KPC targets record oil output

By Najeh Bilal
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) has developed a strategy to capture more international market by exporting ap-

proximately 430,000 barrels per day to foreign refineries, either through direct investment or participation in international contracts.

According to informed sources, KPC

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Drug bust nets 2 Asian drivers

By Munif Naif
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Drug Control General Department (DCGD), led by Director Brigadier General Mohammed Qabazard and his deputy Brigadier General Sheikh Hamad Al-Yousef, arrested two Asian men in possession of synthetic cannabis and crystal meth (Shabu), along with a precision scale.

According to security sources, the suspects were working as drivers for two Kuwaiti families. When DCGD received information about the drug use of the two drivers, they launched an investigation, and then apprehended the suspects.

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NCCAL photos

Left: Joint Kuwaiti-French mission with the recent finds. Right: A pottery piece with Syriac inscriptions.



An exceptional year marked by unprecedented achievements ... With this record, the Human Resources Group at NBK drew 2025 to a close

Prayer Timings			
Fajr	05:14	Asr	14:37
Sunrise ..	06:39	Maghrib ..	16:55
Zohr	11:47	Isha	18:17

Local

Weather			
Expected weather for next 24 hrs:			
By Day: Mild and partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate northwesterly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of 08-28 km/h with a chance for light fog forming at night.			
By Night: Cold and cloudy to partly cloudy with light to moderate northwesterly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of 06-28 km/h with a chance for light fog forming over some areas.			
Station	Max Exp	Min Rec	
Kuwait City	22	16	
Kuwait Airport	23	13	
Abdaly	23	11	
Bubyan	19	14	
Jahra	23	13	
Failaka Island	20	14	
Salmiyah	21	18	

AI: Double-edged sword ... expert control vital

Beneficial if tools used wisely: Chairman Al-Awazem Foundation

By Fares Ghaleb
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Hamad Zaid Al-Bseis, Chairman of the Al-Awazem Charitable Foundation and UN Ambassador for Community Partnership, affirmed that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a cultural and ethical responsibility before being a technological tool.

He stressed that its use requires advanced professional awareness and a governance framework based on transparency and social responsibility, ensuring the protection of values and preservation of national identity amid rapid digital transformations.

Speaking at the opening of the “Al-Awazem Foundation for Culture and Media in the Age of Artificial Intelligence 2025” conference, organized by the Foundation, Al-Bseis highlighted that culture and media are fundamental pillars in building societal awareness



Distinguished tribal elders at the conference.

and shaping public opinion.

He underscored the importance of employing AI tools judiciously to support sustainable development, maintain credibility and professionalism, and strengthen the national value system. Al-Bseis emphasized the importance of using AI tools responsibly to support sustainable development, uphold credibility and professionalism, and strengthen the national value system.

He expressed his deep gratitude to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad, praising his generous support and patronage of the comprehensive development process, as well as his continuous interest in culture, media, and humanitarian work, which has helped reinforce Kuwait's regional and international standing and leadership.

Al-Bseis also thanked Her Excellen-



Al-Awazem Charitable Foundation elders at the opening of the conference.

cy the Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthar Al-Huwailah for her patronage of the conference, along with all partners, supporters, speakers, and participants.

Meanwhile, the Honorary President of the conference, Fahad Fallah Bin Jamea, stated that the conference is taking place at a critical moment marked by an unprecedented acceleration in digital transformation, which

places huge responsibilities on those working in culture and media.

He emphasized that these sectors serve as the first line of defense for national identity and require coordinated efforts between official and community institutions to balance technological advancement with ethical and professional commitment.

He expressed his profound pride and extended his deepest gratitude to His

Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad, commending His Highness's generous support for culture, media, and humanitarian work, and praising the Al-Awazem Charitable Foundation for its institutional role in adopting intellectual and developmental initiatives and organizing this distinguished conference.

In addition, Professor Dr. Yousef Abdulghaffar, President of the Regional Network for Social Responsibility, highlighted that artificial intelligence has become an active element in shaping cultural and media discourse, making it essential to establish clear ethical and institutional frameworks for its use.

He stressed that these frameworks must protect societal values and preserve national identity.

He also praised the Al-Awazem Charitable Foundation for its efforts in expanding knowledge and advancing development in charitable work.

In conclusion, the speakers expressed their hope that the conference's outcomes and recommendations would strengthen the role of culture and responsible media, support sustainable development, and align with the goals of New Kuwait 2035 vision, ultimately fostering a strong national consciousness and a prosperous future for the State of Kuwait.

TEC launches Al-Aqaila beach redevelopment project to boost Kuwait tourism

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24, (KUNA): The Touristic Enterprises Company (TEC) announced on Tuesday the launch pf the Al-Aqaila Beach redevelopment project as part of efforts to enhance waterfronts and boost the tourism and entertainment sector in Kuwait.

Speaking at a press conference, Chief Executive Officer of the TEC Anwar Al-Hlailah said the project, developed in cooperation with Aayan Real Estate Company, supports quality of life and strengthens Kuwait's position as a regional tourism and leisure destination.

He added that the initiative falls within TEC's strategy to develop coastal destinations through sustainable projects with economic and social value in partnership with the private sector.

Aayan Real Estate CEO Ibrahim Al-Awadhi said the project aims to revive Kuwaiti beaches and transform

them into vibrant and sustainable destinations combining entertainment, marine, cultural, and sports activities.

The project spans approximately 60,000 square meters and features a modern design inspired by Kuwait's coastal heritage.

It includes an indoor children's entertainment hall, outdoor and water play areas, a fully equipped health club with sea views, 27 restaurants and cafes, drive-through service units, and a multi-purpose hall for major events. Open spaces and a seaside promenade will also be developed to enhance the visitor experience.

TEC is a state-owned company responsible for developing and managing tourism and entertainment facilities in Kuwait in cooperation with government bodies, the private sector, and international partners.



Chief Executive Officer of the TEC Anwar Al-Hlailah and officials talking to the press.

KUNA photo

MC okays water route for Google Cloud data center

By Inaas Awadh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Municipal Council's Technical Committee, chaired by Munira Al-Amir, approved a request from the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy for allocating a water service route needed to supply the Google Cloud data center in Al-Mutla'a City.

Meanwhile, the committee retained on its agenda a proposal submitted by architect and council member Sharifa Al-Shalfan regarding adding a new requirement for providing parking spaces to Item No. 1 of the Building Regulations.

The committee also received an overview of another proposal aimed at developing residential cities as well as commercial and investment buildings.

In another development, Municipal Council member Waleed Al-Dagher submitted an inquiry to the executive branch regarding the implementation of Ministerial Decree No. 601/2025, which was published in the official gazette and amends Schedule No. 2 related to investment in residential buildings located outside the city.

Al-Dagher's questions aim to assess the decree's effectiveness and identify any obstacles to its implementation.

He specifically requested the following information:

- the total number of building permits issued for investment plots on a single street under the decree, broken down by municipal branch and specifying the number in each governorate.
- details of any practical or technical challenges in implementing the decree, particularly the requirement to provide adequate parking spaces in relation to the permitted building ratios and areas, and how these requirements correspond to the reality of investment properties on a single street.
- details about the areas and locations of investment plots smaller than 750 square meters (such as plots on a single street) where using the full legally permitted building ratio makes it impossible to provide the required number of parking spaces.
- the number of applications submitted by engineering offices since the decree's enforcement, specifying how many were accepted, how many were returned, and the detailed reasons for any returns.

Al-Dagher requested this information to identify and address any regulatory or implementation obstacles that may be preventing the decree from achieving its intended legislative objectives.



Kuwait National Cyber Security Center staff during the exercise.

KUNA photo

Cyber drill conducted to enhance gov't readiness

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24, (KUNA): Chief of the Kuwait National Cyber Security Center Abeer Al-Awadhi affirmed on Tuesday that the first national cybersecurity drill was conducted to enhance real-life scenarios of advanced attacks to enhance analysis and response skills of digital governmental bodies.

In her opening speech during the simulation organized by the National Center, Al-Awadhi said that the exercise comes in accordance with the directives of the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yusuf Saud Al-Sabah to raise the readiness of national human capabilities and enhance the efficiency of government bodies.

She noted that cybersecurity is no longer the responsibility of a single entity, but rather a shared national responsibility that requires integrated efforts among all institutions to protect the data and services provided by the state across its various sectors.

She pointed out that the one-day exercise represents an important step towards strengthening the cybersecurity culture in government agencies.

She emphasized the National Cybersecurity Center's ongoing commitment to supporting all government bodies and providing them with the frameworks, controls, and tools that enable them to build a secure and robust digital work environment.

Asian perishes in hit, run accident near 'Amghara'

By Munif Naif
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: A fatal hit-and-run accident occurred near Amghara, resulting in the death of an Asian resident.

Upon receiving the report, the Ministry of Interior's Operations Room immediately dispatched security and ambulance personnel to the scene, where the victim was found deceased.

The body was transferred to the Forensic Medicine Department, and security personnel have launched an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the accident.

Meanwhile, three expatriates were injured, including one in serious condition, after their vehicle overturned on King Fahad Expressway towards the Nuwaiseeb border crossing, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to a security source, emergency and ambulance teams responded immediately to the incident and transported the injured to Adan Hospital for treatment.

An investigation has been launched to determine the cause of the accident.

Other Voices

The American Constitution and the German language

By Ahmad alsarraf

Due to the high percentage of Americans of German origin, a widespread belief has emerged claiming that the US Congress, at the time of the nation's founding and during the drafting of the U.S. Constitution, voted on the country's official language, choosing between the two most widely spoken languages at the time, English and German.



alsarraf

According to this belief, English won by a margin of just one vote. Had the outcome been different, German would have become the official language of the United States and, as a result, the dominant language in much of the world today, given the immense global influence of American advancements that have generated hundreds of thousands of new vocabulary terms through innovations in fields such as medicine, aerospace, and computing.

The truth is that the U.S. Congress never voted on, nor passed, a law declaring English the official language of the United States. Instead, English became the dominant language as a de facto reality, largely because most of America's founding fathers were of British origin. Over the years, members of Congress have introduced numerous bills seeking to designate English as the official language, but none were enacted as federal law or gained significant traction. In practice, English has been established at the federal level through usage rather than through a constitutional amendment or successful national legislation. Stories of a decisive congressional vote on the nation's language remain historical myths.

It is worth noting that President Donald Trump issued an executive order in March 2025 designating English as the official language of the United States for federal purposes. However, this was an executive action, not the result of a congressional vote or a constitutional change.

Aside from the federal level, many states have adopted laws or constitutional amendments making English their official language, often through state legislatures or popular referendums. This raises an important question - What explains the strong German presence in America?

Germany established a strong presence in the United States through massive waves of immigration during

the 19th century, driven by economic hardship, political instability, and land shortages, surpassing later British immigration in number.

These waves of German migration began in the 1820s and continued until World War I, with nearly six million Germans emigrating to the United States. Immigration peaked in the 1850s and again in the 1880s, largely due to the failure of major agricultural crops and the collapse of the 1848 revolutions. These events displaced political refugees, led to the fragmentation of farmland caused by overpopulation, and intensified social and religious pressures resulting from Prussian unification, particularly affecting Catholic and socialist Germans.

German immigrants settled heavily throughout the United States, forming what became known as the German Belt in the Midwest, which included states such as Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Missouri. They established early communities like Germantown in 1683, and had controlled areas like Cincinnati and Milwaukee by 1890.

However, why were there not more British immigrants, especially given that they had nearly dominated America during the early colonial period, making up about 60 percent of the population in 1790? British immigration to the United States slowed after independence in 1776, largely due to Britain's economic recovery and the easing of pressures such as famines, wars, and political upheaval.

As a result, the number of German immigrants eventually exceeded that of later English immigrants, largely because German migration continued steadily while British migration declined. By 2000, the number of Americans of German descent had reached approximately 42.8 million, or about 15 percent of the U.S. population, surpassing both Irish Americans at 10.8 percent and English Americans at around 9 percent. This growth was driven by higher birth rates and strong integration into American society, while still maintaining elements of German cultural identity.

By 1894, there were around 800 newspapers published in German in the United States, most of which are no longer in circulation today. Cultural similarities, particularly the Protestant work ethic and shared Germanic linguistic roots, helped Germans integrate rapidly into English-speaking society without requiring them to completely abandon their German heritage.

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Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah, accompanied by Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Ali Al-Abdullah Al-Ali Al-Sabah and the acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Public Works Eid Al-Rashidi, during their visit to the new Kuwait International Airport Terminal 2.

Farwaniya Gov., Defense Minister briefed on progress of work at T2

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah, accompanied by Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Ali Al-Abdullah Al-Ali Al-Sabah and the acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Public Works Eid Al-Rashidi, conducted a field visit to the new Kuwait International Airport Terminal 2.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, they were received by the Chairman of the Public Authority for Civil Aviation (PACA) Sheikh Eng. Hamoud Mubarak Al-Hamoud Al-Sabah.

During the visit, Governor Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser received a detailed presentation on the execution process and was shown the services and advanced facilities that enhance Kuwait's position as a regional transport and logistics hub, in line with "New Kuwait 2035" vision.

The governor praised the efforts of national personnel in completing the project and emphasized the government's commitment to executing this leading development project according to the latest global standards and within the scheduled time-frame.

HORIZON TALK

Ahmed Al-Jarallah



The driver said, ‘I discovered after my master’s death that it was he who used to work for me’

A WISE man once captured the essence of this idea when he said, “The money we leave behind is no different from stagnant water that no one drinks. Money sits in banks as cold numbers, while the life we spend accumulating it evaporates like water in a pot of boiling corn.”

This wisdom came to mind when I read about a Chinese businessman who died leaving \$1.9 billion. A few days later, his widow married his driver. The driver then said a sentence that sums up the philosophy of economics - “I thought I worked for my boss, but after his death, I discovered that it was my boss who used to work for me.”

This is not a joke, but it is a wake-up call. The issue is not who owns the money, but who benefits from it. It is not who accumulates wealth, but who truly lives. Money that does not touch its owner ultimately belongs to someone else, even if it carries their name in bank accounts and property records.

In his book “Late Wisdom,” German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer wrote, “True wealth is not about having a lot, but about being able to do without what is superfluous.”

Today, we live in a world obsessed with the superfluous and unnecessary. It is the age of the “70 percent unused surplus”, things we neither use nor fully understand why we accumulated them.

Seventy percent of your smartphone’s features, from powerful cameras to large storage, often go unused. These advantages are digital luxuries that do little to enrich real life.

You don’t need 70 percent of the speed of a luxury car. What matters is reaching your destination, not watching your speedometer explode with pride while you are stuck in traffic.

Seventy percent of your clothes hang in your closet, waiting for an occasion that never

- Schopenhauer said, “True wealth is learning to let go of the surplus.”
- We live in an age of 70 percent surplus.
- Recognize the value of what we have, rather than worrying about the money we leave behind.
- It is not important who owns the money. What matters is who benefits from it.
- The important thing is to reach your destination, not watching your speedometer explode.
- Life was not created for our days to be a stage for a show.
- Empty rooms reflect our lives, which are often overflowing with things.
- A heart consumed by battles becomes barren land.
- Stay humble, even if you are powerful, rich, or famous.

comes. Life wasn’t meant to be a stage every day.

We live in houses and palaces, yet the sun only touches one room, and we choose to sit in just one corner. We leave most of the furniture unused, fixating on a single spot on the sofa.

Our empty rooms mirror our lives. They are filled with everything except what we truly need. The money we spend a lifetime accu-

mulating will ultimately go to someone else.

Perhaps a son will inherit it, unaware of the sacrifices we made to amass such wealth or the countless sleepless nights spent paying the bills for his room’s cooling in summer and heating in winter.

Perhaps a wife will inherit the money and spend it with someone whose face we have never seen. Or the state might claim it for taxes, while we lie in a grave too small even for our old phone.

That is why we must protect the remaining 30 percent, for it is true life. This 30 percent is the life we haven’t lived, the health we have neglected, and the body that has deteriorated while we were busy accumulating money in our bank accounts.

Take care of your health, even if you feel fine. Illness does not ask permission, and strength can fade as quickly as daylight at sunset.

Drink water, even if you don’t feel thirsty. Silent thirst can harm more than we realize.

Rise above disagreements, even if you are right. A heart weighed down by conflict is barren land. Compromise when you can, as rigidity makes us easier to break.

Stay humble, even if you are powerful, wealthy, or famous. Arrogance drains a person, no matter how much money they have.

Train your mind to stay sharp and your body to remain flexible. Laziness is the beginning of aging, even if you are in your twenties.

Spend more time with your loved ones, no matter how busy you are. Those we love are the part of us that no one else can inherit after we are gone.

Allocate a portion of your wealth for your

■ Before investing in a foreign country, an investor carefully studies how that country treats its national and local investors, and whether its policies are strict or supportive. Based on this research, the investor decides whether to invest there, return home, or seek other countries that are more flexible and generous to both local and foreign investors.

■■■■

■ In Kuwait, many issues require the government’s attention. Employee salaries need to be increased. The state should avoid engaging in certain commercial businesses and instead focus on offering incentives to investors and merchants to help ensure their success.

afterlife. The money you spend while alive is the money you truly benefit from, which is your true savings, in a sense. Hoarding extra money is like inflating a balloon. It rises for a while, but eventually bursts.

Wisdom is not about living longer, but about living well. What matters most is recognizing the value of what we have, rather than worrying about the money we leave behind.

When a person dies, they lose everything, even their name. They are remembered only as the deceased, and their name is rarely mentioned again.



Jahra Governorate photo
Jahra Governor Hamad Al-Habashi receives the Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan to Kuwait, Dr. Zubaydullah Zubaydov.

Jahra Gov. meets Tajik envoy, eyes ties boost

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Jahra Governor Hamad Al-Habashi received the Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan to Kuwait, Dr. Zubaydullah Zubaydov, at his office in the governorate headquarters.

According to a press release issued by Jahra Governorate, the governor welcomed the ambassador, and highlighted the friendly relations between Kuwait and Tajikistan and the mutual respect and cooperation shared by the two countries in various fields.

He also commended the Ambassador’s role as Dean of the Diplomatic Corps in strengthening bilateral ties.

During the meeting, both parties engaged in friendly discussions and reviewed aspects of cooperation between the two nations.

House allocation lottery

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) announced that the Women’s Housing Committee will hold a lottery on Thursday, December 25 for Kuwaiti women who submitted applications for rental housing in Sulaibiya and Taima in 2005 or earlier, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

PAHW explained that the lottery will include female applicants who have updated their information and received a notification through the government’s Sahel application.

The lottery will take place at 10:00am at the Abbas Marafie Theater at the PAHW headquarters. Applicants must be present in person to participate.

No change in travel advisory for Kuwaiti visitors to the US

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The spokesperson for the US Embassy in Kuwait Stuart Turner says travel and entry requirements for Kuwaiti passport holders to the United States remain unchanged, despite media reports about a proposed measure from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to collect additional information from some visitors, reports Al-Qabas daily.

In a press statement, Turner explained that the DHS proposal, if implemented, would apply only to travelers using the Electronic System for Travel Authori-

zation (ESTA) under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). However, Kuwait is not part of this program. The ESTA allows citizens of participating countries to travel to the U.S. for tourism or business purposes for up to 90 days without a visa.

He affirmed that the Visa Waiver Program is administered by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in consultation with the U.S. Department of State, and the complete list of eligible countries is available on the website of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Lawyer jailed three yrs for stirring lawlessness

MoE reshuffles exam panel heads

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Criminal Court sentenced a lawyer to three-year imprisonment after convicting him of spreading false news and statements regarding the grievances of women whose citizenship, granted under Article 8 of the Kuwaiti Nationality Law, had been revoked. The statements were found to mislead public opinion, incite unrest, and encourage violations of laws and regulations.

According to the case file, the defendant used social media platforms to circulate inaccurate information and unsubstantiated claims, spread false rumors that undermined the Amir’s authority, and incite others to break the law.

Appeals authority changed: President of the Court of Appeals, Counselor Mohammad Al-Rifai, issued a decision to assign the Seventh Administrative Circuit to hear appeals against judgments issued by the administrative circuits of the Court of First Instance concerning pensions, exceptional bonuses, and related cases.

The decision stipulates that all pending appeals regarding pensions and exceptional bonuses be referred to the Court Presidency for submission to the Seventh Administrative Circuit as the competent authority.

The decision takes effect immediately upon its issuance on Tuesday, with notification sent to the relevant administrative circuits and the Court Clerical Department to take the necessary actions.

Panel heads reshuffled: In accordance with laws and regulations governing examinations, the Ministry of Education announced that it has taken administrative and legal measures against several officials in examination committees, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In an official statement, the ministry explained that it has revoked the assignments of five school principals from their roles as heads of examination committees and referred them to the competent investigative authorities for violating the approved regulations and procedures for organizing examinations, in line with the provisions of Ministerial Resolution No. 115/2025.

The ministry affirmed its commitment to enforcing regulations and stated that any breach of instructions or violation of approved procedures will be met with the necessary measures, without exception. It emphasized that maintaining the integrity of examinations is a top priority, as it ensures fair assessment, equal opportunities for all students, and the credibility of educational outcomes.

The ministry clarified that these decisions aim to protect students’ rights and ensure that examinations are conducted in a fair educational environment for safeguarding their academic future and reinforcing confidence in the outcomes of the educational process.

Hearing adjourned: The Criminal Court has adjourned to Jan 21 the defense hearing in the case of a lawyer accused of drug trafficking and smuggling narcotics from London in collaboration with others.

The postponement was due to the defendant’s medical isolation, which prevented his attendance. Medical reports confirmed the health condition that made his court appearance impossible.

The case arose from allegations that the lawyer and his accomplices established a criminal organization to import narcotics for trafficking purposes. Following investigations, the authorities arrested the suspects and referred the case to the Criminal Court for prosecution.

Bedoun duo arrested with drugs

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Security authorities have arrested two illegal residents (bedoun) in separate incidents involving reckless driving and possession of narcotics, while one suspect, a Kuwaiti citizen, remains at large after fleeing police, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to a security source, Farwaniya support patrols arrested an illegal resident after officers became suspicious of his erratic driving. The suspect was stopped after swerving on the road and appeared confused during questioning. A search revealed five Lyrica pills and three e-cigarette heads containing a synthetic substance known as “Chemical”.

He was arrested and referred with the seized items to the Drug Control General Department for further investigation.

