



PM lauds ministerial panel for efforts in bringing about Mubarak Port deal  
Page 2



## Christmas message

By His Excellency Bishop Aldo Berardi  
of the Catholic Church,  
Apostolic Vicar of the Northern Arabia

On the morning of December 25, at the Diwaniya of the Catholic Church in the State of Kuwait, it was a great joy for us to welcome this blessed gathering of well-wishers, faithful, heads of Churches in Kuwait, diplomats, and visitors, who came to exchange Christmas greetings and to share in the spirit of this joyful season.

On behalf of the Catholic Church in the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia, I express my sincere thanks and gratitude to all who honored us with their presence. Your visit was a beautiful sign of generous friendship, closeness, and goodwill, and a sincere expression of the bonds that unite the components of society in this beloved country.

In this blessed time of Christmas, a time of peace, harmony, joy, reconciliation, and love, I extend, in the name of the Catholic Church, my heartfelt greetings and best wishes to His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may God protect and preserve him, Amir of the State of Kuwait; to His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, may God protect and preserve him; to the wise Government; and to all the noble people of Kuwait.

We ask Almighty God to grant everyone abundant health and well-being, prosperity and success, and that this glorious feast and the New Year now beginning may carry within them an outpouring of graces and blessings for the State of Kuwait, so that it may remain a shining model of hospitality, mutual respect, and fraternal communion between Christians and Muslims.

We also express our deep gratitude for the atmosphere of openness and freedom of worship that the country enjoys, which allows believers to gather for prayer and to practice their faith in peace.

Continued on Page 5



His Excellency Bishop Aldo Berardi with heads of churches in Kuwait and visitors.

Photo by Rezk Tawfiq

## KUWAIT ENFORCES TOUGHER DRUG LAWS WITH TREATMENT PATHWAYS

# Drug raid nabs 11 diverse nationals

First case under new legislation highlights balanced justice

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

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The Criminal Court recently applied the principle of “the law most favorable to the defendant,” as stipulated in the new drug law, to a case that occurred before the law’s enactment. This ruling highlights the judiciary’s commitment to upholding deterrence while simultaneously considering the defendants’ personal circumstances when grounds for leniency exist.**

In particular, the Tenth Circuit of the Criminal Court, presided over by Judge Abdullah Al-Osaimi, applied the new drug law in a case involving drug trafficking and use. The court determined that this law was most favorable to the defendant and sentenced them to seven-year imprisonment with hard labor, in addition to a fine of KD 50,000.

In its reasoning, the court emphasized that the defendant had no prior criminal record and that this was his first offense, making the application of the provisions of the new drug law the most appropriate course of action.

According to the case file, investigation carried out by a detective revealed that the defendant possessed narcotics for both trafficking and personal use. Following a warrant issued by the Public Prosecution, the defendant was arrested in Bneid Al-Gar, where a search uncovered a piece of hashish.

When questioned, the defendant admitted to possessing additional narcotics at his residence. Security personnel accompanied him to his home in Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate, where a subsequent search of his bedroom closet revealed various narcotics, including hashish and cocaine, prepared for consumption.

The court highlighted the defendant’s confession to the charges and, considering that this was his first offense, decided to apply the provisions of the new drug law in sentencing him.

Meanwhile, KUNA reported that two representatives from the Ministry of Interior and the Public Prosecution confirmed on Wednesday that the new law targeting narcotics, psychotropic substances, and trafficking has not only increased penalties but also introduced a confidential treatment pathway. During a panel discussion organized by Kuwait’s Center for Government Communication (CGC) in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, the representatives said that the law, which came into effect in mid-December, reflects Kuwait’s tougher stance on drug-related crimes to protect the state’s security and the future of its youth.

Continued on Page 5



Photo by Rezk Tawfiq

Despite the cold and blustery Thursday weather, churchgoers in Kuwait City filled the Holy Family Co-Cathedral to celebrate Christmas Day Mass, their faith and festive spirit undimmed as they joined together for the holiday service.

## Kuwait faces fog and cool weekend nights

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (KUNA): Director of the Meteorological Department, Dhirar Al-Ali, forecasted that the country would experience chances of fog formation and scattered light rain in some areas, with moderate and cloudy weather during the day and cold nights over the weekend.

Al-Ali explained to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that weather maps and numerical models indicate the country will be affected by a surface high-pressure extension from the northwest, accompanied by a cold air mass, coinciding with a cold upper-level low, causing an accumulation of low and medium clouds.

Chances of fog and scattered light rain are expected in some areas on Friday evening and on Saturday morning, with northwesterly winds shifting to southeasterly on Saturday at light to moderate speeds.

On Friday, the weather during the day will be moderate and partly cloudy, with northwesterly to variable winds, light to moderate, ranging from 6 to 26 km/h, and a chance of fog in the evening. Expected maximum temperatures will range between 18°C and 20°C, and the sea will be light to moderate, with waves between one and three feet.

Friday night will be cold and partly cloudy, with variable light winds ranging from 8 to 22 km/h, a chance of fog in some areas, and the possibility of light rain.

Expected minimum temperatures will range between 10°C and 12°C, and the sea will be light, with waves between one and two feet. On Saturday, the weather during the day will be moderate and partly cloudy, with variable to southeasterly winds, light to moderate, ranging from 6 to 26 km/h, and a chance of scattered light rain and evening fog.

Continued on Page 5

## Hundred plus decrees propel Kuwait growth

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (KUNA): The Kuwaiti government has scaled up its efforts and measures this year by adopting more than one hundred decrees purposed to address national issues, usher in a fresh phase of radical and structural reforms, sustainable economic transformation, augment developmental openness, and broaden the scope of strategic partnerships.

The legislative pillar came as a core aspect of the government agenda priorities throughout the year by means of deciding a package of draft decree-laws as a multifaceted development catalyst for both economic and social landscapes in line with the goals of the sustainable national vision.

For instance, broad amendments have been introduced to the penal code, laws of criminal procedures and trials, civil and commercial pleadings, and court fees, the Expert Law, the provisions of the Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) Law, and the laws of registration and electronic transactions.

The legislative amendments in question featured a set of economic laws involving a financing and liquidity decree-law, an amendment to the bankruptcy law, a digital trade decree-law, marking an integrated legal framework that regulates the digital trade sector and creates some equilibrium between economic freedom and regulatory control.

Continued on Page 5

## Kuwait shuts 409 buildings in Fahaheel for safety violations

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) carried out an inspection campaign on Thursday morning in Fahaheel, targeting buildings that violate safety and fire prevention regulations,

reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The campaign resulted in the administrative closure of 409 non-compliant buildings and the issuance of notices and warnings.

## Cultural offices ‘revamp’ eyed to guide scholarship students

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Dr. Bader Al-Basiri, revealed plans to enhance the higher education system through a series of important reforms such as modernizing the performance of cultural attachés to improve services for scholarship students and restructuring cultural offices to strengthen their guidance and organizational role in monitoring students, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Dr. Al-Basiri explained that the ministry has focused on develop-

ing the performance of cultural attachés through a comprehensive review of work procedures and updating organizational structures to increase efficiency in services provided to scholarship students.

As part of this effort, the ministry has announced openings for Cultural Attaché positions in several Arab and foreign countries, based on a strategic plan aimed at improving performance, rationalizing expenditures, and optimizing resource utilization.

Continued on Page 5

## Fraud, national interest trigger citizenship revocations

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The Higher Committee for Kuwaiti Citizenship Investigations held a meeting on Thursday chaired by the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, during which it decided to revoke Kuwaiti citizenship in a number of cases, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement, the committee explained that the decision is pending submission to the Cabinet. The cases include revocation of citizenship certificates for fraud and false statements, revocation under Articles 7 and 8 in consideration of the supreme interest of the country, and revocation of citizenship granted for “distinguished service”.



Pope Leo XIV waves after delivering the Urbi et Orbi (Latin for ‘to the city and to the world’) Christmas’ Day blessing from the main balcony of St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican, Thursday, Dec. 25, 2025. (AP) – See Page 6

### News watch

**KUWAIT CITY:** The Amiri Diwan on Thursday mourned the passing of Sheikh Maali Mohammad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, at the age of 79.

Her body was to be laid to rest Thursday, after the afternoon prayer. (KUNA)

**KUWAIT CITY:** The State of Kuwait strongly denounces the deadly attack that targeted policemen in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, north Pakistan, Kuwait’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement on Wednesday.

Reaffirming its principled rejection of all forms of violence whatever the motives might be, the State of Kuwait expresses sincere condolences to the government and people of Pakistan and the families of the victims, according to the statement. (KUNA)

PACI’s service helps property owners to monitor residents



When accusations silence debate

Gulf Bank advises updating contact information & activating notifications before traveling



Prayer Timings			
Fajr .....	05:15	Asr .....	14:38
Sunrise ..	06:40	Maghrib ..	16:56
Zohr .....	11:48	Isha .....	18:18

# Local

**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.

### Weather

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	20	11
Kuwait Airport	21	11
Abdaly	22	09
Bubyan	17	08
Jahra	22	11
Failaka Island	19	09

## PM lauds ministerial panel for efforts in bringing about Mubarak Port deal



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chairs the ministerial committee meeting.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (KUNA): His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, chaired on Thursday at Bayan Palace the 40th meeting of the ministerial committee tasked with following up on the implementation of the country's major development projects.

During the meeting, His Highness commended the close attention and continuous follow-up accorded by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to strategic project execution, praising sustained governmental support, guidance, and the committee's diligent efforts in advancing national development priorities.

The Prime Minister lauded the committee's work that culminated in signing the engineering, procurement, and construction contract for Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port, describing it as a milestone effecting Kuwait's comprehensive development drive and commitment to institutional coordination.

He stressed the importance of maintaining close coordination among committee members and all state entities to achieve outlined strategic objectives, noting that sincere collective efforts have produced landmark achievements, productive foundations, and positive transformations supporting economic competitiveness and citizens' aspirations.

Members of the ministerial committee expressed gratitude to the Prime Minister for his patronage and attendance at the recent contract signing ceremony, praising his keen interest in monitoring project progress within unified government programs aligned with national sustainable development priorities.

They affirmed that consolidating efforts and efficiently deploying resources across priority initiatives would generate tangible benefits for the nation, consistent with the supreme visions of His Highness the Amir and the state's overarching development framework.

Assistant Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs and committee rapporteur Ambassador Samih Jawhar Hayat said the meeting reviewed progress reports on Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port, energy systems cooperation, renewable energy development, low-carbon green waste recycling, housing development, and environmental infrastructure.

He added discussions also covered wastewater treatment facilities, environmental protection, combating desertification, and strengthening joint action mechanisms to meet leadership aspirations, underscoring continued efforts to enhance coordinated governmental performance across all major development sectors.

The meeting was attended by Head of the Prime Minister's Dewan Abdulaziz Al-Dakheel, Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Meshaan, Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Abdulatif Al-Mishari, Director General of KDIPA Sheikh Dr. Mishal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Head of Fatwa and Legislation Department Counselor Salah Al-Majed, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Dr. Adel Al-Zamel, and Assistant

# Fund uplifts SME surge with access to market

176 tenders worth KD129 million secured

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

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Development has played a significant role in the growth of SMEs, securing 176 tenders in various government entities since 2017, with a total value exceeding KD 129 million.**

This achievement highlights the Fund's commitment to supporting SMEs, enhancing their competitiveness, and increasing their contribution to the national economy and development efforts.



Al-Jassem

During a recent "Opportunities Gateway" awareness training workshop, the Fund's Director General Basma Al-Jassem reaffirmed the Fund's dedication to facilitating SME access to the government tenders market.

She explained that an important factor enabling this is Kuwait's Central Tenders Law, which supports SME participation by giving them a competitive advantage over the lowest bids from non-registered projects. This is one of the non-financial services the Fund provides to improve SMEs' market readiness.

These regulatory measures aim to remove obstacles for SMEs, and increase their opportunities to participate in government tenders and positively impact the national economy. These initiatives reflect the National Fund's comprehensive strategy to improve the business environment, empower entrepreneurs, and provide high-quality non-financial services that strengthen the capacity and readiness of SMEs for sustainable growth.

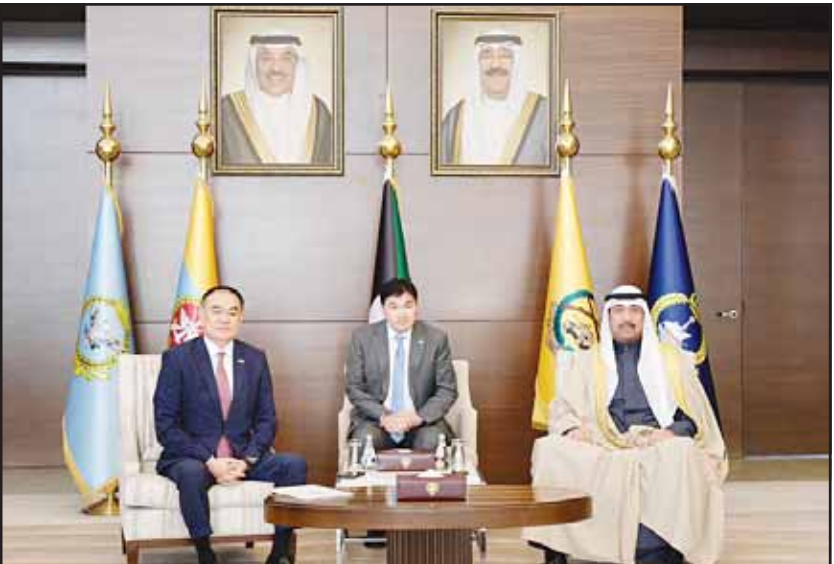
Meanwhile, Reem Al-Farhan, CEO of the

Central Tenders Company, introduced the "Opportunities Portal" platform, explaining its services, which allow users to track tenders and bids, review award decisions, analyze direct contracts, and access the annual plans of government entities.

During the workshop, a comprehensive overview of the platform was provided. The platform features content that includes over one million published tenders from more than 28 sectors, available in 74 languages. This makes it a powerful resource for entrepreneurs and companies, offering suitable opportunities and supporting data-driven decision-making with accurate and up-to-date information.

The workshop also covered the various types of business opportunities available on the portal, including tenders, practices, qualifications, auctions, consulting, requests for proposals, direct contracts, and small business projects.

In addition, the requirements, laws, and application procedures for these opportunities were explained.



KUNA photo  
Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah receives the Mongolian Ambassador to Kuwait Sergelen Boriv Shadai.

## Kuwait MoD meets Mongolia envoy

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (KUNA): Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah received Mongolia Ambassador to Kuwait Sergelen Boriv

Shadai at Bayan Palace on Thursday. Both sides reviewed the friendly ties and issues of mutual interest, the Ministry of Defense said in a statement.

## PACI's service helps property owners to monitor residents

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) has launched a new "Inhabitant/Resident Data" service through a user-friendly application that enables property owners to monitor their properties

directly, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

PACI revealed that the service provides easy access to resident data for their buildings and allow users to automatically submit complaints if any information is found to be inaccurate.

## Give surplus relief aid to Palestinians: MoSA

**By Fares Ghaleb**  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The Ministry of Social Affairs confirmed that there is no objection to allocating the remaining funds from the emergency relief campaign to support the Palestinian people in purchasing winter clothing, tents, blankets, and other essential supplies.

The ministry explained that it had received a letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the remaining funds and donations from the emergency relief campaign previously implemented by charitable organizations to aid the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. Given the timing of this development with the onset of winter in Gaza and its expected humanitarian impact, it has no objection to allocating these funds for essential winter supplies, provided that all applicable regulations are followed.

This will be carried out in cooperation with relevant UN agencies responsible for delivering humanitarian aid, after obtaining the necessary official approvals, and in coordination with accredited Palestinian officials and charitable organizations through the electronic humanitarian aid system of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The ministry emphasized that charitable organizations must adhere to several regulations, most notably Cabinet Resolution No. 1461, which requires the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, public benefit associations, and all governmental bodies and institutions to ensure that all aid and assistance, in any form, consists of national products or products manufactured within the State of Kuwait and bears the state's emblem.

It highlighted the importance of Kuwaiti humanitarian and charitable organizations documenting and registering all their aid and assistance within the United Nations Financial Tracking System (FTS).

## Court acquits tribals in primary 'by-polls' case

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The Court of Cassation upheld the verdict issued by the Court of Appeals, which acquitted the defendants who were accused of organizing and participating in a tribal by-election for the Bani Ghanim tribe in the Fourth Constituency outside Kuwait to select their representatives in the previous National Assembly elections.

The defendants had been arrested by security forces under Law No. 35/1962 concerning elections to the National Assembly and its amendments.

According to Article 45, Paragraph 5, anyone who organizes, participates in organizing, or calls for a tribal by-election shall face imprisonment for up to five years and a fine of no less than KD 2,000 and no more than KD 5,000, or either of these penalties. Such primary elections are considered illegal if held before the scheduled election date to select one or more representatives from a specific group or sect.

### Other Voices

## Today is your Happy Day

**By Ahmad alsarraf**

For nearly a quarter of a century, we have been publishing Christmas and New Year's greetings in Al-Qabas newspaper for wishing Christians, both citizens and residents, as well as those throughout the Arab world, happiness and well-being during these holidays.

This is the least we can offer them. Despite the differing views of some, they are part of us, and we owe them, and the Christians in the Western world, a great deal in the fields of science, medicine, inventions, and pharmaceuticals.

My colleague, the Palestinian writer and researcher Abdul-Ghani Salameh, wrote an article in 2021 about the Christians of the East, which I commented on about two years ago.

The content of Salameh's article highlighted the ignorance of many people, including myself, regarding the religious background of numerous Arab celebrities. Perhaps this is because their names do not immediately indicate that they are Christians.

Examples include Afif Safieh, Maha Nassar, Nayef Hawatmeh, Kamal Nasser, Wadi Haddad, Hanan Ashrawi, Yaqoub Ziadine, Jul Jamal, Salam Helaneh, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, Zuhdi Al-Tarzi, Hanan Imsih, Naim Khader, Karim Khalaf, Naji Alloush, Mahjoub Omar, Samir Ghatas, Khalil Sakakini, Ilya Abu Madi, Tawfiq Toubi, Ameen Rihani, Anis Al-Sayegh, Sabri Jreis, Samir Kassir, May Ziadeh, Hanna Mina, Najib Azoury, Elias Shoufani, Nassif Al-Yaziji, Azmi Bishara, Ghaleb Halsas, Nazih Abu Nidal, Fakhr Qawar, Youssef Beidas, Munib Younan, Mitri Al-Raheb, the Rahbani brothers, Wadih Al-Safi, Majida El Roumi, Sabah, Samirna Tawfiq, Reem Talhami, Reem Banna, Youssef Chahine, Naguib El Rihani, Hani Ramzi, Hala Sedki, Elissa, Najwa



alsarraf

Karam, Wael Kfoury, Nancy Ajram, Nawal El Zoghbi, Melhem Barakat, Diana Haddad, Elias Karam, Salloum Haddad, Abed Fahd, Bassam Yakhour, Qusai Khouli, Abeer Issa, Jamil Awad, Juliet Awad, Nabil Al-Mashini, Osama Al-Mashini, Raed Andoni, George Bahgoury, and Suleiman Mansour.

This is in addition to prominent figures already known to be Christian, including leaders, activists, intellectuals, poets, journalists, writers, artists, economists, and pioneers of the Arab nationalist renaissance.

Salameh says that what motivated him to write about Christians was not only the unjustified hostility they face, but also the perceived loss of resources caused by their emigration to the West. He added that it has become evident that several entities are working systematically and deliberately to diminish the Christian presence in many Arab countries.

As a result, it is clear why those who have emigrated did so, after being treated as second-class citizens and denied access to many senior positions.

This continuous decline in their numbers among us has inevitably led to several negative consequences. They do not need mere tolerance, since they are citizens with rights in these homelands no less than anyone else. What they need is the appreciation and respect they rightfully deserve.

The departure of Christians is heart-breaking, as is the departure and ongoing emigration of many of the best Muslims. This motivated me, eight years ago, to write my article, "Christians, Leave Our Homelands," which many consider one of the most famous and widely read articles in Arabic.

Therefore, I echo Salameh's plea - O Christians, do not leave us, for we need you more than you need us. Your presence among us is essential. Christianity was born and nurtured in our lands. You are not guests, but an integral part of this region, deserving the same rights as everyone else.

☐ ☐ ☐  
email: a.alsarraf@alqabas.com.kw

## KUNA, Judicial Studies Institute sign MoU to boost cooperation

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (KUNA): KUNA and Kuwait Institute for Judicial and Legal Studies signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on Wednesday to enhance cooperation and exchange experiences, expertise, and information in the field of training, as well as to utilize the resources and capabilities available to each.

The MoU was signed by KUNA's Acting Director General Mohammad Al-Mannai, and the Institute's Director General Frisat Attorney General Counselor Bader Al-Massad.

Both sides emphasized their commitment to strengthening existing cooperation between the Institute and the Agency in various fields, recognizing the need to develop highly qualified and distinguished national talent.

In this regard, Al-Mannai stated that KUNA is keen to dedicate its media capabilities to serving the Institute and highlighting its role in qualifying and training national personnel and promoting



Al-Mannai

legal culture and public awareness.

For his part, Counselor Al-Massad explained that the Institute is fully prepared to offer its expertise in training and development to employees of KUNA and various government entities, for the benefit of Kuwait.

He commended the agency's cooperation and its distinguished role in providing media coverage of the Institute's various activities and events.

Under the MoU, the Institute and KUNA will participate in conferences, seminars, and panel discussions held by both parties, in addition to exchanging publications, periodicals, books, studies, and collections of rulings and laws they issue.

The memorandum includes the preparation and training of KUNA's legal staff by the Institute and includes the development of training programs at KUNA's request or at the Institute's suggestion.

Counselor Al-Massad presented Al-Mannai with the Institute's shield, while Al-Mannai presented Al-Massad with a book published by KUNA titled "Kuwait in the Memory of Days." The signing ceremony, at the Institute's headquarters, was attended by officials from the Kuwait Institute for Judicial and Legal Studies and KUNA.

## KD135mln to repair substations

**By Mohammad Ghanem**  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy (MEWRE) has submitted a major tender worth KD 135,409 million for the maintenance and repair of its 132/300/400 kV main substations to the State Audit Bureau for review and approval.

Once approved by the bureau, the contract will be finalized, allowing maintenance work to begin immediately.

This project is a major part of MEWRE's strategy to upgrade and modernize the elec-

trical grid infrastructure, with the aim of extending the lifespan of its components and ensuring maximum operational readiness, especially in preparation for the increased electricity demand during the summer season.

Meanwhile, MEWRE is planning to construct six new green buildings to serve customers in all six governorates.

Six corresponding tenders have been included in the ministry's contract plan for the current fiscal year of 2025/2026, and are scheduled for issuance soon. This project aims to modernize the ministry's facilities in line with contemporary engineering standards.



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Council seeks details on contracts

# Municipality probes delays in Sulaibikhat Bay development

**By Inaas Awadh**  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Municipal Council member Dr. Hassan Kamal submitted a question to the Kuwait Municipality's executive body regarding the Sulaibikhat Bay development project.

He requested information on the signing date and duration of the consultancy services contract for the project, as well as its actual completion date. He also asked whether the project includes residential units (private, model, or investment) and if so, requested details on their locations within the six development zones, land areas, types of residential units, and maximum building heights in meters.

Dr. Kamal questioned the reasons for the executive body's delay in resubmitting the entire project, including approvals from all relevant government agencies, particularly the Environment Public Authority, and requested a detailed explanation.



