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Amir receives 45th session report from GCC chairman Page 2

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Opinion

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

THE article titled “Repetition Doesn’t Teach the Wise” in Al-Jarida newspaper by our colleague Hassan Al-Essa was spot on, in terms of accurately diagnosing the local economic situation. He effectively analyzed the main points highlighted in the Al-Shall reports.

However, we must remind our colleague that this current outcry is not new. For years, a significant portion of the population and various observers have

been warning about the consequences of inaction.

We have repeatedly identified the root causes of these problems. Timely intervention could have spared the country huge difficulties. Even a delayed remedy is better than allowing the economic situation to worsen. We fully agree with our colleague Al-Essa.

For instance, take agriculture, food production, and the pursuit of food self-sufficiency. These are vital necessities for every nation, not just Kuwait. The same principle applies to the industrial and service sectors.

When the government allocated agricultural land to citizens, the primary goal was to achieve food self-sufficiency or, at the very least, secure a reliable domestic supply. This would reduce dependence on food imports, following the example of other countries that strategically use their land to support the national economy and develop a food processing

industry.

The land, initially barren desert, was transformed by its owners through construction, cultivation, development, investment, and the employment of workers.

The government’s decree regulating agricultural tourism was welcomed with optimism. However, in recent years, the situation has declined.

The responsible authorities have stopped providing essential support, placing a heavy burden on farmers. These benefits were crucial for offsetting high electricity and water costs, particularly as treated wastewater continues to be wasted into the sea.

Furthermore, the absence of a regulatory framework prevents farmers from selling their produce properly in the local market, posing a threat to food security. Consequently, they are often forced to sell their crops at minimal prices, sometimes barely cov-

ering the cost of the packaging.

Despite their persistence, farmers’ appeals for assistance have grown increasingly desperate. A positive development occurred following the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior’s visit to some farms, leading to the decision to establish a “Farmers’ Corner” in cooperative societies.

However, this measure alone is not enough. The authorities must address numerous outstanding issues to ensure the successful and sustainable operation of agricultural production.

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Justice Ministry issues new court fees, opens clerk posts to women

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The Ministry of Justice issued a new administrative circular regarding amendments and regulations for court fees and the procedures of the Court Clerks’ Department, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The circular stipulates a fee of KD 0.500 per page for copies of rulings requested by anyone other than the litigants. The same fee applies to each additional page requested by the litigants after receiving the first copy.

It also stipulates a fee of KD 1 for certificates and copies of case documents requested by litigants or others related to the progress of the case or the judgment.

The original copy of a ruling is provided free of charge to the litigant for the first time. Subsequent copies, whether requested by litigants or others, are charged at KD 0.500 per page. The circular specifies a fee of KD 1 for a certificate of the judgment’s operative



Al-Sumait

part, KD 1 for a certificate of case registration or filing, and KD 1 for photocopying the entire case file. Violations of these instructions will incur legal and administrative penalties.

Also, Minister of Justice Counselor Nasser Al-Sumait stated on Sunday that receiving applications from female candidates for the position of Court Clerk is part of the Ministry of Justice’s efforts to develop its human resources, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Minister Al-Sumait highlighted that this is the first time the position has been made available to women.

Counselor Al-Sumait explained to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that opening applications comes within the framework of supporting judicial work and promoting equal opportunities for both genders. The initiative aims to expand the pool of national talent and benefit from qualified female capabilities, thereby supporting the smooth operation of court sessions.

He stressed that this initiative complements the ongoing effort to involve qualified women in various administrative and technical positions within the courts.

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Festival champions Kuwaiti industry

MoCI and Housing ministers back national industrial sector’s growth

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Abdul Latif Al-Mishari affirmed the importance of supporting the national industrial sector and enhancing its growth and competitiveness, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The ministers said this in press statements they issued on Sunday during the opening of the “Pride of National Industries - Third Season” festival, held at Souk Mubarakia in cooperation with the Voluntary Work Center and Kuwait Municipality.