In a separate case, Jahra police arrested another illegal resident after a patrol became suspicious of a vehicle due to the abnormal behavior of its driver and passenger. Upon stopping the vehicle, officers found both individuals behaving in a disoriented manner. The driver resisted arrest and was subdued by force, while his companion, a Kuwaiti citizen, fled the scene and remains under search.

A search of the vehicle uncovered three packets of crystal meth, rolling paper, and a sharp gold knife. The arrested driver was referred to the Drug Control General Department, while security authorities continue efforts to apprehend the fleeing suspect.

E-registration open for ‘26 ‘Academic Aptitude Tests’

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Office of the Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs at Kuwait University for Assessment and Measurement announced the online registration dates for the Academic Aptitude Tests - the Unified National Test (second opportunity) for grade 12 students, scheduled on January 31, February 14, and April 4, 2026, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The office explained that registration is open only to Kuwaiti students from January 6 at 10:00am. The registration for other categories will begin on January 11 at 12:00 noon until seats are filled.

All high school students in grade 12 or equivalent, as well as high school graduates wishing to take the Academic Aptitude Tests, are invited to register via the following link - <https://portal.ku.edu.kw/place-ment>.

Meanwhile , the Council of Public Universities discussed several bylaws governing the admission of high school graduates to Kuwait University and Abdullah Al-Salem University for the 2025/2026 academic year, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

During the meeting, which was chaired by the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Nader Al-Jalal, the council also discussed the draft budgets of both universities for the 2026/2027 fiscal year.

Following the meeting, the acting Secretary-General of the council Dr. Jassim Al-Ali explained that the council reviewed Kuwait University’s annual report for the 2023/2024 academic year, including the indicators related to its educational and research activities.

It discussed a memorandum concerning the appointment of external members to the Abdullah Al-Salem University Council, aimed at strengthening governance and facilitating knowledge exchange.

The council also discussed articles concerning the organizational regulations for managing public shelters at Sabah Al-Salem University City, focusing on defining roles and enhancing the level of preparedness and safety on campus.

It approved the application announcement conditions, the number of students expected to be accepted, and the number of scholarships in the College of Graduate Studies in Kuwait University for the 2026/2027 academic year.

Budget gaps, lack of oversight hinder new cleaning contracts

Council member points to barriers in enforcement

By Inaas Awadh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Municipal Council member Alia Al-Farsi submitted a question to the executive branch concerning delays in issuing new cleaning contracts and fully implementing the Municipal Waste Management and Public Hygiene Regulations.

In her letter, Al-Farsi explained that the regulations were prepared during the thir-

teenth legislative session of the Municipal Council and issued by ministerial decree. Multiple workshops and committee meetings were held, which resulted in recommendations directly affecting hygiene standards, and were subsequently adopted by both the Municipal Council and the Ministry of State for Municipal Affairs, and are considered binding.

She had submitted several questions during the current council session to clarify the executive branch's stance on waste management and public hygiene. However, the required standards have not been implemented in all governorates, the new contracts have still not been issued, and the regulations have yet to be fully applied.

Al-Farsi raised several questions about the main obstacles preventing the municipality from fully enforcing the Municipal Waste Management and Public Hygiene Regulations.

She asked how the municipality plans to ensure compliance by waste producers, transporters, and municipal staff, and whether all fines and penalties outlined in the regulations are being applied.

Al-Farsi highlighted the obstacles including budget constraints, the lack of a dedicated oversight body, the absence of a clear strategy, and the limited scope of public awareness campaigns that require funding.

She also sought clarification on the obstacles delaying the issuance of new cleaning contracts and requested the executive branch's proposed solutions to overcome these challenges.



Farwaniya Governorate photo
Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah poses with officials and community leaders after the 'Kuwait Unifies Us' open meeting, highlighting dialogue, national unity, and civic engagement.

Farwaniya Governor hosts 'Kuwait Unifies Us' open meeting

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah held an open meeting titled "Kuwait Unifies Us" with a number of residents of Farwaniya Governorate.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, the meeting was attended by Director of the Center for Promoting Moderation Dr. Abdullah Al-Shuraika, along with several officials and citizens of the governorate.

The meeting witnessed active participation from residents, who shared their comments and observations on a range of important issues.

Dr. Al-Shuraika delivered an awareness-raising speech, highlighting the importance of consolidating the values of national loyalty, strengthening social cohesion, and rejecting disputes. He emphasized that national unity and solidarity are fundamental to societal security and stability.

During the meeting, the governor affirmed Farwaniya Governorate's commitment to continuing open meetings with citizens, listening to their opinions and suggestions, and promoting community partnership while consolidating the values of national unity.

The governor praised residents for their positive engagement, stressing that such meetings will continue to enhance direct communication and serve the public interest.



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KUNA photo
The Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to South Africa presents his credentials as non-resident Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Mauritius.

Al-Shabli takes office as Kuwait's non-resident envoy to Mauritius

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24, (KUNA): Kuwait Ambassador to South Africa Salem Al-Shabli presented on Tuesday a copy of his credentials to President of the Republic of Mauritius Dharam Gokhool as non-resident ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary to Mauritius.

Ambassador Al-Shabli conveyed to President Gokhool the greetings of His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait Sheikh Me-

shal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He also conveyed His Highness the Amir's wishes of everlasting wellbeing for President Gokhool, and further progress and prosperity for the government and people of Mauritius.

He reaffirmed Kuwait's keenness to strengthen the friendly relations between the two countries and to expand cooperation in various fields in a manner that serves their mutual interests.

Step expands diplomatic footprint in China

Kuwait inks land acquisition deal for new Consulate in Guangzhou

GUANGZHOU, Dec 24, (KUNA): Consulate General of State of Kuwait in Guangzhou signed on Monday an agreement on land acquisition designated for the construction of the consulate buildings.

In a release sent to KUNA, the consulate said that the signing ceremony was conducted in the Services Office of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Guangdong Province.

The release quoted the Consul General of the State of Kuwait in Guangzhou Abdullah Al-Turki saying that "the signing of the executive agreement is a historic and pivotal step in strengthening the diplomatic and institutional presence of the State of Kuwait in southern China." He affirmed that this achievement reflects the depth of the Kuwaiti-Chinese relations and the keenness of both sides on developing those relations in various fields.

He added that the signing of the agreement comes at a time of celebrating 55 years of diplomatic relations between Kuwait and China, which gives this event an important symbolic dimension that embodies the depth of friendship and strategic partnership between the two countries.

On his part, Ma Wengfeng, Director of the Foreign Ministry's Service Office in Guangdong Province, affirmed that the signing of the executive agreement for the land plot constitutes an important milestone in the course of bilateral cooperation between China and Kuwait.

He pointed out that Kuwait is the first Arab country to own a plot of land allocated for the construction of a main headquarters for its consulate in the city of Guangzhou, reflecting the distinguished position it enjoys with the Chinese side.

He added that the volume of trade exchange between Kuwait and China during 2025 witnessed advanced levels that reflect the strength of bilateral economic relations between the two countries. He also expressed his aspiration to continue joint work to enhance the volume of trade and mutual investments during the next stage.

The release mentioned that during the signing ceremony, both sides affirmed that this achievement represents a qualitative step that enhances the institutional presence of Kuwait in Guangzhou and establishes a new phase of practical cooperation between the two friendly countries in various fields of common interest.



Kuwait Consulate photo
The Consul General of the State of Kuwait in Guangzhou Abdullah Al-Turki and Director of the Foreign Ministry's Service Office in Guangdong Province Ma Wengfeng.

5-yr vision to enhance institute's expertise

API launches 10th strategy to strengthen Arab development

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24, (KUNA): Director General of the Arab Planning Institute (API) Dr. Adel Al-Wugayan said that the Institute's vision for the next five years is mainly intended to bolster its position as a leading and credible know-how entity.

In an interview with KUNA on Sunday marking the launching of the AIP's 10th strategy 2025-2030, Al-Wugayan said the API seeks to advance development planning systems in Arab countries and promote cooperation with policymakers to back inclusive growth and sustainable development.

He elaborated that the fresh strategy focuses on a set of prime principles that mark a framework of the AIP's directives that ensure harmony between planned goals and the API's vision and message and address development challenges Arab countries are facing.

He added that the principles on which the blueprint is based are meant to set out clear-cut and measurable strategic goals, prioritize activities, provide financial, human and technical resources, and adopt accurate performance indicators to gauge progress.

The API's strategy is also built on a group of recommendations, mainly including the necessity of promoting and focusing the efforts of Arab capacity building in all relevant domains as well effectively partaking in academic and ideological dialogue regionally and internationally, he remarked.

It also includes advancing and drawing the best research and consulting capabilities and effectively participating in promoting policymaking at the Arab level and bolstering research distinction and disseminating developmental awareness, while ensuring the Institute's financial, regulatory and human sustainability in a bid to ensure its sustainable services.

Al-Wugayan underlined that the Institute attaches great importance to linking its training, consulting and research efforts to economic, financial, social and environmental development requirements within the framework of implementing the 10th strategy, while putting each member state's development landscape privacy into consideration.

The API's chief pointed out the Institute's commitment to designing its activities in a manner that suits the nature of its member states' economies of member countries with a view to strengthening Arab development paths and backing ways of addressing changing challenges and successive crises that most Arab countries are undergoing due to global environment volatility and mounting risks.

The plan considers investment in modern and digital technology in order to beef up the API's operational efficiency, and pays much attention to the institutional communication in an effort to boost the API's presence and influence in the developmental field and develop an Arab content that backs the achievement of the region's sustainable development goals, he noted.

Furthermore, the 2025-2026 training strategy mainly aims at establishing the API's leadership in the area of specialized development training and human capacity-building by means of advancing the quality of training programs and ensuring that they are offered with high efficiency with the goal of maximizing relevant benefits.

He expounded that the plan included a set of advanced training programs that keep abreast of development issues, adding modern topics such as artificial intelligence (AI), the green economy, the circular economy, and energy transition.

He went on saying that the training programs included development planning, economic modeling, macroeconomic management, economic diversification, competitiveness, sustainable finance, human development, social empowerment, digital transformation, smart institutions, entrepreneurship, and support for small and medium-sized enterprises.



Dr. Al-Wugayan

Continued from Page 1

Kuwait slams

Article 2 of the decision permits the sale of energy drinks exclusively in cooperative societies and parallel markets, provided that sales occur in designated areas and under strict supervision by the relevant state authorities. This includes full compliance with age and quantity regulations to ensure effective oversight and safe implementation.

The decision emphasizes the Ministry of Health’s commitment to proactive preventative policies based on clear scientific and regulatory foundations. These policies aim to reduce health risks and promote responsible consumption within a comprehensive national vision focused on improving quality of life and safeguarding public health.

The decision was based on medical and health data highlighting the potential effects of excessive energy drink consumption, particularly among youth and young adults, and the associated health risks, including high caffeine levels, heart problems, sleep disturbances, and changes in eating habits.

In other news, Minister Dr. Al-Awadhi issued a decree for adding the profession of “Home Healthcare Assistant” to the list of professions supporting the medical field and approving the regulations and requirements governing its practice in the private healthcare sector.

The decision was issued in response to the rapidly changing needs of healthcare and its delivery methods, based on the ministry’s commitment to regulating home healthcare services and ensuring their provision according to clear professional standards that protect patients’ rights and enhance the quality and efficiency of care provided at home, in line with national directives to develop the health sector and ensure safe practice.

The decree outlines essential tasks for home healthcare assistants, including providing basic healthcare at home, monitoring patients’ general condition, measuring vital signs and oxygen levels, and assisting in administering non-intravenous medications as prescribed.

Meanwhile, Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi issued a decree for revoking the license of a dental center and closing two of its branches after confirming serious violations of health regulations, specifically the illegal subletting of the license to a third party.

The Ministry of Health stated in a press release that the decision followed the discovery of an illegal contract that allowed another investor to operate and fully manage the clinic in exchange for a monthly fee. It stressed that the action was based on established facts and final court rulings confirming the violation, highlighting that the decision was made in accordance with Law No. 70/2020 and Ministerial Resolution No. 36/2024 concerning the regulation and licensing of private healthcare facilities.

The ministry affirmed its commitment to continuing monitoring and inspection campaigns of private healthcare facilities to protect patients’ rights and ensure compliance with professional and legal standards.

Drug bust

At the time of arrest, the suspects were in possession of 31 grams of synthetic cannabis and shabu, along with drug paraphernalia and a precision scale. They were referred with the seized items to the concerned authorities for necessary legal action.

Failaka dig

Members of the Kuwaiti archaeological team Saif Al-Batti Boutaiban, Ahmad Al-Thawadi, and Anwar Al-Tamimi, said that among the most notable discoveries was a food-processing building opposite the church. The team uncovered a flour mill featuring two low mud-brick pillars designed to support rotating grinding stones.

They explained that part of the grinding equipment was made from local stone, likely sourced from Failaka Island, while other grinding stones were produced from artificial basalt. Although this material closely resembles natural basalt rock, it was manufactured from clay and sand and fired at extremely high temperatures in large kilns.

This advanced process, known as “pyrotechnology,” involved melting and recrystallizing materials to replicate the mechanical properties of volcanic basalt.

KPC targets

is currently focusing all its resources on onshore and offshore exploration to reach a production capacity of four million barrels per day by 2035, with the aim of maintaining this level until 2040.

Kuwait’s current total refining capacity, both locally and internationally, stands at 1.83 million barrels per day.

At the same time, KPC plans to expand the local refining sector from its current capacity of 1.415 million barrels per day to over 1.6 million barrels per day by 2027. This expansion will be achieved by increasing the production capacity of the three local refineries, Mina Abdullah, Mina Al-Ahmadi, and Zour, to meet all local demand for various petroleum products, considering the growing population and the increasing number of visitors to Kuwait.

In the same context, the sources explained that Wadha Al-Khatib, CEO of Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) and Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC), has developed a strategy to increase the production capacity of the three local refineries next year.

She expects an annual increase of between five and ten percent, especially given that KNPC’s board of directors achieved growth in the production capacity of the Mina Abdullah and Mina Al-Ahmadi refineries last year, with their combined annual output reaching 40.56 million metric tons, compared to 40.04 million metric tons in 2023.

The operations at the Mina Al-Ahmadi and Mina Abdullah refineries continued at very high efficiency, reaching a daily refining capacity of 798,600 barrels, compared to an average daily refining rate of 786,100 barrels per day the previous year.

Regarding the Zour Refinery, which is owned by KIPIC, the sources stated that it has completed its maintenance operations and is expected to reach its full production capacity of 615,000 barrels per day by 2026.

They noted that last year’s decline in production to approximately 508,000 barrels per day was due to a malfunction in one of its units. Following repairs, the refinery’s daily refining capacity will reach 615,000 barrels, with further increases planned in the future.

The sources stressed that the initial stages of KIPIC’s integration under KNPC have brought significant successes for the Zour refinery.

They pointed to its recovery from previous losses, particularly after achieving substantial operational savings for the first time last year. These savings

included KD 459,000 through improved fuel and steam consumption, KD 1.2 million through the use of residual catalysts, and USD 14.2 million through enhanced operating procedures.

2026 could

Meanwhile, investment and economic expert Alaa Mohammed Behbehani affirmed that gold proved its value as a financial asset and a hedge during major economic crises in 2025.

He explained that gold prices rose approximately 65.28 percent over the year, climbing from around USD 2,620 per ounce at the start of the year to about USD 4,400 by year-end, an increase of roughly USD 1,700 per ounce. This represents an exceptional rise for an asset traditionally known for its slow and steady price movements.

In an exclusive press statement, Behbehani affirmed that 2025 was a landmark year for gold, not only in terms of price increases but also due to sustained record global demand. By the end of the third quarter, the global volume of gold traded reached approximately 1.313 tons, with a trading value exceeding USD 146 billion. Kuwait’s local market was part of this global momentum.

Behbehani cautioned that these achievements could face some challenges, particularly a decline in consumer demand for gold jewelry and potential price fluctuations due to profit-taking.

However, he emphasized that these factors do not change the overall positive outlook for gold as a hedging instrument, predicting that the precious metal will continue its strong performance throughout 2026, despite the possibility of temporary setbacks.

Behbehani indicated that this rise was not surprising to those closely monitoring the global economy, noting that continued gold purchases by central banks were a major driver of prices.

He revealed that net purchases reached approximately 53 tons in October alone, while total announced purchases from the start of the year through the end of October totaled around 254 tons, adding that this reflects global concerns about the strength of the dollar and U.S. government bonds.

Behbehani affirmed that investors also showed significant activity in gold, particularly during the third quarter of 2025.

The World Gold Council reported trading of approximately 222 tons, with strong demand for gold bars and coins, driven by escalating fears over global economic risks, geopolitical tensions, expectations of interest rate cuts, and a weakening dollar. Regarding his 2026 outlook, Al-Behbehani indicated that his personal view, which is not a buy or sell recommendation, anticipates a continuation of the upward trend in gold.

He stressed that the strength of this rise depends on the trajectory of U.S. interest rates and the implementation of short-term and long-term economic reforms, including developments in bond and stock markets, debt management, and the strengthening of the dollar.

Concerning the Kuwaiti market, Al-Behbehani addressed the common question about the optimal time to buy gold, emphasizing that it should be approached from a clear investment perspective.

He said gold is categorized into jewelry and investment, and true investment involves gradual, measured purchases over the long term rather than short-term speculation.

Shiraa 2026 Award nominees finalized

Winners to be revealed in Feb

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Chairman of the Higher Committee for the Kuwait Media Award (Shiraa), Saad Al-Ali, announced that the four judging committees have completed their work and finalized the lists of nominees after a thorough review and evaluation of the submitted entries.

At a press conference, Al-Ali explained that the winners will be announced at a ceremony scheduled for early February. A total of 217 entries were submitted in various media categories.

The judging process involved multiple stages to ensure fairness and transparency. A select group of media specialists from Kuwait and the Arab world reviewed and evaluated the submissions, with 198 media works accepted as meeting the award’s technical criteria and requirements. This reflects the committee’s commitment to upholding the highest quality standards.

He commended the diligent efforts of the judging committees, saying, “They worked with utmost professionalism to identify the best media works that reflect the creativity of the Kuwaiti media scene.”

Al-Ali highlighted the positive engagement from media professionals, which has strengthened the award’s position as a leading platform for excellence.

He stated that the Higher Commit-

tee will announce the winners of special awards during the ceremony, including Leading Media Personality of the Year, Promising Young Media Personality of the Year, and the Best Media Work or Institution Addressing a Topic of National Importance.

These awards recognize contributions that serve society and promote national values.

Al-Ali expressed his sincere gratitude to the Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, for his keen interest in overseeing the award’s progress.

He also thanked the members of the judging panels and the Higher Committee for their dedication and contributions to the success of this year’s awards.

Al-Ali expressed his anticipation for the awards ceremony, which will mark the culmination of a year of hard work and creativity.

It is worth highlighting that the Shiraa Award aims to encourage excellence in all media categories and highlight Kuwait’s commitment to promoting a culture of innovation and creativity. It also honors individuals who contribute to enriching the vibrant media scene and creating a competitive environment that promotes quality and professionalism, while emphasizing the pivotal role of media in shaping public opinion and supporting societal issues.

The award is presented in various media fields, with individual categories including Best Interviewer, Best Content Creator, Best Investigative Report, Best Columnist, Best Critical Article, Best Photograph, and Best Cartoon.

MoH moves pediatric surgery dept

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Ministry of Health has announced the relocation of the pediatric surgery department from Ibn Sina Hospital to the new Maternity Hospital as part of a comprehensive healthcare system upgrade, with the approval of the Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi, reports Al-Jarida daily.

In an official statement, the ministry explained that the relocation is driven by rapid advancements in pediatric surgery, which require modern equipment, advanced technology, and specialized medical teams to ensure timely and precise surgical interventions. Consolidating care under one roof

will reduce the need for ambulance transfers of newborns and children, minimize risks, and speed up medical decision-making.

The decision also reflects the ministry’s commitment to aligning healthcare infrastructure with the requirements of modern specialized care, while enhancing the patient and family experience in accordance with best medical practices.

In addition, the ministry affirmed that the relocation is part of its strategy to expand and geographically distribute pediatric surgery services, promote integration among healthcare facilities, and improve the overall quality of care.

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Shoppers navigate the rain in San Francisco's Union Square, Tuesday evening, Dec. 23, 2025. (AP)

California drivers warned to reconsider Christmas travel plans ahead of storms

SACRAMENTO, California, Dec 24, (AP): California officials and weather forecasters urged holiday travelers to avoid the roads on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day ahead of a series of powerful winter storms that threatened to slam the state with relentless rains, heavy winds and mountain snow through Friday.

Millions of people are expected to travel across the state. They will likely meet hazardous, if not impossible, traveling conditions as several atmospheric rivers were forecast to make their way through the state, the National Weather Service warned.

"If you're planning to be on the roads for the Christmas holidays, please reconsider your plans," said Ar-

iel Cohen, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Los Angeles.

Forecasters said Southern California could see its wettest Christmas in years and warned about flash flooding, mudslides and debris flows in areas burned by last January's wildfires. Los Angeles County officials said Tuesday they were knocking on the doors of some 380 particularly vulnerable households to order them to leave.

Most areas saw scattered showers Tuesday morning, and the system was expected to pick up in the evening and intensify into Christmas Eve. Some regions will see rain and winds taper off Wednesday before another storm moves in.

Much of the Sacramento Valley and the San Francisco Bay Area were under

a flood watch and a high wind warning through Friday. Forecasters warned of heavy snow and gusts for parts of the Sierra Nevada starting Tuesday that will create "near white-out conditions" and make it "nearly impossible" to travel through the mountain passes.

There's also a risk of severe thunderstorms and a small chance of tornadoes along the northern coast.

Heavy rain and flash flooding that started Saturday in Northern California already led to water rescues and at least one death, local officials said. Shasta County Sheriff Michael L. Johnson on Monday declared a state of emergency to prepare for more rain and allow the state to help with hazard mitigation and search and rescue operations.

Trump administration challenge fails

Judge upholds New York's Green Light Law

NEW YORK, Dec 24, (AP): A federal judge gave a green light Tuesday to New York's so-called Green Light Law, rejecting the Trump administration's bid to stop the state from giving people driver's licenses without having them prove they are in the country legally.

U.S. District Judge Anne M. Nardacci in Albany ruled that the Republican administration - which challenged the law under President Donald Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration - had failed to support its claims that the state law usurps federal law or that it unlawfully regulates or unlawfully discriminates against the federal government.

The Justice Department sued the state over the law in February, naming Gov. Kathy Hochul and the state's attorney general, Letitia James, as defendants. At a news conference announcing the lawsuit, U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi accused the officials, both Democrats, of prioritizing "illegal aliens over American citizens."