Photo by Rezk Tawfiq  
Dr. Hassan Kamal, Municipal Council member

He also inquired whether Kuwait Municipality is the government entity responsible for implementing the project and whether there will be collaboration with other entities, seeking clarification on the relevant details.

## Other Voices

# When accusations silence debate

By Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri

One of the most effective ways to shut down public debate is not censorship, but accusation. When criticism is answered with labels rather than arguments, discussion turns into a warning: speak carefully, or do not speak at all.

This dynamic has become increasingly visible across political contexts. Instead of engaging with legitimate questions, critics are often dismissed through assumptions about their motives or affiliations. The substance of what is being said becomes irrelevant. What matters is who is speaking, and whether they can be portrayed as suspect.

This tactic is not confined to any one country or culture. Internationally, similar patterns have long been used to deflect scrutiny and avoid accountability.

Western democracies have their own



Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri

historical warnings. In the United States, McCarthyism in the 1950s demonstrated how political labeling weakened institutions and eroded public trust. In contem-

porary debates, the frequent conflation of criticism of Israeli government policies with antisemitism risks producing similar effects, narrowing the space for legitimate and necessary discussion.

The same reflex appears in everyday political life. Questioning authority is increasingly treated as provocation rather than civic responsibility.

What this reveals is not confidence, but anxiety. Systems that rely on accusation signal discomfort with independent thought. Silence becomes safer than engagement, and conformity is rewarded over reason.

States are not strengthened by quiet public spaces. They are strengthened by scrutiny, debate, and institutions capable of responding without fear. When accusation replaces argument, the real casualty is not dissent, but the public sphere itself.

# Kuwait energy efficiency experience supports global sustainability goals



Dr. Fotouh Al-Ragom, Acting Executive Director of the Energy and Building Research Center at the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research.

## KISR highlights research-based solutions

MANAMA, Dec 25, (KUNA): Acting Executive Director of the Energy and Building Research Center at the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), Dr. Fotouh Al-Ragom said Kuwait's experience in energy efficiency represents a leading model of research-based local solutions, supporting the global development agenda and sustainability goals.

This came in Al-Ragom's statement to KUNA on the sidelines of the 7th Annual Forum of the Bahrain Center for Strategic, International and Energy Studies (Derasat), held in Manama, in partnership with the General Secretariat of the Arab League, under the theme: "The Arab Research Centers Consortium for Sustainability and Development".

Al-Ragom noted that Kuwait has adopted an applied research approach since the establishment of KISR in 1967 to address national challenges, with outcomes adaptable to countries with similar climatic and economic conditions.

She highlighted the Energy Conservation Code for Buildings as a key example of effective institutional cooperation between KISR and the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy since 1983, noting that the code is periodically updated based on scientific studies.

Al-Ragom said the code has helped save around 8 gigawatts of electrical capacity - nearly 40 percent of Kuwait's installed capacity in 2023 - in addition to conserving about 85 million barrels of oil and reducing more than 30 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions over four decades.

She added that the Arab Research Centers Consortium initiative marks an important step toward strengthening investment in science and knowledge.

# CAPT evaluates 37 key MEW projects

By Mohammed Ghanem  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The Board of Directors of the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) held a meeting with representatives from the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy at CAPT's headquarters to discuss 37 topics related to the ministry's tenders.

According to informed sources, the agenda included several important topics such as the construction, completion, maintenance, and development of the Shuwaikh Water Distribution Complex and its associated works, the management and maintenance of the smart meter system including systems, software, hardware, and communication networks at the main site, and the development, management, and operation of the smart meter system and its communication network in Kuwait.

The meeting also addressed the direct contracting for the repair of steam turbines No. 5 and 6 at the Subiya Power Station.

In another development, the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy provided a temporary power supply to a section of Mubarakia, where January celebrations are taking place.

## Final drafting begins

# Information Ministry completes analytical phase for new strategy

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Ministry of Information announced on Tuesday the completion of the internal and external environment analysis phase for its new strategy project for 2026-2030, and the start of the final drafting phase for its pillars, objectives, and implementation programs, setting the stage for the strategy's adoption and launch in the near future, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press release, the ministry explained that the strategy was developed through a participatory institutional approach involving ministry employees and partners in the media community. This approach aimed to activate their roles in strategic decision-making, in accordance with the directives of the Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, and under the supervision of the Undersecretary of the ministry Dr. Nasser Muhaisen.

It offered a volunteer opportunity to attract qualified Kuwaiti employees and holders of advanced academic degrees. The volunteer team completed an intensive 80-hour training program covering strategic planning and analysis, facilitation skills, managing discussion panels and interviews, and qualitative data analysis.

The analytical phase involved a wide range of research and field activities, during which volunteers contributed over 480 hours. These activities included interviews with senior leadership, panel discussions, surveys, and specialized focus groups.

The research and field work also included meetings with content creators, media institutions, universities, women's associations, and representatives of civil society organizations, as well as extensive consultations with the Arab Planning Institute to review the strategic outputs.

This phase was carried out using a com-



Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs

prehensive scientific analytical methodology combining qualitative and quantitative analysis. This approach identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges facing the media system and forecasts future trends for Kuwaiti media up to 2030.

The final strategy will include a vision, objectives, pillars, and implementation initiatives that are in line with the "New Kuwait 2035" vision, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the requirements of digital transformation and the knowledge economy.

The ministry affirmed that the new strategy will provide an integrated national framework for developing Kuwaiti media, enhancing its role in shaping the national narrative, consolidating professional values, raising the level of public trust, and achieving responsible and innovative digital media that serves national development.

# CSC to announce rankings of new job applicants in mid-Jan

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The relevant departments and divisions at the Civil Service Commission (CSC) are committed to completing the review and auditing of all files submitted by citizens who registered for the first time during the current 93rd registration period within the specified timeframe, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to CSC's official plan, the completion of the process depends on the total number of applicants who registered in accordance with the announced regulations and criteria, after the registration period ends on January 2.

Based on the plan and the number of registrants, the ranking of newly registered candidates eligible for employment is expected to be announced on January 16 or January 23. Applicants will be notified via text messages sent to the mobile numbers provided during registration, as well as through the Sahel application. The published ranking will also include applicants who did not meet the technical requirements of the nominating entities.

Regarding the ranking of applicants who declined positions in specific government entities, sources confirmed that this does not affect the eligibility of those registering for the first time, as nominations are made based on priority order and the criteria approved by CSC.

In the same context, sources at CSC said that Chairman of CSC, Dr. Essam Al-Rubaian, is working on announcing a large-scale recruitment drive expected to include at least 2,000 citizens.

They explained that procedures for the recruitment drive are currently being finalized. It will include applicants registered during the 93rd registration period, which continues until the Friday after next, in addition to those on the waiting lists from the previous registration periods, namely the 90th, 91st, and 92nd.

The new recruitment drive will be announced once the working groups complete their review and confirm a match between the job requirements of ministries, departments, and government institutions governed by the Civil Service Law and Regulations, and the specializations of registered citizens.

If such a match is confirmed, the recruitment drive is expected to be announced in February 2026.

CSC continues to coordinate closely with all government entities to ensure alignment between job requirements and the specializations of registered citizens.

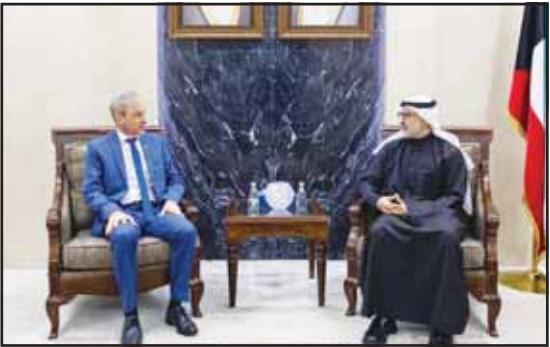
If the job requirements do not align with the applicants' specializations, the announcement of the next batch of candidates will be postponed to a later date.

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KUNA photo  
Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah receives Christian Dooms, the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium to the State of Kuwait.

## Deputy Foreign Minister welcomes Belgian envoy

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on Thursday received Belgian Ambassador in Kuwait Christian Dooms, discussing bilateral relations between both countries and issues of mutual interest.

## Ministry allows property sales for revoked citizens

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The Ministry of Justice announced that individuals whose citizenship was revoked under the “Distinguished Service” category are permitted to dispose of private residences they owned prior to losing their citizenship, reports Al-Rai daily.

In an official statement, the ministry explained that this entitlement is granted in line with the regulations outlined in Cabinet Resolution No. 913, which preserves certain rights and privileges for those affected by citizenship revocation.

The acting Undersecretary Awatif Al-Sanad issued a circular to employees of the Real Estate Registration Department on the implementation of these directives.

# MoH sets up specialized committee to modernize and unify health legislation

Ministry issues new regulations on therapeutic nutrition units

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

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi issued a ministerial decision on Thursday to form a specialized committee tasked with studying and reviewing proposals and drafts aimed at unifying health legislation and developing the regulatory frameworks of the health sector.**

The committee will be responsible for examining drafts, proposing amendments, and suggesting legislative alternatives to enhance the efficiency of the health system and improve the quality of services provided to citizens and residents.

In an official statement, the Ministry of Health emphasized that this step is part of its ongoing efforts to develop medical governance and keep pace with regulatory and scientific developments, in line with a modern and sustainable vision.

The decision is part of the ministry’s initiative to comprehensively modernize laws governing the practice of medical and paramedical professions, mental



Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi, Minister of Health

health, and the regulation of the pharmacy profession and medicine distribution.

The committee comprises representatives from the ministry’s technical, health, and legal departments, along with members from the Medical Liability Authority, the Medical Association, and a national medical expert panel of retired physicians.

It is chaired by a consultant from the Fatwa and Legislation Department, with the Assistant Undersecretary for Supporting Departments serving as vice-chair.

The decision also empowers the committee to invite experts from within or

outside the ministry to attend meetings and provide their opinions without voting rights. It further allows for the appointment of a rapporteur, subject to the minister’s approval.

Under the decision, the committee is responsible for reviewing previous draft legislation, analyzing its legal and technical implications, and submitting detailed recommendations to the Minister of Health. These recommendations will include the committee’s final opinion and any proposed amendments or regulatory and legislative alternatives that serve the public interest and support the ministry’s vision for developing health legislation.

Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Abdulwahab Al-Awadhi issued a ministerial decree regulating the requirements and specifications for licensing therapeutic nutrition consultation units and centers in the private healthcare sector, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The decree aims to protect practitioners and ensure nutrition consultations are conducted according to scientific principles and approved standards.

It applies to all entities providing therapeutic nutrition services in the private sector, including therapeutic nutrition consultation units, consultation centers, food service companies offering nutrition consultations, and sports clubs and health institutes providing nutrition consulta-

tions. Meanwhile, Dr. Yousef Al-Dhafeeri, consultant in retinal medicine at Jaber Hospital, praised Health Minister Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi’s decision to ban energy drinks in schools, restaurants, cafes, grocery stores, and food trucks, calling it a crucial step to protect children and adolescents.

He warned that the harmful effects of excessive energy drink consumption are well documented, extending beyond rapid heartbeat to strokes affecting the brain, heart, and eyes, as well as kidney damage. The high levels of caffeine and sugar make these beverages powerful stimulants, not ordinary drinks, and can cause behavioral changes, nervous irritability, and irregular heartbeats in children.

Al-Dhafeeri highlighted the alarming trend of some children consuming two to three cans daily, leading to insomnia and serious health risks. He cited cases, including a young Kuwaiti man treated for a retinal blood clot, showing that even without large-scale statistics, documented incidents reveal the danger.

He urged parents to monitor their children closely and prevent energy drink consumption. Al-Dhafeeri concluded that the Ministry of Health’s ban is a vital preventive measure to safeguard the health of society, particularly the younger generation.

## Empowering young talent to drive national progress

# KFAED launches ‘Be Among the Outstanding’ program for Kuwaiti youth

By Fares Ghaleb  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The acting Director General of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), Waleed Al-Bahr, affirmed that KFAED has long recognized investing in human capital as the true foundation of sustainable development.**

He emphasized that Kuwaiti youth are the cornerstone of progress, the builders of the future, and among the most important pillars of the country’s success and development.

Al-Bahr said this during his speech at the orientation meeting for the “Be Among the Outstanding” program for 2026, in the presence of the Indonesian Ambassador to Kuwait Lena Maryana, a representative of the Embassy of Uzbekistan Counselor Bahram Turdaliev, Director General of Educational Support Services Mariam Al-Anzi, and a number of educational leaders, parents, and students.

He began his speech by welcoming attendees and expressing his pleasure at participating in the orientation meeting, which holds educational, humanitarian, and national significance, and reflects the KFAED’s commitment to its social role alongside its developmental mission beyond Kuwait’s borders.

Al-Bahr explained that KFAED is committed to directing its initiatives and programs toward empowering national talent, enhancing their skills, and developing a qualified workforce capable of actively contributing to the country’s progress. The “Be Among the Outstanding” initiative is part of this comprehensive framework, as it combines academic motivation, developmental awareness, and cul-



Top & above: Photos during the orientation meeting for the ‘Be Among the Outstanding’ program.

Photos by Samer Shaqir

tural openness. The initiative helps introduce new generations to Kuwait’s humanitarian role and promotes a positive image of the country both regionally and internationally.

Al-Bahr addressed the students, saying they represent Kuwait not only through their academic excellence but also through their ethics, dedication, and positive attitude.

He stressed that this experience provides an opportunity to broaden horizons and deepen understanding of the concept of development, emphasizing that true excellence is measured not only by academic achievement but also by awareness, responsibility,

and a readiness to serve the nation and humanity wherever they may be.

Al-Bahr explained that the selection of countries for the field trip program for outstanding students is based on clear criteria. These criteria take into account the diversity of countries with which KFAED collaborates, the scale of its development contributions in those countries, and the projects completed, allowing students to witness their firsthand.

These trips are not purely touristic, although they provide students with the opportunity to visit landmarks in the host countries. Instead, the primary focus is on familiarizing students with KFAED’s role and its development

projects through on-site visits to projects implemented by KFAED. It reflects Kuwait’s image and its efforts in supporting development and sustainability in various countries worldwide.

The initiative aims to empower students to accurately convey an accurate picture of Kuwait’s active contributions in economic and social development, thereby strengthening national awareness and reinforcing the values of humanitarian and developmental work.

Al-Bahr discussed the origins of the idea, explaining that KFAED, which began its activities in 1961 and has extended its contributions to 107 countries, started developing its programs

about 15 years ago. In addition to its engineering initiatives, it collaborated with the Ministry of Education to involve outstanding students in this experience. The goal is to cultivate a generation that is aware of Kuwait’s developmental role. Many previous participants have gone on to play active and distinguished roles in the future.

He expressed his hope that this trip would inspire the students, motivating them to continue excelling, work as a team, and take pride in their national identity.

Al-Bahr expressed his sincere thanks and appreciation to the Ministry of Education, the strategic partner

in the initiative since its inception, for its dedicated efforts in organizing the trip, monitoring the students, and selecting outstanding representatives of Kuwaiti youth.

He emphasized that this effective collaboration reflects the complementary roles of KFAED and the ministry in nurturing exceptional students and preparing a generation that is aware and ready for the future.

Al-Bahr affirmed that KFAED is committed to supporting Kuwaiti youth, confident in their ability to assume responsibility, hold influential positions, and contribute to building a sustainable and prosperous future for Kuwait.

In addition, Director General of the General Department of Educational Support Services at the Ministry of Education, Mariam Al-Enezi, emphasized that the “My Journey” initiative, implemented by KFAED for outstanding 12th-grade students, reflects a strong belief in the importance of investing in human capital, particularly in the minds of high-achieving students who represent the foundation and hope of the future.

She expressed her delight in participating in this significant day celebrating the initiative, noting that the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development has played a major national and humanitarian role, going beyond traditional development support to include education, capacity building, and raising awareness among young generations, adding that this stems from the belief that true development begins with education and that nurturing excellence and distinction is the best way to cultivate tomorrow’s leaders.

Al-Enezi highlighted the Ministry of Education’s pride in its strategic partnership with the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, emphasizing that the collaboration integrates efforts to serve students, provide quality educational opportunities, expand their horizons, develop their skills, strengthen their national identity, and introduce them to the pioneering development achievements that Kuwait is proud of.

## Drug raid

They emphasized that drug traffickers and those who circulate narcotics or threaten societal security will face strict consequences.

Prosecutor Ahmad Al-Kandari stated that the new law, which prioritizes treatment over punishment for addicts, aligns with the latest legislation and relevant international agreements, adding that the law allows addicts of drugs or psychotropic substances to voluntarily seek treatment at the Addiction Treatment Center without facing any penalties.

Assistant Director of the Drug Control General Department (DCGD), in line with the new drug law, has been carrying out extensive security campaigns throughout the country as part of its ongoing efforts to combat drug abuse and trafficking.

During these campaigns, 11 suspects of various nationalities were arrested and referred, along with the seized items, to the concerned authorities for legal action.

In an official statement, the ministry detailed the results of recent search and seizure operations, which led to the confiscation of various controlled substances. These included 2.145 kilograms of methamphetamine (crystal meth), 1.715 kilograms of marijuana, three grams of hashish, and approximately half a kilogram of synthetic cannabinoids.

Authorities also seized 20 grams of Lyrica powder, 1,610 Lyrica capsules, and four Captagon tablets. In addition to the narcotics, four sensitive elec-

ment.

Lt. Col. Manawer affirmed that decree law No. 159/2025 on the control of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, as well as the regulation of their use and trafficking, provides a comprehensive legislative framework consisting of 84 articles across 13 chapters. The law covers all aspects related to narcotic substances, including punitive, preventive, and therapeutic measures, in addition to regulating medical use and monitoring the circulation of these substances.

In addition, Al-Seyassah daily reported that the Drug Control General Department (DCGD), in line with the new drug law, has been carrying out extensive security campaigns throughout the country as part of its ongoing efforts to combat drug abuse and trafficking.

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tronic scales and a knife were recovered.

## Christmas message

This climate of coexistence is a precious treasure that strengthens social cohesion and builds bridges of understanding among followers of different religions and traditions.

As we look forward to the New Year, we renew our commitment to serve the common good, to care for one another, especially the poor and the vulnerable, and to be instruments of hope in a world that longs for peace.

May God protect the State of Kuwait, bless its leaders and its people, and grant everyone every good: a Christmas filled with joy and a New Year rich in hope.

## Kuwait faces

Expected maximum temperatures will range between 19°C and 21°C, and the sea will be light to moderate, with waves between one and three feet.

Saturday night will be cold, with southeasterly to variable winds, light to moderate, ranging from 8 to 26 km/h, and a chance of fog in some areas. Expected minimum temperatures will range between 11°C and 13°C, and the sea will be light to moderate, with waves between one and three feet.

## Cultural offices

Some students tend to overlook the essential role of cultural attachés, which includes guiding students on housing, banking, and official transactions, as well as providing academic advising, particularly during their first year.

The current mechanisms for academic certificate equivalency strike a balance between speed and accuracy by subjecting certificates to strict procedures.

These include verifying the accreditation of the educational institution, the study system, and academic compliance.

These procedures preserve the quality of educational outcomes and enhance trust in the credibility of degrees obtained outside Kuwait, supporting the efficiency of the equivalency system and meeting the needs of beneficiary entities.

Regarding the ministry’s plan to fill vacancies, Dr. Al-Basiri stressed that it follows a phased approach to address job openings by identifying the actual needs of each sector and attracting specialized national talent in line with institutional requirements and modern developments in higher education.

He emphasized the Ministry’s commitment to investing in human resource development and creating a stimulating work environment that enhances performance efficiency and ensures institutional sustainability.

Dr. Al-Basiri confirmed that the

academic certificates of public sector employees are subject to strict auditing procedures, including verifying the accreditation of the university and study program, reviewing the study system and its duration, and cross-checking academic data with relevant official bodies.

He stressed that these measures help prevent violations, detect unaccredited certificates, enhance transparency and accountability, and maintain confidence in the national workforce in state institutions.

Dr. Al-Basiri stated that the announcement of the overseas scholarship plan was made five months earlier than usual this year, based on direct instructions from the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Nader Al-Jalal.

He explained that the early announcement aims to reassure parents and students, giving them sufficient time to plan their studies without undue pressure. Typically, the scholarship plan is released in May, during the exam period when students and parents are occupied. Providing the plan earlier allows students adequate time to prepare for required exams or meet the specified criteria.

The details of the scholarship plan are available to students and their parents, including the available majors, the number of scholarships offered, and the requirements set by the Ministry of Higher Education and the universities receiving the students. These details are accessible on the ministry’s official website and social media plat-

forms for easy reference.

Regarding the criteria for scholarship applicants, Dr. Al-Basiri explained that candidates must be Kuwaiti citizens, hold a recent high school diploma (no more than two years old), and meet the required grade point average for their chosen field of study. For instance, medicine requires a 95 percent high school score, while the minimum grade point average for acceptance this year has been set at 85 percent.

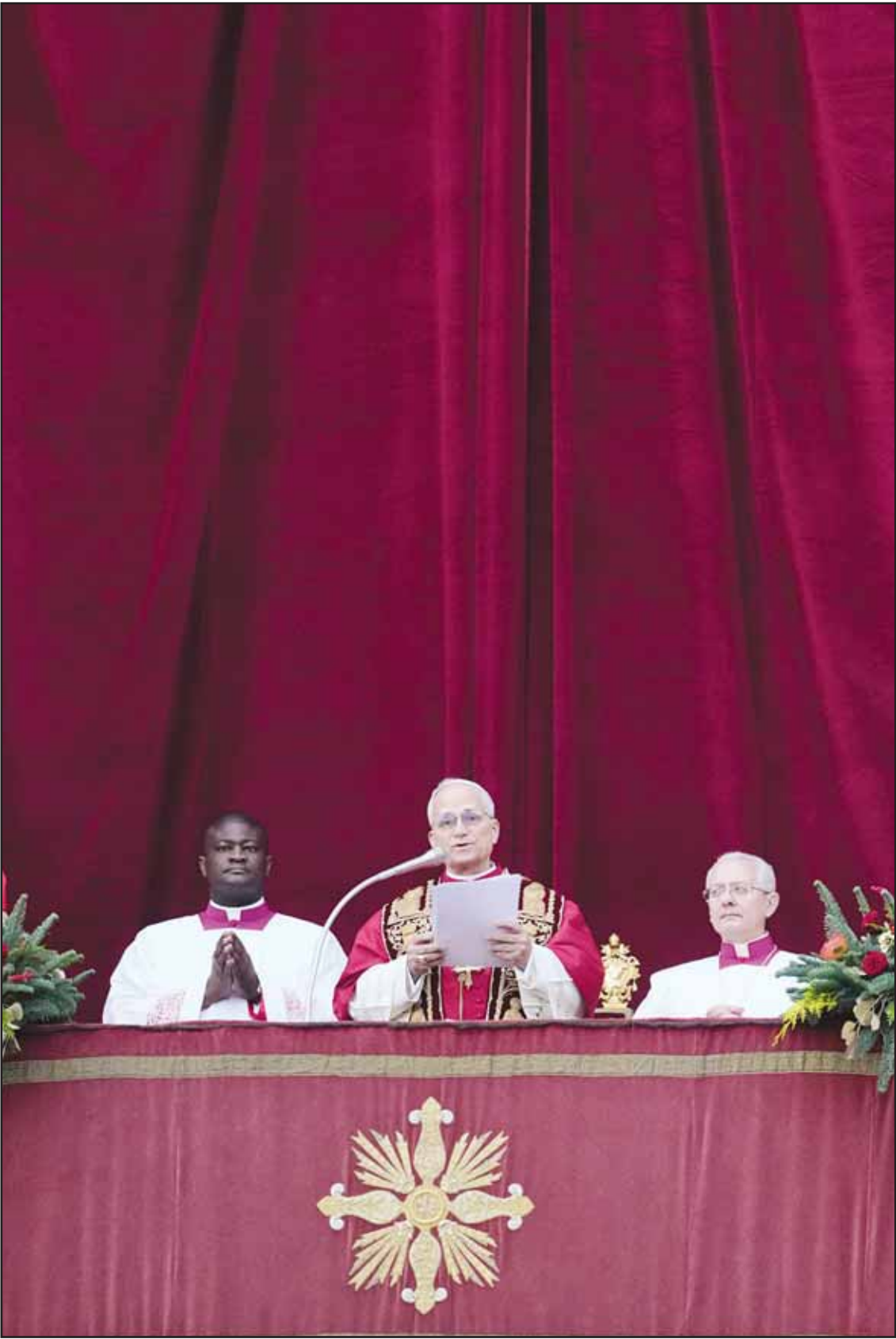
## Hundred plus

Also involved are social and humanitarian laws and amendments to laws on public assistance and children’s rights as well as a new law on the protection of missing persons.