Minister Al-Ajeel highlighted that Kuwait gives strategic priority to the national industrial sector, viewing it as a major driver of economic diversification and a means to enhance the added

value of the national economy.

He stressed that the Kuwaiti government is committed to creating a stimulating environment for local industries, enabling them to grow and compete.

Al-Ajeel highlighted the festival’s role in promoting this approach by connecting national products to Kuwaiti identity and supporting local crafts and industries at one of the country’s most prominent heritage landmarks.

He noted that one of the objectives of the state’s current development plan is to increase the industrial sector’s contribution to national income, expand the production base, and support value-added industries, thereby creating quality job opportunities and enhancing the sustainability of the national economy.

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Photo by Rezk Tawfiq

Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Abdul Latif Al-Mishari during the opening of the ‘Pride of National Industries - Third Season’ festival, at Souk Mubarakia, Kuwait City.

Accurate passenger info a must for alerts

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Abdullah Al-Rajhi, official spokesperson for the Public Authority for Civil Aviation (PACA) and Deputy Director General for Aviation Safety, Air Transport, and Aviation Security, stressed the importance of passengers providing accurate personal contact details, including phone numbers and email addresses, when booking travel, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a statement to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on Monday, Al-Rajhi clarified that contact information submitted during booking, whether directly to airlines or through travel agencies, must belong to the passenger.

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Kuwait banks to close on 1st Jan

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29, (KUNA): The Deputy Secretary General of the Kuwait Banking Association, Sheikha Al-Essa, announced on Monday that Kuwaiti banks will be closed on Thursday, Jan 1, 2026 on the occasion of the New Year holiday, and regular business hours will resume on Sunday, Jan 4.

In a press statement issued on behalf of the association, Sheikha Al-Essa extended her congratulations and best wishes to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown

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17,000-20,000 VISIT VISAS ISSUED WEEKLY

Kuwait simplifies travel with 5-minute visit visa

Residency fees set at KD 10 monthly



Ministry of Health photo

Doctors perform a heart transplant surgery at the Salman Al-Dabbous Cardiac Center.

Cutting edge devices support patients

Kuwait marks 13 heart transplants milestone

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The Ministry of Health announced the successful completion of two heart transplant surgeries at the Salman Al-Dabbous Cardiac Center, marking a milestone in Kuwait’s National Heart Transplant Program. With these procedures, the total number of heart transplants performed in Kuwait has reached 13 since

the program’s inception.

The operations, which were carried out on a 10-year-old child and a patient in their fifties, underscore the growing capabilities of the national healthcare system and highlight Kuwait’s ability to provide advanced cardiac transplant services.

The ministry affirmed that these achievements significantly enhance the quality of life for patients with end-stage heart failure and represent a major step in the development of a comprehensive

national organ transplant system.

Dr. Riyadh Tarazi, a consultant cardiac surgeon at the center, praised the accomplishment, noting that 2025 alone witnessed eight successful heart transplants, compared with one each in 2019, 2021, and 2023, and two in 2024.

He highlighted the center’s continuous growth in clinical and technical expertise, achieved in coordination with the Organ Provision Program.

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Kuwait lowers prices of over 1,600 medicines

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The Ministry of Health announced that it has reduced the prices of 1,654 medications and pharmaceutical products between May 2024 and December 2025, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In an official statement, the ministry highlighted that this move makes drug prices in Kuwait the lowest among Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, thus contributing to lower healthcare costs for citizens and residents.

PACA Chief, UK envoy discuss aviation cooperation



Head of the Public Authority for Civil Aviation (PACA), Sheikh Humoud Al-Sabah with the Ambassador of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to Kuwait, Qudsi Rasheed.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29, (KUNA): Head of the Public Authority for Civil Aviation (PACA), Sheikh Humoud Mubarak Al-Humoud Al-Sabah met on Monday with the Ambassador of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to Kuwait, Qudsi Rasheed, to discuss ways to enhance cooperation in the field of civil aviation.