"As I said from the start, our laws protect the rights of all New Yorkers and keep our communities safe," James said in a statement Friday. "I will always stand up for New Yorkers and the rule of law."

A message seeking comment was left for the Justice Department.

Nardacci, appointed to the bench by President Joe Biden, a Democrat, wrote that her job was not to evaluate the desirability of the Green Light Law as a policy matter. Rather, she said in a 23-page opinion, it was to assess whether the Trump administration's arguments established that the law violates the U.S. Constitution's Supremacy Clause, which gives federal laws precedence over state laws.

The administration, she wrote, has "failed to state such a claim."

The Green Light Law was enacted partly to improve public safety on the



New York Attorney General Letitia James speaks during a press conference, Monday, Dec. 15, 2025, in New York. (AP)

roads, as people without licenses sometimes drove without one, or without having passed a road test. The state also makes it easier for holders of such licenses to get auto insurance, thus cutting down on crashes involving uninsured drivers.

Under the law, people who don't have a valid Social Security number can submit alternative forms of ID that include valid passports and driver's licenses issued in other countries. Applicants must still get a permit and pass a road test to qualify for a "standard driver's license." It does not apply to commercial driver's licenses.

The Justice Department's lawsuit sought to strike down the law as "a frontal assault on the federal immigration laws, and the federal authorities that administer them." It highlighted a provision that requires the state's Department of Motor Vehicles commissioner to inform people who are in the country illegally when a federal immigration agency has requested their information.

In 2020, during Trump's first term, his administration sought to pressure New York into changing the law by barring anyone from the state from enrolling in trusted traveler programs, meaning they would spend longer amounts of time going through security lines at airports.

The governor at the time, Andrew Cuomo, offered to restore federal access to driving records on a limited basis, but said he wouldn't let immigration agents see lists of people who had applied for the special licenses available to immigrants who couldn't prove legal residency in the U.S. The administration ultimately restored New Yorkers' access to the trusted traveler program after a brief legal fight.

In the lawsuit rejected Tuesday, the administration argued that it could be easier to enforce federal immigration priorities if federal authorities had unfettered access to New York's driver information.

Selection starts Feb 2026

H-1B lottery gone, skill and salary decide visas

WASHINGTON, Dec 24, (AP): The Department of Homeland Security said Tuesday it was replacing its longstanding lottery system for H-1B work visas with a new approach that prioritizes skilled, higher-paid foreign workers.

The change follows a series of actions by the Trump administration aimed at reshaping a visa program that critics say has become a pipeline for overseas workers willing to work for lower pay, but supporters say drives innovation.

"The existing random selection process of H-1B registrations was exploited and abused by U.S. employers who were primarily seeking to import foreign workers at lower wages than they would pay American workers," said U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services spokesman Matthew Tragesser.

Earlier this year, President Donald Trump signed a proclamation imposing a \$100,000 annual H-1B visa fee on highly skilled workers, which is being challenged in court. The president also rolled out a \$1 million "gold card" visa as a pathway to U.S. citizenship for wealthy individuals.

A press release announcing the new rule says it is "in line with other key changes the administration has made, such as the Presidential Proclamation that requires employers to pay an additional \$100,000 per visa as a condition of eligibility."

Historically, H-1B visas have been awarded through a lottery system. This year, Amazon was by far the top recipient, with more than 10,000 visas approved, followed by Tata Consultancy Services, Microsoft, Apple and Google. California has the highest concentration of H-1B workers.

The new system will "implement a weighted selection process that will increase the probability that H-1B visas are allocated to higher-skilled and higher-paid" foreign workers, according to Tuesday's press release. It will go into effect Feb. 27, 2026, and will apply to the upcoming H-1B cap registration season.

Supporters of the H-1B program say it is an important pathway to hiring health-care workers and educators. They say it drives innovation and economic growth in the U.S. and allows employers to fill jobs in specialized fields. Critics argue that the visas often go to entry-level positions rather than senior roles requiring specialized skills. While the program is intended to prevent wage suppression or the displacement of U.S. workers, critics say companies can pay lower wages by classifying jobs at the lowest skill levels, even when the workers hired have more experience.



A banner hangs during a ceremony announcing a proposed \$300 million expansion of Google's data center operations Tuesday, June 2, 2015, in Lithia Springs, Ga. (AP)

Eastern industrial heartland dispute hinders conflict resolution

US and Ukraine reach consensus on key issues

KYIV, Ukraine, Dec 24, (AP): The United States and Ukraine have reached a consensus on several critical issues aimed at bringing an end to the nearly four-year conflict, but sensitive issues around territorial control in Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland, along with the management of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, remain unresolved, Ukraine's president said.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy briefed journalists on each point of the plan on Tuesday. His comments were embargoed until Wednesday morning. The draft proposal, which reflects Ukraine's wishes, intertwines political and commercial interests to safeguard security while boosting economic potential.

Asked about the plan, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that Moscow would set out its position based on information received by Russian presidential envoy Kirill Dmitriev, who met with U.S. envoys in Florida over the weekend.

Peskov declined to share further details, saying that Moscow believed it was "highly inappropriate to conduct any kind of communication via the media."

At the heart of the negotiations lies the contentious territorial dispute concerning the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, known as the Donbas. This is "the most difficult point," Zelenskyy said. He said these matters will be discussed at the leaders level.

Russia continues to assert maximalist demands, insisting that Ukraine relinquish the remaining territory in Donbas that it has not captured - an ultimatum that Ukraine has rejected. Russia has captured most of Luhansk and about 70% of Donetsk.

In a bid to facilitate compromise, the United States has proposed transforming these areas into free economic zones. Ukraine insists that any arrangement must be contingent upon a referendum, allowing the Ukrainian people to determine their own fate. Ukraine is demanding the demilitarization of the area and the presence of an international force to ensure stability, Zelenskyy said.

How the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, the largest plant in Europe which is under Russian occupation, will be managed is another contentious issue. The U.S. is proposing a consortium with Ukraine and Russia, with each party having an equal stake in the enterprise.

But Zelenskyy countered with a joint venture proposal between the U.S. and Ukraine, in which the Americans are able to decide how to distribute their share, presuming it would go to Russia.

"We did not reach a consensus with the American side on the territory of the Donetsk region and on the ZNPP," Zelenskyy said, referring to the power plant in Zaporizhzhia. "But we have significantly brought most of the positions closer



An injured elderly woman looks out of her broken window as an apartment building was hit by a Russian drone during an aerial attack in Kyiv, Ukraine, Tuesday, Dec. 23, 2025. (AP)

together. In principle, all other consensus in this agreement has been found between us and them."

Point 14, which covers territories that cut across the eastern front line, and Point 12, which discusses management of the Zaporizhzhia plant, will likely be major sticking points in the talks.

Zelenskyy said: "We are in a situation where the Russians want us to leave the Donetsk region, and the Americans are trying to find a way so that it is 'not a way out' - because we are against leaving - they want to find a demilitarized zone or a free economic zone in this, that is, a format that can provide for the views of both sides."

The draft states that the contact line, which cuts across five Ukrainian regions, be frozen once the agreement is signed.

Ukraine's stance is that any attempt to create a free economic zone must be ratified by a referendum, affirming that the Ukrainian people ultimately hold the decision-making power, Zelenskyy said. This process will require 60 days, he added, during which time hostilities should stop to allow the process to happen.

More difficult discussions would require hammering out how far troops would be required to move back, per Ukraine's proposal, and where international forces would be stationed. Zelenskyy said ultimately "people can choose: this ending suits us or not," he said.

The draft also proposes that Russian forces withdraw from Dnipropetrovsk, Mykolaiv, Sumy, Kharkiv regions, and that international forces be located along the contact line to monitor the implementation of the agreement.

US not looking to 'conquer' the Danish territory: envoy

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla., Dec 24, (AP): US President Donald Trump's newly appointed envoy to Greenland said Tuesday that the Republican administration is looking to begin a conversation with residents of the semi-autonomous Danish territory about the best way forward for the strategically important island.

In his first extended comments since being appointed to the role this week, Louisiana Gov. **Jeff Landry** said the Trump administration isn't going to "go in there trying to conquer anybody" or try to "take over anybody's country."

The governor's comments seemed somewhat at odds with Trump, who has repeatedly said the U.S. needs to take over the Arctic territory for the sake of U.S. security and has not ruled out military force to take control of the mineral-rich, strategically located Arctic island.

"Well, I think our discussions should be with the actual people in Greenland - the Greenlanders," Landry said in an appearance on Fox News' "The Will Cain Show." "What

are they looking for? What opportunities have they not gotten? Why haven't they gotten the protection that they actually deserve?"

Trump's announcement of Landry's appointment has once again stirred anxiety in Denmark and Europe.

Denmark's foreign minister told Danish broadcasters that he would summon the U.S. ambassador to his ministry.

"We have said it before. Now, we say it again. National borders and the sovereignty of states are rooted in international law," Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and her Greenlandic counterpart, Jens-Fredrik Nielsen, said in a joint statement Monday. "They are fundamental principles. You cannot annex another country. Not even with an argument about international security."

Trump called repeatedly for U.S. jurisdiction over Greenland during his presidential transition and in the early months of his second term. In March, Vice President JD Vance visited a remote U.S. military base in Greenland and accused Denmark of under-investing there.

The issue gradually drifted out of the headlines, but in August, Danish officials summoned the top U.S. diplomat in Copenhagen following a report that at least three people with connections to Trump had carried out covert influence operations in Greenland.

Europe

Hackers claim cyberattack: A pro-Russian hacking group claimed responsibility for a major cyberattack that halted package deliveries by France's national postal service just days before Christmas, prosecutors said Wednesday.

After the claim by the cybercrime group known as Noname057, French intelligence agency DGSI took over the investigation into the hacking attack, the Paris prosecutor's office said in a statement to The Associated Press.

The group has been accused of other cyberattacks in Europe, including around a NATO summit in the Netherlands and French government sites. (AP)

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Illinois move disappoints Pope: Pope Leo XIV said Tuesday he was "very disappointed" that his home state of Illinois had approved a law allowing for medically assisted suicide, and he called for greater respect of life.

Leo said he had spoken "explicitly" with Gov. JB Pritzker and urged him to not sign the bill into law. Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich did the same, Leo told reporters as he left his country house in Castel Gandolfo, south of Rome.

"We were very clear about the necessity to respect the sacredness of life from the very beginning to the very end, and unfortunately, for different reasons, he decided to sign that bill," Leo said. "I am very disappointed about that." (AP)

□ □ □

Moscow blast kills 3 people: Three people, including two police officers, were killed in an explosion in Moscow on Wednesday, Russian investigators said, just days after a car bomb killed a high-ranking general not far away.

The two traffic police officers were approaching a "suspicious individual" when an explosive device detonated, Investigate Committee spokesperson Svetlana Petrenko said in a statement. The two officers, as well as another person standing nearby, died from their injuries. (AP)

□ □ □

New Romania ministers take office: Romania's new defence and economy ministers were sworn in on Tuesday at a ceremony, the Presidential Administration said.

Radu Miruta assumed office as minister of national defence, while Irineu Darau was appointed minister of economy, digitalisation, entrepreneurship and tourism in Prime Minister Ilie Bolojan's cabinet. President Nicusor Dan signed the appointment decrees earlier in the day. The prime minister attended the swearing-in ceremony, and both ministers had been validated last Friday by the Save Romania Union (USR), a member of the governing coalition. (Xinhua)



South Korean President Lee Jae Myung speaks during a news conference to mark the first anniversary of the Dec. 3 martial law crisis at the Blue House in Seoul, South Korea, Dec. 3, 2025. (AP)

S. Korea lawmakers OK ‘fake news’ bill

SEOUL, Dec 24, (AP): South Korea’s liberal-led legislature on Wednesday passed a bill allowing heavy punitive damages against traditional news and internet media for publishing “false or fabricated information,” brushing aside concerns the legislation could lead to greater censorship.

Journalist groups and civil liberty advocates urged President Lee Jae Myung to veto the bill pushed by his Democratic Party. They say the wording is vague about what information would be banned and lacks sufficient protections for the press, potentially discouraging critical reporting on public officials, politicians and big businesses.

The Democrats, who have failed to pass similar legislation under past governments, say the law is needed to counter a growing threat of fake news and disinformation that they argue undermine democracy by fueling divisions and hate speech.

The bill would allow courts to award punitive damages of up to five times the proven losses against news organizations and large YouTube channels that disseminate “illegal information or false, fabricated information” to cause harm or seek profit.

The bill also would allow damages of up to 50 million won (\$34,200) for losses that are difficult to quantify in court. The country’s media regulator would be able to fine outlets up to 1 billion won (\$684,000) for distributing information a court confirms to be false or manipulated more than twice.

The bill passed the National Assembly by a vote of 170-3 with four abstentions after many lawmakers from the main conservative opposition People Power Party boycotted the vote. The vote was delayed after a 24-hour filibuster by PPP, during which lawmakers from both parties debated the bill.

PPP lawmaker Choi Soo-jin said during the filibuster that the bill fails to define the degree of inaccuracy for information to be banned, warning it could be broadly applied to content containing minor errors or general claims and used as a tool to silence critics with the threat of lawsuits.

The Democrats argue punitive damages would apply only when there is clarity that false information has been deliberately spread for harmful or profit-seeking purposes and causes actual damage, while routine allegations or claims would not be penalized.

They note the law prohibits filing damage claims with the purpose of “obstructing just criticism or oversight conducted in the public interest,” although legal experts and journalist groups have criticized the provision as vague and unrealistic.

Venezuela approves law against oil ship seizures

CARACAS, Dec 24, (AP): Venezuela’s parliament on Tuesday approved a measure that criminalizes a broad range of activities that can hinder navigation and commerce in the South American country, such as the seizure of oil tankers.

The bill - introduced, debated and approved within two days in the National Assembly - follows this month’s seizures by U.S. forces of two tankers carrying Venezuelan oil in international waters. The seizures are the latest strategy in U.S. President Donald Trump’s four-month pressure campaign on Venezuela’s leader **Nicolás Maduro**.

The tankers are part of what the Trump administration has said is a fleet Venezuela uses to evade U.S. economic sanctions.

The unicameral assembly, which is controlled by Venezuela’s ruling party, did not publish drafts on Tuesday nor the final version of the measure. But as read on the floor, the bill calls for fines and prison sentences of up to 20 years for anyone who promotes, requests, supports, finances or participates in “acts of piracy, blockades or other international illegal acts” against commercial entities operating with the South American country.

Venezuela’s political opposition, including Nobel Peace laureate Maria Corina Machado, has expressed support for Trump’s Venezuela policy, including the seizure of tankers. Machado and Trump have both repeatedly said that Maduro’s days in power are numbered.

The bill, which now awaits Maduro’s signature, also instructs the executive branch to come up with “incentives and mechanisms for economic, commercial and other protections” for national or foreign entities doing business with Venezuela in the event of piracy activities, a maritime blockade or other unlawful acts.

The U.S. Coast Guard on Saturday seized a Panama-flagged vessel called Centuries that officials said was part of the fleet moving sanctioned cargo. With assistance from the U.S. Navy, it seized a rogue tanker called Skipper on Dec. 10. That ship was registered in Panama.

Trump, after that first seizure, said the U.S. would carry out a “blockade” of Venezuela. He later demanded that Venezuela return assets that it seized from U.S. oil companies years ago, justifying anew his announcement of the blockade against sanctioned oil tankers traveling to or from the South American country.

At an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council called by Venezuela, U.S. Ambassador Mike Waltz on Tuesday stressed that sanctioned oil tankers “operate as the primary economic lifeline for Maduro and his illegitimate regime.”

“Maduro’s ability to sell Venezuela’s oil enables his fraudulent claim to power and his narco-terrorist activities,” Waltz said. “The United States will impose and enforce sanctions to the maximum extent to deprive Maduro of the resources he uses to fund Cartel de los Soles.”

Maduro was indicted in 2020 on narcoterrorism charges in the U.S. and accused of leading the Cartel de los Soles, which the Trump administration designated as a foreign terrorist organization last month. But the entity is not a cartel per se.

Venezuelans began using the term Cartel de los Soles in the 1990s to refer to high-ranking military officers who had grown rich from drug-running. As corruption expanded nationwide, its use loosely expanded to police and government officials as well as activities like illegal mining and fuel trafficking.

At Tuesday’s meeting, Venezuela’s U.N. Ambassador Samuel Moncada accused the U.S. of acting “outside international law” and its own domestic laws, by demanding that Venezuelans vacate the country and hand it over to the Trump administration, including all its oil fields.



Maduro



In this Dec. 8, 2025, photo released by Japan's Imperial Household Agency, Emperor Emeritus Akihito, left, and Empress Emerita Michiko pose for a photo at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, marking Akihito's 92nd birthday on Dec. 23. (AP)

Niigata consent clears Japan’s nuclear restart after 13 years

TOKYO, Dec 24, (AP): The governor of Niigata on Tuesday formally gave local consent to put two reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in the north-central prefecture back online, clearing a last hurdle toward restarting the plant idled for more than a decade following the 2011 meltdowns at another plant managed by the same utility.

Gov. Hideyo Hanazumi, in his meeting with Economy and Industry Minister Ryosei Akazawa, conveyed the prefecture’s “endorsement” to restart the No. 6 and No. 7 reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, accepting the government’s pledge to ensure safety, emergency response and understanding of the residents.

Restart preparations for No. 6 reactor have moved ahead and utility company TEPCO is expected to apply for a final safety inspection by the Nuclear Safety Authority later this week ahead of a possible resumption in January. Work at the other reactor is expected to take a few more years.

The move comes one day after the Niigata prefectural assembly adopted a budget bill that included funding necessary for a restart, supporting the governor’s earlier consent.

“It was a heavy and difficult decision,” Hanazumi told reporters.

Hanazumi also met with Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, who also supports nuclear energy, and asked her to visit to observe the safety at the plant.

Japan once planned to phase out atomic power following the disaster at the Fukushima plant caused by an

earthquake and tsunami. But in the face of global fuel shortages, rising prices and pressure to reduce carbon emissions, the government has reversed its policy and is now seeking to increase nuclear energy use by accelerating reactor restarts, extending their operational lifespan and considering building new ones.

Of the 57 commercial reactors, 13 are currently in operation, 20 are offline and 24 others are being decommissioned, according to the nuclear authorities.

The Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, which comprises seven reactors, is the world’s biggest. The plant has been offline since 2012 as part of nationwide reactor shutdowns in response to the March 2011 triple meltdowns at TEPCO’s Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Reactors No. 6 and 7 at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa had cleared safety tests in 2017, but their restart preparations were suspended after a series of safeguarding problems were found in 2021. The Nuclear Regulation Authority lifted an operational ban at the plant in 2023.

Its resumption again faced uncertainty following the Jan. 1, 2024, earthquake in the nearby Noto region that rekindled safety concerns among local residents about the plant and evacuation in case of a major disaster. The industry ministry sought an early resumption approval from Niigata two months later.

In Japan, a reactor restart is subject to the local community’s consent.



This aerial photo shows the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Kashiwazaki, northern Japan, April 2021. (AP)

Turkiye recovers flight recorders, launches probe

Libya army chief, 7 others perish in jet crash

ANKARA, Dec 24, (AP): Search teams on Wednesday recovered the cockpit voice and flight data recorders from the jet that crashed and killed Libya’s military chief and other senior officers, while efforts to retrieve the victim’s remains were still underway, **Turkiye’s** interior minister said.

The private jet carrying Gen. Muhammad Ali Ahmad al-Haddad, four other officers and three crew members crashed in **Turkiye** on Tuesday after taking off from the capital, Ankara, killing everyone on board. Libyan officials said the cause of the crash was a technical malfunction on the plane.

The high-level Libyan delegation was on its way back to Tripoli after holding defense talks in Ankara aimed at boosting military cooperation between the two countries.

Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya told journalists at site of the crash that wreckage was scattered across an area covering three square kilometers (about 1.2 square miles), complicating recovery efforts. Authorities from the Turkish forensic medicine authority were working to recover and identify the remains, he said.

A 22-person delegation - including five family members - arrived from Libya early on Wednesday to assist in the investigation, he said.

Libyan Prime Minister Abdul-Hamid Dbeibah confirmed the deaths on Tuesday, describing the incident on Facebook as a “tragic accident” and a “great loss” for Libya.

Al-Haddad was the top military commander in western Libya and played a crucial role in the ongoing, U.N.-brokered efforts to unify Libya’s military, which has split, much like Libya’s other institutions.

The four other officers who died in the crash were Gen. Al-Fitouri Ghraibil, the head of Libya’s ground forces, Brig. Gen. Mahmoud Al-Qatawi, who led the military manufacturing authority, Mohammed Al-Asawi Diab, advisor to the chief of staff, and Mohammed Omar Ahmed



Top: Turkey's Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya, center, speaks to the media at the site where rescue teams are searching for the remains of a private jet carrying Libya's military chief and four others that crashed after taking off from Ankara, killing everyone on board, in Ankara, Turkey, early Wednesday, Dec. 24, 2025. Above: Turkish rescue teams search for the remains of a private jet carrying Libya's military chief and four others that crashed after taking off from Ankara, killing everyone on board, in Ankara, Turkey, early Wednesday. (AP)

Mahjoub, a military photographer with the chief of staff’s office.

The identities of the three crew members were not immediately released.

Turkish officials said the Falcon 50 type business jet took off from Ankara’s Esenboga airport at 8:30

p.m. and that contact was lost some 40 minutes later. The plane notified air traffic control of an electrical fault and requested an emergency landing. The aircraft was redirected back to Esenboga, where preparations for its landing began.

The plane, however, disappeared from the radar while descending for the emergency landing, the Turkish presidential communications office said.

The Libyan government declared a three-day period of national mourning. Flags would be flown half-mast at all state institutions, according to the government’s announcement on Facebook.

The wreckage was found near the village of Kesikkavak, in Haymana, a district some 70 kilometers (about 45 miles) south of Ankara.

At the crash site, search and recovery teams intensified their operations on Wednesday after a night of heavy rain and fog, the state-run Anadolu Agency reported. Gendarmerie police sealed off the area while the Turkish disaster management agency, AFAD, set up a mobile coordination center. Specialized vehicles, such as tracked ambulances, were deployed because of the muddy terrain.

Turkiye has assigned four prosecutors to lead the investigation and Yerlikaya said the Turkish search and recovery teams numbered 408 personnel.

While in Ankara, al-Haddad had met with Turkish Defense Minister Yasar Guler and other officials.