Regarding anti-crime measures, the Cabinet approved vital pieces of legislation, including ones pertinent to fighting drugs and psychotropic substances as well international crimes, along with international judicial cooperation.

Furthermore, the Cabinet sought to keep abreast of global advancement in several vital sectors through structural steps and fresh laws, including the Civil Aviation Law, which is considered one of the basic requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the main determinant of airport and air navigation service facility licenses, along with the law scrapping the Public Authority for Roads and Land Transport (PART).





Pope Leo XIV delivers the Urbi et Orbi (Latin for ‘to the city and to the world’ ) Christmas’ Day blessing from the main balcony of St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican, Thursday, Dec. 25, 2025. (AP)

# Pope remembers Gaza’s suffering in 1st Christmas homily, calls for peace

VATICAN CITY, Dec 25, (AP): Pope Leo XIV during his first Christmas Day homily on Thursday remembered the people of Gaza “exposed for weeks to rain, wind and cold” and said the world’s many conflicts can only be silenced through dialogue.

Leo led the Christmas Day Mass from the central altar beneath the balustrade of St. Peter’s Basilica, adorned with floral garlands and clusters of red poinsettias. White flowers were set at the feet of a statue of Mary, mother of Jesus, whose birth is celebrated on Christmas Day.

Recalling that God was made flesh through Jesus’s birth in a manger in Bethlehem, Leo likened God’s word to “a fragile tent among us.”

“How then can we not think of the tents in Gaza, exposed for weeks to rain, wind and cold; and of those so many other refugees and displaced persons on every continent, or of the makeshift shelters of thousands of homeless people in our own cities,” Leo said.

The pontiff also recalled the fragility of “defenseless populations, tried by so many wars,” and of “young people forced to take up arms, who on the front lines feel the sense-

lessness of what is asked of them, and the falsehoods that fill the pompous speeches of those who send them to their deaths.”

Leo underlined that peace can emerge only through dialogue.

“There will be peace when our monologues are interrupted and, enriched by listening, we fall to our knees before the humanity of the other,” he said.

Thousands of people packed the Basilica for the pope’s first Christmas Day Mass, holding aloft their smartphones to capture images of the opening procession.

Leo will later deliver the traditional Christmas message from a loggia overlooking St. Peter’s Square, where the faithful were gathering beneath a steady rain. The “Urbi et Orbi” blessing - Latin for “to the City and the World” - serves as a summary of the woes facing the world this year.

This Christmas season marks the winding down of the Holy Year celebrations, which will close on Jan. 6, the Catholic Epiphany holiday marking the visit of the three wise men to the baby Jesus in Bethlehem.

## Christmas calls with kids mix festivity and political commentary

# Trump talks Santa, takes jabs at left

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla., Dec 25, (AP): US President Donald Trump marked Christmas Eve by quizzing children calling in about what presents they were excited about receiving, while promising to not let a “bad Santa” infiltrate the country and even suggesting that a stocking full of coal may not be so bad.

Vacationing at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, the president and first lady Melania Trump participated in the tradition of talking to youngsters dialing into the North American Aerospace Defense Command, which playfully tracks Santa’s progress around the globe.

“We want to make sure that Santa is being good. Santa’s a very good person,” Trump said while speaking to kids ages 4 and 10 in Oklahoma. “We want to make sure that he’s not infiltrated, that we’re not infiltrating into our country a bad Santa.”

He didn’t elaborate.

Trump has often marked Christmas-es past with criticisms of his political enemies, including in 2024, when he posted, “Merry Christmas to the Radical Left Lunatics.” During his first term, Trump wrote online early on Dec. 24, 2017, targeting a top FBI official he believed was biased against him, as well as the news media.

Shortly after wrapping up Wednesday’s Christmas Eve calls, in fact, he returned to that theme, posting: “Merry Christmas to all, including the Radical Left Scum that is doing everything possible to destroy our Country, but are failing badly.”

But Trump was in a jovial mood while talking with the kids. He even said at one point that he “could do this all day long” but likely would have to get back to more pressing matters like efforts to quell the fighting in Russia’s

war with Ukraine.

When an 8-year-old from North Carolina, asked if Santa would be mad if no one leaves cookies out for him, Trump said he didn’t think so. “But I think he’ll be very disappointed.”

“You know, Santa’s - he tends to be a little bit on the cherubic side. You know what cherubic means? A little on the heavy side,” Trump joked. “I think Santa would like some cookies.”

The president and first lady Melania Trump sat side-by-side and took about a dozen calls between them. At one point, while his wife was on the phone and Trump was waiting to be connected to another call, he noted how little attention she was paying to him: “She’s able to focus totally, without listening.”

Asked by an 8-year-old girl in Kansas what she’d like Santa to bring, the answer came back, “Uh, not coal.”

## Europe

**Russian forces capture settlement:** The Russian Defense Ministry said on Thursday that units of its Southern Group of Forces had taken control of the settlement of Sviato-Pokrovsk in the Donetsk region.

“As a result of decisive actions, units of the Southern Group of Forces liberated the settlement of Sviato-Pokrovsk in the Donetsk region,” the ministry said in a statement.

Additionally, Russian air defense systems shot down six aerial bombs, one U.S.-made HIMARS rocket, and 472 fixed-wing unmanned aerial vehicles in the special military operation zone over the past 24 hours, the ministry added. (Xinhua)

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**Demilitarized zone mullied:** Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he would be willing to withdraw troops from the country’s eastern industrial heartland as part of a plan to end Russia’s war, if Moscow also pulls back and the area becomes a demilitarized zone monitored by international forces.

The proposal offered another potential compromise on control of the Donbas region, which has

## Speech to focus on the theme of pilgrimage

# King Charles III leads family to church

LONDON, Dec 25, (AP): King Charles III led his family to church on foot Thursday, hours before his annual Christmas Day speech to the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth was expected to focus on the theme of pilgrimage.

Charles and Queen Camilla, along with the Prince and Princess of Wales, William and Kate, and their children, Princes George and Louis and Princess Charlotte, and extended family walked to St. Mary Magdalene Church on the king’s private Sandringham Estate.

The location is about 100 miles north of London, where Charles recorded the address from Westminster Abbey, the landmark known for the lavish coronations and royal weddings it has hosted for more than 1,000 years.

The abbey is also the focus of an annual pilgrimage to the tomb of Edward the Confessor, which lies at the heart of the church. Edward, a monk-like monarch, was canonized as a saint in 1161.

The monarch’s annual holiday message is watched by millions of people in the U.K. and across the Commonwealth, a voluntary association of 56 independent nations, most of which have historic ties to Britain. The prerecorded speech is broadcast at 3 p.m., when many families are enjoying their traditional Christmas lunch.

The speech is one of the rare occasions when Charles, 77, is able to voice his own views and doesn’t seek guidance from the government. It usually has a strong religious framework, reflects current issues and sometimes draws on the monarch’s personal experiences.

This year’s address comes just two weeks after Charles made a deeply personal television appearance in which he said “good news” from his doctors meant that he would be able to reduce his treatment for cancer in the new year.

The king was diagnosed with a still undisclosed form of cancer in early 2024. Buckingham Palace says his treatment is now moving



Britain’s King Charles III and Queen Camilla leave after attending Christmas Day service at St Mary Magdalene Church in Sandringham, Norfolk, England, Thursday, Dec. 25, 2025. (AP)

to a “precautionary phase” and his condition will be monitored to ensure his continued recovery.

Charles recorded last year’s speech at Fitzrovia Chapel, which was once part of the now demolished Middlesex Hospital. During that address, he honored care workers around the country and gave a special thanks to the doctors and nurses who supported him after his cancer diagnosis.

This year’s Christmas speech will be the fourth since Charles ascended to the throne after his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, died in September 2022.

# Back-to-back winter storms place flood-weary Southern Calif at risk

LOS ANGELES, Dec 25, (AP): Rain from a powerful winter storm that swept across Southern California has begun to taper off, but another storm system was on the horizon for Christmas Day with showers and possible thunderstorms.

Forecasters said Southern California could see its wettest Christmas in years and warned of flash flooding and mudslides. Areas scorched by wildfires in January saw evacuation warnings as heavy rains and gusty winds brought mudslides and debris flows.

Many flood areas were in burn scar zones, which were stripped of vegetation by fire and are less able to absorb water.

San Bernardino County firefighters said they rescued people trapped in cars Wednesday when mud and debris rushed down a road leading into Wrightwood, a resort town in the San Gabriel Mountains about 80 miles (130 kilometers) northeast of Los Angeles. It was not immediately clear how many were rescued.

Firefighters also went door to door to check homes, and the area was under a shelter-in-place order, officials said. An evacuation order was issued for Lytle Creek, also in the San Gabriel Mountains.

Travis Guenther and his family were trapped in Lytle Creek after roaring waters washed out the only bridge in or out of their neighborhood. More than a dozen neighbors took shelter at a community center or found hotel rooms.

“Everybody that left to go to work this morning is stuck,” he said. “Half the families are here, and half the fami-

lies are on the other side of the creek.”

Guenther said he had plenty of supplies and was coordinating with other in the community of about 280 people. Two nurses who live on his street offered to help anyone who may need medical attention.

Janice Quick, president of the Wrightwood Chamber of Commerce and a resident of the mountain town for 45 years, said a wildfire in 2024 left much of the terrain without tree coverage.

The storm also stranded Dillan Brown, his wife and 14-month-old daughter at a rented cabin in Wrightwood with almost no food and only enough diapers for about another day. Roads leading off the mountain and to a grocery store became blocked by rocks and debris, Brown said.

A resident learned of his situation and posted a call for help in a Facebook group. In less than an hour, neighbors showed up with more than enough supplies to ride out the storm, including bread, vegetables, milk, diapers and wipes.

“I think we’re a little sad and upset that we’re not going to be home with our families,” Brown said, but the “kindness shown is definitely an overwhelming feeling.”

Residents around burn scar zones from the Airport Fire in Orange County were also ordered to evacuate.

Areas along the coast including Malibu were under flood warnings until Wednesday evening, and wind and flood advisories were issued for much of the Sacramento Valley and the San Francisco Bay Area.

Several roads including a part of Interstate 5 near the Burbank Airport closed due to flooding.

The storms were the result of multiple atmospheric rivers carrying massive plumes of moisture from the tropics during one of the busiest travel weeks of the year.

Southern California typically gets half an inch to 1 inch (1.3 to 2.5 centimeters) of rain this time of year, but this week many areas could see between 4 and 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters) with even more in the mountains, National Weather Service meteorologist Mike Wofford said.

Heavy snow and gusts created “near white-out conditions” in parts of the Sierra Nevada and made mountain pass travel treacherous. Officials said there was a “considerable” avalanche risk around Lake Tahoe, and a winter storm warning was in effect until Friday morning.

Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency in six counties to allow state assistance in storm response.

The state deployed emergency resources and first responders to several coastal and Southern California counties, and the California National Guard was on standby.

The California Highway Patrol reported a seemingly weather-related crash south of Sacramento in which a Sacramento sheriff’s deputy died. James Caravall, who was with the agency for 19 years, was apparently traveling at an unsafe speed, lost control on a wet road and crashed into a power pole, CHP Officer Michael Harper said via email.



Left: A resident sweeps water and mud in her house after flooding Wednesday, Dec. 24, 2025, in Wrightwood, Calif. Right: A car sits buried in mud after flooding Wednesday, Dec. 24, 2025, in Wrightwood, Calif. (AP)



Russian President Vladimir Putin, right, and Russian State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin shake hands prior to a meeting of the State Council on training professionals for Russian economy at the St. George’s Hall of the Grand Kremlin Palace in Moscow, Russia, Thursday, Dec. 25, 2025. (AP)

kov declined to share further details. (AP)

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**EU slams travel restrictions:** The European Commission on Wednesday strongly condemned a U.S. decision to impose travel restrictions on five European individuals, including former European Commissioner Thierry Breton, warning it would act “swiftly and decisively” to defend the bloc’s regulatory autonomy if needed.

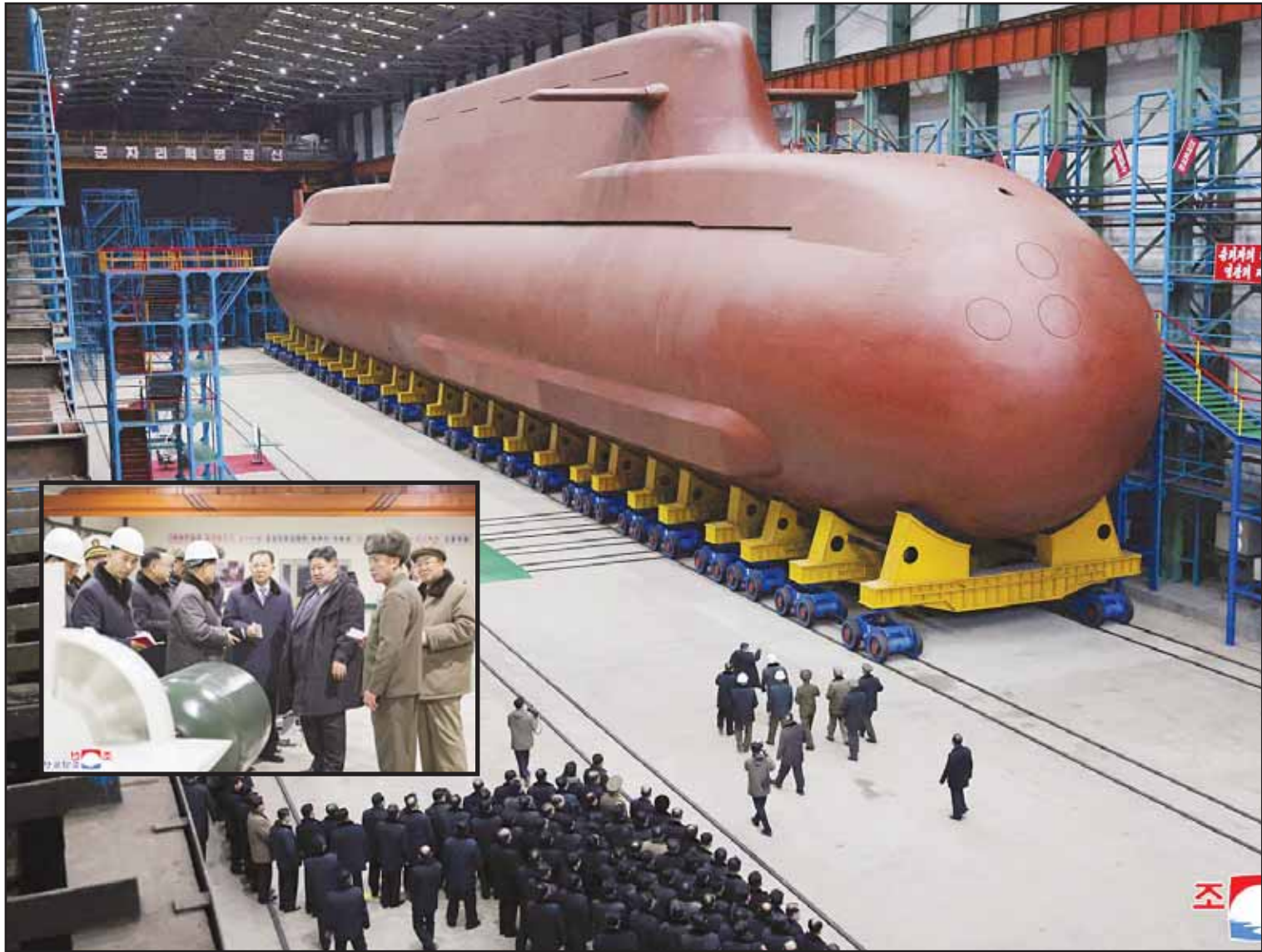
“Freedom of expression is a fundamental right in Europe and a shared core value with the United States across the democratic world,” a Commission spokesperson said in an attributable response to Xinhua.

The spokesperson stressed that the European Union is “an open, rules-based single market,” and retains the sovereign right to regulate economic activity in line with its democratic values and international commitments.

The EU’s digital rules are designed to ensure “a safe, fair, and level playing field for all companies,” and are applied fairly and without discrimination, the spokesperson said.

The Commission has requested clarifications from U.S. authorities and remains engaged, the spokesperson added. (Xinhua)





In this undated photo provided Thursday, Dec. 25, 2025, by the North Korean government, its leader Kim Jong Un (inset) inspects a nuclear-powered submarine under construction at an undisclosed location in North Korea. (AP)

## North Korea signals new era in nuke naval power

SEOUL, Dec 25, (AP): North Korea on Thursday displayed apparent progress in the construction of a nuclear-powered submarine, with state media photos showing a largely completed hull, as leader Kim Jong Un condemned rival South Korea’s push to acquire the technology.

North Korea’s official Korean Central News Agency said Kim visited a shipyard to inspect the construction of what the North describes as an 8,700-ton-class nuclear-propelled submarine, which the leader has called a crucial step in the modernization and nuclear armament of North Korea’s navy. The North has indicated it plans to arm the submarine with nuclear weapons, calling it a “strategic guided missile submarine” or a “strategic nuclear attack submarine.”

During the visit, Kim described South Korea’s efforts to acquire its own nuclear-powered submarine, which have been backed by U.S. President Donald Trump, as an “offensive act” that severely violates the North’s security and maritime sovereignty.

He said that the South Korean plan further underscores the need to advance and nuclear-arm North Korea’s navy, and claimed that the completion of his nuclear-powered submarine would be an “epoch-making” change in strengthening its nuclear war deterrent against what he called enemy threats.

The agency did not specify when Kim visited the shipyard but released photos showing him inspecting a huge, burgundy-colored vessel, coated with what appears to be anti-corrosion paint, under construction inside an assembly hall with senior officials and his daughter. It was the first time North Korean state media had released images of the submarine since March, when they mostly showed the lower sections of the vessel.

It was not immediately clear how close North Korea is to completing the vessel. But because submarines are typically built from the inside out, the release of what appears to be a largely completed hull suggests that many core components, including the engine and possibly the reactor, are already in place, said Moon Keun-sik, a submarine expert at Seoul’s Hanyang University.

“Showing the entire vessel now seems to indicate that most of the equipment has already been installed and it is just about ready to be launched into the water,” said Moon, a former submarine officer in the South Korean navy, who believes the North Korean submarine could possibly be tested at sea within months.

A nuclear-powered submarine was one item on a long wish list of sophisticated weaponry that Kim announced during a major political conference in 2021 to cope with what he called growing U.S.-led military threats. Other weapons were solid-fueled intercontinental ballistic missiles, hypersonic weapons, spy satellites and multi-warhead missiles.

North Korea has conducted a series of tests to develop some of those systems and recently unveiled a new naval destroyer, which Kim hailed as a major step toward expanding the operational range and preemptive strike capabilities of the country’s nuclear forces.

## Son of former Bangladesh PM returns after 17 yrs in exile with chance to lead

DHAKA, Dec 25, (AP): The son of a former prime minister of Bangladesh returned home Thursday after more than 17 years in self-imposed exile as a frontrunner to become the nation’s next leader in upcoming elections.

Tarique Rahman moved to London in 2008 for medical treatment with permission after he was tortured while in custody during a military-backed government that ruled from 2006 to 2008.

Rahman, 60, is the acting chairman of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, one of two major political parties in the South Asian nation of more than 170 million people. His return is seen as politically significant ahead of the next election set for Feb. 12 under the current interim government.

A flight carrying Rahman, his wife and daughter arrived at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in the capital, Dhaka, late Thursday morning among tight security measures.

Massive crowds of supporters spread across an area about 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) between the airport and a reception venue, where many had stayed overnight. A sea of people also waited at the venue. Rahman’s senior party leaders said earlier they expected “millions.”

After a reception, party officials said Rahman plans to go to a hospital to visit his critically ill mother, former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, who led a coalition government from 2001 until 2006 when a non-elected government backed by the military came

to power during a period of political chaos.

Zia, a former housewife, came to politics after her husband, former military chief and then President Ziaur Rahman, was assassinated in a military coup in 1981. She held power for the first time in 1991 after becoming a key leader in a nine-year movement against a former military dictator who was forced to resign during a mass uprising in 1990.

Zia is considered one of two key figures in Bangladesh politics along with Sheikh Hasina, who was sentenced to death in absentia in November. Hasina was convicted on charges of crimes against humanity involving the crackdown on a mass uprising that ended her 15-year rule in 2024. India has not approved requests to extradite Hasina since she fled there last year.



Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Acting Chairman, Tarique Rahman, waves to supporters at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka after returning from London, ending more than 17 years of self-imposed exile, Thursday, Dec. 25, 2025. (AP)



Indian devotees light candles during Christmas at St. Mary's Garrison church, in Jammu, India, Thursday, Dec. 25, 2025. (AP)

## Suspected suicide attack targets worshippers

### Bomb blast kills 5 at Nigeria mosque

LAGOS, Dec 25, (AP): A bomb exploded during prayers at a mosque in Nigeria’s northeastern city of Maiduguri on Wednesday night, killing five people in what police described as a likely suicide attack.

Police said that 35 people were also injured in the attack.

Nahum Daso, spokesperson for police command in the surrounding state of Borno, said in a statement that fragments of a suspected suicide vest were found at the site.

The bombing is the latest in a series of attacks in Nigeria’s troubled northern region, where the country is battling multiple armed groups, including Boko Haram and its splinter group, Islamic State West Africa Province.



People inspect the scene of a deadly bomb explosion inside a mosque in Maiduguri, Nigeria, Thursday, Dec. 25, 2025. (AP)

Several thousand people have been killed, with millions displaced from their homes since 2009, according to the United Nations.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, but the use of suicide bombers has been heavily attributed to Boko Haram, the Islamic militant group that has previously claimed responsibility for many such attacks across the north-eastern region.

Analysts say the group’s use of suicide bombers has subsided over the past few years, but it still has the capacity to launch such attacks.

In July 2024, a three-pronged suicide attack on a wedding ceremony in Borno raised the specter of a renewed use of the method by the militant group.