In a statement to KUNA, the PACA said the meeting addressed opportunities for exchanging expertise and strengthening bilateral relations in a manner that supports the air transport system and facilitates passenger movement between Kuwait and the UK.

The statement added that both sides stressed the importance of continuing coordination and developing partnerships that serve mutual interests and contribute to achieving the highest standards of safety and efficiency in the aviation sector.

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The Director General of the Residency Affairs Department, Brigadier General Mazyad Al-Mutairi, says the department issues between 17,000 and 20,000 visit visas weekly, including family, business, and tourist visas, in addition to around 25,000 residency permits, with numbers varying according to the season.

He emphasized that work is being carried out at an accelerated pace, guided by a clear vision to regulate residency matters and streamline visit visa procedures without compromising legal regulations.

Brigadier General Al-Mutairi said this during his appearance on the “Kuwait Nights” show on Kuwait TV, where he discussed the important features of the new residency law. The law, which was issued along with its executive regulations by the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef, came into effect on November 23.

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Day by Day

REJOICE quietly, and achieve your goals in silence. We live in a society where envy touches everyone. They may even envy a bald man for the hair on his eyebrows.

Once, a leader of a Gulf country said the envy in his nation is so heavy that not even a camel or a truck could carry it.

... Yet tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar

NBK organizes session for KNPC and KIPIC employees about fraud prevention and cybersecurity awareness



Warba's Rowad program concludes with London showcase

Prayer Timings			
Fajr	05:17	Asr	14:40
Sunrise ..	06:41	Maghrib ..	16:58
Zohr	11:50	Isha	18:21

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:
By Day: Rather cold with moderate to fresh strong at times northwesterly wind, with speeds of 20-55 km/h causing rising dust and some scattered clouds will appear.

Weather			
By Night:	Cold to very cold with light to moderate freshening at times over coastal areas northwesterly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of 10-50 km/h.		
Station	Max Exp	Min Rec	

Kuwait City	23	14
Kuwait Airport	20	12
Abdaly	21	09
Bubyan	20	08
Jahra	21	13
Failaka Island	19	11
Salmiyah	22	16

Major leap in technology, AI

GCC in '25: 2 summits, Gaza truce, global clout



Amiri Diwan photo
His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a report on Kuwait's presidency of the 45th session of the GCC Supreme Council from the GCC Secretary General Jassem Al-Budaiwi.

Amir receives 45th session report from GCC chairman

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, received on Sunday the Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassem Al-Budaiwi at Bayan Palace.

Al-Budaiwi presented His Highness the Amir with a report on Kuwait's presidency of the 45th session of the GCC Supreme Council.

His Highness the Crown Prince, Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, received the Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassem Al-Budaiwi at Bayan Palace.

Al-Budaiwi presented His Highness the Crown Prince with a report on Kuwait's presidency of the 45th session of the GCC Supreme Council.

His Highness the Prime Minister, Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, also received the Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassem Al-Budaiwi at Bayan Palace.

Al-Budaiwi presented His Highness the Prime Minister with a report on Kuwait's presidency of the 45th session of the GCC Supreme Council. The meeting was attended by the Head of the Prime Minister's Diwan Abdulaziz Al-Dakhil.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29, (KUNA): As 2025 draws to a close, it leaves behind decisive milestones for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, including two landmark summits, one extraordinary, affirming shared destiny and unified purpose, alongside efforts that culminated in ending the devastating Gaza war after nearly two years.

Building positive momentum from previous years, GCC states in 2025 further strengthened their strategic positioning at the heart of evolving global geopolitics and economics by expanding international partnerships and leading high-quality investments targeting future-oriented sectors worldwide.

Throughout the year, GCC countries consolidated their regional and global standing through parallel tracks encompassing accelerated development, reinforced collective security principles, deepened political decision-making engagement, and assumed complex mediation roles amid some of the worlds most sensitive diplomatic arenas.