Libya plunged into chaos after the country’s 2011 uprising toppled and killed longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi. The country split, with rival administrations in the east and west, backed by an array of rogue militias and foreign governments.

Turkiye has been allied with Libya’s government in the west, but has recently taken steps to improve ties with the eastern-based government as well.

Tuesday’s visit by the Libyan delegation came a day after **Turkiye’s** parliament approved to extend the mandate of Turkish troops serving in Libya for two years. Turkey deployed troops following a 2019 security and military cooperation agreement that was reached between Ankara and the Tripoli-based government.

Subcontinent

India, Sri Lanka talk recovery effort: Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Tuesday held talks with Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya and other senior officials on restoration and relief efforts following the devastation caused by Cyclone Dittwah.

India acted promptly as Sri Lanka’s closest neighbour in line with its Neighbourhood First and MAHASAGAR policies, Jaishankar said at a joint press conference with Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath during his two-day official visit to Sri Lanka. India started the assistance on the day the cyclone made landfall, a statement from the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, quoted the minister as saying.

He said Indian naval vessels delivered relief supplies, Indian

Air Force helicopters conducted operations for over two weeks, an 80-member National Disaster Response Force carried out rescue missions, and an Indian Army field hospital provided emergency medical care to more than 8,000 people. (KUNA)

Tribal violence kills 2 in Assam: At least two people were killed and more than 40 injured in intense violence over the past 24 hours between two tribal groups in India’s north-eastern state of Assam, a local police officer confirmed by phone on Wednesday.

Among the injured were some policemen, too.

The violence reportedly broke out between two warring tribal groups in Assam’s Karbi Anglong district. One tribal group alleged that those belonging to the other group were outsiders and demanded that they be evicted from the area.

According to an online report by Hindustan Times, a group of protesters had observed a hunger strike for the past two

weeks, demanding the eviction of alleged “illegal settlers” from Professional Grazing Reserve and Village Grazing Reserve lands. (Xinhua)

Asphyxiation claims 5 in India: At least five persons died of asphyxiation after inhaling carbon monoxide in India’s northern state of Haryana, the local police confirmed on Tuesday.

The incident was reported from Haryana’s Kurukshetra district. According to the police, the deceased died of asphyxiation as they inhaled carbon monoxide emitted from burning charcoal kept inside the closed room they were sleeping in.

All the deceased were laborers, involved in painting works, and hailed from the neighboring state of Uttar Pradesh. Giving details, a local cop stated, “All the five had arrived in Kurukshetra on Monday evening. They hired a room in a hotel and slept inside it with burning charcoal in a container called angithi in a

bid to keep themselves warm amid the cold during night hours. In their sleep, they inhaled carbon monoxide coming out from the burning charcoal, and eventually died.” (Xinhua)

N. Pakistan attack kills 5 policemen: At least five policemen were killed on Tuesday when a police vehicle came under attack in Pakistan’s northern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province bordering Afghanistan. The district police chief spokesperson, Shaukat Khan in a statement to media confirmed that five police constables were killed when a police mobile came under attack in Gurguri area of Karak district in KPK.

The gunmen set the vehicle ablaze after shooting at it.

A large police contingent, including the district police chief, reached the scene and a search operation went underway.

The District Police Officer, Saud Khan said, “We are investigating the incident from all angles and efforts are underway to trace the attackers.” (KUNA)

Kuwait oil prices up to \$61.37 pb

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24, (KUNA): The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by 88 cents to USD 61.37 per barrel (pb) on Tuesday, compared to USD 60.49 pb on Monday, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC). In global markets, Brent Crude went 30 cents up to reach USD 62.38 pb, West Texas Intermediate also went up 37 cents to USD 58.38 pb.

Business

Hackathon spurs female-led startups & AI innovations

Zain Kuwait’s ‘Women in Tech’ opens new pathways for women into digital roles

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Zain Kuwait’s ‘Women in Tech’ initiative proved to be a resounding success in 2025, as the company continued to open new pathways for women into digital and technology roles by developing talent, reskilling career pathways, strengthening readiness for the digital job market, and creating real opportunities for employment, professional growth, and entrepreneurship in the ICT sector.

The initiative is a key part of Zain’s Group-wide corporate sustainability and IDE strategy, which prioritizes investment in human capital, support for diversity and inclusion, and the development of national capabilities. It primarily aims to understand and create market opportunities for women in technology and digital domains, helping them reskill and realign their skills and career paths to match the industry’s needs.

Through the initiative, Zain focused on delivering specialized training and awareness programs targeting female students, graduates, and early-career professionals, through content that combined technical skills with career-enabling competencies and practical exposure to bridge academic knowledge with digital market needs.

The programs were delivered by experts and specialists, including Zain employees from various technical and business functions who shared their experience through one-to-one guidance and mentoring sessions.

Throughout 2025, ‘Women in Tech’ recorded strong engagement across multiple academic stops, achieving results that reflected both high participation and meaningful impact. The initiative attracted more than 550 participants across its tracks, sessions, workshops, and activities, supporting women across a wide range of digital specializations.

In addition, 25 participants graduated from the Cyber-She program with a 100% completion rate, delivering direct career outcomes including employment opportunities, professional development, and career transitions into technical roles. To translate skills into real market opportunities, the Cyber-She hackathon saw 9 teams participate and supported entrepreneurial pathways and technical solutions with a direct impact on 16 female students.

The program also resulted in the employment of two



Zain employees from technical and business functions mentored the students.



The initiative aimed to understand and create market opportunities for women in tech and digital domains.



The program delivered tangible outcomes in career development and entrepreneurship.

- Empowering women in STEM by identifying and creating market opportunities and reskilling career pathways
- 550+ students/graduates benefitted from multiple tracks, including mentoring sessions and interactive workshops
- Key part of Zain’s Group-wide corporate sustainability and IDE strategy
- Participation of 6 female students with special needs advanced inclusion and equity

graduates, the promotion of one participating employee within her organization, and the successful transi-

tion of four participants from traditional business roles into technical tracks. Graduates also earned interna-

Demand exceeded offered bonds, emphasizing investors’ trust in Markaz

Markaz successfully closes 5-year KD 35 mln bond issue

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Kuwait Financial Centre K.P.S.C. “Markaz” announces it has successfully completed the private placement of the First Tranche of bonds with a total value of KWD 35 million issued under KWD50m Senior Unsecured Bond Program, composed of two equal tranches (Fixed and Floating) with maturity date 5 years from the issuance date (17 December 2025). The bonds were oversubscribed affirming investors’ trust in Markaz. The fixed-rate tranche has a coupon of 5.25% per annum payable quarterly, while the floating-rate tranche offers a coupon of 2.00% above the Central Bank of Kuwait discount rate, capped at 6.25% per annum and payable quarterly. Ahli Capital Investment Company and Markaz were the joint lead managers. The subscription period for the issuance lasted from 3 November to 15 November 2025.

“Capital Intelligence”, an international credit-rating



Diraar Yusuf Alghanim

company, rated the bonds at (BBB) with a stable outlook. This rating reflects Markaz’s sound financial standing in terms of liquidity, solvency and the sustainability of its management fees and commission income. Other supporting factors include Markaz’s consistent track record of meeting its debt service obligations, its access to unsecured financing, and its diversified lender base.

Mr. Diraar Yusuf Alghanim,



Ali H. Khalil

Chairman of Markaz, stated: “We are pleased to announce that Markaz’s latest bond issue was received positively by the capital market.

The strong demand for our fourth issue reflects the continuing trust that investors place in Markaz, its solid creditworthiness, and the capital markets’ confidence in the quality of our bond issues. The Capital Intelligence rating also confirms Markaz’s status as

a well-established franchise with a sound reputation in the region, particularly in Kuwait. Our experienced management team has succeeded in effectively guiding the company through this year’s challenges, while always ensuring that we fulfill our responsibilities to our stakeholders.”

Markaz CEO, Mr. Ali H. Khalil, commented: “These bonds were competitively priced and attracted extensive participation from institutional investors; reinforcing their trust in our credit risk. He added that Markaz has always been an active participant in the debt capital markets as an issuer, lead manager, and investor, and will continue to work with regulators and the public and private sectors to create an efficient and liquid bond market in Kuwait. We always seek to maintain and reinforce these relationships, and entrusted Ahli Capital in view of their strong market positions, as well as our confidence in their distribution networks.”



Part of the workshop activities.

Series promotes eco-creativity

Gulf Bank organizes creative furniture upcycling workshop

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: In line with its commitment to environmental sustainability and community engagement, Gulf Bank successfully concluded a creative workshop focused on furniture recycling and upcycling, transforming used pieces into innovative and functional art forms.

The workshop was held as part of the Bank’s Design and Sustainability Engagement Series, an initiative aimed at raising awareness, building practical skills, and encouraging responsible lifestyle choices through hands-on community experiences.

The session was conducted in collaboration with Kuwaiti interior designer Aisha Qurainees. The workshop witnessed strong participation from Gulf Bank customers and members of the wider community, who benefited from a practical and interactive learning experience.

Participants explored creative techniques to reimagine and repurpose old furniture, demonstrating how discarded items can be transformed into aesthetically appealing and functional pieces, reinforcing the value of upcycling as a sustainable alternative to disposal.

Initiative

Through this initiative, Gulf Bank aims to promote a culture of sustainability, creativity, and lifelong learning, while actively engaging the community in environmental dialogue.

The workshop highlighted the importance of responsible consumption and production, encouraging participants to rethink waste and adopt practices that reduce environmental impact.

The initiative aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to responsible consumption and production, sustainable cities

and communities, and climate action, reflecting Gulf Bank’s commitment to supporting global sustainability objectives through locally driven, high-impact initiatives.

Gulf Bank continues to place strong emphasis on embedding environmental sustainability standards across its programs and operations.

Efforts

These efforts include recycling initiatives, encouraging the use of reusable alternatives, and launching innovative projects that enhance resource efficiency and minimize waste.

The Bank praised the enthusiasm and creativity demonstrated by participants, noting that community-led engagement plays a vital role in translating sustainability principles into everyday practices.

This workshop forms part of Gulf Bank’s broader Design and Sustainability Engagement Series, which underscores the Bank’s ongoing commitment to community development, environmental awareness, and creative innovation. Through this series, Gulf Bank seeks to empower individuals with the knowledge and tools needed to make more sustainable choices, while fostering collaboration between experts, creatives, and the community.

It is worth noting that Gulf Bank continues to play a leading role in environmental protection and sustainability awareness through organizing and sponsoring a wide range of initiatives.

The Bank was recently awarded Best Sustainability Initiative of the Year 2025 by Asian Banking & Finance magazine for its innovative project that transforms used advertising materials into reusable bags, further reinforcing its position as a responsible institution committed to sustainable development at both the local and regional levels.

Yiwu sets the pace for the global Christmas economy

Kuwaiti merchant stocks up early for next Christmas

YIWU, Dec 24, (Xinhua): While shoppers worldwide are still on the hunt for last-minute gifts, the real pulse of the global Christmas economy is beating strong in east China’s Yiwu, the renowned “world’s supermarket.”

Kuwaiti merchant Kamel Mumen exemplifies a dynamic forward-thinking cycle. Amidst a rich variety of ornaments, he meticulously selects Santa hats -- not for this December, but for the next Christmas. His early planning is the norm here, where factories are deep in preparation for the next holiday season.

At the Yiwu Junhong Christmas Costumes & Gifts Factory, owner Jiang Jiangping is expected to roll out over 400 new products for the next Christmas. “After October, our focus shifts entirely to designing for the next year,” said Jiang, whose factory offers nearly 2,000 items. “We’ve already created over 200 custom designs for European clients.”

As the world’s largest Christmas goods hub, Yiwu manufactures about two-thirds of the world’s festive products, shipping over 20,000 varieties to more than 100 countries annually. Customs data reveals robust growth: exports in the first three quarters of 2025 hit 5.17 billion yuan (about 732.6 million U.S. dollars), a surge of 22.9 percent year on year.

This boom arrived earlier



Businessmen from Kuwait select Christmas product samples at the Yiwu International Trade City in Yiwu, east China’s Zhejiang Province, Dec. 17, 2025. (Xinhua)

this year. Amid global trade uncertainties, foreign buyers are stockpiling well in advance. Orders that traditionally peaked in summer began flooding in by April this year. Yiwu’s customs officials reported a staggering year-on-year increase of over 90 percent in May exports alone. June saw 890 million yuan in exports, half the first-half total, rising to 1.11 billion yuan in July and nearing August’s 1.39 billion yuan.

This agility is powered by a formidable regional industrial ecosystem. Zhejiang’s integrated support framework-- combining agile supply chains with policy, logistics, and financial backing --

ensures Yiwu’s reliable delivery to the world.

Innovation is the cornerstone of Yiwu’s competitive edge. At Yiwu Luochen Crafts, two dancing Santas, which are among the newest designs for next Christmas, move to holiday tunes.

“These products are priced one-third higher than traditional ones,” said manager He Jun, noting that AI advances and rising market demands encourage his business to innovate, especially to develop interactive products continuously.

He noted that designing a dancing Santa usually involves collaboration with more than 20 supply-chain partners, forming

Writing a new chapter of excellence ... Turning strategy into innovation & leadership

An exceptional year marked by unprecedented achievements ... With this record, the Human Resources Group at NBK drew 2025 to a close

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: An exceptional year, defined by unprecedented achievements; this is how the Human Resources Group at National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) brought 2025 to a close. A year in which vision was translated into reality, reinforcing the Bank's position as the leading workplace in the banking sector, while sustaining its successful commitment to investing in human capital and empowering national talent.

The Pulse of Leadership Development

At the heart of the Group's success, Human Resources led a new chapter of excellence this year, as professional development strategies and employee well-being evolved into an integrated workplace experience that brings together innovation and leadership. These efforts were crowned by the Bank's receipt of prestigious international awards, reflecting its success in applying global best practices and creating a work environment on par with the world's leading institutions.

Mr. Emad Al-Ablani, Group Chief Human Resources Officer at NBK, remarked: "2025 was an exceptional year by every measure. We successfully achieved our strategic objectives in alignment with the Bank's ambitious vision, and our accomplishments went beyond numbers to embedding a culture of continuous learning, fostering innovation, and developing workforce capabilities, while placing employee health and well-being at the forefront of our priorities."

"Our employees are the fundamental pillar of the Bank's success and the sustainability of its leadership in the banking sector. They represent our true wealth, one in which we invest through development programs and innovative initiatives to ensure their readiness to meet future challenges and to achieve excellence within a work environment built on creativity and innovation, Al-Ablani added.

"The awards we received throughout the year reflected the impact we have made on the journey of national talent that has found its home at NBK, on the development of employees' career paths, and on the future of the Bank, which is now equipped with a stronger human capital base, better positioned to meet the challenges of tomorrow," he affirmed.

Your Voice Matters 2025

As part of reinforcing a culture of engagement and transparency, Al-Ablani commented: "We firmly believe that achievements and success begin with attentive listening to our employees. For this reason, we launched the 'Your Voice Matters 2025' survey for the fourth consecutive year, not merely to measure engagement indicators, but to genuinely capture the pulse of our employees across all local and international Group divisions. Their feedback has served as the cornerstone for our initiatives aimed at building a more engaging, agile, and supportive workplace aligned with their future aspirations."

"Our people's voice has become the compass guiding Human Resources strategies toward greater development and innovation. This year's survey saw the participation of 5,099 employees, achieving a response rate of 81%, while sustained engagement reached an outstanding level of 87%, well above international benchmarks," he added.

Al-Ablani emphasized that NBK offers more than a conventional workplace; it is a space for creativity, personal growth, and professional excellence, where employee well-being lies at the core of the Bank's priorities through initiatives that support both mental and physical health.

He further noted that learning and training initiatives represent a cornerstone of the Human Resources strategy at NBK Group, having established a comprehensive framework focused on career development and professional guidance, alongside providing diverse opportunities for continuous learning within the Bank. He added that this integrated approach is designed to empower employees to confidently chart their career paths, while fostering a work environment that supports innovation and enables them to achieve the highest levels of success.

Furthermore, Al-Ablani explained that NBK's talent acquisition strategy goes beyond recruiting employees, seeking instead to build a generation of leaders and future makers capable of leading transformation and innovation in the banking sector. He noted that the workplace at NBK represents the ideal environment for individuals driven by passion and ambition, particularly young talent aspiring to chart a successful professional career.

Talent Acquisition & Nationalization

In 2025, the Talent Acquisition Department strengthened the workforce with top national talent through participation in six major career fairs, resulting in a notable increase in new hires, particularly across technical and digital disciplines such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and data analytics, aligned with the Bank's drive toward innovation and digital transformation.

In line with its commitment to supporting Kuwait's strategic agenda and increasing the participation of national workforce in the private sector, the Bank raised its nationalization (Kuwaitization) rate to 76.8% of the total workforce.

The Bank received more than 8,000 applications, resulting in the hiring of 249 new employees, 90% of whom are national talent, including 68 hires across science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields.

Strengthening Academic Partnerships

As part of its efforts to enhance recruitment and professional development, NBK entered into a number of strategic partnerships with leading academic and professional institutions, aimed at aligning educational outcomes with labor market needs and delivering specialized training programs. These partnerships included collaboration with the American International University to deliver joint workshops and training courses; with Kuwait Law Society to launch development initiatives and create employment opportunities for Kuwaiti lawyers; and with the American University of Kuwait (AUK) to offer training programs and summer internship opportunities. In addition, the Bank signed a memorandum of understanding with Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) to enhance knowledge exchange and support the development of national talent.

Furthermore, the Bank provided specialized practical training opportunities for Kuwaiti youth, welcoming 125 students from leading universities and educational institutions, in collaboration with prominent entities such as the Public Authority for Manpower, the American University of the Middle East, the American International University, Kuwait University, the Australian University in Kuwait, and LOYAC. The



Emad Al-Ablani

Al-Ablani:

- We strengthened our position as the employer of choice within the banking sector
- Specialized development programs empowered national talent to chart promising and sustainable career pathways
- Initiatives focused on supporting employees' mental and physical well-being, while embedding diversity and inclusion across every facet of the workplace
- 2025 marked a year of deepening engagement with the academic and professional communities, ensuring a continuous pipeline of national capabilities
- The awards we received stand as clear validation of the success of our strategy in applying global best practices in human resources management
- Our employees' feedback forms the cornerstone of building a more engaging, agile, and supportive workplace that aligns with their future aspirations
- Employee well-being is at the heart of our priorities, while education and training initiatives remain a fundamental pillar of our strategy
- We delivered more than 147,000 training hours to over 5,000 employees, achieving a satisfaction rate of 91%
- Our recruitment strategy goes beyond hiring talent to nurturing a new generation of leaders and future makers
- The workplace at NBK stands as the ideal environment for those driven by passion and ambition to build a successful career



NBK introduces Ebtakir; Kuwait's groundbreaking intrapreneurship initiative with Plug and Play.

Bank invested more than 11,766 training hours in these young participants to refine their skills and further develop their capabilities.

NBK: A Pipeline for Future Leaders

In 2025, the Bank launched the 30th cohort of NBK Academy, welcoming 20 outstanding Kuwaiti graduates into an intensive learning journey that integrates technical, behavioral, and practical dimensions. The year also marked the launch of the second cohort of NBK Tech Academy, a pioneering initiative and the first of its kind in Kuwait, which attracted nine high-caliber technology talents across cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, software development, and data analytics.

The programs of NBK Academy and NBK Tech Academy were designed to equip participants with advanced skills spanning fintech, digital innovation, and the fundamentals of digital payments, alongside the development of leadership and personal capabilities such as teamwork, project management, and achieving measurable outcomes. These programs extended beyond technical training to include hands-on mentoring and rotational assignments across various Bank departments, providing participants with practical experience and strategic insights into the nature of the banking business.

The Bank also celebrated the 15th anniversary of NBK Academy, which over the years has graduated 30 cohorts of national talent, contributing to strengthening the Bank's capabilities and enhancing its performance across various areas.

These efforts reflect the Bank's ongoing commitment to building leadership capable of keeping pace with the rapid transformations shaping the banking industry, reaffirming that NBK does not merely adapt to change, but leads it through sustained investment in human capital, continuing to set the benchmark for innovation and empowerment.

Moreover, NBK continued to roll out advanced development programs aimed at accelerating the growth of emerging leaders and strengthening their readiness for leadership roles. The Bank celebrated the graduation of new cohorts from its two flagship intensive development programs, NBK PRIME and NBK Pioneers. The NBK PRIME program graduated 56 leaders following a comprehensive, two-phase development journey that addressed advanced themes such as emotional intelligence-driven leadership, change management, innovation in banking services, and building high-performance teams, delivered in collaboration with a select group of leading global training institutions. Meanwhile, the NBK Pioneers program focused on preparing a new generation of leaders through an intensive six-month program covering personal branding, artificial intelligence in banking, fraud prevention, and advanced sales capabilities.

The Bank also launched the ninth cohort of the NBK High Fliers program, in collaboration with the globally renowned IE Business School. The program comprises six integrated training modules covering leadership capabilities, emerging marketing trends, change management and innovation, and the cultivation of a culture of excellence. It also features an innovation lab that enables participants to develop practical solutions to current banking challenges. The program is designed to empower national talent to transition from technical proficiency to strategic leadership thinking, enhancing their readiness to assume future leadership roles.

Diversity, Inclusion, and Women's Empowerment

As part of its commitment to advancing diversity and inclusion, empowering women, and increasing their representation in leadership roles, NBK achieved notable

milestones in 2025. Female employees accounted for 42.5% of the total workforce, while women represented 27.4% of managerial positions. Meanwhile, new female hires comprised 34.5% of total appointments during the year.

NBK also celebrated the graduation of the second cohort of NBK RISE program, a pioneering initiative and the first of its kind in Kuwait, specifically designed to support and empower female leaders and enable their progression to senior leadership roles.

The nine-month program, delivered in collaboration with IE Business School in Spain, focused on developing leadership and strategic capabilities, building confidence, and enhancing effective decision-making. It also included executive coaching sessions and practical projects addressing real-world business challenges. The cohort comprised 25 participants from diverse professional backgrounds, including employees from NBK and its international branches, as well as representatives from leading regional companies.

In addition, NBK launched the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) Council as an institutional framework aimed at embedding these values across all human resources practices. Serving as a guiding compass for policies and decisions related to recruitment, development, and recognition, the Council ensures equal opportunity for all within a fair workplace, transforming diversity into a source of strength and creativity.