Civilian heroes rushed toward danger: PM

## Australia plans bravery awards after terror attack

NEWCASTLE, Australia, Dec 25, (AP): Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced plans Thursday for a national bravery award to recognize civilians and first responders who confronted “the worst of evil” during an antisemitic terror attack that left 15 dead and has cast a heavy shadow over the nation’s holiday season.

Albanese said he plans to establish a special honors system for those who placed themselves in harms way to help during the attack on a beachside Hanukkah celebration, like Ahmed al Ahmed, a Syrian-Australian Muslim who disarmed one of the assailants before being wounded himself.

Sajid Akram, who was killed by police during the Dec. 14 attack, and his 24-year-old son Naveed Akram are accused of perpetrating Australia’s worst massacre since 1996.

Speaking at a press conference after a Christmas Day lunch at a charitable foundation in Sydney, Albanese described a Christmas defined by a sharp contrast between extremist violence and the “best of humanity.”

“This Christmas is a different one because of the anti-terror and the terrorist attack motivated by ISIS and antisemitism,” Albanese said. “But at the same time as we have seen the worst of humanity, we have seen the bravery and kindness and compassion ... from those who rushed to danger.”

The proposed honors would recognize those who are nominated and recommended for bravery or meritorious awards under the existing Australian Honors and Awards system for their actions during and after the attack.

Just a day after pushing through the country’s toughest firearm laws, New South Wales state leader Chris Minns issued a plea for national solidarity, urging Australians to support their Jewish neighbors during what he described as a fortnight of “heartbreak and pain.”

“Everybody in Australia needs to wrap their arms around them and lift them up,” Minns said at the same press conference Thursday. “I want them to know that Australians have got their back. We’re in their corner and we’re going to help them get through this.”

The gun reforms which passed through the New South Wales state legislature on Christmas Eve include capping individual gun ownership at four and reclassifying high-risk weapons like pump-action firearms.

The legislation also tightens licensing by reducing permit terms to two years, restricting ownership to Australian citizens, and removing the review pathway for license denials.

“Gun reform alone will not solve hatred or extremism, but

we can’t fail to act on restricting access to weapons which could lead to further violence against our citizens, Minns said earlier in the week when introducing the proposed laws.

Other new laws will ban the public display of terrorist symbols and grant police expanded powers to restrict public gatherings in specific areas following terrorist incidents.

Albanese has also announced plans to tighten Australia’s already strict gun laws.

A man accused of shooting dead 15 people at Sydney’s Bondi Beach in an antisemitic attack faced a lengthy delay in getting a gun license because of a bureaucratic mishap, not because he raised suspicions, a state government leader said on Tuesday.

Sajid Akram, who was killed by police during the attack, and his 24-year-old son Naveed Akram are accused of assassinating hundreds of Jews celebrating Hanukkah on Dec. 14, in Australia’s worst mass shooting since 1996.

Questions have been raised about how the 50-year-old father came to legally own six rifles and shotguns.

New South Wales Premier Chris Minns on Tuesday con-



In this photo released by the Prime Minister office, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese meets Ahmed al Ahmed at St George Hospital in Sydney, Tuesday, Dec. 16, 2025. (AP)

firmed that the father applied for a state license to own firearms in 2000, three years before it was granted. The process typically takes six to 10 weeks.

“The latest information that we have is that there was a real mess in relation to the bureaucracy when it comes to gun licenses and the delays related to that - not a specific threat” posed by the father, Minns told reporters.

Reporters asked Minns on Monday why the father was allowed to own guns when he shared his Sydney home with Naveed Akram, who had been investigated in 2019 by the spy agency Australian Security Intelligence Organization over his extremist links.

“I don’t know. I’d give anything to go back a week, month, two years, to ensure that didn’t happen. But we need to make sure that we take steps so that it never happens again,” Minns said.

A wide ranging and powerful form of public investigation known as a royal commission will examine circumstances surrounding the massacre and the surge of antisemitism in Australia since the war between Israel and Hamas began in 2023.

New South Wales Parliament was asked this week to pass laws that Minns said would provide the state with Australia’s toughest gun laws.

Experts say video of the attack show the gunmen apparently using guns with straight-pull mechanisms, which enable more rapid fire than a comparable bolt-action mechanism.

Straight-pull guns would not be available to recreational shooters such as Sajid Akram under the proposed new laws.

The new restrictions would include making Australian citizenship a condition of qualifying for a gun license. That would have excluded Sajid Akram, who was an Indian citizen with a permanent resident visa.

A government decision to refuse a gun license, for reasons including spy agencies’ suspicions, could no longer be appealed under the proposed reforms.

Recreational shooters would be allowed to own a maximum of four guns. Farmers and sports shooters would be allowed up to 10.

There are currently no limits in New South Wales. One individual currently has 298 guns registered in his name.

Farmers’ groups have complained that 10 guns won’t be enough for some. The Nationals party, which represents rural voters, opposed the proposed laws.

Lat/Am

Trump ally clinches Honduras presidency:

Trump-backed candidate Nasry Asfura won Honduras’ presidential election, electoral authorities said Wednesday afternoon, ending a weeks-long count that has whittled away at the credibility of the Central American nation’s fragile electoral system.

The election is continuing Latin America’s swing to the right, coming just a week after Chile chose the far-right politician José Antonio Kast as its next president.

Asfura, of the conservative National Party, received 40.27% of the vote in the Nov. 30 vote, edging out four-time candidate Salvador Nasralla of the conservative Liberal Party, who finished with 39.53% of the vote. (AP)



Asfura

Bolsonaro hospitalized for surgery:

Former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro was admitted to the DF Star Hospital in the capital Brasilia on Wednesday morning, where he will undergo surgery for an inguinal hernia.

The procedure, scheduled for Thursday, was recommended by private physicians and experts from the Federal Police with authorization from Justice Alexandre de Moraes of the Supreme Federal Court.

Bolsonaro, 70, was taken to the hospital under police custody. His hospitalization is taking place in an isolated area of the hospital, separate from other patients. By order of the Supreme Federal Court, he is under constant surveillance, with officers stationed 24 hours a day outside his hospital room, and additional security personnel inside and outside the hospital. (Xinhua)

‘Quarantine Venezuelan oil’: The White House has ordered the U.S. military to focus almost exclusively on enforcing a “quarantine” of Venezuelan oil for at least the next two months, Reuters reported on Wednesday, citing a U.S. official.

“While military options still exist, the focus is to first use economic pressure by enforcing sanctions to reach the outcome the White House is looking,” the official said. (Xinhua)



# Kuwait oil price rises to \$61.61

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (KUNA): Price of Kuwaiti oil rose by 24 cents to USD 61.61 per barrel in Wednesday’s trading, compared to USD 61.37 pb the previous day, according to Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Thursday. Globally, price of Brent crude fell by 14 cents to USD 62.24 pb, while West Texas Intermediate crude fell by 3 cents to USD 58.29 pb.

# Business

On the occasion of the New Year holiday and as part of its support for the ‘Diraya’ campaign

## Gulf Bank advises updating contact information & activating notifications before traveling

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: As part of its ongoing support for the “Diraya” campaign, and on the occasion of the New Year holiday, Gulf Bank has provided a set of valuable tips to help travelers manage their finances wisely, protect their banking information, and ensure a comfortable and secure travel experience.

Gulf Bank advised all travelers to update their contact information with the bank to ensure prompt communication in the event of any unusual activity.

The bank also emphasized the importance of activating instant notifications through the mobile application, allowing customers to receive real-time alerts for every transaction made on their accounts or bank cards.

This enables them to monitor their spending and verify transactions with ease.

The bank also presented a set of important guidelines that are recommended to be followed before, during, and after travel to ensure a pleasant journey, as follows:

**Before You Travel**

- Ensure your bank cards are valid throughout your travel period.
- Check your account balance and confirm that your credit limit is sufficient to cover travel expenses.
- Activate SMS and push notifications to receive real-time alerts on all financial transactions. Review every message carefully to confirm the validity of each transaction.
- Download the Gulf Bank App and log in to keep track of your spending and card activity while traveling.
- Confirm you can access online banking ser-



‘Diraya’ campaign

vices before departure.

- Update antivirus and security software on devices used for online booking.
- Make sure your travel insurance is active and covers your entire trip.
- We recommend storing your valuables in Gulf Bank’s secure Safety Deposit Boxes.

**Tips While Traveling**

- Keep your cards in a secure place and never leave them unattended. Use your hotel’s safe to store valuables.
- Store your cards separately and avoid expos-

ing them to direct sunlight or high heat.

- Never share your card information or PIN with anyone. Ensure the card remains visible during any transaction.
- When using ATMs, check for any unusual attachments or signs of tampering. Cover the keypad when entering your PIN, and never accept assistance from strangers.
- Always review receipts carefully before signing or entering your PIN. Do not leave the “tip” or “total” fields blank.
- Check the payment terminal screen (POS)

and verify the merchant name and amount before confirming the transaction.

- Regularly monitor your card activity via the app or online banking.
- Activate international roaming or provide the bank with an alternative contact number for quick communication in case of emergencies.
- Avoid using public or unsecured Wi-Fi networks. If necessary, use a trusted VPN connection.
- If your card is lost or you suspect fraudulent activity, immediately freeze or temporarily block it through the app. You can also contact our Customer Service .
- Always choose to pay in the local currency to avoid additional currency conversion fees.
- Keep all your receipts and review them upon return to reconcile with your account statement.

**After Returning from Travel**

- It’s advisable to change your card PIN at any Gulf Bank branch or ATM.
- Review your card statement carefully to ensure there are no unauthorized transactions.
- Contact the bank immediately if you notice any discrepancies or suspicious activity.

The bank emphasized that it does not request personal information via email, text messages, or phone calls.

It advised customers not to click on any links received from untrusted sources, to update their passwords regularly, and to ensure the use of strong and unique passwords.

# Kuwait stock market ends session in positive territory

Main 50 Index records slight uptick

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (KUNA): **Boursa Kuwait ended Thursday’s trading session on a positive note, with its general index climbing 16.01 points, or 0.18 percent, to close at 8,978.07 points. The market witnessed a total trading volume of 152.5 million shares across 11,294 cash transactions, amounting to KD 43.5 million (around USD 132.6 million).**

The Main Market Index edged up by 15.83 points, or 0.19 percent, to close at 8,276.51 points. Trading

in this segment reached 63.6 million shares through 5,621 transactions, with a total value of KD 13 million (approximately USD 39.6 million).

Similarly, the Premier Market Index recorded an increase of 16.85 points, or 0.18 percent, to end at 9,595.75 points. About 88.8 million shares changed hands across 5,673 transactions, valued at KD 30.4 million (around USD 92.7 million).

Meanwhile, the Main 50 Index posted a modest gain of 5.22 points, or 0.06 percent, closing at 8,700.29 points. Trading volume in this category amounted to 37.2 million shares through 3,213 transactions, worth KD 8.17 million (approximately USD 24.9 million).

## Unveiling high-impact leadership initiative

# Taher Group launches Brian Tracy Solutions™ in Kuwait and Mideast

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Taher Group For Training has announced the first-of-its-kind launch of Brian Tracy Solutions™ in the State of Kuwait and the Middle East an initiative considered one of the most significant leadership and organizational development milestones in the region in recent years.

These solutions are being introduced at this level for the first time and are designed for a select, elite audience of leaders, CEOs, entrepreneurs, and decision-makers. The programs are based on globally recognized methodologies developed by Brian Tracy, one of the world’s leading authorities on leadership and high performance, author of 92 books, and trainer of more than five million individuals worldwide.

Dr. Fawaz Khaled Alkhateeb, Managing Partner of Taher Group, stated that this initiative “represents a qualitative leap in the development of Gulf and Arab human capital and addresses a clear gap in the training industry particularly in high-level executive training while aligning with Kuwait’s and the Gulf region’s strategic direction toward building a conscious, productive generation capable of competing globally.”

Dr. Adel Al-Kout, internationally accredited Brian Tracy trainer, explained that these solutions “target entrepreneurs and change-makers by equipping them with practical, applicable tools to close major deals, enhance advanced leadership capabilities, and achieve exceptional performance—from ground zero to the top.”

In the same context, Mrs. Kanwal McKenzie, CEO of the Training Sector, emphasized that Brian Tracy Solutions™ programs “are designed to deliver a premium, high-quality learning experience tailored to the needs of regional leaders, offering measurable, application-based models with immediate impact on workplace performance.”

Taher Group For Training has invited leaders, decision-makers, CEOs, and entrepreneurs seeking to elevate their institutional and personal performance to register promptly for these programs, noting the limited number of seats and the specialized target audience. The programs represent a rare training opportunity being offered at this level for the first time in Kuwait and the region.



Kuwait hosts regional launch of Brian Tracy Solutions.

- Brian Tracy, one of the world’s foremost experts in leadership and high performance
- Taher Group For Training launches his programs in Kuwait and the Middle East

Brian Tracy Solutions™ are now available through Taher Group as part of a specialized portfolio of advanced leadership and management programs, built on curricula that aim to develop institutions and cultivate successful, visionary individuals in line with the latest global standards in leadership and performance.

# UIC magazine examines market development and liquidity trends

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The Union of Investment Companies (UIC) has announced the release of the twenty-fourth issue of The Investor magazine, with its main theme dedicated to the concept of the Market Maker. This focus reflects the magazine’s ongoing commitment to highlighting key issues related to the development of capital markets and examining mechanisms that enhance liquidity, improve trading efficiency, and support market stability, through a professional perspective that keeps pace with the evolving dynamics of financial markets.

This issue is published within the broader knowledge-based and awareness-raising role undertaken by UIC, through the provision of specialized content aimed at deepening professional understanding of issues related to the financial and investment sectors. It also provides a platform for discussion and analysis of topics that directly affect market structure and operating mechanisms, thereby enhancing investment awareness and serving a wide spectrum of stakeholders interested in economic affairs.

The issue presents a comprehensive overview of the market maker concept, outlining its roles and operational mechanisms in financial markets, particularly its function in continuously providing buy and sell orders. This contributes to facilitating trading activity, improving price discovery efficiency, and narrowing price spreads, thereby enhancing transparency and continuity in market transactions. The topic is addressed through an explanatory and analytical approach that focuses on clarifying the concept and its practical dimensions.

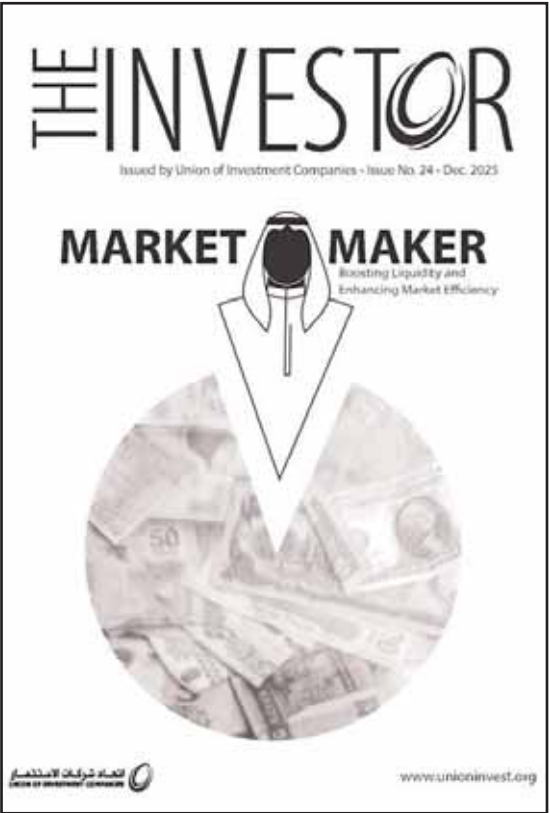
The issue also explores the development of market-making activities in the State of Kuwait by reviewing the general framework of the experience and discussing the associated regulatory and operational aspects, within the context of market development programs and approved modernization initiatives. It highlights a number of practical applications that reflect the trajectory of this industry’s evolution and the qualitative value it adds to the overall market infrastructure.

In addition, the issue examines the relationship between liquidity levels, market depth, and the attractiveness of markets to investors, through an analytical perspective focusing on factors such as ease of entry and exit, trading stability, and the clarity of pricing mechanisms—key considerations for investors when evaluating markets. This discussion is presented within a broader framework that links these elements to ongoing efforts to develop financial markets and enhance their competitiveness.

The issue features in-depth interviews with senior executives from Kuwait Investment Company, the main sponsor of this edition. In this context, Mr. Fawaz Sulaiman Al-Ahmad, Chief Executive Officer of Kuwait Investment Company (KIC), affirmed that “Kuwait’s capital markets remain fundamentally resilient,” noting that “the State’s prudent management of public finances, its stable monetary framework, and its forward-looking regulatory approach together provide a strong platform for long-term sustainable growth.” He added that these reforms “send a clear message that Kuwait is firmly committed to a path of serious structural reform and the development of a deeper financial market over the long term.”

For his part, Mr. Sulaiman Zaid Al-Musallam, Vice President – Market Maker Department, Asset Management Sector at Kuwait Investment Company (KIC), stated that “market-making activity has become a core extension of the Company’s asset management and trading capabilities,” explaining that this activity “enhances execution efficiency and investor confidence, not only for our clients but for the broader market as well.” He emphasized that market making “strengthens the Company’s position as a trusted liquidity provider and as a driving force behind the accelerated development witnessed in Kuwait’s capital markets.”

Mr. Abdullah Hamad Al-Terkait, UIC Chairman and Editor-in-Chief of The Investor magazine, affirmed that dedicating this issue to the topic of market making aligns with UIC’s objective of addressing issues related to the development of capital markets and shedding light on concepts and mechanisms that en-



UIC The Investor issue cover

hance market efficiency and professional awareness. He noted that UIC is keen to deliver balanced content that enriches knowledge and serves professionals and stakeholders in the investment sector.

He added that The Investor magazine continues to play its role as a specialized knowledge platform by presenting financial and investment topics in a professional manner grounded in analysis and interpretation, with the aim of supporting constructive dialogue on issues related to market development and enhancing readers’ understanding of market mechanisms and trends.

In this context, UIC invites those interested in financial and investment affairs to review the twenty-fourth issue of The Investor magazine through its digital edition available on UIC’s website at [www.unioninvest.org](http://www.unioninvest.org). The magazine provides readers with access to specialized analytical content that addresses market-related topics in a clear and structured manner, offering in-depth perspectives on issues affecting the reality and evolution of capital markets. The digital edition offers a flexible means for readers to follow the content at any time and benefit from the analyses, interviews, and explanatory materials it includes, in line with the requirements of the digital age.

UIC also offers interested readers the opportunity to obtain a complimentary printed copy of The Investor magazine from the premises of UIC, reflecting its commitment to making specialized knowledge accessible to the widest possible audience and supporting its role in promoting financial and investment literacy. The printed edition serves as a valuable reference, containing analytical content and specialized interviews that contribute to enhancing investment awareness and fostering a deeper understanding of market mechanisms and their development.

This approach is consistent with UIC’s commitment to its educational and knowledge-based role, and its ongoing efforts to provide reliable platforms that contribute to raising the level of financial and investment literacy, enabling readers to access economic and investment issues through specialized sources, whether via digital platforms or printed publications.

In conclusion, UIC extends its sincere appreciation and gratitude to Kuwait Investment Company for sponsoring this issue, reaffirming The Investor magazine’s continued commitment to its knowledge-driven mission and its ongoing focus on issues related to the development of capital markets and the business environment, in alignment with national priorities and Kuwait’s future vision.



AI, digital tools to drive next wave of growth in Kuwait

Kuwait’s wealth grows 4.2% amid market evolution

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Kuwait’s financial wealth grew by 4.2% between 2023 to 2024, rising from \$271 billion to \$282 billion. Real assets saw a decline of 2.1%, valued at \$293 billion, with projected growth to \$330 billion by 2029. Liabilities remained stable at \$37 billion.

The Global Wealth Report 2025: Rethinking the Rules for Growth by Boston Consulting Group reveals that investable wealth is projected to grow from \$221 billion in 2024 to \$267 billion by 2029, with a 3.8% CAGR growth. Non-investable wealth, currently at \$61 billion, is expected to grow at 3.5% CAGR to reach \$72 billion by 2029.

Wealth continues to grow steadily but the dynamics behind that growth are shifting—and the implications for firms are profound. Most firms have leaned heavily on market performance, M&A, and advisor hiring. While these levers remain important, they’re not enough. The limiting factor for many firms isn’t opportunity, but their ability to capture it from within.

The firms gaining traction are investing in the capabilities that matter most: a clearer market presence, more deliberate client acquisition, better-equipped advisors, and earlier, more relevant engagement with rising generations. Technology plays a central role in scaling these capabilities.

Lukasz Rey, Managing Director and Partner, said: “Kuwait’s wealth management sector is entering a new phase where organic growth capabilities will separate leaders from followers.

Despite short-term headwinds in real assets, the fundamentals remain strong, and firms that invest in advisor development, digital transformation, and next-generation client strategies will capture disproportionate value in this evolving market.”

**The key Kuwait findings of BCG’s new proprietary analysis are:**

- Financial wealth totals \$282 billion in 2024, with strong growth projected to reach \$339 billion by 2029 (3.8% CAGR)
- Real assets amount to \$293 billion in 2024, expected to rise to \$330 billion by 2029 (CAGR: 2.4%)
- Liabilities remained stable at \$37 billion in 2024, with growth projected to \$42 billion by 2029 (CAGR: 2.8%)



Lukasz Rey, Managing Director and Partner BCG      Nabil Saadallah, Managing Director & Partner BCG

- Between 2023 and 2024, Kuwait’s financial wealth grew by 4.2%, rising from \$271 billion to \$282 billion.
- Real assets saw a decrease of 2.1%, reaching \$293 billion.
- Liabilities remained stable at \$37 billion.
- BCG projects investable wealth to rise from \$221 billion in 2024 to \$267 billion by 2029, growing at a CAGR of 3.8%
- Most firms today rely on market performance, M&A, and advisor recruitment to capture revenue; however, they must have the ability to innovate and build internal capabilities to outperform peers.

■ Equities & Currency & Deposits are the dominant asset classes in 2024, valued at \$97 billion and \$68 billion, respectively. They are projected to grow to \$113 billion and \$91 billion by 2029, with CAGRs of 3.1% and 5.9%.

■ Bonds, Life Insurance & Pensions reported a value of \$1 billion in 2024, and are projected to grow by 2.6% CAGR and 1.6% CAGR, respectively, by 2029.

■ Other assets (e.g., alternative investments) are substantial at \$115 billion in 2024, with a projected increase to \$133 billion by 2029, reflecting diversified portfolios (CAGR: 3%).

**Strategic Imperatives**

According to there port, organic growth is moving to the center of the performance agenda. The report identifies four high-impact levers for firms looking to elevate their organic growth engines:

- Brand Differentiation: Building trust and relevance through clear identity and messag-

ing while strengthening digital marketing

■ Gen AI-Driven Client Acquisition: Using a genetic AI to identify high-potential prospects, build comprehensive profiles, and enable highly personal outreaches

■ Data-Driven Recommendation Systems: By integrating data across all business lines, wealth managers can build a comprehensive view full of signals about what a client might need next

■ Next-Gen Client Engagement: Personalizing the client journey for younger investors with digital-native expectations

“Kuwait’s wealth management industry stands at an inflection point. While traditional asset classes facehead winds, the diversification into alternative investments and the strong performance in currency and deposits signal a maturing market. Companies that adopt AI for prospecting, tailor the onboarding experience, and leverage digital tools to enhance productivity are poised to lead the next growth surge,” added Nabil Saadallah, Managing Director and Partner at BCG.