In a decisive security and political response reflecting unity and solidarity, Doha hosted an extraordinary Arab-Islamic summit and an exceptional GCC summit following Qatar's interception of an unprecedented Iranian attack on Al-Udeid Airbase last September.

The extraordinary GCC summit affirmed full solidarity with Qatar, directing the unified military command to activate joint defense mechanisms, enhance deterrence capabilities, and implement necessary operational measures to safeguard Gulf security and collective stability.

Command

The Joint Defense Council approved expanded intelligence sharing through the unified military command, accelerated the Gulf early-warning missile defense system, and updated joint defense plans in coordination with the operations and training committees across member states.

Meanwhile, outcomes of the 46th regular GCC summit, concluded in Bahrain in early December, underscored growing momentum toward strengthening collective security and advancing

integration steps across political, economic, and institutional domains.

The final communique reiterated commitments from the extraordinary and Arab-Islamic summits, stressing full implementation of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques vision to enhance joint Gulf action, including completing economic unity pillars and shared defense and security systems.

The summit approved the phased operation of the customs data exchange platform in the second half of 2026, the establishment of a GCC Civil Aviation Authority headquartered in the UAE, and the adoption of the agreement linking member states to the Gulf railway project.

GCC leaders also pushed to accelerate implementation of joint action plans with international partners following summits with the US, European Union, ASEAN, and China, reinforcing the blocs outward-looking economic and strategic engagement. During 2025, Gulf states hosted and participated in numerous high-level forums, including the GCC-US Summit in Riyadh attended by US President Donald Trump, alongside ministerial and international meetings addressing Syria and broader regional challenges.

Economic foresight featured prominently as Gulf states prioritized digital transformation and innovation, positioning the region as a hub for global knowledge-economy events, including mining, real estate, labor markets, Islamic finance, media, and the World Governments Summit.

The region witnessed a major leap in technology and artificial intelligence (AI), highlighted by Saudi Arabia's LEAP 2025 conference with record regional investments, and a UAE-France framework agreement to establish a large-scale AI data center.

GCC states reaffirmed unwavering commitment to the Palestinian cause through active diplomacy, mediation, and humanitarian action, participating in summits, ministerial committees, international conferences, and emergency financial sustainability initiatives for the Palestinian Authority.

The 46th GCC summit sent clear messages supporting Palestinian statehood on 1967 borders, ending occupation, lifting the Gaza siege, and reaffirming the centrality of the Palestinian issue within Gulf collective foreign policy.

The statement of the GCC, delivered by Kuwait during the UN Security Councils emergency session under the agenda item "The Situation in the Middle East, including the Question of Palestine," embodied the firm Gulf position in support of the Palestinian people.

Statement

The statement was delivered by the Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and reaffirmed the GCCs principled stance. The Gulf states pivotal role in preventive diplomatic mediation was reflected in a package of efforts addressing some of the worlds most complex regional and international conflicts, including notable mediation initiatives related to the Russia-Ukraine crisis.

These efforts included prisoner exchange operations between Moscow and Kyiv led by the UAE, as well as the UAEs hosting of prisoner exchange operations between the US and Russia.

Qatar also played a decisive role in stabilizing the ceasefire in Gaza and reaching an agreement to halt the war in the Strip, while Oman facilitated US-Iranian dialogue and the announcement of an agreement between the United States and Houthis militias.

In a bid to restore international balance and support efforts to end the Russia-Ukraine war, Saudi Arabia hosted talks bringing together the foreign ministers of both countries in the first meeting at this level since the outbreak of the war in February 2022. (more) Gulf efforts also continued to support stability in Syria and its reintegration into the Arab and international arenas, alongside active mediation initiatives aimed at resolving African, regional and international conflicts.