Employee Well-Being

Throughout 2025, NBK placed employee well-being at the core of its priorities by launching an integrated suite of initiatives designed to promote work-life balance and support financial stability. The Bank introduced a three-day well-being leave, implemented reduced working hours on Thursdays, and excluded Saturdays from annual leave deductions. In addition, NBK expanded employee financial benefits by revising the terms of the 0% interest employee loan to include a second loan, introducing Al-Jawhara account for employees with exclusive prize-draw privileges, and establishing an employee fund to provide financial support in emergency and extraordinary circumstances.

Investing in Minds

As part of its strategy to empower its employees, the Bank invested in learning across all levels, designing curricula that keep pace with transformation requirements and align with the evolving needs of the banking sector. In this context, the Bank launched a comprehensive training program titled "AI Mindset Curriculum", aimed at raising awareness of artificial intelligence concepts and ethics, and developing employees' digital mindset in line with future requirements. The program combines e-learning with interactive workshops, equipping participants with the knowledge needed to leverage AI technologies to enhance productivity, support innovation, and improve customer experience.

In parallel, the Learning and Development Department continued to invest in capability building throughout the year through advanced training programs that combined in-person and digital learning. These included initiatives such as NBK High Fliers, the Moody's Credit Certificate, Middle Management, Transcendence Leader Coach (TLC), Trade Finance, as well as the NBK Ebtakir intrapreneurship program in collaboration with Plug and Play. Over the year, the Bank delivered more than 147,000 training hours to Group employees, with 5,320 participants, achieving an overall employee satisfaction rate of 91% across all training and development programs.

A Clear Career Path

NBK seeks to adopt global best practices in human resources management by establishing a unified organizational and job architecture across all business segments, both locally and internationally. This approach aligns with international standards in the design and development of operating models, while keeping pace with leading global banking institutions.

This structure is underpinned by a unified and clearly defined performance evaluation and career progression framework, which promotes fairness and transparency in promotions, compensation, and rewards. It ensures alignment of roles and job titles with banking sector standards, while enabling accurate benchmarking against industry peers.

The introduction of standardized job families and a unified grading system represents a core enabler for defining and evaluating roles in line with internationally recognized job classification and evaluation methodologies. This, in turn, supports the development of competitive and equitable policies for compensation, career progression, and talent development. Through these globally aligned standards and the consistency of its job architecture and evaluation framework, NBK strengthens its competitiveness on an international scale, enhancing its ability to attract, retain, and develop top talent, while reinforcing its leadership position within the banking sector.

Prestigious Awards Stand as Testament to HR Leadership

The efforts of the Human Resources Group in 2025 were crowned with a series of prestigious awards from local, regional, and international institutions, reaffirming NBK's leadership across recruitment, learning and development, and diversity and inclusion. The Bank received three awards from AUM Corporate: Trainee Empowerment Award, Excellence in Recruitment Award, and Gold Sponsor Award, in addition to being named Best Bank for Diversity and Inclusion by the renowned Euromoney magazine. NBK also secured two accolades under the GCC Government Human Resources and Youth Awards: Most Distinctive Learning and Development of the Year in Private Sector for the NBK Academy and NBK Tech Academy programs, and Excellence in Digital Learning Innovation for the Bank's learning platform, NBK Learning Hub.

Silver Award for Excellence in Employee Recognition for the Most Valuable Player (MVP)

Bronze Award in the Best High-Potential Development Program category for NBK High Fliers Program

Award for Excellence in Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) in recognition of NBK RISE Program

Going forward, the Human Resources Group at NBK will continue to play its vital role in supporting and enhancing the Group's performance by focusing on the development of human capital, integrating advanced technologies into employee development, expanding well-being programs, and strengthening a culture of diversity and inclusion, ensuring the Bank's continued position as the employer of choice for Kuwaiti youth.



NBK launches 9th cohort of High-Fliers program for developing young leaders.



NBK participates in 'Watheefi,' Kuwait's largest career fair.



Shaikha Al-Bahar, Omar Bouhadiba, Emad Al-Ablani, and Zaid Al-Sager in a group photo during the Human Resources Conference.



Graduation of a new batch of distinguished leaders and employees from the NBK PRIME and NBK Pioneers programs.



NBK receives the Silver Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion Award.



NBK signs MoU with KBA to support law professionals.



Isam Al-Sagr, Shaikha Al-Bahr, Salah Al-Fulaij, Sulaiman Al-Marzouq and Imad Al-Ablani honor the winners of the NBK Academy awards.

The two entities sign MoU to develop skills of both employees and students

Burgan Bank and AUK partner to shape the future of Kuwaiti talent

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: As part of its ongoing commitment to empower Kuwait's next generation of talent and advance national development goals, Burgan Bank signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the American University of Kuwait (AUK). Laying the groundwork for a strategic partnership that bridges education and professional experience, the collaboration aims to align academic knowledge with real-world market needs; cultivating a new generation of professionals equipped to thrive in the rapidly evolving banking and financial landscape.

Representing Burgan Bank at the MOU signing Ceremony was Mr. Nageeb Amin, General Manager-Human Resources & Development Group alongside Dr. Aseel Al-Awadhi, Vice President – Academic Affairs from AUK.

"In line with our strategy to nurture human capital and drive innovation across the financial ecosystem, this partnership reaffirms Burgan Bank's commitment to continuous learning and sustainable national development," said Mr. Nageeb Amin at Burgan Bank. "Collaborations of this nature enhances our employees' capabilities and ensure that academic institutions are closely aligned with evolving industry needs, a synergy that is important for contributions to the goals of Kuwait Vision 2035. By working hand-in-hand with AUK, we're giving young talents the tools and experiences they need to shape the next era of banking — one defined by knowledge, innovation, and impact."

This partnership aligns with the Bank's strategy for investing in Kuwait's human capital and its commitment to fostering a culture of continuous learning for its employees. This initiative further cements Burgan Bank's role in



Mr. Nageeb Amin and Dr. Aseel Al-Awadhi signing the MoU.



A group photo of the Burgan Bank and AUK teams at the MoU signing ceremony.

contributing to the advancement of Kuwait's dynamic sectors, including education, as part of its commitment to embedding environment, social, and governance (ESG) principles across all operations, comprehensive social responsibility program, and advocacy for Kuwait Vision 2035.

On her part, Dr. Aseel Al-Awadhi at AUK, said: "We are delighted to collaborate with Burgan Bank, an institution that continues to set benchmarks in corporate citizenship and talent empowerment. This MOU enriches the academic journey of our students, giving them access to real-world experiences that complement their classroom learning. Through initiatives like this, we enable our graduates to step into the workforce with confidence, purpose, and a deeper understanding of the industries that drive Kuwait's progress."

As per the MoU, the two parties will collaborate on developing educational programs tailored to the professional needs of Burgan Bank employees across different departments and job grades. In addition, they will design curricu-

lum-based courses and hands-on learning opportunities that aim to advance AUK students with an interest in digital banking and financial innovation, with numerous topics that serve innovation and digital transformation aspects in banking and change management. Furthermore, field trips to Burgan Bank's Head Office will be arranged quarterly, where students can engage with professionals in conversation and build their networks, as well as joint workshops, seminars, and guest lectures delivered by Burgan Bank experts and hosted by AUK.

Under the umbrella of its program "Teach Them Young", Burgan Bank continues to introduce new opportunities for Kuwait's aspiring youth to develop vital skills needed for their personal and professional future success. This included hosting visits at its HQ, where students from multiple universities in Kuwait were able to experience a more profound educational experience by witnessing the banking industry operations in real life.

CSR program promotes inclusivity and understanding

stc Kuwait organizes autism awareness session for employees

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, continues to demonstrate its strong commitment to corporate social responsibility, guided by belief in creating a positive and inclusive impact beyond telecommunications.

In collaboration between stc's Human Resources and Strategy teams, an autism session was organized for its employees as part of the Company comprehensive Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) framework, with health and social well-being positioned as key pillars while reflecting the ongoing commitment to building a supportive and diverse workplace culture.

The awareness session was conducted in collaboration with 'Friends of Autism' and led by its founder, Mr. Abdullah Al Oqab.

The initiative aimed to raise awareness among stc employees about autism, while equipping them with practical knowledge and tools to better understand, communicate with, and support individuals diagnosed with autism.

Through this awareness session, the Company seeks to empower its workforce and encourage positive, informed interactions that promote inclusivity both within the workplace and across the wider community.

Mr. Ahmad AlNuwaibet, Director of Public Relations and Social Media at stc Kuwait, stated "this initiative aligns with the Company broader CSR objectives, which focuses on driving meaningful and sustainable social impact.

With health and well-being serving as one of the key pillars behind our comprehensive CSR and sustainability programs, the Company actively organizes educational and awareness-driven initiatives that aim to educate stc employees and the



Abdullah Al Oqab in a group photo with company employees participating in the awareness session.

public.

As part of this ongoing commitment, we continuously supports causes that contribute to positive change, while advancing a culture based on understanding and acceptance.

Through partnerships such as this, stc aims to cultivate an innovative and inclusive work environment that upholds responsible practices and supports long-term sustainable development."

Mr. AlOqab stated, "This partnership has played an important role in influencing greater understanding and acceptance of the autism spectrum, while reinforcing the value of inclusivity within the workplace. Together, we are proud to contribute to giving back to the community and creating a positive, lasting impact that extends beyond the organization itself." He also added "Friends of Autism was established with the

purpose of supporting organizations and businesses by providing them with the knowledge and tools needed to effectively engage with individuals with autism."

stc highlighted it's continued commitment to support and raise awareness around causes that impact various segments of the community, through organizing initiatives and events that aim to drive positive and long-lasting change. The Company's expansive CSR and sustainability programs are guided by a clear objective to empower the community, promote inclusivity, and contribute to the overall well-being of society. Through these efforts, stc aims to foster responsible practices, support social development, and play an active role in shaping a more inclusive and sustainable future, both internally and for the communities it serves.

About stc

Kuwait Telecommunications Company (stc) is a Kuwaiti shareholding company incorporated pursuant to Amiri Decree No. 187 on 22 July, 2008, to operate and manage the third GSM mobile network in Kuwait as per Law No. 2 of 2008. Accordingly, stc launched its operations in December 2008 and was listed on Boursa Kuwait in December 2014.

stc Kuwait is a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and solutions to customers, both for individuals and enterprises, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, and is a subsidiary of stc Group. stc Kuwait has expanded its portfolio by acquiring companies such as Qualytynet General Trading and Contracting Company (solutions by stc) in Kuwait, and e-portal Holding Company and its subsidiaries.

To know more about "stc Kuwait": [click here](#)

In partnership with Western Union

KFH: Diverse money transfer services through 'KFHOnline'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) continues to lead the way in delivering advanced digital banking solutions, offering customers a wide range of local and international money transfer services through KFHOnline mobile application, in cooperation with Western Union's global network. This partnership enables KFH customers to make fast and secure money transfers, whether in cash, directly to bank accounts, or to digital wallets in various countries. Users can easily select beneficiaries and access Western Union's extensive worldwide network.

These services reflect KFH's commitment to genuine digital transformation in the banking sector, allowing customers to carry out financial transactions seamlessly through clear and efficient electronic steps, while maintaining the highest security standards. The result is greater efficiency and an enhanced digital experience that meets customers' expectations. Western Union operates one of the world's largest and most trusted money transfer networks, with retail locations in more than 200 countries and territories. Customers can also make payments to billions of bank accounts and millions of digital wallets and cards globally.

Through these services, KFH further enhances the customer experience by providing fast, safe, and convenient transfers that meet diverse financial needs. The partnership also strengthens KFH's digital capabilities and reaffirms its commitment to offering comprehensive financial solutions, a commitment clearly reflected in



the growing customer demand for this service.

KFH's strong performance in e-banking is evident in the wide range of services available through the KFHOnline app. These services include the instant issuance of virtual cards, opening additional accounts without a branch visit, card activation and deactivation, creating deposits, adding beneficiaries, and conducting account balance and transaction inquiries. Furthermore, the app facilitates chequebook requests, gold trading (buying and selling), financing requests, managing children's accounts, WAMD instant payment service, and sending and receiving money through KFH Pay, alongside other advanced digital banking services.

KFH also provides innovative services such as Live FX Pricing for real-time currency exchange rates, instant transfers to KFH-Turkey through the RippleNet network, and digital wallet compatibility with Garmin, Fitbit, and Samsung smart devices. Additionally, customers can instantly issue bank cards via self-service kiosks available in KFH branches.

Bank reaffirms commitment to inclusive innovation

KIB sponsors International Assistive Technology Conference in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) concluded its participation as a strategic sponsor of the 2025 International Conference and Forum on Assistive Technologies for Special Needs (ATS'N'25). The event was held under the patronage of H.E. Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah, Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs, and attended by Ghada Al-Tahir, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in the State of Kuwait, along with the President of Kuwait College of Science and Technology (KCST) Khalid Al-Begain, the Deputy Director General of the Public Authority for Disability Affairs Dr. Khalifa Al-Haila'a, as well as partners, sponsors, and distinguished guests.

The opening events saw a strong turnout, as the conference highlighted the latest innovations designed to empower persons with disabilities, promote digital inclusion, and develop technological solutions that enhance their quality of life and support their full integration into society.

Commenting on KIB's participation in the opening ceremony, Marwa Marafie, Corporate Communications Manager, stated that this event reflects Kuwait's commitment to advancing technologies for persons with disabilities and strengthening the ecosystem of social innovation. She emphasized the importance of assistive technology in creating new opportunities to better serve this community.

She also affirmed that KIB's par-



The KIB team with Ghada Al-Tahir, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in the State of Kuwait, along with the President of KCST Khalid Al-Begain, and the Deputy Director General of the Public Authority for Disability Affairs Dr. Khalifa Al-Haila'a.

ticipation as a strategic sponsor aligns with the Bank's commitment to supporting all segments of society, especially persons with disabilities, stressing that the Bank views technology as a human and social value before it is a commercial service. She added that KIB continues to develop inclusive banking solutions, more accessible digital platforms, and operational procedures that take into account the needs of persons with disabilities at every step of their banking journey.

Marafie emphasized that the Bank's support for this conference falls within a broader strategy to strengthen partnerships with the United Nations, academic institutions, and international organizations, with the aim of

accelerating the adoption of assistive technologies in Kuwait and fostering an enabling environment for impactful technological innovation.

She also noted that investment in assistive technology is a fundamental component of KIB's commitment to corporate social responsibility, adding that the Bank is continuously working to raise awareness about the importance of digital accessibility as a pivotal step toward achieving broader digital equity.

In her concluding remarks, Marafie affirmed that KIB will continue supporting initiatives and events that contribute to enhancing the quality of life for persons with disabilities and enabling their active

participation in society. She expressed her appreciation to the organizing entities and to both international and local partners for the success of this distinguished event.

It is worth noting that KIB's participation in this event is part of a series of initiatives the Bank continues to implement to promote digital inclusion and develop services that are better tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities. The Bank consistently works to expand its community programs and partnerships and to support innovative technological solutions, driven by its belief that empowering persons with disabilities is a fundamental element of KIB's mission to serve the community and



The KIB team with Ghada Al-Tahir, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in the State of Kuwait, and the President of KCST Khalid Al-Begain.

strengthen its role in sustainable development.

About KIB

Kuwait International Bank (KIB) is a bank that operates according to the Islamic Shari'ah, based in the State of Kuwait. Incorporated in 1973, and originally known as Kuwait Real Estate Bank, KIB made the transition to its current Islamic operating model in 2007. In 2018, KIB embarked on a new phase of its journey full of innovation and development. As part of its new strategic direction, the Bank focuses on offering a next-level customer experience under the slogan: "Bank for Life".

Through a network of branches spread across the State of Kuwait, KIB

offers a broad range of banking products and services, as well as innovative digital banking solutions in line with international best standards. As part of its duty towards the community, the Bank also encompasses a leading social responsibility program that aims at positively impacting all members of the community through a wide range of impactful initiatives and activities.

Today, KIB has taken concrete steps in implementing its new strategic objectives. The Bank has cemented its role as a key player in the local banking industry and has continued to maintain its strong financial performance; enabling it to be globally recognized for its strong credit rating and financial position.

South Korea's Oscar hope is dark, funny and daring

Korean satire 'No Other Choice' masterful thriller from Park Chan-wook

NEW YORK, Dec 24, (AP): Leaves and bodies fall in "No Other Choice," Park Chan-wook's masterfully devilish satire with a chilling autumnal wind blowing through it.

"Come on, fall," urges You Man-su (Lee Byung-hun) as he grills an eel for dinner for his family in the opening moments of Park's film. He's eager for the season to start but unprepared for the amount of cyclical collapse - familial, economic, even existential - that Park has in store.

Man-su pronounces the very thing no movie protagonist ever should: "I've got it all." He lives with his wife, Miri (Son Ye-jin), and two children (Kim Woo Seung, Choi So Yul) in a handsome modernist house in the woods, with two golden retrievers. But almost as soon as he says that, Man-su's fortunes turn. After 25 years at a paper mill, Man-su is laid off, as are many others, with little fanfare or apology. Desperation begins to set in. He's forced to sell the home he loves so dearly, including the attached greenhouse where he tends to plants and bonsai trees. They even have to, horror of horrors, cancel Netflix.

Another movie might have sunk with Man-su into bankruptcy and midlife struggle, following his quest to find a new line of work and restart his life. This is not that movie. Man-su, considering his prospects, decides he needs to better his odds of new employment. After posting a fake job listing and comparing all the incoming resumes, he decides he's about the fifth best option for any new paper mill managerial jobs. He decides to kill the ones with better creden-

tials.

The concept, a Grade-A barnburner of a movie idea, is not new. "No Other Choice," South Korea's Oscar submission, is based on Donald Westlake's 1997 crime novel "The Ax," which Costa-Gavras also made into a film in 2005. But Park, the filmmaker of such diabolical movies as "Oldboy," "The Handmaiden" and "Decision to Leave," is exquisitely suited to the material. This is a director capable of conjuring menacing brutality with nothing but a hallway and hammer.

And in "No Other Choice," he remains at the peak of his powers, archly and elegantly spinning a yarn about a murderous rampage that accumulates wider and wider reverberations. "Hitchcockian" is a term that often, understandably, finds Park. He is, like Hitch, a seemingly polite and erudite man with a latently dark imagination. But for more than two decades, Park has cut his own bloody, unyieldingly meticulous path in movies that are rarely predictable, very funny and sneakily revelatory.

Much of the delight of "No Other Choice," which Park co-wrote with Lee Kyoung-mi, Don McKellar and Jahye Lee, isn't just seeing how Man-su's scheme goes but how Park frames it. He is probably the preeminent filmmaker of putting wild, outrageous happenings into cleverly formal, eminently stylish imagery. As Man-su bumbles from target to target, each potential murder is a window into another family reckoning with unemployment. The way Man-su spies on them (or worse) adds delicious layers of satire. Relish, especially, the way Park uses

reflections and trees.

How "No Other Choice" puts capitalism in the crosshairs, with a handsome house in the center, will no doubt bring to mind another Korean satire: Bong Joon Ho's "Parasite." Park had been wanting to make his film for almost two decades. Either way, the two movies would make one hell of a destabilizing double feature.

If "Parasite" was the feat of an ensemble, "No Other Choice" belongs to Lee. His Man-su is no killer at heart, and his attempts to become one are as comical as they are Dostoyevskian. The tone is so farcical that the gruesomeness of some of Man-su's acts come slyly. How many movies have we seen about a parent driven, heroically, to extremes to defend their family? Man-su's circumstance is frightfully understandable. "Our family is in a war," he says. To keep them happy - in particular Miri - Man-su thinks whatever it takes is necessary.

But what makes "No Other Choice" brilliant is how it shows that perceived predicament as a ubiquitous mistake of modern life. I won't spoil the incredible final minutes of Park's film, but they expand the notion of necessary termination - of a job, of a life - to automation, AI and beyond. The leaves falling in "No Other Choice" aren't coming back in the spring.

"No Other Choice," a Neon release is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for violence, language and some sexual content. In Korean with English subtitles. Running time: 139 minutes. Four stars out of four.



This image released by Neon shows Lee Byung-hun in a scene from 'No Other Choice.' (AP)

A big test

'Marty Supreme' could mark turning point for Chalamet

NEW YORK, Dec 24, (AP): Timothée Chalamet squints as he gazes out at the Manhattan shoreline. It's a few hours before the premiere of his new movie, "Marty Supreme," but at this moment, he's sitting on a quiet bench at the end of a West Side pier.

It's brisk and there's snow on the ground, but it's sunny and Chalamet, dressed warmly in a parka, is enjoying the perspective looking back at the city. For him, it's like looking back on himself.

"Now in my late 20s, there should be every reason to go, 'All right, career's good. Let me start shilling out,'" says Chalamet, who turns 30 just after Christmas. "But it's like I've quadrupled down on the original pursuit of my life. I've gotten out of the pool and redived from a higher board."

That high dive is "Marty Supreme," Josh Safdie's hyperkinetic 1950s-set New York tale of a singular striver. Chalamet plays Marty Mauser, a Jewish kid working at a shoe store who aspires to be the best table tennis pro in the world. The character is loosely based on a real-life player, Marty Reisman, but the movie is just as much a reflection of Chalamet and Safdie's own whatever-it-takes ambitions.

"The gift of my life is this work," Chalamet says while seagulls fly overhead. "You want to honor it. Not in some Keynesian way - I don't know if that's the right economist to cite. Capitalistic is not what I mean. I mean: If you're not going up, you're kind of going down. 'He not busy being born is busy dying,' the great Dylan quote. Ooh, is that on the money."

Since his breakthrough performance in 2017's "Call Me By Your Name," Chalamet has been on an ever-ascending path that seemed to reach a culmination when he, soon after finishing shooting on "Marty Supreme," declared that he's "in pursuit of greatness" while accepting the best actor award from the Screen Actors Guild for his performance as Bob Dylan in "A Complete Unknown."

Motion

But "Marty Supreme" is yet another new level for Chalamet. His Marty, far from a period-piece study, is a blur of forward motion. (To shoot the film's sprinting poster, Safdie closed down two blocks, so Chalamet would be up to full speed.) To make his dreams a reality, Marty uses every desperate scheme and every bit of grandiose swagger. He's a quintessentially American hustler, and it's probably the defining performance of Chalamet's young career. A year after he came so close, it may win him his first Academy Award.

"It's not like a long arc thing for me," he says. "It's like I'm chasing a feeling."