As part of supporting all segments of society

KFH enhances accessibility with special needs-friendly branches

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: As part of its commitment to serving all segments of society, Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has allocated branches equipped with an array of features and services that cater to customers with special needs. These branches offer high-quality and seamless banking experience, underscoring KFH’s leadership in social responsibility.

These designated branches are located across Kuwait governorates in areas including Rawda, Al-Rehab, Mubarak Al-Kabeer, Zahra, Dahar and Saad Al-Abdullah.

KFH is keen on enabling all its customers with special needs to benefit from its banking services. Therefore, KFH has dedicated branches equipped with a thorough set of features and services that support its main objectives. These include designated parking for individuals with special needs and wheelchair accessible entrances, access to ATMs with headphone features, safety deposit

boxes, in addition to staff trained in sign language.

Additionally, account opening forms, contracts, and transaction documents are printed in Braille. Voice service is also available on the website, facilitating on-line banking transactions.

These facilities include providing trained staff to serve this customer, offering the necessary support to complete banking transactions, and ensuring alternative communication channels to address their specific requirements. In addition, the doors are equipped with sensors to facilitate smooth transitions between customers, automatically closing until the transaction is completed.

In partnership with the Public Authority for Disability Affairs (PADA), KFH is the first bank in Kuwait to launch a comprehensive program for integrating individuals with special needs by offering practical training programs and full-time employment opportunities.



A KFH branch

WTI crude declines to six-month lows on oversupply concerns

By KAMCO Invest

Crude oil prices registered consistent declines last week and traded at multi-month low levels led by concerns of oversupply in 2026. US crude grade WTI futures traded below the USD 60/b level at USD 57.44/b at the close of the week, the lowest in six months, while Brent futures were at two month lows at around the USD 61/b mark. The decline also reflected two consecutive weeks of growth in crude oil output in the US that reached near record levels. On the other hand, geopolitical issues, especially related to US and Venezuela and the continued escalation of issues between Ukraine and Russia provided support to crude oil prices. Also, a pickup in refining activity in China during November-2025 provided temporary support to prices, although several other datapoints signaled weakness in the broader economy.

On the supply side, almost all recent forecasts suggest an elevated oversupply situation in the oil market in 2026. The chief economist at Trafigura termed next year’s over supply as a “super glut” led by a wave of supplies against sluggish demand growth. Although he added that sustained buying from importers, mainly China, as well as adjusted supply plans from the US and OPEC+ producers could postpone or mitigate the oversupply situation. In its latest monthly report, the IEA forecasted a surplus of 3.84 mb/d next year, a lowered expectation from last month’s forecast of a surplus of 4.09 mb/d, about 4% of global consumption. Although elevated, this was for the first time since May-2025 that the agency has lowered its forecast for expected glut in 2026.

On the geopolitical front, there were news related to oil tanker seizures last week threatening supplies of crude oil globally. This included the US seizure of a sanctioned oil tanker off the coast of Venezuela aimed at targeting shadow tanker fleet selling oil to China and other nations. As per Reuters, close to 6 million barrels of crude oil was suspended after the seizure. The report said that the US preparing to intercept more ships transporting Venezuelan crude oil. In another instance, Iran also seized a foreign tanker in the Gulf of Oman last week carrying 6 million liters of fuel, as per reports. Meanwhile, despite several meetings between Russia and Ukrainian officials brokered by the US, there was no resolution to the ongoing war between the two nations. The latest escalations included attacks by Ukraine targeting the Atpisky oil refinery and an oil storage facility in the Volgograd region. Even Russia continued strikes on Ukrainian energy infrastructure. The refinery has a capacity of processing 180 thousand barrels of crude oil per day.

In terms of production, OPEC+ output increased by 43 tb/d during November-2025, as per OPEC secondary sources, to reach 43.1 mb/d. The increase was mainly led by higher production in Kazakhstan that partially recovered output to September-2025 levels. Oil output from OPEC producers remained almost flat m-o-m.



Oil Prices

Crude oil market remained volatile during December-2025 led by key economic events as well as geopolitical issues. Brent crude futures reached the highest levels in two weeks during the first week of the month as expectations built up for US rate cuts for the third time this year. The gains reflected expectations of a boost to economic growth due to the cuts and higher crude oil demand. On the geopolitical front, supply disruptions from Russia and Venezuela also added support to crude oil prices. As per Reuters, the failed talks between Russia and Ukraine has prompted the G7 countries and the European Union to replace a price cap on Russian crude oil exports with a full maritime services ban in order to curb oil revenues generated by Russia. The talks continues between the two countries even as drone attacks caused a fire at Russia’s Azov Sea port of Temryuk that handles LPG, oil products and petrochemicals. Prices declined in the subsequent weeks led by forecasts of record oversupply in the oil market.

In terms of monthly price trend, average crude oil prices saw declines across the board during November-2025 after showing sharp declines during October-2025. Average spot Brent crude oil price witnessed a decline of 1.6% to reach USD 63.6/b during November-2025, as compared to an average of USD 64.6/b during October-2025. On the other hand, average OPEC reference basket price witnessed a slightly smaller decline of 1.1% to reach USD 64.5/b as compared to USD 65.2/b during the previous month. Kuwait export grade crude prices

also witnessed a similar decline of 1.2% to average at USD 65.2/b during November-2025 vs. USD 66.0/b during October-2025. Average crude oil prices during the first eleven months of the year have seen double-digit declines this year with Brent spot falling by 14.4% while OPEC crude oil basket declining by 12.7% y-o-y. In terms of expectations, the consensus estimate for Brent crude remained consistent with last month’s expectations for the next three quarters while it was upgraded marginally for 2H-2026. As per consensus forecasts, crude oil is expected to reach USD 63/b by the end of 2026. That said, the EIA forecasts a relatively lower oil price next year reaching an average of USD 55.08/b next year.

**World Oil Demand**

Global oil demand growth forecast for 2025 was kept unchanged in the latest monthly report from OPEC at a growth of 1.3 mb/d with demand expected to reach 105.1 mb/d during the year. However, there were minor adjustments to estimates for the first three quarters of the year reflecting actual data from the producers. As per the OPEC report, demand in the OECD region saw a downward revision for Q1-2025 and Q2-2025 and a higher downward adjustment for 3Q-2025 aggregating to 0.05 mb/d in downward adjustments for the full year. Demand estimates for the OECD Asia Pacific region also underwent a downward revision for Q3-2025 and by 0.02 mb/d for full year 2025. These downward adjustments were almost fully offset by an upward revision to estimates for OECD Americas, mostly the US, during the last two quarters of the year. In the non-OECD region,

revisions were mainly done to estimates for Q3-2025 and Q4-2025 that fully offset the adjustments made to the data for the OECD region. At the country level, oil imports in China reached the highest level in more than two years during November-2025. According to government data, oil imports in China increased to 50.89 million metric tons, equivalent to 12.38 mb/d, last month, the highest in twenty-seven months. The y-o-y increase came in at 4.88% while monthly increase was even stronger at 5.24%. The imports during the first eleven months of the year were up by 3.2% to reach 521.87 million tons. Imports from Saudi Arabia increased during the month to a five-month high level reaching 1.59 mb/d while imports from Iran increased to 1.35 mb/d, the highest level since August-2025, as per Kpler. Russia was the third-biggest supplier with arrivals falling m-o-m to 1.19 mb/d during November-2025. Meanwhile, oil demand trend in India also showed healthy growth during November-2025 reaching the highest level in six months, as per data from India’s petroleum ministry. Total consumption reached 21.27 million tons of fuel during the month, up 3.0% y-o-y, led by pickup in activity in the construction and agriculture sectors after the end of the monsoon season. In terms of imports, crude oil from Russia increased to the highest level in five months and are expected to see elevated imports in December, before the implementation of sanctions from the US. In terms of oil demand in 2026, OPEC once again kept it’s forecast unchanged with a growth expectation of 1.4 mb/d to a total demand of 106.5 mb/d.

World Oil Supply

World oil supply witnessed another decline during November-2025 as compared to the previous month reflecting a decline in output mainly from OPEC+ producers along with producers outside this group. Total supply declined by 610 tb/d during November-2025 while total decline during the October-2025 and November-2025 stood at 1.5 mb/d from record supply of 109 mb/d in September-2025, according to data from the IEA. As per the IEA’s monthly report, OPEC+ accounted for 80% of the decline over the previous two months mainly reflecting output decline from Russia and Venezuela. As per the IEA, oil exports from Russia declined by 0.4 mb/d in November to 6.9 mb/d.

The monthly report from OPEC showed an upward revision to supply forecast for non-DoC liquids production as compared to the previous month’s estimates. As per OPEC, supply from non-DoC producers is expected to grow by 1 mb/d in 2025, an upward revision of 50 tb/d reflecting seasonality and latest data received. At the country level, the revision reflects higher output from the US. As per the latest weekly report from the EIA, oil production in the US has seen two consecutive weeks of growth until the first week of December-2025 with output near record high of 13.8 mb/d. Meanwhile, the monthly report from IEA forecasts a slightly lower production growth in 2025 at 3.0 mb/d, a downward revision from its previous month’s forecast of a growth of 3.1 mb/d, to reach 106.2 mb/d during the year.

The OPEC kept its forecast for non-DoC liquids production growth for 2026 unchanged at a growth of

0.6 mb/d to reach an average of 54.8 mb/d during the year. At the global level, the IEA has forecasted a slightly smaller supply growth next year at 2.4 mb/d (vs. previous forecast of 2.5 mb/d) to reach an average of 108.6 mb/d. For US oil production, the EIA has forecasted a slight decline in its forecasted output for the US. The agency now expects US oil production to reach 13.5 mb/d next year, a downward revision from its earlier forecast of 13.6 mb/d.

OPEC Oil Production & Spare Capacity

OPEC crude oil production declined marginally during November-2025 after three consecutive months of growth until October-2025, led by a fall in production reported by a majority of the producers in the group. Data from Bloomberg showed OPEC output staying above the 29.0 mb/d mark but declining by 10 tb/d to reach 29.09 mb/d during November-2025 from 29.1 mb/d in October-2025. The small decline was led by a fall in production in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Gabon, Iraq and Equatorial Guinea that was partially offset by an increase in output mainly from the UAE. Based on the data for November-2025, the spare capacity for OPEC producers stood at 4.6 mb/d or 13.7% of the total production capacity, as per Bloomberg estimates. Data from OPEC secondary sources showed average OPEC production reaching 28.48 mb/d during November-2025, in line with the production in October-2025 which was the highest in 30 months. However, at the country level, the OPEC report showed higher output mainly in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait and Algeria was fully offset by decline in output mainly in

Venezuela, Iraq and Iran. Output from the broader DoC producers group showed a production increase of 43 tb/d to reach an average of 43.07 mb/d during November-2025. The increase was solely led by higher output from non-OPEC DoC producers, mainly Kazakhstan that partially recovered its output from a sharp decline during October-2025.

In its latest monthly meeting, OPEC+ reiterated its plan to pause production increases during the first quarter of 2026. The group has announced output increase of 2.9 mb/d since the start of April-2025 until December-2025. The group still has around 3.24 mb/d of output cuts in place despite the hikes announced this year. However, a report from Bloomberg NEF showed that OPEC+ output fell further below the quota ceiling, excluding compensatory cuts by earlier overproducers.

Oil production in Kazakhstan recovered partially to 1.745 mb/d during November-2025, up by 36 tb/d, after reporting a decline in of 152 tb/d in October-2025. The increase came after the US granted exemptions for Lukoil’s projects in Kazakhstan, including the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, Tengizchevroil, and the Karachaganak oil and gas project in mid-November. However, the recent airstrikes by Ukraine that damaged the Caspian Pipeline Consortium during maintenance work could result in reduced output in the near term.



Five east coast wind projects paused for 90 days

# Trump admin halts offshore wind projects over security concerns

WASHINGTON, Dec 25, (AP): The Trump administration has directed five large-scale wind projects under construction off the East Coast to suspend their activities for at least 90 days, according to letters from the Interior Department obtained by The Associated Press, which provide new details on the government’s move to pause the offshore ventures.

During the pause, the Interior Department will coordinate with project developers “to determine whether the national security threats posed by this project can be adequately mitigated,” the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management said in a letter to project developers. The 90-day period can be extended if necessary, the ocean management agency said.

The administration announced Monday it was suspending the offshore wind projects because of national security concerns. Its announcement did not indicate whether the pause was limited, nor did it reveal specifics about the national security concerns.

It was the latest step by the Trump administration to hobble offshore wind in its push against renewable energy sources. It comes two weeks after a federal judge struck down President Donald Trump’s executive order blocking wind energy projects, calling it unlawful. The move angered local officials who have supported the projects and posed a new threat to offshore wind development that has faced increasing pressures since Trump took office.

The letter to the developers said the Defense Department completed a recent assessment regarding the national security implications of offshore wind projects and provided senior leadership at Interior with new classified information, “including the rapid evolution of relevant adversary technologies and the resulting direct impacts to national security from offshore wind projects.”

The potential impacts are “heightened by the projects’ sensitive location on the East Coast and the potential to cause serious, immediate and irreparable harm to our great nation,” the letter said. The letter was signed by Matthew Giacona, the acting director of BOEM and a former lobbyist for the National Ocean Industries Association.

Kirk Lippold, a national security expert and former Commander of the USS Cole, said concerns about wind turbines’ possible effects on radar systems “have been known for decades.”



Wind turbine bases, generators and blades are positioned at The Portsmouth Marine terminal that is the staging area for Dominion Energy’s wind turbine project Monday Dec. 22, 2025, in Portsmouth, Va. (AP)

While Interior Secretary Doug Burgum said new classified information indicates turbines may pose a national security threat, “I want to know what’s changed?” Lippold said in an interview on Tuesday. “What threat vector has changed? Have the Chinese developed new weapons or techniques that we’re unaware of and can’t fight against?”

“To my knowledge, nothing has changed in the threat environment that would drive us to stop any offshore wind programs,” he said.

House Democrats, meanwhile, have called for an

ethics investigation into Giacona’s actions since taking over at the agency that manages offshore waters. Giacona’s work may directly overlapped with his prior lobbying work for the ocean industries group, Democrats said.

A spokesperson for Interior said Giacona “is a highly qualified and ethically sound employee who is working tirelessly on behalf of this administration to make real change for the American people.”

Wind proponents slammed the administration’s move to suspend the projects, saying it was another

blow in an ongoing attack by the Trump administration against clean energy.

Democratic governors of four affected states - Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and New York - issued a joint statement Tuesday vowing to fight the action, which they said “lands like a lump of dirty coal for the holiday season for American workers, consumers and investors.”

Pausing active leases, including for projects that are nearly completed, “defies logic, will hurt our bid for energy independence, will drive up costs for America’s ratepayers and will make us lose thousands of good-paying jobs,” the governors said. “It also threatens grid reliability that is needed to keep the lights on.”

The statement was issued by Govs. Ned Lamont of Connecticut, Maura Healey of Massachusetts, Kathy Hochul of New York and Dan McKee of Rhode Island.

Meanwhile, two Democratic senators said the lease suspensions mean that congressional efforts to approve bipartisan permitting reform are “dead in the water.”

The House approved legislation last week aimed at speeding up permitting reviews for new energy and infrastructure projects, seeking to meet growing demand for electricity.

The bill would also limit judicial review as Congress seeks to enact the most significant change in decades to the National Environmental Policy Act, a bedrock environmental law that requires federal agencies to consider a project’s possible environmental impacts before it is approved.

Sens. Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island and Martin Heinrich of New Mexico said Monday that with House approval, “there was a deal to be had that would have taken politics out of permitting, made the process faster and more efficient, and streamlined grid infrastructure improvements nationwide.”

But they said any deal would have to be administered by the Trump administration, whose “reckless and vindictive assault on wind energy” destroys the trust needed for true permitting reform.

“There is no path to permitting reform if this administration refuses to follow the law,” the senators said. Whitehouse is the top Democrat on the Senate environment panel, while Heinrich is the senior Democrat on the committee on energy and natural resources.

# US employment claims plunge to 214,000 amid signs of weakness

Labor market cools even as claims remain low

WASHINGTON, Dec 25, (AP): The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits fell last week and remain at historically healthy levels despite some signs that the labor market is weakening.

U.S. applications for jobless claims for the week ending Dec. 20 fell by 10,000 to 214,000 from the previous week’s 224,000, the Labor Department reported Wednesday. That’s below the 232,000 new applications forecast of analysts surveyed by the data firm FactSet.

The weekly report was released a day early due to the Christmas holiday.

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

Last week, the government reported that

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

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

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

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

Hiring has clearly lost momentum, hobbled by uncertainty over President Donald Trump’s tariffs and the lingering effects of the high interest rates the Fed engineered in 2022 and 2023 to rein in an outburst of pandemic-induced inflation. Since March, job creation has fallen to an average 35,000 a month, compared to 71,000 in the year ended in March.

Earlier this month, the Federal Reserve trimmed its benchmark lending rate by a quarter-point, its third straight cut.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell said the committee reduced borrowing costs out of concern that the job market is even weaker than it appears. Powell said that recent job figures could be revised lower by as much as 60,000, which would mean employers have actually been shedding an average of about 25,000 jobs a month since the spring.

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

The Labor Department’s report Wednesday also showed that the four-week average of claims, which evens out some of the week-to-week volatility, fell by 750 to 216,750.

The total number of Americans filing for jobless benefits for the previous week ending Dec. 13 rose by 38,000 to 1.92 million, the government said.

## Home loan rates flat as Fed cuts support market

# US 30-year mortgage rate dips to 6.18%

WASHINGTON, Dec 25, (AP): The average rate on a 30-year U.S. mortgage ticked down modestly this week, remaining in the same narrow range of the past two months.

The average long-term mortgage rate fell to 6.18% from 6.21% last week, mortgage buyer Freddie Mac said Wednesday. A year ago, the rate averaged 6.85%.

Borrowing costs on 15-year fixed-rate mortgages, popular with homeowners refinancing their home loans, rose this week. The rate averaged 5.50%, up from 5.47% last week. A year ago it averaged 6%, Freddie Mac said.

Mortgage rates are influenced by several factors, from the Federal Reserve’s interest rate policy decisions to bond market investors’ expectations for the economy and inflation. They generally follow the trajectory of the 10-year Treasury yield, which lenders use as a guide to pricing home loans. The 10-year yield was at 4.15% at midday Wednesday, up

modestly from last week’s 4.12%.

The average rate on a 30-year mortgage has been mostly holding steady in recent weeks since Oct. 30 when it dropped to 6.17%, its lowest level in more than a year.

Mortgage rates began easing in July in anticipation of a series of Fed rate cuts, which began in September and continued this month.

The Fed doesn’t set mortgage rates, but when it cuts its short-term rate that can signal lower inflation or slower economic growth ahead, which can drive investors to buy U.S. government bonds. That can help lower yields on long-term U.S. Treasuries, which can result in lower mortgage rates.

Even so, Fed rate cuts don’t always translate into lower mortgage rates.

Home shoppers who can afford to pay cash or finance at current mortgage rates are in a more favorable position than they were a year ago. Home listings are up sharply from

last year, and many sellers have resorted to lowering their initial asking price as homes take longer to sell, according to data from Realtor.com.

Still, affordability remains a challenge for many aspiring homeowners, especially first-time buyers who don’t have equity from an existing home to put toward a new home purchase. Uncertainty over the economy and job market are also keeping many would-be buyers on the sidelines.

Sales of previously occupied U.S. homes rose in November from the previous month, but slowed compared to a year earlier for the first time since May despite average long-term mortgage rates holding near their low point for the year. Through the first 11 months of this year, home sales are down 0.5% compared to the same period last year.

Economists generally forecast that the average rate on a 30-year mortgage will remain slightly above 6% next year.

## Shutdown’s SNAP freeze hits millions, relief efforts ramp up

Finances already looked tight for Jade Grant and her three children as she entered the year’s final months. “Everyone’s birthday is back-to-back,” the 32-year-old certified nursing assistant said. “You have holidays coming up. You have Thanksgiving. Everything is right there. And then, boom. No (food) stamps.”

Grant is among the nearly 42 million lower-income Americans who get help buying groceries from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. When the federal shutdown began in October, she wasn’t worried about losing her benefits - she said she is used to government “foolishness.”

But circumstances got dicey when the budget impasse entered its second month and President Donald Trump took the unprecedented step of freezing November SNAP payments. With one child who eats gluten free and another with many allergies, specialty items already drove up her grocery bill. Now Grant wondered how she’d put food on the table - especially with her youngest’s 6th birthday approaching.

Then Grant logged into Propel, an app used by 5 million people to manage their electronic benefits transfers, where she saw a pop-up banner inviting her to apply for a relief program. Within a minute she’d completed a survey and about two days later she got a virtual \$50 gift card.

The total didn’t come close to her monthly SNAP allotment. But the Palm Bay, Florida, resident said it was enough to buy a customized “Bluey” birthday cake for her son.

Nearly a quarter of a million families got that same cash injection from the nonprofit GiveDirectly as they missed SNAP deposits many need to feed their households. The collaboration with Propel proved to be the largest disaster response in the international cash assistance group’s history outside of COVID-19; non-pandemic records were set with the \$12 million raised, more than 246,000 beneficiaries enrolled and 5,000 individual donors reached.

Recipients are still recovering from the uncertainty of last month’s SNAP delays. Company surveys suggest many are dealing with the long-term consequences of borrowing money in early November when their benefits didn’t arrive on time, according to Propel CEO Jimmy Chen. At a time when users felt the existing safety net had fallen through, they credit the rapid payments for buoying them - both financially and emotionally.

“It’s not a lot. But at the same time, it is a lot,” Grant said. “Because \$50 can do a lot when you don’t have anything.”

It’s not the first partnership for the antipoverty nonprofit and for-profit software company. They have previously combined GiveDirectly’s fast cash model with Propel’s verified user base to get money out to natural disaster survivors - including \$1,000 last year to some households impacted by Hurricanes Milton and Helene.

“This particular incident with the shutdown we saw as akin to a natural disaster,” Chen said, “in the sense that it created a really sudden and really acute form of hardship for many Americans across the country.”

The scope differed this time. The “man-made disaster,” as GiveDirectly U.S. Country Director Dustin Palmer put it, was not geographically isolated. The benefits freeze impacted more people than they usually serve. SNAP costs almost \$10 billion a month, Palmer said, so they never expected to raise enough money to replace the delayed

benefits altogether.

But 5,000 individual donors - plus \$1 million gifts from Propel and New York nonprofit Robin Hood, as well as other major foundations’ support - provided a sizable pot. Palmer found that the issue resonated more than he expected.

GiveDirectly reports that the median donation was \$100. Palmer took that response as a sign the issue hit close for many Americans.

“You and I know SNAP recipients. Maybe we’ve been SNAP recipients,” Palmer said. “So that was not a disaster in Central Texas where I’ve never been, but something in our communities.”

The greatest question revolved around the total sum of each cash transfer. Should they reach more people with fewer dollars or vice versa? Los Angeles wildfire survivors, for example, got \$3,500 each from a similar GiveDirectly campaign. But that’s because they wanted to provide enough to cover a month’s worth of lodging and transit to those who lost their houses.

They settled on \$50 because Palmer said they wanted a “stopgap” that represented “a meaningful trip to the grocery store.” To equitably focus their limited resources on the that would be missing the most support, Palmer said they targeted families with children that receive the maximum SNAP allotment. Propel’s software allowed them to send money as soon as the app detected that a family’s benefits hadn’t arrived at the usual time of the month.