Ambassadors extend New Year greetings

Progress, prosperity for Kuwaiti leaders, people

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: As the New Year approaches, a number of ambassadors extended their warmest greetings and best wishes to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti people, wishing Kuwait continuous progress and prosperity.

Ambassador of Tajikistan Zubaydullo Zubaydov expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, wishing them good health and well-being, and to Kuwait – its leadership, government and people – lasting security, stability, progress and prosperity.

In a press statement, Zubaydov affirmed that relations between Tajikistan and Kuwait are deep-rooted and strong, based on mutual respect and understanding. He pointed out the remarkable developments these relations have witnessed in the political, economic and developmental fields, thanks to the shared commitment of both countries' leadership to strengthen cooperation and expand the horizons of bilateral partnership.

He commended Kuwait's com-



Issal Daniel



Zubaydullo Zubaydov



Vladimir Zheltov

prehensive development and reform process, which has encompassed various sectors, emphasizing that these achievements reflect His Highness the Amir's forward-looking and insightful vision, and his unwavering commitment to consolidate the foundations of a modern State and promote sustainable development, which benefits Kuwaiti citizens and enhances Kuwait's regional and international standing.

He affirmed that Kuwait holds a distinguished position in Tajikistan, in recognition of its prominent humanitarian and developmental role and its efforts at the regional and international levels in supporting stability and development. He emphasized that this role reflects a consistent approach to supporting joint action and serving humanitarian causes.

He said the coming period holds

promising opportunities to strengthen cooperation between the two countries in the areas of investment, sustainable development, and cultural exchange, which will contribute to deepening the historical and humanitarian ties that bind the two friendly peoples and serve the common interests of both nations.

He confirmed Tajikistan's aspiration to continue coordination and consultation with Kuwait during the new year and to work towards developing bilateral relations towards broader horizons, thereby, strengthening the strategic partnership and consolidating the bonds of friendship and cooperation between the two countries.

Ambassador of the Russian Federation Vladimir Zheltov stated "I am confident that the historic partnership between Russia and Kuwait will continue its path towards fur-

ther strengthening and development in the new year. We will also continue, in cooperation with our Kuwaiti partners, our efforts to elevate our bilateral relations to broader horizons, in a way that serves the common interests of our two friendly countries. I am certain that the State of Kuwait will enter a new phase of development and prosperity in 2026 under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad."

Ambassador of the Central African Republic Marzouk Issan Daniel praised Kuwait's pioneering role in supporting stability and humanitarian work, emphasizing that Kuwait enjoys great respect and appreciation in Africa for its sincere humanitarian and development initiatives.

He added that his country looks forward to strengthening cooperation with Kuwait in the developmental, economic, and humanitarian fields, noting that the Kuwaiti leadership is a model of wisdom and quiet diplomacy based on peace and effective partnership.

Turkish Ambassador Tuba Sönmez affirmed the depth and strength of the bilateral relations between Türkiye and Kuwait, indicating that last year marked a significant milestone in the course of joint cooperation between the two countries at various levels.

Over 1,000 qualify for top co-op jobs exams

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The acting Assistant Undersecretary for Financial and Administrative Affairs at the Ministry of Social Affairs Dr. Sayed Issa announced that the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) has submitted to the relevant selection committee a list of 1,072 qualified candidates for supervisory positions in cooperative societies.

Dr. Issa explained that these candidates were chosen from a total of 1,305 applicants who registered through the "Fakhruna" (Our Pride) platform. The eligible applicants will proceed to the second round, which includes qualifying examinations to be held at a private university.

He confirmed that a meeting with the university is scheduled for next week to discuss feedback on previous exams and to set oversight and regulatory measures for future examinations to ensure maximum transparency and accuracy.

Dr. Issa explained that a dedicated website has been launched for applicants to the Financial and Administrative Supervisor position. The website allows users to upload required documents using a unique barcode and automates all stages of the appointment process, including registration for training courses. This initiative aims to enhance digital transformation, streamline procedures, and strengthen oversight of cooperative work.