"Marty Supreme," which opens wide Thursday, is a big test. A24 spent some \$70 million on it, making it one of the indie studio's biggest budgeted movies ever. To build the hype, Chalamet has unveiled some very Marty-esque stunts, including an 18-minute video of a pseudo-Zoom call about the movie's marketing. That led to a real orange blimp, emblazoned with "Dream Big," flying over Los Angeles.

When The Associated Press caught up with Safdie at his Chelsea office, he had recently returned from promoting the movie in London, Brazil and Los Angeles. For him, "Marty Supreme" could hardly be more personal. Pingpong paddles filled his office, as did an old piece of awning scrounged from Rodney Dangerfield's New York comedy club. Safdie once tried to turn pro at table tennis, himself, before moviemaking became his obsession.

"My dad is the ultimate dreamer," Safdie says. "He still dreams to this day. When I was a kid, I'd ask him where I came from. And he'd say, 'You came from the stars.' It put this intense feeling inside me that there was huge future ahead of me."

When Safdie and his brother, Benny, set out to make films, they had a New York hustler mentality. For their second feature, "Daddy Longlegs," they approached the filmmaker Ronald Bronstein, then working as a projectionist, and told him he had to star in the film. Bronstein wasn't even an actor.

"I thought: This guy is made out helium and I've had my feet stuck in lead for six years," recalls Bronstein, who co-wrote "Marty Supreme."

The hardscrabble life of independent filmmaking made Safdie accustomed to giving everything to get his movies made. To convince a potential financier to pay for the basketball portions of 2019's "Uncut Gems," Safdie, a non-drinker, remembers downing half a dozen whiskies during a meeting.

"You're in a position where you're at their beck and call," he says. "You'll do whatever it takes."



Timothée Chalamet, Josh Safdie pose for a portrait in New York. (AP)

Film



This image released by Mubi shows Adam Driver, left, and Mayim Bialik in a scene from 'Father Mother Sister Brother.' (AP)

Jarmusch turns family estrangement into art

'Father Mother Sister Brother' explores family disconnect

NEW YORK, Dec 24, (AP): Jim Jarmusch invites audiences into three family gatherings of adult children in his gentle triptych "Father Mother Sister Brother."

Don't worry, you won't be resentful you're not part of any of them, not even the one where Tom Waits plays Adam Driver's dad. To be fair, all the groupings are pretty cool on paper. In the first chapter, siblings Jeff (Driver) and Emily (Mayim Bialik) drive together to visit their father (Waits) for the first time in a while. In the second, a mother (Charlotte Rampling) awaits her grown daughters Tim (Cate Blanchett) and Lilith (Vicky Krieps) for their annual tea. And in the third, all that's left of Skye (Indya Moore) and Billy's (Luka Sabbat) parents are things.

But these are awkward and strained hangouts, none connected to one another literally, and all in different parts of the world. Yet there are little threads throughout - Rolex watches, toasting with water, red clothing, and the idiom "bob's your uncle," for instance. And then there's the more cosmically haunting realization that familiarity and closeness are not always in the cards when it comes to family. In "Father Mother Sister Brother," everyone would rather be anywhere but where they are. Same same, but different, you know?

The film opens with "Father," and siblings Jeff and Emily reluctantly doing a kind of wellness check on theirs. They're both very buttoned up and formal, both in appear-

ance (blazers, sweaters, combed hair) and demeanor. Waits, as their father, is very much the opposite - one might imagine that he doesn't even own a blazer, or a comb for that matter. His home is as rumpled as his zip up hoodie sweatshirt and he is a little bumbling himself, rattling off all the drugs he's not taking (anymore). The chasm between him and his children is vast and growing. Besides the death of their mother, it doesn't even seem like there was even some inciting incident that might explain some level of estrangement - they're just very, very different. And the father might not be as helpless and destitute as he's presenting to his children. After they leave, he tidies the place up and calls a friend to go out to a nice dinner.

Blame it on the age of the people who get to make the movies, but the parents are often the afterthoughts, the supporting characters in the children's stories. Jarmusch slyly inverts this in the "Father" segment, which perfectly tees up expectations for his next entry, "Mother," in which Rampling is on the phone, presumably with a therapist, mentally preparing for her daughters to arrive. They all live around Dublin, but rarely see one another, making this tea a bit of a dreaded ritual. Blanchett's Tim, a quintessential first born, is very stressed about being late. Krieps' Lilith, meanwhile, is all about posturing - bragging about material things and accomplishments that she doesn't have the receipts for and knows on some level no one believes anyway. These wom-

en aren't connecting either.

In the final segment, the parents are gone. They've died and left behind only mementos in a Parisian apartment that's three months overdue on rent. This is both a puzzle and a mess that their children now have to clean up and make sense of. "Father Mother Sister Brother" is in some ways deeply cynical about family bonds and the possibility of ever really knowing ones' parents. It's devoid of warm, fuzzy sentiment and trite revelations, just the crushing idea that no matter what bloodlines might exist, we're all fundamentally strangers.

Ultimately, it's an interesting experiment of a film, and perhaps even more interesting that it won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival earlier this year over the likes of "No Other Choice."

"The Voice of Hind Rajab," "The Testament of Ann Lee" and "Bugonia." And yet there's something comforting about the fact that Jarmusch is still doing his thing, exactly how he wants to, and that so many great actors are lining up to be part of it. He's a singular voice in a landscape that's always in danger of flattening. Just don't go in expecting a warm holiday hug of a movie.

"Father Mother Sister Brother," a Mubi release in select theaters Wednesday, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for language. Running time: 110 minutes. Three stars out of four.

Variety

KUALA LUMPUR: Twelve highly valuable paintings by world-renowned artists, linked to the misappropriation of 1Malaysia Development Berhad (IMDB) funds, will be exhibited at the National Art Gallery, according to the country's anti-corruption body.

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), which is responsible for bringing back the artworks to the country, plans to hand them over to the National Art Gallery, as the gallery has greater expertise in caring for high-value works of art, reported local daily Berita Harian.

MACC special operations senior director Mohamad Zamri Zainul Abidin said that several important plans would be implemented once the artworks arrive in Malaysia, including their public exhibition.

The paintings, with an estimated value of around 30 million U.S. dollars, include Pablo Picasso's 1961 work. (Xinhua)

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LONDON: Greta Thunberg was arrested in central London while supporting pro-Palestinian activists who are staging a hunger strike to protest their imprisonment while awaiting trial on charges related to a series of earlier demonstrations.

The protest group Prisoners for Palestine shared a video showing the 22-year-old Swede holding a sign supporting the hunger strikers and their organization, known as Palestine Action. The British government earlier this year banned Palestine Action as a terrorist organization.

The protests were part of a larger demonstration in which two other activists sprayed red paint in front of an insurance company in the City of London, the area of central London known as the hub of Britain's financial services industry. Prisoners for Palestine says they targeted the insurer because it supports the Israel-linked defense firm Elbit Systems. (AP)

60 Minutes' Trump immigration segment leaks online by mistake

NEW YORK, Dec 24, (AP): A news segment about the Trump administration's immigration policy that was abruptly pulled from "60 Minutes" was mistakenly aired on a TV app after the last minute decision not to air it touched off a public debate about journalistic independence.

The segment featured interviews with migrants who were sent to a notorious El Salvador prison called the Terrorism Confinement Center, or CECOT, under President Donald Trump's aggressive crack-down on immigration.

The story was pulled from Global Television Network, one of Canada's largest networks, but still ran on the network's app. Global Television Network swiftly corrected the error, but copies of it continued to float around the internet and pop up before being taken down.

"Paramount's content protection team is in the process of routine take down orders for the unaired and unauthorized seg-

ment," a CBS spokesperson said Tuesday via email.

A representative of Global Television Network did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

In the story, two men who were deported reported torture, beatings and abuse. One Venezuelan said he was punished with sexual abuse and solitary confinement.

Another was a college student who said guards beat him and knocked out his tooth upon arrival. "When you get there, you already know you're in hell. You don't need anyone to tell you," he said.

The segment featured numerous experts who called into question the legal basis for deporting migrants so hastily amid pending judicial decisions. Reporters for the show also corroborated findings by Human Rights Watch suggesting that only eight of the deported men had been sentenced for violent or potentially violent crimes, using available ICE data.

Al-Dhafeeri affirms Kuwait’s firm commitment to Arabic education

OIC, King Salman Global Academy celebrate World Arabic Language Day with Kuwaiti participation

JEDDAH, Dec 24, (KUNA): The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), in partnership with King Salman Global Academy for Arabic Language, organized a celebration marking World Arabic Language Day, in Jeddah, with Kuwaiti participation.

In an opening address delivered on his behalf, OIC Secretary General Hussein Taha said the initiative reflects the General Secretariat’s openness toward cooperation with Saudi institutions and member states seeking to grant Arabic the status it deserves.

Assistant Secretary-General for Palestine and Jerusalem Affairs Samir Bakr noted that cooperation with the academy has produced specialized training courses for non-native Arabic speakers, achieving wide success and strong participation, alongside three joint celebrations hosted at the Secretariat.

He explained that the celebration is significant in establishing a practical



Left: Group photo of the participants. Right: Officials address the participants.



KUNA photos

cooperation model with specialized bodies, foremost the academy, focusing efforts on capacity building and delivering effective training programs to beneficiaries from member states.

For his part, Secretary General of

the academy Saleh Al-Washmi, in remarks delivered by Deputy Secretary General Ibrahim Abanami, said cooperation with OIC resulted in initiatives including seminars and training programs benefiting teachers and learners

across member states.

He added that cooperation expanded into knowledge and research fields, producing studies monitoring linguistic realities in OIC countries, stressing that the partnership represents a pivot-

al pillar supporting language initiatives and developing educational policies enhancing Arabic presence.

Meanwhile, Chairman of the Board of the Kuwait Arabic Language Association Eid Al-Dhafeeri affirmed

Kuwait’s firm commitment to Arabic education, describing it as a core subject across all stages, stressing the importance of qualified, scientifically and pedagogically competent teachers nationwide.

He stressed Kuwait’s keenness, through the Ministry of Education, to modernize curricula inspired by leading global experiences, while preserving community characteristics and Arab linguistic heritage, alongside initiatives promoting reading, dialogue, writing skills, and regulatory measures mandating Arabic use across key sectors.

The Kuwaiti participation included Deputy Chairman Ahmad Al-Harbi and Reham Al-Fouzani, and was attended by Consul General Yousef Al-Tunaihi and Counselor Turki Al-Daihani, underscoring Kuwait’s continued support for Arabic language initiatives across regional international platforms.

Entertainment



Well-known Ukrainian artists perform during the shooting of the Christmas TV show 'Dancing with the Stars' in Kyiv, Ukraine. (AP)

‘It’s about our resilience and it’s about our future’

‘Dancing with the Stars’ is back on for a special episode with heroes

KYIV, Ukraine, Dec 24, (AP): Before the war, Ukraine’s own “Dancing with the Stars” was a cherished and popular television show, dazzling the audiences with performances by celebrities and professional dancers. The show is now back on for one special episode - this time with Ukrainian wartime heroes as the stars, underscoring the nation’s resilience in difficult times.

Many still remember how President Volodymyr Zelenskyy - then an actor - won the dance competition in 2006, the year that “Tantsi z zirkamy” as the show is known in Ukrainian, first debuted.

In the new, special episode, the dancers perform with prosthetic limbs, showcasing their strength in overcoming adversity. The lineup of participants includes public figures who rose to prominence since Russia’s full-out war on Ukraine was launched in February 2022.

But like all of present-day Ukraine, the show - which is part of an international franchise - has had to deal with a multitude of wartime challenges, including frequent power outages.

All the proceeds will go to the Superhumans

Center, a specialist clinic for the treatment and rehabilitation of war-wounded victims.

During a prerecording last week, dancers spun, leapt and glided under the sparkle of lights, some seamlessly integrating their prosthetic limbs into the choreography.

For creative producer Volodymyr Zavadiuk, every segment of the show is precious, creating something special during tough times.

“It’s about our resilience and it’s about our future,” said Zavadiuk, who also heads Big Brave Events and the Big Entertainment Shows department at 1+1 Media.

Among the performers was Ruslana Danilkina, a war veteran who lost her leg in combat in 2022 and is now renowned in Ukraine for dedicating herself to helping injured troops adapt to life with prosthetics.

She delivered a passionate performance centered on reclaiming her womanhood following the traumatic injury.

Also back in the show is beloved dancer Dmytro Dikush, this time as a competition judge. He juggled filming and serving with his platoon on

the front lines.

Ukrainian rock musician Yevhen Halych sat in the makeup chair ahead of his number, reflecting on his own determination to bring back the show.

“We are filming this project in a country where there is a war. ... We have power cuts, we may have an air alert, it could be bombing,” he said. “What do I feel? I feel a genuine desire to live a full life, no matter what happens.”

Producing the show’s special episode has been no easy feat in time of war. A live broadcast was impossible - a Russian attack can happen at any time. Then there were the technical obstacles: during last week’s recording, a key generator malfunctioned.

When the show airs on Sunday, audiences will vote for their favorite.

Danilkina, who was only 18 years old when she lost her leg and who today works at the Superhumans Center, enthralled everyone with her passionate performance, her prosthetic limb artfully integrated into her routine.

“Our dance number is about life. It’s about accepting love,” she told The Associated Press

after her performance. “Because in reality, when your body is wounded, it’s very difficult to love yourself. And allowing someone else to love you is even harder.”

Her injury was not the end of her life, she said, and now she wants to show “thousands of wounded boys and girls who are starting their lives over again” that it’s not the end of theirs.

For veteran Ivan Voinov and his wife of three months, Solomiia, the show was more than just a dance performance: it was the second time they had danced together since his injury, the first time was at their wedding.

Solomiia Voinov smiled shyly, recounting how she had long tried to persuade Ivan that they should dance until he gave in.

“We don’t take our eyes off each other while dancing, and it’s a great connection,” she said. “I’m happy.”

Voinov said he was already planning their next dance - a bachata, a fast-paced, hip-swaying style of dance that originated in the Dominican Republic. “We will be able to continue dancing,” he said. “It means that there is a future.”

Variety

PARIS: A freight lift rose up on its crane Tuesday toward the Louvre Museum - but this time it wasn’t jewel thieves. It was workers installing security bars on the window used to break into the Paris landmark’s Apollo Gallery in October’s stunning heist.

The world’s most-visited museum is slowly coming to terms with security failings exposed by the theft, while investigators hunt for missing crown jewels worth \$102 million.

With the Louvre closed Tuesday, maintenance workers in security helmets and high-visibility vests mounted a freight lift to a second-floor balcony to secure new metal bars outside a now-infamous window. (AP)

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PALM BEACH: Venus Williams and Andrea Preti are married, the tennis great announced on social media.

Williams and Preti became wife and husband over the weekend in Palm Beach, Florida, as part of a five-day celebration.

After becoming the second-oldest woman to win a tour-level singles match in July, the 45-year-old Williams gave thanks to her fiancé, who was in the stands at the DC Open. Preti is a Danish-born Italian model and actor, according to the website IMDB.

Williams hadn’t played in a tournament in 16 months until entering the event in Washington. (AP)

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MACAO: The “Finest Cultural Gifts From China” Cultural and Tourism Trade Promotion Campaign, themed on “Creativity Illuminates Life,” opened on Tuesday at the Macao Fisherman’s Wharf and runs through Friday.

The organizer said that the event highlights emerging trends in the cultural and creative industries, drawing inspiration from traditional Chinese culture. It brought together products from nearly 100 enterprises across China.

The event featured a cultural and creative exhibition area, an intangible cultural heritage zone and an interactive entertainment space. A signing ceremony for collaboration in related sectors was also held at the opening. (Xinhua)

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JOHANNESBURG: The term “G20” was the most frequently used word in South Africa in 2025, the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) said.

PanSALB said it worked with media research company Focal Points to analyze frequency data and discovered that “G20” featured prominently in the “reputable print, broadcast and online media.” According to PanSALB, the selection process involved shortlisting candidates based on authentic language usage. “G20” emerged as the most dominant keyword largely due to South Africa’s role as the G20 presidency in 2025 and its hosting of the G20 Leaders’ Summit.

The terms “Government of National Unity” and “Tariffs” ranked second and third, respectively, reflecting key political developments, international engagements and socioeconomic debates that shaped the country during the year, the agency added. (Xinhua)



The restoration team work on the restoration project for the ancient King Khufu’s second solar boat at the Grand Egyptian Museum in Cairo, Egypt. (Xinhua)



This photo taken on Dec. 23, 2025 shows the Colossal Statue of Ramesses II at the Grand Egyptian Museum in Greater Cairo, Egypt. (Xinhua)



Left: Artifacts are displayed at the Grand Egyptian Museum in Greater Cairo, Egypt. Right: The restoration team work on the restoration project for the ancient King Khufu’s second solar boat at the Grand Egyptian Museum in Cairo, Egypt. (Xinhua)



Artifacts are displayed at the Grand Egyptian Museum in Greater Cairo, Egypt. (Xinhua)



Egypt begins reassembling ancient pharaoh’s boat at new museum

CAIRO, Dec 24, (Xinhua): Egypt began reassembling ancient King Khufu’s second solar boat at the newly opened Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM), a restoration process expected to take about four years and open for visitors to watch live.

Tourism and Antiquities Minister Sherif Fathy said the assembly follows years of preservation, documentation and 3D scanning of the fragments, stressing its global heritage significance.

The boat, dating back some 4,500 years, was discovered

in pieces near the Great Pyramid, the tomb of King Khufu, in 1954. It consists of about 1,650 wooden fragments and measures roughly 42 meters in length.

“Khufu’s first solar boat was found almost complete, but the second boat, which is a bit smaller, was found in a very poor condition,” said GEM’s CEO Ahmed Ghoneim.

“Restoration in front of visitors is a dimension you cannot find in museums around the world,” Ghoneim said, highlighting its unique educational experience.

Mazdutide delivers improved glucose control and weight loss in Phase III trial

Chinese researchers make significant progress in diabetes treatment

NANJING, Dec 24, (Xinhua): A team of Chinese researchers has achieved significant progress in blood glucose control and weight reduction for the treatment of type 2 diabetes through a study evaluating the efficacy and safety of the home-grown medicine Mazdutide.

In a Phase III clinical trial conducted by Nanjing Drum Tower Hospital in east China’s Jiangsu Province, 320 Chinese adults were randomly assigned in equal proportions to receive once-weekly subcutaneous injections of Mazdutide or a placebo for 24 weeks, followed by a 24-week open-label extension with Mazdutide.

The study, published in the journal Nature, highlighted that Mazdutide monotherapy outperformed placebo in participants with type 2 diabetes whose condition was inadequately controlled by diet and exercise alone.

The treatment produced clinically meaningful improvements in both blood glucose control and weight reduction while maintaining a favorable safety profile.

Despite advances in type 2 diabetes management,



A team of Chinese researchers has achieved significant progress in blood glucose control and weight reduction for the treatment of type 2 diabetes through a study evaluating the efficacy and safety of the home-grown medicine Mazdutide. (Xinhua)

there remain unmet needs for therapies that not only effectively control hyperglycaemia but also address related metabolic disorders, according to Zhu Dalong, director of the department of endocrinology at Nanjing Drum Tower Hospital.

Zhu said that the treatment of type 2 diabetes has long presented a dilemma. While some conventional blood sugar-lowering medications are effective, they often cause weight gain, which can in turn worsen insulin resistance, creating a vicious cycle that complicates long-term disease management.

Mazdutide is a dual GCGGLP-1 receptor agonist developed by China’s Innovent Biologics, and its core advantage lies in its dual mechanism of action.

GLP-1, or glucagon-like peptide-1, is released after meals. It can stimulate insulin secretion, slow down digestive movement, and promote satiety. GCG, or glucagon secreted by the pancreas, can enhance fat oxidation and boost energy expenditure when its receptors are ac-

tivated.

By targeting both pathways, this dual-action mechanism can curb appetite and accelerate metabolism, allowing it to address complex metabolic issues in obese patients more comprehensively, such as visceral fat accumulation and insulin resistance.

Zhu said that GCG has traditionally been used to rescue patients with type 1 diabetes experiencing hypoglycemia by raising blood glucose. “The significance of this study lies in confirming that activating both GCG and GLP-1 receptors in specific ratios can achieve the synergistic effect of lowering blood glucose levels.”

In 2024, one in nine adults worldwide was living with diabetes. The number of adults with diabetes in 2024 exceeded 500 million and is projected to rise to close to 900 million by 2050, according to a research article published by the International Diabetes Federation in the journal The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology earlier this month.

Japan steps up controls as bird flu confirmed in Kyoto

TOKYO, Dec 24, (Xinhua): Japan’s agriculture ministry said on Wednesday that genetic testing has confirmed an outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza at a farm in Kyoto Prefecture, marking the ninth bird flu outbreak in the country this season.

According to a statement released by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the outbreak occurred at a poultry farm in Kameoka City, Kyoto Prefecture, which raises approximately 280,000 egg-laying chickens.

Local authorities received a report on Tuesday and conducted a rapid avian influenza test on the farm’s chickens the same day, with the results coming back positive. Genetic testing carried out on Wednesday confirmed infection with the highly pathogenic avian influenza virus.

In accordance with relevant

guidelines, all chickens at the farm will be culled, incinerated and buried. Additionally, farms within a 3-kilometer radius are banned from moving chickens and eggs, while others located within a radius of 3 to 10 kilometers cannot transport poultry products outside the area.

Disinfection efforts around the farm have been strengthened to prevent further spread of the virus, and an epidemiological investigation team has been dispatched, with experts from the ministry to be sent if necessary, according to the statement.

Japan’s avian influenza season typically runs from autumn until the following spring. The previous eight outbreaks this season have already led to the culling of nearly 2.4 million chickens. The country’s first case was confirmed in the northernmost prefecture of Hokkaido on Oct. 22.



In this file photo dated Nov 29, 2016, health officials investigate a chicken farm in Sekikawa village, Niigata prefecture, northern Japan, after a highly contagious avian flu strain in poultry was detected. (AP)

BEIJING, Dec 24, (Xinhua): A decade ago, biodiversity monitoring often required researchers to haul heavy equipment across rugged mountains and vast grasslands. Today, a quiet revolution is unfolding as satellites scan from orbit, sensors perch atop towers, drones skim treetops and mobile laboratories traverse the ground.

This multi-tiered technological collaboration is transforming the way China monitors and protects its biodiversity.

“Previously, surveys were predominantly manual, limited in scope, slow and labor-intensive,” said Wu Jiyou, director of the Satellite Application Center for Ecology and Environment (SACEE) of the Ministry of Ecology and Environment. “Now, our ‘Five Platforms System’ integrates satellites, drones, towers, mobile patrols and ground stations. It covers larger areas, operates more efficiently, and is sustainable.”