Recipients decided whether their prepaid debit cards arrived physically, which might allow them to take cash out of an ATM, or virtually, which could be used almost immediately. The split is usually pretty even, according to Palmer, but this time more than 90% of recipients went with the virtual option.

“To me, that speaks to the speed and need for people,” Palmer said. “Just saying, ‘Oh yeah, I just need food today. I don’t want to wait to get it mailed.’”

Dianna Tompkins relies on her SNAP balance to feed her toddler and 8-year-old child.

“I watch it like a hawk, honestly,” she said.

But she said she entered “panic mode” when she missed what is usually a \$976 deposit last month. She’s a gig worker, completing DoorDash and Uber Eats orders when she finds the time.

Her pantry is always stocked with non-perishables - canned goods, pastas, sauces - in case her unreliable van stops working and she can’t get to the store. But she couldn’t risk running out as uncertainty continued over the shutdown’s length and future SNAP payments.

GiveDirectly’s \$50 bought her milk and bread - not much but “a big help,” she said. Her local food pantries in Demotte, Indiana, had proven inconsistent. One week they gave far more than expected, she said, but the following week they were “so overwhelmed” that it almost wasn’t worth visiting.

She said it’s “scary” the government “can just decide to not feed so many people.” “At least I have my safety net but not everybody’s lucky,” she said. “I’ve never trusted the government and that’s just a new solid reason why I don’t trust them.”

Chen, the Propel CEO, said his company’s research suggests that November’s freeze damaged many recipients’ confidence in the government. Even with SNAP funded through the next fiscal year, Chen said, many respondents are concerned about another shutdown. (AP)



**‘Relationship will grow stronger in the future’**

## Poetry, song bridge cultures at China-Myanmar friendship event in Yangon

YANGON, Dec 25, (Xinhua): Soft orchestral music filled Studio A of Myanmar Radio and Television in Yangon, Myanmar, as voices rose in both Chinese and Myanmar verse, weaving together two literary traditions shaped by centuries of shared history.

On Wednesday morning, poetry and song became more than performances. They became a bridge between the two neighboring nations.

The classical poetry recitation and musical concert, jointly organized by China’s Guangxi Radio and Television and Myanmar Radio and Television under Myanmar’s Ministry of Information, brought together around 200 audience members from the Chinese and Myanmar communities.

The event marked not only a celebration of literature and the arts but also the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Myanmar.

As the morning program unfolded, audiences listened attentively to the recitation of renowned literary works from both cultures. Together, the works demonstrated how poetry can transcend borders, even when expressed in different languages.

Adding a musical dimension to the literary exchange, Myanmar singers performed Chinese songs accompanied by an orchestra.

Saw Daniel, one of the performers, sang a Chinese song during the event.

Having grown up watching Chinese movies, he de-

scribed Chinese culture as familiar, adding that events like this help deepen that connection.

“I will continue participating in such friendship events. They help strengthen China-Myanmar friendship, and I believe our relationship will grow stronger in the future,” he said.

Another singer, La Woon May, said she practiced throughout the night to prepare for her performance. “I was afraid of making mistakes,” she said, noting that singing in Chinese requires careful pronunciation and strong focus.

Having studied the Chinese language since 2019, she explained that songs have become one of her favorite learning tools. “I also love Chinese culture, especially costumes and handicrafts. Through events like this, I feel closer to the culture and understand it more,” she said.

Speaking at the event, U Ye Naing, director-general of Myanmar Radio and Television, said Myanmar and China are neighboring countries connected geographically, historically, and culturally.

He also said that literature and reading play a vital role in strengthening friendship and mutual understanding, recalling the long history of literary and poetry exchanges between the two sides.

Continued cooperation in literature, the arts, and cultural exchange would help deepen the friendship between the peoples of Myanmar and China, he said.



An artist sings during a classical poetry recitation and musical concert at Myanmar Radio and Television in Yangon, Myanmar. (Xinhua)

## Music

## Other genres stall

## Christian and gospel music surge, streaming habits shift

NEW YORK, Dec 25, (AP): It is one of the most surprising music stories of the year. While streams of new music - releases from the last 18 months - were down from last year, one genre is on the rise: Christian and gospel music, according to industry data and analytics company Luminate’s 2025 Midyear Report.

Jaime Marconette, Luminate’s vice president of music insights and industry relations, said the shift is led by acts like Forrest Frank, Brandon Lake and Elevation Worship, who are connecting with a “younger, streaming-forward fan base” that’s 60% female and 30% millennial. In fact, for the first time in 11 years, two contemporary Christian music songs - Frank’s “Your Way’s Better” and Lake’s “Hard Fought Hallelujah” with Jelly Roll - broke through the Billboard Hot 100’s all-genre Top 40, placing them in direct competition with mainstream artists.

It’s also why traditionally secular artists like Jelly Roll, Killer Mike and T.I. are nominated in Christian music categories at the forthcoming 2026 Grammys - the lines are blurring.

“Christian music (is) unlike any other genre that’s defined by a sonic component. Christian music is defined by its lyrical component,” says Holly Zabka, the president of Provident Entertainment, a Sony Christian music subsidiary. “It’s not limited to a narrow definition. It’s a lyrical component that can appeal to anyone’s musical preference.”

From a label perspective, she’s interested in pursuing artists that “don’t have to fit within that narrow lane of Christian bookstore and Christian radio. It can be rap, hip-hop, it can be rock, it can be country, and that’s appealing to a broader audience because it’s what they’re already listening to,” she says. “Very few people listen in a vacuum and only listen to one genre.”

But for many years, CCM has held a reputation for being unimaginative - what writer John Jeremiah Sullivan infamously referred to as “excellence-proof” - for its tendency to mimic and water down popular, contemporary mainstream sounds for a religious audience.

“Absolutely there’s been an improvement in quality,” says Zabka. “When all the music has to live side by side on these streaming platforms, we can’t just be the cheap alternative. ‘Oh, you like Taylor Swift? You will like this lesser version offering in the Christian genre.’ We want to be the greatest art.”

## Innovative

“You have to imitate before you innovate,” Chris Brown, singer and worship leader at Elevation Worship, jokes. “There’s not as many rigid lines stylistically within Christian music as maybe there was 10 years ago or certainly like 20, 30 years ago.”

“There was a period of time where people idealized Christian music as like, ‘OK, we’re going to have this look, we’re going to sound like this,’” says two-time Grammy-winning Christian and pop musician Lauren Daigle. “There’s so much more artistry now. People are very expressive. They’re able to share their creativity. And that also comes with different types of people represented.”

Zabka says her genre is experiencing “a special moment and ... a perfect storm.” Streaming and the ability to connect on social media have democratized music discovery, she says, allowing CCM to compete with secular music. That, partnered with what she views as “a resurgence of faith” in young people, is responsible for the interest.

The number of Americans who identify as Christian has declined steadily for years, but that drop shows signs of slowing, according to a 2025 survey from the Pew Research Center. A new class of millennial and Gen Z Christian influencers, too, are aiming to connect with young people.

“Christian music has also shifted in its authenticity of the lyrics,” Zabka adds, making the music more relatable than previous iterations of the genre, which often featured a neat message of “everything is going to be OK, just follow Jesus” in 3 ½ minutes. Now, she says, “their songs are much more authentic and real and honest. ‘Life is hard. Breakups are hard. Bad things happen,’ and that provides a level of hope that other music doesn’t provide for the listener.”

Daigle points out that artists like Lake are performing in huge stadiums - categorical proof that Christian artists are growing in popularity. “I think a lot of people are looking at the world and ... they find fortitude in this music, and they find a sense of strength in this music, and they find truth in this music,” she says.

Daigle also theorizes that because “Christian music points to something else” - to God - instead of focusing on individual issues or the ego of the performer on stage, it evens the playing field between listener and artist, while giving both a sense of purpose.

“In a world that has become so self-focused and self-centered, the freedom of saying ‘Wow, I can actually lean on someone else for a while,’ or ‘There’s something that is actually greater than me,’” she says. “And the purpose of Christian music, for me, is to bring hope to people.”

Brown theorizes that people relate to his Charlotte, North Carolina-based CCM collective because of “how fundamentally we’re rooted” in their local church.



In this file photo, Lauren Daigle performs at the Pre-Grammy Gala in Beverly Hills, Calif. (AP)

## Film



This image released by Searchlight Pictures shows Amanda Seyfried, left, and Lewis Pullman in a scene from ‘The Testament of Ann Lee.’ (AP)

## Movie is daring, demanding and impossible to ignore

## Seyfried mesmerizing in ‘Testament of Ann Lee’

NEW YORK, Dec 25, (AP): Filmmakers Mona Fastvold and Brady Corbet are clearly fascinated by ambition. They’re fascinated, too, by dreamers - difficult dreamers, brilliant but demanding people who have plans they must fulfill no matter the personal cost.

They’re also interested in dreamers who cross the ocean to America with these difficult, lofty plans. And, finally, they find singular actors to play these roles.

You could say the couple, artistic and life partners, is on a roll. They together made “The Brutalist” last year, directed by Corbet and co-written with Fastvold, which won Adrien Brody an Oscar. And now, with Fastvold directing, we have “The Testament of Ann Lee” - a stirring and, yes, difficult movie that features a blazing Amanda Seyfried as the Shaker leader. It’s a performance that will knock your 18th-century socks off.

There are, of course, key differences. For one thing, unlike fictional architect László Tóth in “The Brutalist,” Ann Lee was a real person - a woman whose life story hasn’t been widely told (as the filmmakers have pointed out, people are more likely to remember the Shakers for their furniture design.) And she was a deeply spiritual figure:

Oh, yes, one other thing: “The Testament of Ann Lee” is a musical. An 18th-century religious musical - with both the agony (lots of agony) and ecstasy of Lee’s life channeled into song-and-dance numbers based on a dozen or so traditional hymns.

Yes, it’s a lot. It’s lots and lots. The film is absolutely not for everyone.

But Fastvold has undeniably created something we’ve never quite seen before; speaking of visions, her singular artistic vision fills every frame. And Seyfried is a marvel, in yet another role that stretches this

fiercely talented actor in ways we might not have predicted.

Fastvold, shooting on 70mm film as in “The Brutalist,” and cowriter Corbet divide Lee’s life into chapters. The first details her upbringing as a poor, illiterate child in Manchester, England. We’re told it was no coincidence that a “miraculous” woman would be born on Feb. 29. The year is 1736. Ann, daughter of a blacksmith, has visions as a child.

As a young woman, to escape the mill where her family works, Ann works as a nurse. Yearning for spiritual purpose, she attends a religious meeting and encounters a female preacher, something altogether new. The early Shakers - called the “Shaking Quakers of Manchester” - engage in an intense form of confession; the term “shaker” refers to their ecstatic gestures in worship, as if to shake off sin.

## Presence

It’s tough to imagine what the film would be like without Seyfried’s grounding presence. She can be both spiritual and earthly, and when she breaks into song and dance, in numbers choreographed by Celia Rowson-Hall to music by Daniel Blumberg (an Oscar winner for his “Brutalist” score), it feels organic and unforced.

Ann marries a locksmith, with whom she births four babies. All die by age 1. It’s almost too painful to watch, especially when her husband must tear away the last one from her grieving arms.

Devastated, she throws herself into worship. During a stint in jail for her heretical beliefs, she fasts, has visions and comes to believe she and her husband have been punished by God for having sexual intercourse. She will henceforth practice and preach celibacy.

The second chapter involves Ann leading a harrowing journey across the Atlantic to establish

a base in the New World. (Fastvold found a fully operational 18th-century ship, with hand-stitched sails, in Sweden.) The worshippers almost don’t survive the trip.

But they arrive in New York City, somehow, two years before the American Revolution. The final act details the yearslong efforts to find a home where the Shaker community can live safely and grow - hardly a given.

Eventually the community settles upstate, where they learn to build furniture for revenue. Ann’s brother William (Lewis Pullman, excellent) sets out to find followers. The community has strict rules: celibacy, no marriage, gender equality, a pursuit of utopian perfection.

But their beliefs put them in danger. A chilling final sequence has a violent mob of townspeople setting fire to a house where the group is recruiting members.

At their peak, there were thousands of Shakers. Now there are exactly three (celibacy limited the community’s ability to grow.) It’s not unreasonable to ask: Why put so much energy and attention and craftsmanship into telling this particular story?

Well, one answer is pretty simple: they had Seyfried. The actor spent a year before shooting simply working on her 18th-century Manchester accent. She sings, she dances. And she gives one of the rawest renderings of childbirth, and child loss, that you’ll see on-screen.

No matter how you feel about the history here, it’s a visceral performance that simply demands to be seen.

“The Testament of Ann Lee,” a Searchlight Pictures release, has been rated R by the Motion Picture Association “for sexual content, graphic nudity, violence and bloody images.” Running time: 137 minutes. Three stars out of four.

## Splitting country at Grammys is the right call

NEW YORK, Dec 25, (AP): Flashback to February. It’s the 2025 Grammys, and Beyoncé has made history. Not only was she finally awarded the top prize of album of the year, but she also became the first Black woman to win best country album, for “Cowboy Carter.” Recent changes by the Recording Academy have made it even more monumental: She might be the last person to ever win the award.

In June, the Academy announced that the Grammys’ country album title was splitting into two categories. A new award was created, traditional country album. The preexisting country album category has been redefined and is now contemporary country album, reflecting the genre’s ongoing sonic evolutions.

The decision was divisive: Some viewed it as backlash to Beyoncé’s win. Others welcomed the addition of a new award and the creative doors it might open. Some questioned how the categories would be defined in a genre where the word “traditional” is loaded.

Here’s everything you need to know

about the change - and what it could signify in the future.

Charles L. Hughes, Rhodes College professor and author of “Country Soul,” says Beyoncé’s victory was a welcomed surprise, despite being obviously worthy. That’s because her album inspired a larger conversation about reclamation, standing in opposition to the music industry’s rigid power structures and “indicated how significant this historical question remains of whether or not Black folks have equal access to success in a genre of music that bears such strong Black influences and has from the very beginning,” Hughes said.

He believes the decision to alter the country album categories was not in direct response to her win - “I think it is a more complicated story,” he says - but the timing might’ve been less than ideal, emboldening fans to view it as reactionary. He hopes the changes will open the category to more diversity of sounds and “whether this leads to a broader opening and opportunity for

Black artists, especially Black women in country music,” he posits.

Francesca T. Royster, a DePaul University professor and author of “Black Country Music: Listening for Revolutions,” views Beyoncé’s victory as positively connected to this change. She wonders if artists - particularly artists of color, who never had their music recognized in country music categories, think of artists like “Millie Jackson or Candi Staton, Bobby Womack” - would now see their work recognized. “Having these two categories just allows for more experimentation and maybe less of a double standard,” she says, “in terms of artists who are often held to higher standards to conform to, or be recognizable as, meeting an idea about what country music is.”

“It makes sense that the Grammy categories for country would become a little bit more expansive,” she says, “because I think the music is more expansive and the audience is also more expansive than it’s ever been.”

According to the Recording Academy’s rule book, the traditional country category is defined by “country recordings that adhere to the more traditional sound structures of the country genre, including rhythm and singing style, lyrical content, as well as traditional country instrumentation.”

Those are: acoustic guitar, steel guitar, fiddle, banjo, mandolin, piano, electric guitar and live drums. This is also where subgenres like outlaw country, Western and Western swing would fit.

The contemporary country category description is a bit more conceptual. The rule book states that albums eligible in this category “utilize a stylistic intention, song structure, lyrical content, and/or musical presentation to create a sensibility that reflects the broad spectrum of contemporary country style and culture.”

The hope is that those titles are “relevant to the legacy of country music’s culture, while also engaging in more contemporary music forms.”



The best time to plant hollies is in early spring

# Deck your garden with holly: Evergreen beauty and symbolism

AUSTIN, Texas, Dec 25, (AP): No doubt you've seen your share of hollies this month - in wreaths and boughs or perhaps on holiday cards and catalog covers. But are they growing in your garden?

There are hundreds of holly species and hybrids hailing from China, Japan, South America, Europe and North Africa, and more than a dozen are native to the continental U.S.

Lore holds that ancient pagans fashioned the evergreen's branches into wearable crowns and believed that displaying it indoors would repel evil spirits and hasten the return of spring. Later, hollies were adapted by early Christians, their evergreen nature symbolic of eternal life.

Although the plants can promise neither, their red berries and deep-green foliage, which mirror the traditional colors of the season, are beautiful year-round garden staples. And their berries provide an important winter food source for birds and wildlife, although most are considered toxic to humans.



This image provided by the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center shows a berry-bearing branch of a Native American Holly (Ilex opaca) at the Lady-Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin, Texas. (AP)



This image provided by the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center shows a native Yaupon Holly (Ilex vomitoria) branch bearing a profusion of berries at the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin, Texas. (AP)

The best time to plant hollies is in early spring, after the last hard freeze (if applicable) but before the heat of summer sets in. Be sure to water regularly during the plant's first year in your garden, when its roots are working to establish themselves. With very few exceptions, hollies are dioecious, which means plants are either male or female, and in order for the female to produce berries, there must be a male growing nearby. One

male can effectively pollinate about 10 female plants growing within 50 feet (15 meters), sometimes more.

Plant tags don't always note if a dioecious plant is male or female, but the variety name can help. "China Girl" is female, and to get fruit, you'll need "China Boy." It's not always obvious, though; for example, "Greenleaf" is also female. If you're unsure, ask nursery staff.

Here are four favorites to consider (and one you might want to avoid):

This long-living species naturally occurs along the United States' southern Atlantic coast and across the Southeast and Southwest. Choose dwarf, weeping or upright varieties to grow trees, shrubs or pruned hedges. Hardy in USDA horticultural zones 7-9, the unfussy natives are tolerant of both sun and shade, and thrive in any soil type and pH, as long as it is moist and well-draining.

Native along the entire East Coast and west to Missouri and Texas, this slow-growing, pyramidal holly can reach 25-60 feet (8-18 meters) tall at maturity.

## Tourism

Cultural guides are redefining tourism

# The 'cultural ferrymen' offering a more authentic glimpse into everyday China



This photo taken in April of 2025 shows a tour guide with his tourists tasting Shanghai-style scallion oil noodles at a restaurant in Shanghai, east China. (Xinhua)



This photo taken in November of 2024 shows Sun Shuli posing for a photo with foreign tourists she leads on the Qianmen pedestrian street in Beijing, capital of China. (Xinhua)



Clarisse Le Guernic leads foreign tourists on a 'citywalk' tour in east China's Shanghai. (Xinhua)



This photo taken on May 13, 2025 shows Clarisse Le Guernic, a French woman working as a local tour guide, leading foreign tourists in a 'citywalk' in Shanghai, east China. (Xinhua)

SHANGHAI, Dec 25, (Xinhua): As the scent of freshly steamed bean paste buns drifts through the People's Park in downtown Shanghai and laughter erupts from a nearby English-language stand-up comedy club -- not at the unfamiliar, but at the recognizable -- China's latest chapter of inbound tourism begins to take shape.

These are scenes of proximity, marking a shift in how international visitors encounter the country: away from checklists and fleeting curiosity, and toward participation and sustained engagement.

Behind this shift is a loosely connected group of people who do not fit neatly into media narratives or influencer culture. They are present in everyday encounters, helping visitors bridge the gap between assumption and experience.

In China's media and academic cultural communication circles, people have begun calling them "cultural ferrymen." Some are Chinese professionals who have turned away from conventional tourism; others are foreigners who have built their lives in China and now find themselves translating it. Together, they are reshaping how international visitors experience the country -- not as a spectacle, but as a lived reality.

One of these cultural ferrymen is Liu Sen, a former finance professional who now plans guided journeys designed around observation. During walks, he asks foreign visitors to guess how many electric vehicles pass through a single intersection in any given minute. The answer -- nearly half -- often surprises them.

The exercise is one of many ways Liu and his colleagues invite visitors to update the assumptions they formed long

before their arrival.

Liu is the co-founder of Eastbound and Beyond, a four-person team whose members come from different professional backgrounds but share the conviction that showing the world the authentic China requires proximity rather than performance. Many of their European and U.S. clients, Liu told Xinhua, arrive with outdated impressions of the country and are unaware that the level of daily convenience in major Chinese cities now surpasses that of many global metropolises.

Their itineraries reflect that belief. Instead of bus tours packed with landmarks, they visit familiar sites such as the Bund and the centuries-old Yuyuan Garden, delighting in unplanned encounters. Tourists practice Tai Chi with retirees in the historically and culturally rich Fuxing Park, browse handwritten notices in the matchmaking corner of the People's Park, and walk through neighborhoods in the former French Concession area while hearing the stories of Shanghai's traditional residential communities -- details even many locals overlook.

This approach is what appeals to visitors like Baha Korkmaz, a traveler from the Netherlands who has visited about 50 countries. "We don't want to go on the tour bus to see the city because everyone can see the Bund," he said. What drew him and his partner, he added, was the chance to see the city with Chinese people and understand more about local life.

Like many visitors, they were initially inspired by social media images of China that combined futuristic technology

with everyday warmth. The reality, they found, was more compelling and harder to leave.

Similar tourism initiatives are unfolding beyond Shanghai. Sun Shuli, who has worked in inbound tourism for years, now leads teams offering in-depth "citywalk" tours and cultural experiences in Beijing and Shanghai. Her group has hosted more than 38,000 international visitors to date. For Sun, telling China's story means "understanding not only the country itself, but how it connects to the wider world." Sun prefers conversations about alleyway life, small shopkeepers and retirees sitting in parks to reciting macro-level statistics. She finds that these slices of ordinary life resonate most deeply and linger longer in visitors' memories.

Through a local meal, a casual chat with a street vendor or an impromptu shared dance in a park, abstract ideas about safety, convenience and vitality become tangible.

As Chinese guides are reshaping how visitors see China from the inside, expatriates are building bridges from another direction. Many foreign nationals who have lived in the country for years feel compelled to share what they have come to know about it.

One such expat is Clarisse Le Guernic, a 29-year-old French woman who arrived at Fudan University at the age of 19 and has lived in Shanghai ever since. Over time, Shanghai became a home of her own making. She later founded Arcade, a tourism company she named after Arcadio Huang, a key figure of Sino-French cultural exchange and one of the earliest Chinese grammar and Chinese-French dictionary compilers.

# Lebanon's holiday dimmed by economic collapse

BEIRUT, Dec 25, (Xinhua): A modest artificial Christmas tree, adorned with ornaments reused for years, stands in the corner of the Haddad family's Beirut apartment. For Rania Haddad, a public-school teacher and mother of two, this tree represents a fragile link to tradition in a year that has forced austerity into every festive plan.

"We explained to the kids that Christmas is smaller now," Rania said. "They're getting one shared gift. The important thing is that the tree stays." This scaled-back celebration mirrors a profound national reality. Across Beirut and its suburbs, the holiday season has become a careful calculus between cherished custom and crushing economic constraint.

In the southern suburb of Choueifat, Nadim Salame, a father of three, shops with a calculator and a strict list. "You don't browse anymore," he said. "You calculate." Gifts are now symbolic -- books, small toys, sometimes handmade items. "We used to plan joy first and money second," Salame observed. "Now it's the opposite." The stark imprint of this shift is visible in Beirut's once-vibrant commercial districts. On Hamra Street, famed for its holiday bustle, shop owner Nadia Mezher recalled a different time.