View from above

At the core of this shift is remote sensing, which enables data collection without direct physical contact.

Wan Huawei, a specialist at the SACEE, has not only witnessed this paradigm shift but also played an active role in advancing it. More than a decade ago, her team addressed reports concerning the spread of the invasive plant *Spartina alterniflora* in southern China. By leveraging satellite imagery and drone technology, they mapped its expansion patterns, providing evidence that helped guide control efforts.

Later, in collaboration with ecologists from Peking University, SACEE applied analogous methodologies to snow leopard conservation efforts. By integrating satellite data on terrain and human activity with confirmed sightings, researchers identified key habitats and assessed their connectivity, facilitating the development of wildlife corridors.

“China’s Gaofen satellite series now delivers more frequent and higher-resolution data than ever before,” Wan said. “New tools, such as hyperspectral imagery and lidar, have further enhanced our capabilities.”

“By integrating space-, air- and ground-based data, ranging from infrared cameras to high-resolution imagery, we can monitor biodiversity across multiple scales, from individual species to entire ecosystems,” she added.

Biodiversity database

On the grasslands of north China’s Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Wang Yongcai, an engineer, and his colleagues are constructing what they describe as one of China’s most comprehensive grassland biodiversity databases. Each summer, Wang spends about six weeks in the field documenting grass spe-



A drone photo shows black-necked cranes and other wild birds at Caohai National Nature Reserve in Yi-Hui-Miao Autonomous County of Weining, southwest China’s Guizhou Province, Dec. 1, 2025. (Xinhua)

cies, pasture growth and ecosystem health.

“It’s demanding work, but we believe it’s extremely meaningful,” Wang said, his skin tanned from long hours spent outdoors.

The goal is to achieve dynamic monitoring of pasture growth, vegetation coverage and grassland degradation, including desertification and salinization, enabling more precise assessments of grassland conditions over time.

So far, SACEE has amassed extensive datasets and established a preliminary digital platform, with an intelligent grass species identification system and a grassland parameter inversion system already operational.

“In pilot areas of Inner Mongolia, plant species identification accuracy has exceeded 80 percent,” Wang said.

Given that data volume directly impacts database quality and identification accuracy, the SACEE plans to construct unmanned aerial vehicle airports in pilot regions. Once completed, drones could be remotely operated from Beijing, significantly enhancing moni-

toring capacity, Wang added.

Smart tools

Technological advances have also reshaped fieldwork. Bulky equipment once shipped to remote locations has been replaced by portable, high-efficiency instruments, improving productivity and safety.

Parked outside the SACEE is what appears to be a standard off-road vehicle, but in fact, it is a multifunctional ecological mobile patrol unit. Since its completion in August 2022, it has undergone continuous upgrades. Equipped with self-developed multimodal animal recognition models, it can automatically identify, count and track wildlife populations. The system has been tested in Beijing, Inner Mongolia, northwest China’s Qinghai Province and east China’s Shandong Province.

On the Inner Mongolia grasslands, a four-legged robotic “dog” is also assisting with plant diversity surveys. Controlled remotely, the camera-equipped machine can navigate autonomously, photograph vegetation and transmit images in real time, greatly improving efficiency.

Russia eyes lunar power station

MOSCOW, Dec. 24, (Xinhua): Russia plans to build a lunar power station by 2036 as part of its long-term lunar exploration program, Russian space authorities said on Wednesday.

Russia’s state space corporation Roscosmos signed a government contract with Russian aerospace enterprise Lavochkin Association in December to carry out work on the project through 2036, it said in a statement.

The lunar power station will provide a long-term energy supply for Russia’s lunar programs, including lunar rovers and observatories, as well as the infrastructure of the International Lunar Research Station, including facilities of foreign partners.

The whole project includes spacecraft development, ground testing, flight tests and the deployment of infrastructure on the Moon, it said.

According to Roscosmos, the project is an important step toward establishing a permanently operating scientific lunar station and marks a shift from one-off missions to a sustained lunar research program.

SKorea sees uptick

Philippine live births fall to 1.36m in 2024

MANILA, Dec 24, (Xinhua): The Philippines recorded 1,358,989 live births in 2024, translating to a crude birth rate (CBR) of 12 births per thousand population, according to the latest data released by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Over the past decade, registered live births declined by 22.1 percent from 1,744,767 in 2015 to 1,358,989 in 2024, the PSA said on Monday.

It also noted that a decline of 6.2 percent was observed in 2024 compared to the 1,448,522 registered live births in 2023.

Data showed that more males were born than females during the year. Male births totaled 705,714, accounting for 51.9 percent of all registered live births, while female births reached 653,275 or 48.1 percent.

This resulted in a sex ratio at birth of 108 males for every 100 females, the PSA said.

Meanwhile, South Korea’s births grew for the 16th successive month amid higher marriages, statistical ministry data showed Wednesday.

The number of newborn babies rose 2.5 percent from a year earlier to 21,958 in October, continuing to go up since July 2024, according to the Ministry of Data and Statistics.

The total fertility rate, or the number of children a woman is expected to bear during life, added 0.02 to 0.81 in the cited month, but it stayed far below the replacement rate of 2.1 births per woman to maintain a stable population.

The number of marriages inched up 0.2 percent to 19,586 in October on a yearly basis, while the number of divorces climbed 2.4 percent to 7,478.

The number of deaths edged down 0.3 percent to 29,739 in October compared to the same month of last year.

Affected by the still high deaths and low births, the natural population decline stood at 7,781 in the cited month.

The Conversation

Rest is essential during the holidays, but it may mean getting active, not crashing on the couch

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



By Stacy Shaw,
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

The holiday season is often painted as an idyllic vision of rest, conjuring images of warm beverages and bountiful time with loved ones. But many people have trouble unwinding at this time of year. Why do the December holidays offer the promise of respite but never seem to deliver? And is more restorative rest possible during this busy season?

I am a psychologist who studies how rest supports learning, creativity and well-being. Sleep is often the first thing that many people associate with rest, but humans also require restorative downtime when awake. These active rest periods include physical, social and creative experiences that can occur throughout the day - not just while mindlessly scrolling on the couch.

When holiday stresses begin to snowball, rest periods replenish depleted psychological resources, reduce stress and promote well-being. But reaping the full benefits of rest and leisure requires more than a slow morning or a mug of hot cocoa. It’s also about intentionally scheduling active recovery periods that energize us and leave us feeling restored.

That’s because good rest needs to be anticipated, planned and refined.

The winter holiday season can take a toll on well-being. Financial stress increases, and daily routines are disrupted. Add the stress of travel, plus a dash of challenging family dynamics, and it’s not surprising that emotional well-being declines during the holiday season.

Quality rest and leisure periods can buffer these stressors, promoting recovery and well-being. They also can help reduce psychological strain and prolong positive emotions as people return to work.

Effective rest comes in many forms, from going outdoors for a walk to socializing, listening to music or engaging in creative hobbies. These activities may feel like distractions, but they serve important mental health functions.

For instance, research finds that walking in nature results in diminished activation in the area of the brain associated with sadness and ruminating thoughts. Walks in nature are also associated with reduced anxiety and stress.

Other studies have shown that activities such as playing the piano or doing calligraphy significantly lower cortisol, a stress hormone. In fact, some of the most promising in-



Active leisure experiences, like going for a walk outdoors, can help reduce stress and restore energy during the holidays. (AP)

terventions for depression involve participation in pleasant leisure activities.

So why does it feel so hard to get good rest during the holidays?

One of the most robust findings from psychologists and researchers who study leisure is that the effectiveness of rest periods depends on how satisfying they feel to the individual. This might sound obvious, but people often spend their free time doing things that are not satisfying.

For example, a famous 2002 study of how people spent their time found that the most popular form of leisure was watching television. But participants also rated TV time as their least enjoyable activity. Those who watched more than four hours of TV a day rated it as even less enjoyable than those who watched less than two hours a day.

A few years ago, my colleagues and I collected data from college students and found that students reported turning to mindless distractions, such as social media, at the end of the day, but that it usually did not leave them feeling reenergized or restored. Although this study was specifically about college students, when I presented the findings to the larger research team, one of my collaborators said, “It really makes you think about yourself, doesn’t it?” There were silent nods around the room.

To combat the pitfall of poor rest cycles, science suggests planning for active rest and pleasant activities, and carrying through with those plans. A large body of research shows that designing, scheduling and engaging in enjoyable activities is effective at lowering symptoms of

depression and anxiety.

For the holiday season, this might mean following an afternoon of shopping with a recovery period reading a book in a quiet place, or going for a walk after opening gifts instead of immediately shifting into cleaning mode. By following a schedule, not a mood, research suggests that people can break cycles of poor rest and inactivity and achieve greater recovery and well-being.

Even with perfectly planned and executed rest periods, guilt can loom. Leisure guilt is a psychological construct that encompasses feelings of distress about spending time doing things that are relaxing rather than productive. It can reduce enjoyment of leisure, undercutting one of the mechanisms that link rest with well-being.

During the holidays, this problem may become even more pronounced. The season brings changes to daily routines, daylight levels and temperature, and diets. All of these shifts can deplete people’s energy levels. High expectations during the holidays may make guilt an even bigger threat to rest.

If the answer to poor-quality rest cycles is planned active rest periods, then what is the solution to feelings of guilt?

Research on leisure guilt is in its infancy, but my own struggles have shown me a few ways to resist the pressure to be productive every spare minute. Here are some tips to fight back against the flawed belief that rest is just laziness in disguise, during the holidays and beyond.

First, I work to convince myself and my family members to lower expectations for our seasonal activities. Not every baked cookie needs to be individually frosted and decorated, and not every gift has to be wrapped with a perfect bow. By agreeing to lower our expectations, we eliminate extraneous work and the guilt of feeling that there is more to be done.

Second, I’ve found that restful activities that provide a strong feeling of immersion - playing video games, going for walks and playing with my young nieces and nephews - are a lot more restorative than scrolling on my phone or watching TV on the couch. These diversions require my full attention and prevent me from thinking about things such as my overflowing email inbox or unfinished household chores.

Finally, when I do experience leisure guilt, I accept the feeling and try to move on. During high-stress situations, accepting negative emotions rather than avoiding them can reduce depressive symptoms.

Humans need restorative periods of downtime during the holidays and beyond, but this does not always come easily or naturally to everyone. Through small adjustments and intentional actions, good rest can be within reach this holiday season. (AP)

Spurs run riot against Thunder

Clippers roll past Rockets

SAN ANTONIO, Dec 24, (AP): Keldon Johnson had 25 points, Stephon Castle added 24 points and the San Antonio Spurs stormed past Oklahoma City 130-110 on Tuesday night, winning their seventh straight and beating the Thunder for the second time in 10 days.

Victor Wembanyama’s streak of consecutive games with at least one block ended at 101 games, but the Spurs were just happy to have him on the court after he was downgraded to questionable on Monday. Wembanyama finished with 12 points.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 33 points for Oklahoma City. Jalen Williams added 17.

San Antonio has won 14 of 17 to move into second in the West. Oklahoma City has lost three of five games since opening the season 24-1. The defending champions’ fourth loss this season was by far their worst, as the previous three were by 2, 2 and 5 points.

The Thunder’s second loss of the season was 111-109 against the Spurs in the NBA Cup semifinal on Dec. 13 in Las Vegas.

The rematch was another tense battle between the top two seeds in the Western Conference.

Clippers 128, Rockets 108
In Los Angeles, Kawhi Leonard scored 41 points and James Harden added 29 as the Los Angeles Clippers beat the Houston Rockets .

Leonard shot 16 for 23 from the field and 4 for 5 from long distance as the Clippers won consecutive games for just the second time this season. Los Angeles was coming off a 103-88 win over the Lakers on Saturday that snapped a five-game skid. The Clippers also won consecutive games Oct. 24-26, against Phoenix and Portland.

Harden, who shot 7 for 14 from the field and 3 for 8 from long distance, was helped by 12-for-13 shooting from the line.

Pistons 136, Kings 127
In Sacramento, Cade Cunningham had 23 points and 14 assists, Jalen Duren had 23 points and 12 rebounds, and the Eastern Conference-leading Detroit Pistons beat the Sacramento Kings.

Tobias Harris scored 24 points for the Pistons, who have won nine of 11. Duren’s double-double was his fourth straight and 17th of the season. Ausar Thompson had 19 points for Detroit, and Isaiah Stewart added 16 points off the bench.

DeMar DeRozan scored 37 points and Russell Westbrook had 27 for the Kings, who have lost 10 of 12.

Suns 132, Lakers 108
In Phoenix, Dillon Brooks scored 25 points, Devin Booker added 21 and the



Detroit Pistons forward Tobias Harris (12), right, dribbles past Sacramento Kings guard Demar Derozan (10), left, during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Sacramento, Calif. (AP)

Phoenix Suns pulled away in the second half to beat the Los Angeles Lakers.

The Lakers were playing without five-time All-Star Luka Doncic, who was out with a lower leg contusion. They did welcome the return of Austin Reaves, who missed the past three games with a left calf strain.

Reaves finished with 17 points on 6-of-11 shooting off the bench, while LeBron James led the Lakers with 23. Los Angeles has lost two straight.

Mavericks 13, Nuggets 130
In Dallas, Cooper Flagg had 33 points, nine rebounds and nine assists, and Anthony Davis had 31 points and nine rebounds as the Dallas Mavericks beat the Denver Nuggets.

Flagg’s career-high fourth 3-pointer gave Dallas a 126-121 lead with 3:17 left, and he assisted on Naji Marshall’s left-corner 3 that put the Mavericks ahead 131-125 with 1:12 left.

The Nuggets, who trailed 50-29 early in the second quarter, got their first lead early in the fourth quarter and pulled within a point in the final minute, having a shot to win after forcing the Mavericks into a 24-second violation with 7.8 seconds left. However, Peyton Watson’s 3-point attempt from the left corner at the buzzer rimmed out.

Magic 110, Trail Blazers 106
In Portland, Desmond Bane scored 23 points, Anthony Black added 22 and the Orlando Magic turned away Portland’s comeback attempt for victory over the Trail Blazers.

After trailing by 17 in the third quarter, the Blazers took a one-point lead early in the fourth before Tyus Jones answered with a 3-pointer and Wendell Carter Jr. hit a jumper for the Magic.

Shaedon Sharpe had a chance to tie it with 38.9 seconds left but made only one of two free throws, leaving Portland down 107-106.

Bane missed a pull-up jumper at the other end, then blocked a layup attempt by 7-foot-2 center Donovan Clingan with 12 seconds remaining to preserve the lead. Bane sank two free throws to make it 109-106 and Demi Avdija missed a long 3 for the Trail Blazers before Black added a foul shot for the final margin.

Cavaliers 141, Pelicans 118
In Cleveland, Donovan Mitchell scored 27 points, Sam Merrill added 22 and the Cleveland Cavaliers pulled away in the second half for a victory over the New Orleans Pelicans.

Nine of the 11 players used by the Cavaliers players scored in double figures as they won consecutive games for the first time since Nov. 21-23. Cleveland



Houston Rockets forward Kevin Durant dribbles during the first half of an NBA basketball game against the Los Angeles Clippers Tuesday in Inglewood, Calif. (AP)

also evened its December record at 5-5.

It was the fifth time in the NBA this season and the second time in three days a team has had nine players score in double figures. According to Sportradar, it was only the second time

in franchise history the Cavaliers had done it. The previous time was Nov. 10, 1992, against the Washington Bullets.

Grizzlies 137, Jazz 128
In Salt lake City, Santi Aldama made seven 3-pointers and scored a career-high 37 points to lead the Memphis Grizzlies to a 137-128 victory over the Utah Jazz .

Jaren Jackson Jr. chipped in 21 points, GG Jackson II had 18 points, and Jock Landale added 17.

Cam Spencer dished out a career high 13 assists to go with 11 points, while Aldama added a season-high seven assists to help the Grizzlies snap a two-game losing streak.

Memphis shot 56% from the field and made 19 3-pointers.

Timberwolves 115, Knicks 104
In Minnesota, Anthony Edwards scored 38 points to help the Minnesota Timberwolves beat former teammate Karl-Anthony Towns for the first time and hold off the New York Knicks.

Julius Randle had 17 of his 25 points in the fourth quarter and Rudy Gobert contributed 11 points, 16 rebounds and his reliably fierce rim protection for the Wolves (20-10), who have won 10 of 12.

Towns scored a season-high 40 points before fouling out in the final

minute for the Knicks (20-9) in the absence of fellow All-Star Jalen Brunson, who rested his previously injured ankle. Tyler Kolek started for Brunson and had 20 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists.

Bucks 111, Pacers 94
In Indianapolis, Kevin Porter Jr. scored 24 points, Ryan Rollins had 23 and the Milwaukee Bucks, playing their seventh consecutive game without the injured Giannis Antetokounmpo, beat the Indiana Pacers.

Kyle Kuzma scored 15 and Bobby Portis had 14 points and a team-high nine rebounds as the Bucks shot 51% to snap a three-game losing streak.

Bulls 126, Hawks 123
In Atlanta, Josh Giddey had 19 points, 15 assists and 11 rebounds, Coby White hit a tiebreaking free throw with 1.9 seconds left, and the Chicago Bulls rallied for their fourth straight victory over the Atlanta Hawks.

White finished with 24 points for the Bulls, who trailed by 18 points in the second quarter, by 15 late in the third and by 10 with less than six minutes left.

Giddey’s triple-double was his seventh this season, the second-most in the league behind Denver’s Nikola Jokic, who has 14. Nikola Vucevic had 21 points and 10 rebounds as the Bulls moved to 3-0 against the Hawks this season.

Nets 114, 76ers 106
In Philadelphia, Michael Porter Jr. scored 28 points, Egor Demin added 20 and the Brooklyn Nets beat the Philadelphia 76ers .

Porter went 5 of 12 from the 3-point arc and Demin hit a couple of late 3s after the 76ers cut a 19-point lead to nine in the fourth quarter. Brooklyn shot 17 of 46 from 3-point distance to win for the third time in four games. Nic Claxton added 16 points and 10 rebounds.

Raptors 112, Heat 91
In Miami, Scottie Barnes scored 27 points and grabbed eight rebounds, and the Toronto Raptors beat the reeling Heat in the final pre-Christmas game for both teams.

Immanuel Quickley scored 18 for the Raptors - who got their 18th win in their 31st game of the season. They needed 57 games last season to get to the 18-win mark and are over .500 at Christmas for the first time since the 2019-20 season.

Hornets 126, Wizards 109
In Charlotte, LaMelo Ball had 23 points and nine assists, Brandon Miller added 20 points and the Charlotte Hornets pulled away in the fourth quarter to beat the Washington Wizards.

Rookie of the Year candidate Kon Knueppel finished with 19 points and provided a huge spark with five second-half 3-pointers for the Hornets. Moussa Diabate had a career-high 18 rebounds and 12 points for the Hornets and Miles Bridges flirted with a triple-double before finishing with 10 points, nine rebounds and nine assists.

Wins key for Inoue, Nakatani clash

Top Japanese boxers poised for epic clash

TOKYO, Dec 24, (AP): The Floyd Mayweather Jr.- Manny Pacquiao bout happened probably five years too late. Tyson Fury and Anthony Joshua still haven't fought.

Naoya Inoue and Junto Nakatani are ready to square off now in what would be the biggest fight in Japanese boxing history. No posturing, just two top pound-for-pound boxers in their prime seemingly willing to give fans what they want.

Here's the catch: They each have one more fight and need to avoid a surprise before their expected showdown.

Inoue (31-0, 27 KOs) is the undisputed super bantamweight (122 lbs) champion and the headliner Saturday in Saudi Arabia. He faces Mexico's Alan David Picasso (32-0-1, 17 KOs). Nakatani (31-0, 24 KOs), moving up in weight to make his debut in the division, faces Sebastian Hernandez Reyes (20-0, 18 KOs) - also Mexican - on the same card, a showcase of Japanese fighters.

"This is very important for Japanese boxing," Inoue told The Associated Press through a translator.

Most important for Inoue and Nakatani, though, are victories that would clear the way for a blockbuster match-up, likely in Tokyo in May.

"Firstly, I have a plan to have a fight with Nakatani," Inoue said of his goals for 2026. "Also, I have the idea that I may move up to the featherweight division."

The buildup to the Riyadh event, billed as the "Night of the Samurai," has been as much about Inoue-Nakatani as it has about their respective opponents Saturday. At a press event last month, promoters sat Inoue and Nakatani next to each other and made sure they were the last two off the stage during the photo session. The pair didn't exchange chitchat or handshakes.

"Personally, I have no contact or connection with him," the 32-year-old Inoue said. "Of course, I value his boxing, that's why I'm looking forward to fighting him."

With the retirement of Terence Crawford plus the injury layoff of undisputed heavyweight champion Oleksandr Usyk, there's a good argument that Inoue is now the top pound-for-pound boxer in the world.

The 5-foot-5 (1.65 meter) Japanese star, a four-division champion, uses



In this file photo, Naoya Inoue celebrates after defeating Ramon Cardenas in a junior featherweight title boxing match Sunday, May 4, 2025, in Las Vegas. (AP)

precision combinations plus elite speed and power to dismantle opponents.

The Yokohama native has already fought three times this year, most recently a unanimous decision victory over Murodjon Akhmadaliev in September.

In two of his past five fights, Inoue has overcome an early knockdown - both times from a left hook - en route to stoppage victories. Luis Nery stunned a Tokyo Dome crowd in May 2024 when he sent Inoue to the canvas in the first round. One year later, Ramon Cardenas dropped Inoue in the second round in Las Vegas.

Inoue's promoters made sure the Las Vegas fight was on ESPN rather than pay-per-view to expose him to a wider US audience. Bob Arum, Inoue's promoter at Top Rank, had said he wants Inoue to reach Shohei Ohtani-level fame.

Inoue himself, however, isn't so sure.

"Apart from the boxing, I'm a boring person. I just focus on boxing."

At 5-foot-8 (1.72 meters), Picasso has height and reach advantages on Inoue, but probably not much else. Inoue is a -3000 favorite at BetMGM Sportsbook, and -700 to win by stoppage.

"The pressure is on Inoue, he needs to win," the 25-year-old Picasso told AP, also through a translator. "I have nothing to lose. Everybody expects him to win."

Picasso, who has studied neuroscience at university, vowed to take Inoue's belts in what he said will be "Mexican Aztec warrior night."

"I come to win. I will beat this guy. I will beat the Monster."

Picasso's training team includes cardio coach Germán Silva, who twice won the New York City Marathon (1994 and '95).

Just like Inoue, the 27-year-old Nakatani has been collecting world titles as he's progressed through weight categories. The three-division champion vacated his two belts at bantamweight to move from 118 lbs to 122 lbs.

"I feel I have gained power and speed as well," he told AP.

Nakatani, nicknamed "Big Bang," said he's not overlooking his 25-year-old Mexican opponent: "He has a strong punch and he's very strong-willed."

Nakatani's goal for 2026 is pretty simple.

"I'm going to be the champion at super bantamweight."

The event at the 22,000-capacity Mohammed Abdo Arena is available pay per view on DAZN with a subscription. The ring walk for Inoue's fight is expected to be just before 4 p.m. local time (1 p.m. London, 8 a.m. ET), which is 10 p.m. in Japan. Nakatani's bout is scheduled to begin about 70 minutes before Inoue's fight.

Stokes backs team amid troubles

Injury blow for England as Archer sidelined

MELBOURNE, Australia, Dec 24, (AP): England's Ashes tour of Australia appears to be going from bad to worse.

Star bowler Jofra Archer will not play in the remaining two tests due to a left side strain, a team official said Wednesday, adding to England's problems both on and off the field that include accusations of drunken behavior by opener Ben Duckett.

The 30-year-old Archer spent four years battling a variety of fitness issues, including stress fractures of the back and right elbow, but has been in strong form since making a long-awaited red-ball return against India.

The fourth test begins Friday at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and the fifth on Jan. 4 in Sydney. Australia has a winning 3-0 lead in the five-test series and has retained the Ashes.

Archer joined the squad at training on Wednesday at the MCG, but played no part in practice and a spokesperson later confirmed he was out for the remainder of the tour.

He had bowled a total of 80 overs in the games at Perth, Brisbane and Adelaide, taking nine wickets at 27.11 and maintaining the lowest strike-rate among England bowlers.

In the third test at Adelaide, he took five for 53 in the first innings and scored 51 runs.

Gus Atkinson replaced Archer in the visitors' XI named later Wednesday while Jacob Bethell has replaced No. 3 Ollie Pope for the Melbourne test. Pope is averaging 20.83 with the



England's Ben Stokes, right, walks with teammate Jofra Archer after dismissing Australia during play on day four of the third Ashes cricket test between England and Australia in Adelaide, Australia. (AP)

bat for the series.

But Duckett, the subject of a team investigation after footage purportedly showing the 31-year-old intoxicated between the second and third tests emerged this week, has held his spot despite averaging 16 for the series.

England captain Ben Stokes said he had spoken to Duckett.

"I've obviously reached out, spoken to him and offered my complete support throughout this, particularly in a moment like this where everything feels like it's on top of you," Stokes told Britain's Press Association.

"My job as England captain is obviously to be out there and get results for the team, but also to try to give people the best chance of being in a mental space where they can go out there and perform."

On Tuesday, Australia said Todd Murphy would replace the injured Nathan Lyon as the team's spin bowler and captain Pat Cummins, as expected, was rested for the MCG test.

England team:ak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Jacob Bethell, Joe Root, Harry Brook, Ben Stokes (captain), Jamie Smith, Will Jacks, Gus Atkinson, Brydon Carse, Josh Tongue.

Best of the Rest

Endrick joins Lyon on loan: Real Madrid and Lyon have agreed a deal for Brazilian striker Endrick to spend the second half of the season on loan with the Ligue 1 club, both sides announced.

Lyon will pay Real Madrid around one million euros (1.18 million U.S. dollars) for the loan, which does not include an option to make the move permanent at the end of the campaign.

The 19-year-old joined Real Madrid in the summer of 2024. He scored one goal in 22 La Liga appearances last season, most of them as a substitute, but netted five times to help the club reach the Copa del Rey final. (Xinhua)

Johnson signs contract with DC United: Sean Johnson, a backup U.S. goalkeeper at the 2022 World Cup, signed a 1 1/2-year contract with Major League Soccer's

D.C. United on Tuesday that runs through June 2027.

Johnson, 36, has made 13 international appearances, the last at the 2023 CONCACAF Gold Cup.

He has played in MLS for Chicago (2010-16), New York City (2017-22) and Toronto (2023-25), helping NYCFC win the 2021 MLS title. (AP)

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Independiente names Papa as manager: Independiente del Valle has appointed Uruguayan Joaquin Papa as manager for the 2026 season, the Ecuadorian side said.

The 39-year-old replaces Spaniard Javier Rabanal, who left earlier this month after leading the club to its second top-flight title.

"Joaquin Papa takes charge. A leader, a guide, and above all, the head of this great family," read a statement on Independiente's website. "Welcome to a different club. Here we welcome him with the hope that we are in good hands." Papa had been without a club after parting ways with Liverpool Montevideo on Dec. 12. (Xinhua)

Al-Waqi takes the crown

Sheikh Al-Jaber hails huge success of Arab Masters Tennis tournament



Sheikh Al-Jaber and Bin Abdullah honor winner Aziz Al-Waqi.

MANAMA, Dec 24: The fifth Arab Masters Tennis tournament concluded with Tunisian player Aziz Al-Waqi claiming the title after defeating Jordan's Mohammad Qutb 2-0 in the final at the Public Security Officers Club in Manama. The event was held under the patronage of Bahraini Minister of Interior Sheikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa and attended by Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber, Chairman of the Arab Tennis Federation, and Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, President of the Bahraini Tennis Federation. Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber expressed his delight

at the unprecedented success of the tournament, praising its high standards in terms of technical quality, organization, and media coverage. He noted that the fifth edition demonstrated professionalism and highlighted the championship's growing prestige in the Arab sports arena. Sheikh Al-Jaber thanked the Bahraini Minister of Interior for his sponsorship and presence at the closing ceremony, commending the strong cooperation with the Bahraini Tennis Federation and the dedication of its team in ensuring the tournament's success.

He also extended gratitude to the Ministry of Interior and the Public Security Officers Club for hosting the event, noting that Bahrain's reputation for excellent organization and warm hospitality was evident throughout the championship. Sheikh Al-Jaber acknowledged the support of the tournament sponsors, including the National Bank of Kuwait, KGL, Kuwait Airways, and KDD. He added that the Arab Tennis Federation had increased the total prize fund to \$50,000 to encourage players and enhance competition, congratulating all the winners for their achievements.

The track promises a true test of skill

Red Bull's 'Car Park Drift' makes Kuwaiti comeback

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Kuwait is set to host the Red Bull Car Park Drift 2026, returning bigger and more exciting than ever. The Kuwait Motor Sports City will serve as the stage for the region's largest drift competition, featuring an up-graded format that challenges drivers and delivers a thrilling experience for fans. The action begins at 12:00 PM on January 8 with qualifying rounds, where drivers will be evaluated using the standard scoring system. The top 16 drivers will advance to the final, with the winner earning a spot in the global final, also scheduled in Kuwait in 2026. The track promises a true test of skill, as drivers navigate multi-

ple obstacles and execute precise maneuvers. The local final, taking place at 6:00 PM on January 9, will consist of two rounds, with the best score used to determine the top four qualifiers. Points and penalties will be calculated through the new electronic judging platform, DriftPoint.net, where each 90-second run is assessed by two judges. Competitors may also use a spotter for guidance. The penalty system has been updated to align with international standards, and drivers can earn 20 bonus points for performing an additional 360-degree spin. Partners Nissan and Castrol will add extra excitement to the track, while Aqua Eva ensures the audience stays refreshed.



In this file photo, a racing car powers through the track.

Arsenal downs Palace, set for Chelsea clash



Crystal Palace's goalkeeper Walter Benitez saves shot by Arsenal's Declan Rice during the English Football League Cup quarter-final soccer match between Arsenal and Crystal Palace in London. (AP)

EPL gears up for hectic holidays

LONDON, Dec 24, (AP): Arsenal will face Chelsea in the English League Cup semifinals after beating Crystal Palace 8-7 on penalties following a 1-1 draw in normal time Tuesday. Kepa Arrizabalaga stopped Maxence Lacroix's spot kick to seal the shootout victory at Emirates Stadium. Lacroix's own goal in the 80th minute had given Arsenal the lead before Marc Guehi equalized for Palace deep into stoppage time. Manchester City will play defending champion Newcastle in the other semifinal. Arsenal took the lead when Palace failed to clear Bukayo Saka's corner. Lacroix knocked the ball over his line and shook his head in disbelief. In the fifth minute of stoppage time, Jefferson Lerma headed down and Adam Wharton's free kick for Guehi to sweep it into the goal. The penalty takers were perfect up until Lacroix's effort. Arrizabalaga dove right and stopped it. "We generated a lot (of chances). We should have scored many more goals than the one that we scored," Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta told Sky Sports. "Overall, another victory, I'm really happy."

winter break, the Premier League continues with a round of weekend fixtures to start an intense week with three rounds of matches, which could have a massive effect on the title race. With the traditional Boxing Day fixtures nearly all moved back to December 27th, the only game played on the 26th is at Old Trafford, where Manchester United is at home to Newcastle United. Manchester United coach Ruben Amorim has lost key midfielder Bruno Fernandes to injury and with Kobbie Mainoo also out and Casemiro suspended, Amorim has a problem in filling the gap, especially as forward Bryan Mbeumo is

at the African Cup of Nations. Newcastle travels after a 2-2 draw at home to Chelsea, but needs to cut out the habit of dropping points from winning positions. Second-place Manchester City is first in action on Saturday with a visit to Nottingham Forest that gives Pep Guardiola's side the chance to leapfrog Arsenal to the top of the table, if only for a few hours. Arsenal is at home to Brighton and coach Mike Arteta will be without defenders Cristhian Mosquera, Ben White and Gabriel Magalhaes for the holiday season, limiting his options to rotate his back four during an intense period of games. 10 consecutive wins in all com-

petitions, including Sunday's success at home to Manchester United, means Aston Villa is very much in the title race ahead of Saturday's visit to play Chelsea at Stamford Bridge. Chelsea coach Enzo Maresca confirmed that Liam Delap and Esteveo Wiliam are both available for what looks like a must-win match for his side that goes into the holiday period 10 points behind Arsenal and seven behind Aston Villa. Liverpool has lost Alexander Isak with a broken leg that he suffered away to Tottenham, while Mohamed Salah is at the African Cup of Nations, so Hugo Ekitike will lead the attack at home to bottom-of-the-table and winless Wolverhampton Wanderers. Crystal Palace is at home to a Tottenham side that tends to play better away from home, while Sunderland has five players on African Cup duty for the home match against a rugged Leeds United that has two wins and two draws from its last four matches. West Ham needs to win at home to Fulham to avoid being cut adrift in the bottom three, while Brentford is at home to a Bournemouth side denied its first win in two months by Burnley's late equalizer at the weekend. That goal ended Burnley's run of seven consecutive defeats, but with just 11 points, Scott Parker's side desperately needs a win at home to Everton, who travels north of Liverpool after consecutive losses.



Arsenal's Gabriel Jesus shoots by Crystal Palace's Maxence Lacroix during the English Football League Cup quarter-final soccer match between Arsenal and Crystal Palace in London. (AP)

Al-Musallam gears up for Ghasil Show Jumping Championship

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Supreme Organizing Committee has completed preparations for the Ghasil Show Jumping Championship, set to kick off on January 1 at the Kuwait Equestrian Center, marking a major international equestrian event. Rider Saleh Al-Musallam stated, "The first day will feature competitions at 130 cm and 140 cm, followed by two more rounds at the same heights on Friday. The championship will conclude with two final rounds at 135 cm and 145 cm." Al-Musallam highlighted that over the past decade, Ghasil has become Kuwait's most widely used car wash service, emphasizing their support for small business owners. He noted that the championship offers riders a larger platform to showcase their skills and compete, providing a premier sporting experience and attracting growing local and international participation. The judging committee is chaired by Nadar Al-Mustafa and includes Ibtisam Al-Arouri, Raghad Al-Dabbous, and international judge Ralph Claassen-Hofman. The course design is led by Samir Al-Javid, assisted by Abdulaziz Al-Ajeel, Abdulaziz Al-Mutawa, and Salem Al-Wuhaib. Arena judging is overseen by Bahraini judge Mo-



Saleh Al-Musallam

hammad Dadallah, along with Ali Al-Rifai, Asma Mal Allah, Bader Al-Haihi, and Dr. Yahya Al-Hudban. The event is managed by Walid Al-Jassem, with Jassim Al-Khaffan directing the stables, and commentary provided by Ana Malizart. Al-Musallam extended his gratitude to the Kuwait Equestrian Federation and the Kuwait Equestrian Center for their support, predicting strong competition as riders vie for the top positions.

Best of the Rest

A minute's silence for 2 dead sailors: A briefing for this year's Sydney to Hobart race began Wednesday with a minute's silence for the two sailors who died in last year's event. It ended with hopes that the catastrophic weather conditions will not be repeated in this year's race starting Friday. The mandatory briefing from the Bureau of Meteorology predicted the scheduled 129 starters in the annual race from Sydney harbor to Hobart on the island state of Tasmania will face strong southerly winds of up to 25 knots (about 46 kilometers per hour, or 28 mph) after leaving Sydney Heads. Those winds are likely to slacken across the New South Wales state and Tasmanian coasts across the weekend. The fleet has still been warned there is a chance of strong winds on the first night. "It's going to be cold, wet and bumpy, people will get seasick," said chairman of the race committee Lee Goddard. (AP)

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While most leagues enjoy a short



A fan waves Algerian flags as she waits for the start of the Africa Cup of Nations group E soccer match between Algeria and Sudan in Rabat, Morocco. (AP)

Sports

Amir congratulates Kuwait Club on Cup victory

Crown Prince commends the outstanding performance displayed by finalists



KUNA photos
His Highness the Crown Prince, Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah is welcomed upon arriving for the final.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, sent a congratulatory cable to Khaled Ali Al-Ghanim, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Sports Club, on winning His Highness the Amir Cup after defeating Al-Arabi in the 2024–2025 season final.

In his message, His Highness praised the outstanding performance, exemplary sportsmanship, and high morale demonstrated by both teams during the final held at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium. He wished continued success to all teams, emphasizing their role in raising Kuwait's sports standards and achieving greater accomplishments.

His Highness the Crown Prince, Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah,



Kuwait Club players celebrate after winning the Amir Cup.

also sent a congratulatory cable to Al-Ghanim, commending the exceptional performance displayed by both teams. Meanwhile, His Highness the Prime Minister, Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, extended his congratulations to Kuwait Club's chairman on the victory.

Minister of Information and Culture and State Minister for Youth Affairs, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, affirmed that Kuwait's sports community is honored by the patronage of His Highness the Amir and the presence of the Crown Prince at the Amir Cup final. Speaking at a press briefing, Al-Mutairi highlighted that this support reflects the political leadership's continued interest in and encourage-

ment of Kuwaiti athletes, motivating them to excel in national and international competitions.

Al-Mutairi emphasized that the leadership's support inspires athletes to persist in giving their best, enhances Kuwait's sports development, and empowers youth to actively contribute to the nation's present and future.

He also congratulated Kuwait Sports Club on their Amir Cup triumph, commended Al-Arabi for securing second place, and praised the Kuwait Football Association for the excellent organization of the final and the enthusiastic public attendance that contributed to the event's success.



Officials celebrate the historic win.

Amir Cup win caps Kuwait Club unprecedented sweep

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Kuwait Club maintained its dominance in domestic competitions, achieving another historic milestone by claiming the Amir Cup title with a 2-0 victory over Al-Arabi in the final held at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

With this win, "Al-Abyad" secured a historic quadruple – the club's second ever – becoming the first team to reach such a milestone. They also lifted their fourth cup in the competition's history and claimed their 17th overall title, drawing level with Al-Qadisia and surpassing Al-Arabi, which has 16 titles.

This success is no accident. It reflects the club's relentless effort, starting with the board's unwavering support, strategic signings of talented local and professional players, and the dedication of technical, administrative, and medical teams to maintain high performance throughout the season.

Club President Khaled Al-Ghanem described the victory as the result of a "tremendous effort," emphasizing that Kuwait Club's rightful place is on the winners' podium. He praised the players' commitment and thanked all staff, while expressing pride in securing the "most precious cup." He also highlighted the contributions of hon-



Dhahham celebrates the quadruple.

orary president Marzouq Al-Ghanem, former golden president Abdulaziz Al-Marzouq, and his brother Fahad Al-Ghanem, whom he called "the architect of Kuwait's generation."

Deputy Head of the Football Department, Adel Aqla, expressed his joy at winning this prestigious title and ex-

tended thanks to the fans for their continuous support. Montenegrin coach Nebojsa Jovovic confirmed that the team fully achieved its objectives this season, stating that Kuwait deserved the title. He thanked the board, technical staff, medical team, and players for their hard work throughout the season.



Al-Houshan awarded Man of the Match.

Goalkeeper Saud Al-Houshan, who was named Man of the Match and received the award from Zain, said the quadruple triumph reflected "relentless effort." He added, "The season is still in its early stages, and we have several more titles to aim for and defend this year."

Senegal sends warning to Cup of Nations rivals

TANGIER, Morocco, Dec 24, (AP): The contrast could hardly be greater.

Nicolas Jackson scored twice and Senegal started its Africa Cup of Nations title bid with a comfortable 3-0 win over Botswana, before Nigeria opened with a nervy 2-1 victory over Tanzania.

Both teams are among the favorites for the 35th edition of the tournament, but only one lived up to its billing.

Senegal substitute Cherif Ndiaye completed his team's scoring after Botswana goalkeeper Goitseone Phoko had prevented worse for the Zebras, who lined up with five at the back and were pinned back for most of the game.

"We have to keep going like this," said Senegal coach Pape Thiaw, who nevertheless saw room for improvement. "There are no easy opening matches."

Nigeria got a Group C win in the old "imperial city" of Fez, but the performance may cause concern.

"We are satisfied with the three points. That is the most important," Nigeria coach Eric Chelle said.

The Super Eagles made the better start and should have scored long before Semi Ajayi finally broke the deadlock in the 36th with a header off Alex Iwobi's cross after a short corner.

Charles M'Mombwa equalized against the run of play early in the second half, and though Ademola Lookman replied almost straight away with a fine strike, the Taifa Stars' goal seemed to drain Nigerian confidence

away. Nigeria star Victor Osimhen, who'd earlier had a would-be goal ruled out for offside, was unhappy when he went off in the 86th.

Ibrahim Hamad missed the last chance for Tanzania, and Nigeria – the beaten finalist in the last edition – ultimately had enough experience to hold on.

Senegal, winner of the 2021 edition, could have scored more against a team ranked 138th in the world, all while the colorfully dressed Senegal fans danced



Senegal's Ismail Jakobs, front, and Botswana's Thumisang Orebonye jump for the ball during the Africa Cup of Nations Group D soccer match between Senegal and Botswana in Tangier, Morocco. (AP)

to the beat of their drums.

The official team supporters had taken their positions long before kick-off and never stopped, not even as organizers blared pop tunes and advertisements in the otherwise mostly empty stadium.

Attendance in the 68,000-capacity Grand Stade de Tanger, which looks like a sugar-coated donut from the outside, was just over 18,500. Heavy rainfall likely kept neutral fans away. It kept pouring on the third day of what is shaping up to be the wettest

and coldest Africa Cup to date. The tournament was initially scheduled for the summer, but it was pushed back to avoid clashing with FIFA's new Club World Cup competition.

Jackson, who has had limited opportunities at Bayern Munich since his summer switch from Chelsea, missed a host of chances. The first came early with Phoko getting the better of their one-on-one, before Pape Gueye fired over, and Phoko made another great save to deny Sadio Mané.

Many more chances were missed before Jackson finally broke the deadlock in the 40th with a simple finish to Ismail Jakobs' fast cross.

Botswana initially showed more attacking ambition after the break, but that yielded more counterattacking opportunities for the Teranga Lions, who quickly resumed their earlier dominance.

Jackson used both feet before sweeping in the ball in for his second goal in the 58th from Ismaila Sarr's cross.

Phoko remained the busiest Botswana player as Jackson's frustrations grew. Jackson went off for Ndiaye in the 78th and the substitute wrapped up the scoring in the last minute.

Elias Achouri scored twice and Tunisia dealt Nigeria a warning with a 3-1 win over Uganda in Group C.

Ellyes Skhiri also scored for the Carthage Eagles, who were buoyed by vocal support, with Denis Onedi getting Uganda's consolation goal in stoppage time.

Al-Ittihad closes in on Asian CL Elite knockout round

JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia, Dec 24, (AP): Karim Benzema's second-half strike was enough to give Al-Ittihad a 1-0 win over Nasaf Qarshi of Uzbekistan on Tuesday, placing the Saudi title holders within sight of the Asian Champions League Elite knockout round.

The French striker volleyed home from close range at the far post after 57 minutes, meeting a cross from Portuguese winger Roger Fernandes.

The victory moved Al-Ittihad to sixth place in the 12-team Western

group. With the top eight from the East and West advancing to the round of 16, a win against Qatar's Al-Gharafa in the next match would clinch advancement for the two-time champion.

Elsewhere, Roberto Mancini delivered Al-Sadd's first win in dramatic fashion.

Trailing 2-1 to Al-Ahli Dubai after 90 minutes, the Qatar club scored three goals in stoppage time to win 4-2, with Spanish striker Rafa Mujica completing his hat trick, and keep faint hopes of advancing alive.

Best of the Rest

Fernandes to miss United game: Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim appeared optimistic about the injuries to Bruno Fernandes and Kobbie Mainoo though he confirmed both midfielders will miss Friday's Premier League game against Newcastle.

Fernandes clutched his hamstring and sustained a soft tissue injury in United's defeat by Aston Villa on Sunday, after which Amorim initially said he feared his captain would be out for "a while." (AP)

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Richards season in doubt: Crystal Palace manager Oliver Glasner is unsure when United States defender Chris Richards will be available again.

The American was taken off on a stretcher with a nasty cut to his right foot. Palace hosts Tottenham in the Premier League on Sunday, then welcomes Fulham on New Year's Day.

"He got a knock on his foot, a stamp on his foot, and it had to be stitched," Glasner said about Richards after the game against Arsenal. "I don't know how many stitches, but a few."

"The doctor told me it doesn't look so bad. I'm always hopeful. We have to be hopeful. I don't know if he will be okay for the Tottenham game, but I'm still hoping that he will be back against Fulham." (AP)