"Christmas used to be very important for us," she said. "Before 2019, we didn't

even have time to sit on a chair. Now we open and close the shop without selling." Even lowering prices has yielded little, she noted. "People come, ask, and leave. They lost their money in the banks. Christmas is no longer a priority." Nearby, the owner of Medawar clothes shop said he has not sold a single Christmas gift this season. "Our sales dropped 100 percent compared to before," he said, citing an astronomical rent increase from 9,000 U.S. dollars per year to 50,000 dollars as the final blow. "I lost my bank deposit. I cannot continue. I will close." Some merchants have reported a marginal uptick from last year's worst moments, but the recovery is fragile. Hama Hamza, owner

of Hatab clothes shop, noted that sales are slightly higher than during last year's conflict. "People still care about Christmas," he said, "but they reduce their gift budgets." The broader economic collapse underpins this caution. The financial crisis in Lebanon that began in 2019 reached catastrophic levels by early 2024, with the Lebanese pound losing over 98 percent of its value and inflation surging to 221 percent in 2023. More than a year after the ceasefire that took effect on Nov. 27, 2024, Lebanon continues to grapple with the conflict's aftermath compounded by what economists rank among the most severe economic downturns in modern history.



Students control a simulated robotic arm at an AI experience center of a primary school in north China's Tianjin. (Xinhua)

## Balance is hard Classrooms embrace AI to foster innovation

TIANJIN, Dec 25, (Xinhua): With a simple click of the mouse, a school emblem materialized from a computer screen into a nearby 3D printer. Layer by layer, the machine meticulously transformed lines of code into a solid form, seamlessly converting an abstract digital design into a tangible object that students could now hold in their hands.

"It's like watching an idea take shape as a model, and then become a real object right before your eyes," said sixth-grader Yang Miaotian from New Star Primary School in north China's Tianjin Municipality. For her, the experience was nothing short of eye-opening. "It feels just like playing with building blocks." Such scenes are increasingly becoming a routine occurrence in classrooms across Tianjin. Starting this fall semester, the city has embarked on a systematic rollout of a compulsory artificial intelligence (AI) curriculum, encompassing nearly all grades in primary and secondary schools. This initiative stands as one of the most comprehensive local endeavors to integrate AI into the basic education system of the world's second-largest economy.

This initiative represents just one facet of a broader nationwide effort. In Beijing alone, over 1,400 primary and secondary schools have integrated AI general education courses, reaching approximately 1.83 million students. Meanwhile, cities such as Hangzhou in the east and Xi'an in the northwest have systematically incorporated AI into their basic education frameworks. In southwest China's Chongqing Municipality, authorities have designated the second Friday of every October as a citywide AI Day for primary and secondary school students.

This educational momentum mirrors the explosive growth of China's AI industry. According to the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, the country's AI sector surpassed 900 billion yuan (about 128 billion U.S. dollars) in 2024, marking a 24 percent year-on-year increase. By the third quarter of this year, the number of AI enterprises in China had exceeded 5,300, accounting for 15 percent of the global total.

As China's homegrown AI technology accelerates toward large-scale real-world applications, the education sector has emerged as one of the most dynamic testing grounds. A report by the Changjiang Securities research institute forecasts that the AI education market will expand to 160 billion yuan by 2027 and approach 180 billion yuan by 2030.

**Robust**

Policy support has been equally robust. In August, the State Council unveiled a policy document advancing the "AI Plus" initiative, outlining a decade-long roadmap that mandates the integration of AI across all educational domains, fosters innovative human-AI collaborative teaching models, and shifts educational focus from rote knowledge transmission to competency-based learning.

In Tianjin, translating national policy directives into classroom implementation has required meticulous calibration.

"The hardest part is finding the right balance," said Gao Shuyin, deputy director of the educational technology and informatization center of Tianjin Academy of Educational Sciences. "Overly advanced content risks becoming an unrealistic college-level curriculum, while oversimplified material reduces it to mere science popularization." After multiple rounds of curriculum refinement, Tianjin has anchored its AI education framework firmly on the concept of literacy rather than technical specialization. The resulting system emphasizes a progressive learning pathway, from foundational cognitive understanding and practical application to creative design and ethical reflection, while deliberately de-emphasizing pure intensive coding skills.

Under the current arrangement, fourth-grade and eighth-grade students are required to take one compulsory AI class per week as part of the local curriculum. Other grades are encouraged to develop school-based AI courses or integrate AI into existing subjects.

At the high school level, students can opt for AI-focused elective modules alongside national courses such as information technology and general technology. Beijing is adopting a comparable tiered approach, with students receiving a minimum of eight AI classes each academic year.

Primary schools emphasize experiential learning to cultivate AI thinking, while junior high schools focus on applying AI in both academic and everyday contexts. In senior high schools, the curriculum prioritizes hands-on projects that foster innovation and creativity.

At Tianjin No.7 High School, AI has been woven directly into traditional subjects.



Regulation, education advance

China-trained doctor bridges healthcare gap in Zimbabwe

HARARE, Dec 25, (Xinhua): After studying medicine in China, Zimbabwean doctor Karen Gurure has been seeking to translate her overseas-acquired knowledge into practical, locally tailored solutions that strengthen Zimbabwe's healthcare system.

Returning to Zimbabwe in 2019 after graduating from Jiangxi University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Gurure's experiences in China have significantly shaped her approach to healthcare innovation and public health leadership in Zimbabwe.

Now serving as a regulator under Zimbabwe's Ministry of Health and Child Care, she has applied regulatory and quality assurance frameworks drawn from the Chinese health system to support safer integration of traditional and complementary medicine, strengthen compliance, and improve oversight.

"My exposure to China's research, pharmaceutical development, and technology translation ecosystem has also informed my work in registering and deploying life-saving medicines and diagnostics, including antimalarial therapies and rapid HIV testing technologies," said Gurure.

Meanwhile, she also remained committed to skills transfer by facilitating scholarship opportunities for Zimbabwean students to study pharmacy in China, helping address national skills gaps and build long-term pharmaceutical capacity.

Through Gurure's assistance, 15 local students will depart for China in late December to study pharmacy at Jiangxi University of Traditional Chinese Medicine under a scholarship.

"China is a global leader in pharmaceutical innovation, and these skills are critically needed in Zimbabwe. Equipped with this knowledge and technology, these graduates will be well positioned to contribute to local medicine manufacturing, strengthen our pharmaceutical industry, and support national health self-sufficiency," said Gurure.

One of the scholarship beneficiaries is 19-year-old Niel Dutiro, who hopes to make significant contributions to his field of study from his education in China.

"It is a new environment, but a new environment means new possibilities, experiences, and knowledge," Dutiro said after submitting his visa applica-



A doctor from the 22nd batch of the Chinese medical team to Zimbabwe examines a patient at a local hospital in Harare, Zimbabwe, June 10, 2025. (Xinhua)

tion at the Chinese Embassy in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital.

Another grant recipient, 19-year-old Devine Dendere, hopes to bring new pharmaceutical knowledge back home.

"I hope to bring better options here in Zimbabwe, better drugs that will help us, things that we do not have, getting exposure from other countries, seeing how people work outside, and then bring it back here, to help our country," she said.

According to Gurure, China has increasingly become a main study destination for Zimbabwean students, particularly in such fields as medicine, pharmacy, engineering, and the applied sciences.

"China offers high-quality education with strong emphasis on science, technology, and practical training, often at a lower cost compared to traditional Western destinations," she said.

The availability of fully-funded and partially-funded scholarships, supported by the Chinese government and partner institutions, has made higher education in China accessible to students, she said.

"China's long-standing diplomatic and development cooperation with Zimbabwe has strengthened academic exchange programs. This has created opportunities not only for education, but also for skills training, technology exposure, and long-term institutional partnerships," she said.

Leukemia, lymphoma outcomes near advanced-economy levels

China sees marked rise in 5-year survival rate for pediatric and adolescent cancers

BEIJING, Dec. 25, (Xinhua): China's pediatric and adolescent cancer patients have achieved a 5-year survival rate of 77.2 percent, marking significant progress, with some specific types reaching world-class levels, study results showed on Wednesday.

The study, conducted by the National Center for Pediatric Cancer Surveillance (NCPCS), also showed that the 5-year survival rate for children aged below 14 years old stood at 77.8 percent, while that for adolescents aged between 15 and 19 years old was 75.3 percent. The survival rate for girls was slightly higher than that for boys.

Among the surveyed cancers, retinoblastoma had the highest 5-year survival rate at 91.2 percent, while malignant bone tumors had the lowest at 60.4 percent.

Notably, for the six high-priority cancer types identified by the World Health Organization (WHO)'s Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer, China's 5-year survival rates all exceeded 80 percent, with the highest reaching 93.8 percent. This far surpassed the WHO's target of a 60-percent survival rate for these cancers, which are acute lymphoblastic leukemia, Burkitt lymphoma, Hodgkin lymphoma, retinoblastoma, Wilms tumor, and low-grade glioma.

"Compared with estimates from a decade ago, the 5-year survival rate for cancer patients aged 0-19 in China has improved markedly," said Ni Xin, director of the NCPCS and president of Beijing Children's Hospital, which is affiliated with Capital Medical University.

"Particularly for common childhood cancers such as leukemia and lymphoma, progress has been significant. The survival rates for neuroblastoma, retinoblastoma, and Hodgkin lymphoma are now close to the levels seen in high-income countries," Ni noted. He credited these improvements to China's sustained healthcare reforms, the enhanced



A research team of Peking University (PKU) conducts research of tumor cachexia in a laboratory at PKU in Beijing, capital of China, on March 29, 2024. (Xinhua)

inter-provincial medical billing system, specialized policies for major disease treatment, the adoption of standardized treatment protocols, and the development of a multi-center collaborative network.

For a long time, the absence of authoritative, high-quality data on childhood and adolescent cancer survival rates presented a significant gap in China's healthcare landscape.

To address this, the NCPCS was established in 2019, with a mandate to standardize the nationwide registration and management of pediatric oncology cases.

As of December 2025, the NCPCS has developed an extensive monitoring network, encompassing 31 provincial-level regions and integrating data from 1,760 designated hospitals and medical institutions.

This study analyzed 95,189 cas-

es registered within this network. All cases involved individuals aged 0-19 who were diagnosed between 2018 and 2020. The research delivered a comprehensive analysis, reporting 5-year survival rates across 12 major diagnostic categories and 47 specific cancer subtypes.

The complete findings of this study have been published in the international medical journal The Lancet.

Miracle baby: Born outside the womb

Rare abdominal pregnancy defies all odds as mother and son thrive

LOS ANGELES, Dec 25, (AP): Suze Lopez holds her baby boy on her lap and marvels at the remarkable way he came into the world.

Before little Ryu was born, he developed outside his mom's womb, hidden by a basketball-sized ovarian cyst - a dangerous situation so rare that his doctors plan to write about the case for a medical journal.

Just 1 in 30,000 pregnancies occur in the abdomen instead of the uterus, and those that make it to full term "are essentially unheard of - far, far less than 1 in a million," said Dr. John Ozimek, medical director of labor and delivery at Cedars-Sinai in Los Angeles, where Ryu was born. "I mean, this is really insane."

Lopez, a 41-year-old nurse who lives in Bakersfield, California, didn't know she was pregnant with her second child until days before giving birth.

When her belly began to grow earlier this year, she thought it was her ovarian cyst getting bigger. Doctors had been monitoring the mass since her 20s, leaving it in place after removing her right



This photo provided by the family shows, from left, Kaila, Suze, Ryu and Andrew Lopez at Cedars-Sinai hospital in Los Angeles in August 2025. (AP)

ovary and another cyst.

Lopez experienced none of the usual pregnancy symptoms, such as morning sickness, and never felt kicks. Though she didn't have a period, her cycle is irregular and she sometimes goes years without one.

For months, she and her husband, Andrew Lopez, went about their lives and traveled abroad.

But gradually, the pain and pressure in her abdomen got worse, and Lopez figured it was finally time to get the 22-pound (10-kilogram) cyst removed. She needed a CT scan, which required a pregnancy test first because of the radiation exposure. To her great surprise, the test came back positive.

Lopez shared the news with her husband at a Dodgers baseball game in August, handing him a package with a note and a onesie.

"I just saw her face," he recalled, "and she just looked like she wanted to weep and smile and cry at the same time."

Shortly after the game, Lopez began feeling unwell and sought help at Cedars-Sinai. It turned out she had dangerously high blood pres-

sure, which the medical team stabilized. They also did blood work and gave her an ultrasound and an MRI. The scans found that her uterus was empty, but a nearly full-term fetus in an amniotic sac was hiding in a small space in her abdomen, near her liver.

"It did not look like it was directly invading any organs," Ozimek said. "It looked like it was mostly implanted on the sidewall of the pelvis, which is also very dangerous but more manageable than being implanted in the liver."

Dr. Cara Heuser, a maternal-fetal specialist in Utah not involved with the case, said almost all pregnancies that implant outside the uterus - called ectopic pregnancies - go on to rupture and hemorrhage if not removed. Most commonly, they occur in the fallopian tubes.

A 2023 medical journal article by doctors in Ethiopia described another abdominal pregnancy in which the mother and baby survived, pointing out that fetal mortality can be as high as 90% in such cases and birth defects are seen in about 1 in 5 surviving babies.

But Lopez and her son beat all the odds.

On Aug. 18, a medical team delivered the 8-pound (3.6-kilogram) baby while she was under full anesthesia, removing the cyst during the same surgery. She lost nearly all of her blood, Ozimek said, but the

team got the bleeding under control and gave her transfusions.

Doctors continually updated her husband about what was happening.

"The whole time, I might have seemed calm on the outside, but I was doing nothing but praying on the inside," Andrew Lopez said. "It was just something that scared me half to death, knowing that at any point I could lose my wife or my child."

Instead, they both recovered well.

"It was really, really remarkable," Ozimek said.

Since then, Ryu - named after a baseball player and a character in the Street Fighter video game series - has been healthy and thriving. His parents love watching him interact with his 18-year-old sister, Kaila, and say he completes their family.

With Ryu's first Christmas approaching, Lopez describes feeling blessed beyond measure.

"I do believe in miracles," she said, looking down at her baby. "God gave us this gift - the best gift ever."

WHO urges vigilance on global situation of MERS

GENEVA, Dec 25, (Xinhua): The World Health Organization (WHO) said on Wednesday that 19 cases of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), including four deaths, have been reported globally so far this year, while stressing that the overall risk level remains moderate.

Of the 19 cases reported to WHO between the beginning of 2025 and Dec. 21, 17 were recorded in Saudi Arabia and two in France. The French cases were travel-related and involved individuals who had recently visited countries on the Arabian Peninsula, the agency said.

MERS is a viral respiratory disease caused by the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV), with dromedary camels identified as a natural host and a source of human infection.

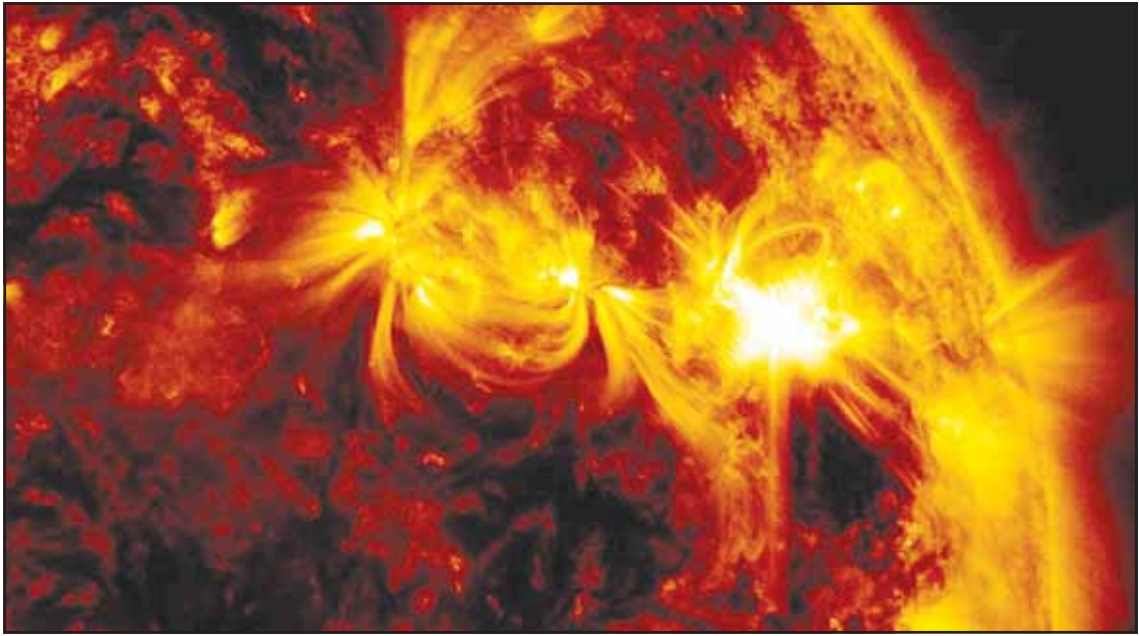
WHO said Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Health reported seven MERS cases, including two deaths, between June 4 and Dec. 21 this year. The remaining cases were reported earlier in the year.

Cumulatively, from 2012 to Dec. 21, 2025, a total of 2,635 laboratory-confirmed MERS cases, including 964 deaths, have been reported worldwide, representing a case fatality rate of 37 percent.

WHO said the recent cases do not alter its global or regional risk assessment for MERS-CoV, which remains moderate. However, the agency warned that the virus continues to pose a threat in areas where it circulates among camels, with ongoing spillover into humans.

The organization urged countries to maintain strong surveillance for acute respiratory infections and to apply targeted infection prevention and control measures to prevent health care-associated transmission.

WHO does not currently recommend special screening at points of entry, nor does it advise any travel or trade restrictions related to MERS.



This colored image captured by NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory space telescope shows a powerful solar flare blasting from the sun on March 31, 2022. (NASA)

Earth's magnetic storm days in 2025 poised to hit decade high: scientists

MOSCOW, Dec 25, (Xinhua): The number of days with magnetic storms on Earth in 2025 is on track to reach its highest level in a decade, Russian scientists said Wednesday. According to a statement from the Laboratory of Solar Astronomy of the Space Research Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Earth has experienced 69 days with magnetic storms since the beginning of this year, up from 44 days in 2024.

The increase was even more pronounced in the number of

days with geomagnetic disturbances, which totaled 164 in 2025, compared with 94 last year.

Comparable numbers of magnetic storm days on Earth were last recorded in 2015 with 79 days, and in 2016 with 69 days.

Scientists noted that the 2016 figure will almost certainly be surpassed during the remaining week of the year, as a large coronal hole on the Sun continues to affect Earth.

Future-shaping innovations

China's top 10 sci-tech news events unveiled

BEIJING, Dec 25, (Xinhua): Science and Technology Daily, China's major science newspaper, unveiled the country's top 10 sci-tech news events in 2025 on Thursday, including the large model Deepseek, the Experimental Advanced Superconducting Tokamak (EAST), and the superconducting quantum computing prototype.

Among the top 10 events are DeepSeek gaining global attention; China's "artificial sun," EAST, achieving the world record by lasting more than 1,000 seconds at 100 million degrees Celsius; the successful construction of the superconducting quantum computing prototype Zuchongzhi 3.0; and the large-scale preparation of two-dimensional metallic materials.

The selected events also include the clinical trial of an invasive brain-computer interface; the discovery of the evolutionary history of the moon's far side; the transformation process from a single somatic cell into a complete plant; and the development of a high-precision, scalable analog matrix computing chip.

Other events in the top 10 are the emphasis on the leading role of sci-tech innovation in the Recommendations of the Communist Party of China Central Committee for Formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) for Economic and Social Development, and the commissioning of China's first aircraft carrier equipped with electromagnetic catapults.

The selection was hosted by Science and Technology Daily, with academicians from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Engineering, as well as media heads participating in the evaluation.



Charges raise questions over NBA games integrity

Rozier seeks dismissal of federal gambling charges

NEW YORK, Dec 25, (AP): Miami Heat guard Terry Rozier’s lawyers are asking a judge to throw out sports gambling charges that have kept him off the court this season, arguing that the government overreached by turning a private dispute over bettors’ use of nonpublic information into a federal case.

In a motion to dismiss made public on Tuesday, Rozier’s lawyers argued that the government’s theory of the case - that he prevented sportsbooks from making informed decisions about accepting certain bets - runs afoul of a recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling that narrowed the federal wire fraud statute.

Federal prosecutors in Brooklyn allege that Rozier, 31, helped gamblers cash in by tipping off a friend that he would leave a March 2023 game early because of a supposed injury. The friend, Deniro “Niro” Laster, who is also charged, shared or sold the information to others, who placed more than \$250,000 in prop bets, prosecutors said.

“The government has billed this case as involving ‘insider betting’ and ‘rigging’ professional basketball games,” Rozier’s lawyers, James M. Trusty and A. Jeff Ifrah, wrote in the motion. “But the indictment alleges something less headline-worthy: that some bettors broke certain sportsbooks’ terms of use against wagering based on non-public information and ‘straw betting.’”

Rozier was on the Charlotte Hornets at the time and the information about his early exit was not listed on the team’s injury report, nor was it shared with the public or the sportsbooks that accept wagers on NBA games and player performances, prosecutors said.

Rozier pleaded not guilty on Dec. 8 to wire fraud conspiracy and money laundering conspiracy charges. He was released on \$3 million bond and is due back in court for a hearing before U.S. District Judge LaShann DeArcy Hall on March 3.

His charges were part of a sweep of more than 30 other people in a take-down of two sprawling gambling operations: one that authorities said leaked



Miami Heat's Terry Rozier leaves Brooklyn federal court in New York. (AP)

inside information about NBA athletes and another involving rigged, Mafia-backed poker games.

The charges have raised questions about the integrity of NBA games in an era of legalized betting and myriad prop bets, prompting the league to tweak its injury reporting requirements.

A spokesperson for the federal prosecutors’ office in Brooklyn declined to

comment on Rozier’s motion.

In the motion, Rozier’s lawyers wrote that under the Supreme Court’s 2023 ruling in United States v. Ciminelli, prosecutors can’t make a wire fraud case out of allegations that defendants conspired to deprive a person - or, in this case, sportsbooks - of the right to information needed to make discretionary economic decisions.

They also questioned whether federal prosecutors have the authority to bring such a case, since sportsbooks are regulated at the state level, not the federal level.

“This is not to say that sports betting platforms are without recourse when their terms of use are violated - they can void bets, pursue civil remedies, or seek state prosecutor involvement,” Trusty and Ifrah wrote in the motion, which was dated Dec. 12 but only posted to the case docket on Tuesday. “But Ciminelli puts to rest the notion that federal prosecutors are here to enforce contractual agreements between bettors and platforms.”

Rozier has earned about \$160 million over a 10-year NBA career. He was a first-round pick for the Boston Celtics in 2015 after starring at the University of Louisville. Charlotte traded him to the Heat last year.

In the game in question, Rozier played the first nine minutes and 36 seconds against the New Orleans Pelicans before leaving, citing a foot issue. He did not play again that season.

Rozier’s lawyers noted that the indictment does not allege that he ever placed a bet on any NBA game, nor does it allege that he knew Laster intended to sell his tip to others or that using it to place wagers would violate the sportsbooks’ terms of service. And, they said, he really was injured.

“The government’s cynicism as to whether Mr. Rozier was injured is belied by a variety of witnesses and medical professionals who were aware of Rozier’s injury, in many cases before the Pelicans game,” Trusty and Ifrah wrote.

Mineiro closing in on Lodi deal

Perez nears Argentinos switch

BUENOS AIRES, Dec 25, (Xinhua): Veteran Argentine midfielder Enzo Perez could join Argentinos Juniors on a free transfer, the Buenos Aires club said on Wednesday.

Perez’s contract with River Plate is due to expire on December 31 and manager Marcelo Gallardo has told the former Valencia and Benfica player he is not part of his future first-team plans.

Argentinos Juniors sporting director Raul Sanzotti said the club was negotiating a possible performance-based contract with the 39-year-old.

“We like him. Hopefully at some point he can be with us, we are talking,” Sanzotti told DSports Radio. “It’s not so much about money, it is more about the sporting side, about what we want to compete for.”

“Argentinos signs contracts based

on productivity, beyond the salary. We support players from that angle so there is more competitiveness.” Perez made 37 appearances across all competitions for River Plate this year, having joined the club for a second time in January from Estudiantes.

He also represented River from 2017 to 2024, helping it lift the 2018 Copa Libertadores trophy.

Renan Lodi set for Atletico Mineiro move Atletico Mineiro has reached an agreement to sign former Atletico Madrid defender Renan Lodi on a free transfer, the Brazilian Serie A club said on Wednesday.

The 27-year-old is due to arrive in Belo Horizonte in the coming days to undergo a medical and sign a five-year contract.

“The signing of the contract and the official announcement will take place after the completion and approval of the medical exams,” read a statement on Atletico Mineiro’s official website.

Lodi, who has 19 Brazil caps, had been without a club after parting ways with Al-Hilal in September. His nine-year professional career has also included spells at Nottingham Forest, Marseille and Atletico Paranaense.

Atletico Mineiro finished 11th in Brazil’s 20-team Serie A standings this year with 12 wins, 12 draws and 14 losses.



Enzo Perez

Best of the Rest

**Johnson avoids major injury:** The Denver Nuggets got good news Wednesday when an MRI revealed that forward Cameron Johnson suffered only a bone bruise to his right knee and not any ligament or structural damage, according to a person familiar with the medical test results.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the team didn’t announce the results of Johnson’s MRI.

Johnson got hurt early in the fourth quarter of Denver’s 131-130 loss at Dallas on Tuesday night.

There isn’t a timetable for his return but Johnson is expected to miss a few games. He’s the third Nuggets starter sidelined by injury, joining Aaron Gordon (hamstring) and Christian Braun (ankle). (AP)

**Chris optimistic about quick return:** United States defender Chris Richards said it “won’t be long” until he’s back for Crystal Palace. The American was taken off on a stretcher with a nasty cut to his right foot in the second half of Palace’s match against Arsenal in the English League Cup quarterfinals on Tuesday.

“Thanks everybody for the messages, won’t be long til I’m back,” Richards wrote on his Instagram account Wednesday.

Palace manager Oliver Glasner didn’t have a timetable for when Richards would return.

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 OK for the Tottenham game, but I’m still hoping that he will be back against Fulham.” (AP)

Shiffrin dominates slalom as Olympic season takes shape



United States’ Mikaela Shiffrin competes in an alpine ski, women’s World Cup slalom, in Courchevel, France. (AP)

‘I want to keep improving and build more consistency’

WASHINGTON, Dec 25, (AP): Mikaela Shiffrin has plenty to celebrate this Christmas.

The American skiing standout is off to a perfect start in slalom during the Olympic season - with four wins in four World Cup races. And she’s regaining her form in other disciplines, too, following the two biggest crashes of her career.

“This season so far, I could like bring top-level turns in those pressure moments,” Shiffrin said. “The world, when they’re watching, thinks there’s no pressure because I have a big lead or I did it the race before, but every single time I stand in the start, it’s like a new situation, and I found a way so far. I found a way to dig really deep to find that quality skiing. But it’s not straightforward. It takes so much effort.”

This weekend, Shiffrin returns to the Austrian resort of Semmering, where she’s claimed seven of her record 105 World Cup victories. On two occasions, Shiffrin has claimed three victories in three days in Semmering - in 2016 and in 2022.

This season there are just two races: a giant slalom on Saturday and then a slalom on Sunday.

While Shiffrin has won a record 22 World Cup giant slaloms, she hasn’t been on the podium in the

discipline since before her nasty crash in Killington, Vermont, last season, which left her with a deep puncture wound in her side and severe trauma to her oblique muscles.

But Shiffrin has been getting closer in giant slalom, finishing fourth twice this season, including in the last race in Tremblant, Quebec.

“It’s just going to keep taking time,” she said. “I want to just keep improving or maybe get repetition from the slalom level.”

Shiffrin also recently entered a super-G in St. Moritz, Switzerland, for her first speed event since crashing in a downhill in Cortina d’Ampezzo, Italy, nearly two years ago. She was on pace for a decent finish until she missed the final gate.

Still, it was progress toward her goal of possibly adding super-G to her program at the upcoming Milan Cortina Winter Olympics, where women’s Alpine skiing will be contested in Cortina.

“Even if it’s not the Olympics, super-G is a big goal of mine to return to a strong form in the super-G World Cup,” Shiffrin said.

In slalom, Shiffrin’s form is so solid that she’s been able to consistently win by massive margins - an average gap of 1.5 seconds - and quickly recover from errors.

It’s quite a turnaround from the second half of last season, when Shiffrin was struggling with post-

traumatic stress disorder due to her fall in Killington.

“Right now I can feel when I have a disruption in my momentum, and then in my mind it is like a gas pedal,” she said of how she can turn up the pace mid-run.

One more victory in slalom and Shiffrin will match the best start to a season in her career in the discipline: She won the first five slaloms back in 2018-19.

Overall, Shiffrin has won five straight slaloms, including the final race of last season. Her longest total winning streak is seven slaloms, which she has achieved twice.

Already the holder of two Olympic golds - slalom in 2014 and giant slalom in 2018 - Shiffrin could race in four events at the Olympics in Cortina: slalom, giant slalom, super-G, and the new team combined.

Shiffrin and downhill teammate Breezy Johnson claimed gold in team combined at last season’s world championships.

The team combines involves one racer competing in a downhill run and then a teammate competing in a slalom run, with the times added together to determine the results.

Lindsey Vonn unsuccessfully campaigned to team with Shiffrin in the combined event at the World Championships, but now has a better chance of forming a skiing “Dream Team” after her strong start this season at the age of 41.

Aviators edge Shandong Heroes

Beijing Ducks & China Tigers keep perfect starts

BEIJING, Dec 25, (Xinhua): The Beijing Ducks and the Guangdong Southern China Tigers each went to a 5-0 record after beating their respective opponents in the fifth round of the 2025-2026 season of the Chinese Basketball Association league.

The Beijing Ducks overwhelmed the Sichuan Blue Whales 97-46 on Monday. Despite benching star forward Zeng Fanbo due to injury, three-time CBA champion Beijing started the game well with a 14-2 run and closed the first quarter 29-10.

The Blue Whales continued their struggle on the offensive side in the second quarter, in which they made only six points. The half ended with Beijing leading 52-16. Sichuan’s 16 points set a new CBA record for the lowest first-half score by a team (previously 19 points, also by Sichuan).

Beijing maintained its good form in the second half, wrapping up the victory with a 51-point advantage. The 51-point margin marked the largest in the ongoing season, and Sichuan’s 46 points turned out to be the second-lowest in CBA history.

Omar Spellman had 17 points for the Ducks. Eugene German added 12. Mangok Mathiang and Fang Shuo got 10 points respectively.



Pang Zhenglin (2nd right) of Jiangsu Dragons breaks through during a match between Tianjin Pioneers and Jiangsu Dragons at the 2025-2026 season of the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) league in Tianjin, north China. (Xinhua)

In other games, the Shenzhen Aviators edged the Shandong Heroes 95-92, the Liaoning Flying Leopards beat the

Beijing Royal Fighters 98-86, and the Jilin Northeast Tigers downed the Ningbo Rockets 82-77.

Guangdong defeated Guangzhou 93-85. Jared Sullinger had 32 points and 10 rebounds for Guangdong, while point guard Xu Jie added 20. Lindell Wigginton had 20 points, 8 rebounds and 11 assists for Guangzhou.

Sullinger led Guangdong to a 10-point advantage in the first quarter. Guangzhou’s Wigginton spearheaded a comeback, narrowing the gap before halftime to 50-52. The third quarter saw a back-and-forth battle, and in the final quarter, Guangdong extended its lead to 14 points with a strong run. Guangzhou fought back to reduce the deficit to 5 points, but Sullinger’s clutch 4-point play sealed the victory for Guangdong.

In other games, the Zhejiang Lions breezed past the Fujian Sturgeons 84-65, the Jiangsu Dragons edged the Tianjin Pioneers 88-84, the Shanghai Sharks smashed the Zhejiang Golden Bulls 97-77, and the Shanxi Loongs moved past the Nanjing Monkey Kings 103-77.

The Qingdao Eagles beat the Xinjiang Flying Tigers 97-79.

Shenzhen Aviators beat the Sichuan Blue Whales 96-87, Jilin Northeast Tigers defeating the Beijing Royal Fighters 87-73.

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Kuwait

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Embassy of India, Kuwait invites application from suitable candidates for the local post of Clerk in the Embassy.

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# Al-Qadsia stays alive in Gulf Champions League

‘Beating Zakho & Al-Ain key to qualification’

**By Hassan Mosa**  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Sattf

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Al-Qadsia bounced back from a challenging season, both domestically and regionally, with a crucial 2-1 victory over Bahraini side Sitra at Mohamed Al-Hamad Stadium in the fourth round of Group A in the Gulf Champions League.**

The win ended a period of inconsistency for the team, who had been struggling for form in local competitions and were bottom of their Gulf Champions’ League group. The victory now gives Al-Qadsia a strong chance to secure the second qualifying spot for the semifinals.

With the result, Al-Qadsia moved to 4 points in third place, while Sitra remains last with 2 points. In the same group, Iraq’s Zakho has already secured a semifinal spot with 10 points, and UAE’s Al-Ain sits second on 6 points.

The win was powered by Congolese forward N’Zkins Kipano, who scored both goals for Al-Qadsia.

Speaking after the match, Coach Nabil Maaloul confirmed that Libyan player Mohammed Soula will leave during the winter transfer period, while a decision regarding Egyptian star Mahmoud Kahraba will be made within five days. Maaloul also emphasized his commitment to retaining Eid Al-Rashidi and ruled out signing Kuwaiti player Faisal Zayed.

Maaloul expressed his satisfaction with the victory, calling it “the team’s last opportunity to remain in the semifinal race.” He added that the team’s qualification now depends entirely on its own results, noting: “Beating Zakho and Al-Ain is our main goal to advance.”

The return of key injured players, including Algerians Victor Lekhel and Sofiane Bouchar, along with Kipano, strengthened the squad, though Khaled Sabah, Abdullah Matawah, and Khaled Ibrahim remain sidelined. Maaloul also praised Youssef Al-Haqqaan, who delivered an impressive performance in his return to the lineup.



Al-Qadsia’s Eid in full control of the ball during the match.

## Continental appointment is a tremendous honor

# Baqer pledges to elevate Asian handball

CAIRO, Dec 25: Faisal Baqer expressed his immense joy after being elected Treasurer of the Asian Handball Federation for the 2025–2029 term, during the General Assembly meeting held in Cairo, Egypt.

He described the victory as a significant milestone in his sporting career, emphasizing that the trust placed in him by member countries, as well as sports and media figures, is a source of great pride and honor. Baqer extended his heartfelt thanks to everyone who supported him.

“This continental appointment is a tremendous honor,” Baqer said. “I pledge to represent Kuwait with integrity and pride, and to work diligently alongside Asian Handball Federation President Badr Al-Dhiab and the Board of Directors to develop and elevate Asian handball, in cooperation with national federations, clubs, and media institutions.”

Baqer highlighted that his election reflects Kuwait’s strong standing in Asia and underscores the country’s ability to contribute effectively and honorably to international organizations across all fields.



Faisal Baqer, newly elected Treasurer of the Asian Handball Federation.

## Tournament marks club’s international debut

# Kuwaitis sharpen skills at Qatar International Curling Champ’ship



The Kuwaiti delegation poses for a group photo at the Qatar International Curling Championship.

DOHA, Dec 25, (KUNA): The Qatar International Open Curling Championship kicked off recently at the Ahmed bin Ali Al-Atiya Ice Hall in Al Sadd, featuring five national teams: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, India, Belgium, and host Qatar. The three-day tournament promises high-level competition and international exposure for all participating teams.

Kuwaiti curlers Saud Al-Kandari and Fatima Abdul Latif are representing the nation in the mixed doubles event, according to Mohsen Al-Muasib, head of the Kuwaiti delegation and board member of the

Winter Sports Club.

Al-Muasib highlighted the championship’s strong competitive level, noting that teams from Europe and Asia are providing valuable experience for Kuwaiti athletes. “This participation is a great opportunity to prepare our players for upcoming sporting events,” he said.

He expressed optimism about Kuwait’s performance, citing the growing development of curling in the country after the team’s impressive showing at the Winter Asian Games in Harbin, China, last Febru-

ary. This tournament marks the club’s first participation at this international level.

Al-Muasib also praised the Qatari organizers for their excellent management and warm hospitality, emphasizing those competitions help elevate the technical skills of Kuwaiti players.

He added that the club, led by Fahad Al-Ajmi, is committed to promoting curling, one of the five Olympic winter sports it oversees, aiming to expand the sport’s player base, especially among younger athletes.

## Al-Qurain secures key win

# Dominant Al-Qadsia thrashes Al-Nasr

**By Hassan Mosa**  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Al-Qadsia dominated Al-Nasr 120-73 to take a share of lead in the basketball league. In another crucial matchup, Al-Qurain defeated Al-Sulaibikhat 92-74, strengthening their bid for a semifinal spot.

Al-Nasr remains in sixth place with 10 points, while Al-Qurain climbs to third with 13 points and Al-Sulaibikhat moves to fifth with 12 points.

Al-Qadsia dominated from start to finish, winning the first quarter 36-21, the second 59-39, the third 85-48, before sealing a decisive 120-73 victory.

The clash between Al-Qurain and Al-Sulaibikhat was critical for the playoff race. Both teams are competing for a spot in the semifinals alongside Kuwait, Al-Qadsia, and Kazma. Al-Qurain held a narrow lead after the first quarter, 21-19, and maintained momentum through halftime, 39-36.

In the third quarter, coach Yahya Kleib’s squad widened the gap to 69-59. Despite Al-Sulaibikhat’s efforts to rally in the final quarter, Al-Qurain sealed the game, led by American import Robinson Love, who scored 34 points, finishing as



Qadsia surges forward controlling the ball while Nasr stands firm.

the match’s top scorer.

The tournament features a league system with three divisions, with the top four teams advancing to a best-of-three semifinal playoff series.

## Best of the Rest

**Forest legend Robertson dies:** John Robertson, a former Scotland winger who won the European Cup twice with Nottingham Forest and scored the only goal in the 1980 final, has died. He was 72.

The Premier League club said in a statement Thursday that it was “heartbroken to announce the passing of Nottingham Forest legend and dear friend, John Robertson.” No cause of death was given.

Robertson won 28 caps for Scotland during his five-year international career, which included being selected at the 1978 and 1982 World Cups.

He became a cult hero at Forest after playing an integral part in the East Midlands club’s European Cup victories in 1979 and 1980.

Robertson provided the cross for Trevor Francis to head home the only goal against Swedish side Malmö in Munich as Brian Clough’s side lifted the European Cup - which evolved into the Champions League - for the first time in 1979.

Twelve months later, Robertson was on the scoresheet in another 1-0 victory as Forest successfully defended its European crown against Hamburg in Madrid.

He also won the English League Cup twice with Forest.

Robertson started and ended his career at Forest, either side of a spell at local rival Derby.

“Rest in Peace, Robbo ... Our greatest,” Forest said. (AP)

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NEWS





Ivory Coast's Ghislain Konan and Mozambique's Elias Gaspar Pelembe compete during the Africa Cup of Nations group F soccer match between Ivory Coast and Mozambique in Marrakech, Morocco. (AP)

# Sports



The Kuwaiti team, winner of the silver medal in the 50-meter prone rifle event, on the podium.



Kuwait's team receives recognition for winning the silver medal in the 50-meter prone rifle event. KUNA photos

## Kuwait adds 4 medals on final day to reach 9 at Arab Shooting Champ'ship

Team's success highlighted by men's 50m prone rifle team

MUSCAT, Dec 25: The Kuwaiti national shooting team capped off a remarkable performance at the Arab Pistol and Rifle Shooting Championship in Muscat, Oman, by adding four more medals on the final day, bringing their total haul to nine medals—1 gold, 3 silver, and 5 bronze.

The team's success was highlighted by the men's 50m prone rifle team, where Khaled Al-Majed, Turki Al-Shammari, and Ali Al-Mutairi won silver, finishing behind Oman and ahead of Bahrain. Al-Majed also earned bronze in the individual category with a score of 618.1 points, narrowly missing out on silver and gold.

On the women's side, shooters Maryam Razouqi, Retaj Al-Ziyadi, and Fajr Al-Dhabeeb claimed bronze in the team event, while Razouqi added another bronze in the individual competition. Gold went to Bahrain, and silver to

Oman.

Obaid Al-Otaibi, head of the Kuwaiti delegation and Secretary-General of the Kuwaiti and Arab Shooting Federations, dedicated the achievement to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and the Kuwaiti government, praising their continued support of the sport.

Al-Otaibi also thanked Minister of Information and Culture, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, and the Public Authority for Sports for their ongoing backing, which he said was instrumental in the team's success.

He applauded the outstanding performances of both male and female shooters, and congratulated the athletes for their impressive results. Al-Otaibi emphasized that the Shooting Club Board, led by Dweij Al-Otaibi, will continue its efforts to achieve further international, continental, and regional successes. He also commended the Omani organizing committee for their excellent management, which contributed to the smooth running of the championship.

### Best of the Rest

**Uganda commissions stadium:** Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni on Wednesday officially commissioned the 20,000-seater Hoima City Stadium, marking a major milestone in the country's preparations to co-host the 2027 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON).

The stadium, built at a cost of 130 million U.S. dollars, was formally handed over to the government during a ceremony held in Hoima City in the Western Region of Uganda.

"This Africa Cup of Nations that Uganda will host in 2027 has stimulated us to do something here in Hoima City," Museveni said.

Janet Museveni, the First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, thanked the president and the government for prioritizing the project and ensuring its completion in record time.

"This is the day as a country we celebrate this new stadium as a Christmas gift," she said, adding that the stadium is a testimony to what can be accomplished when the country works together.

Uganda will co-host the 2027 AFCON with Tanzania and Kenya. (Xinhua)

### Ivory Coast starts title defense with win

## Proud dad Zidane sees Algeria beat Sudan

RABAT, Morocco, Dec 25, (AP): Ivory Coast got its Africa Cup of Nations title defense off to a winning start and France great Zinedine Zidane watched his goalkeeper son's safe hands as Algeria also started its campaign with a victory.

Riyad Mahrez scored twice and the 20-year-old Ibrahim Maza scored his first international goal for Algeria, one of the tournament favorites, to beat 10-man Sudan 3-0 to move top of Group E.

"The most important thing was to start with a win," Mahrez said. "The last two AFCONs, we didn't start good. Today, we really wanted to make it happen and we did."

Zidane, who was at the sweet-smelling Moulay El Hassan Stadium in Rabat to see his son Luca Zidane playing in the Algeria goal, was fêted by the crowd every time he was shown on the big screens.

Luca Zidane opted to represent his grandfather's country after getting the Fennec Foxes' invitation and he's been given his chance to shine because of an injury to Alexandre Okidja, who might have been expected to start otherwise.

Algeria wasted little time Wednesday with Mahrez sweeping in the opener in the second minute after unselfish play from Hicham Boudaoui to set him up.

Zidane was called into action shortly afterward to deny Yaser Awad on a break.

Sudan had to play all its qualification games away from home because of the near 1,000-day old civil war ravaging the country.

Though the Algerians looked confident and played with intensity, the big chances fell at the other end, with

Zidane saving again from Awad before Abdel Raouf fired over.

Salah Adil was sent off just as the rain began to fall shortly before the break with his second yellow card for a foul on Rayan Ait-Nouri, who would have been through otherwise.

But the Algerian fans, who were in a majority, needed to be patient.

Mohammed Amoura produced a brilliant cross with the outside of his boot for Mahrez to score in the 61st, and Baghdad Bounedjah headed the ball into Maza's path for the substitute to complete the scoring in the 85th.

"I'm very happy," Maza told The Associated Press. "My first goal in my first African Cup game, it couldn't go any better for me, Alhamdulillah."

Amad Diallo's second-half strike was enough for defending champion Ivory Coast to beat Mozambique 1-0 in a rain-soaked game in Fez.

The Elephants' captain, Franck Kessie, headed the ball back and Diallo struck it inside the far corner shortly after the break.

Ivory Coast, which won the title in scarcely believable fashion on home ground in the last edition, missed a host of chances to finish the game with Vakoun Bayo having two good chances blocked late on.

Then Geny Catamo eluded three Ivorian defenders in stoppage time only to lack power with his final shot, which was gathered by goalkeeper Yahia Fofana to safeguard the win.

In the other Group F game, Etta Eyong's early goal through the goalkeeper's legs was enough for five-time champion Cameroon to beat Gabon 1-0 in the coastal city of Agadir.

## Al-Fahad leads Kuwait to impressive 12-medal tally in Doha



The Kuwaiti weightlifting team celebrates.

KUNA photo

DOHA, Dec 25, (KUNA): Kuwait's weightlifting team delivered an impressive performance, securing a total of 12 medals across two major events: the West Asia Weightlifting Championships for seniors and the Qatar International Weightlifting Cup 2025, both held in Doha.

At the West Asia Championships, Abrar Al-Fa-

had dominated the 77-kg category, claiming three gold medals, while Hanan Al-Amir and Al-Zahraa Kamshad each earned three bronze medals in the 77-kg and 69-kg divisions, respectively.

Meanwhile, at the Qatar International Weightlifting Cup, Abrar Al-Fahad added three more bronze medals in the 77-kg category to her tally.

The events are part of a packed weightlifting calendar in Qatar, which includes the 10th edition of the Qatar International Weightlifting Cup 2025, the Arab Weightlifting Championship for seniors, youth, and juniors, and the West Asia Weightlifting Championship for the same age groups.

## Prince Bin Turki calls for Renard's removal ahead of World Cup

RIYADH, Dec 25: Prince Faisal Bin Turki, former president of Al-Nassr Club, has called for French coach Hervé Renard to be removed as head coach of the Saudi national team ahead of the 2026 World Cup. Bin Turki revealed that Renard had previously declined an offer to coach Al-Nassr.

Speaking on television, he criticized Renard's leadership, saying, "I didn't see a clear identity for the team in the Arab Cup. Yes, we won matches, but there was no defined style of play."

On the timing ahead of the World Cup, he added, "It's still possible to replace Renard. The team scores, but

there's no clear methodology, and the recent changes are unconvincing."

He also questioned Renard's decision to attend the 2026 World Cup draw during the Arab Cup, calling it illogical, and criticized his remark that Saudi Arabia hadn't won a title in 22 years as inappropriate.

Bin Turki stressed, "We hired him

to bring championships. Naturally, the Saudi team should have excelled in the Arab Gulf Cup, but that didn't happen."

He concluded by noting that he had once tried to bring Renard to Al-Nassr, but the coach was not interested at the time, adding, "Renard is more suited for national teams than clubs."



Algeria's Adil Boulbina takes a shot at goal next to Sudan's Mohamed Saeed Ahmed during the Africa Cup of Nations Group E soccer match between Algeria and Sudan in Rabat, Morocco. (AP)