Meanwhile, Dr. Issa conducted an inspection tour of the Ministry of Social Affairs' departments within the government complex to review workflow and monitor progress in areas undergoing renovation and development. This includes the Legal Affairs, Civil Society Organizations, Public Relations, and Citizen Services departments.

The renovations aim to provide more space for employees and create a comfortable, motivating work environment to boost institutional performance.

Regarding working hours during the current holiday season, Dr. Issa confirmed that staffing levels in the ministry's departments are well-organized and fully covered to ensure uninterrupted operations.

He emphasized that all departments are continuing to perform their duties normally, adhering to established processing rates and processing transactions quickly without any disruption.

Other Voices

Diversifying leadership, expertise to avoid bias

By Ahmad alsarraf

MANY countries, either voluntarily or by law, appoint officials to sensitive geographic or security positions who do not belong to those areas, sects, or tribes.

This strategy is often adopted outside of advanced countries to prevent ethnic, familial, religious, or sectarian bias. It can offer significant benefits when senior officials are selected and appointed through a sound and transparent process.

However, this strategy can become dangerous if misused or implemented in a tense environment without strong institutional support.

One advantage of this decision is the reduction of conflicts of interest. Officials appointed from outside the local community or their immediate work environment are generally less influenced by pressures from family, tribe, sect, or nepotism. This helps ensure a more impartial and fair application of the law.

Such appointments also strengthen loyalty to the institution rather than to local affiliations. As a result, senior officials are more committed to the state, the law, and the administrative system, rather than being swayed by narrow local or familial networks that might pressure them to bend rules or make decisions benefiting their social circle. This method helps break down stereotypes among different segments of society and encourages daily communication and positive interaction, rather than limiting relationships to tense media or political contexts. It reinforces the principle of



alsarraf

citizenship above sub-identities.

When people see an official from another region or sect performing his duties professionally and respectfully, it strengthens the understanding that public office is national rather than local, and that competence, not narrow affiliation, is the basis for selection.

This method also widens the experience and skills of officials, whether governors or teachers, enhancing their ability to understand new social patterns and interact with diverse subcultures, languages, and dialects.

These skills are essential in modern public service, particularly as most forms of favoritism and direct familial pressure have diminished. As a result, officials find it easier to say "no" when asked to violate the law.

However, the approach becomes problematic if appointments are used abusively or provocatively, for example, assigning an official known for hostility toward a particular group to a region dominated by that group.

Therefore, a prerequisite for the success of this type of appointment is a clear institutional framework that protects the official's independence while requiring engagement with representatives of the local community, including local councils, civil society organizations, tribal groups, and religious or sectarian bodies. Transparent criteria for competence and promotion must be followed, and local personnel should be supported by a team from the community to ensure that people feel their voices are heard within the administration, while the senior official remains above local divisions. The approach can be further strengthened by appointing civilian officials to religious or military institutions, particularly for functions that are non-religious and non-military in nature.

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‘Be Kuwaiti, buy Kuwaiti veggies’

Farmers’ corner at co-ops

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: With the aim of supporting local agricultural products, Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah issued a new decision on Sunday to allocate a “Kuwait Farmers’ Corner” at cooperative societies for allowing national farmers to display and sell their agricultural produce directly, without intermediaries, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Minister Dr. Al-Huwailah told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the decision is not merely an update to the previous decision No. 31 but a significant step forward that improves governance and regulates marketing mechanisms. It introduces clear controls and organizes auctions through a fully automated system, thereby reducing violations, enhancing transparency, and ensuring strict oversight via digital transformation in the buying and selling processes.

She emphasized that the new decision represents a major regulatory shift in supporting national agricultural products and strengthening food security, within a comprehensive vision based on four main pillars designed to address challenges in a fair and balanced manner.

Minister Dr. Al-Huwailah explained that the decision mandates the establishment of a “Kuwait Farmer’s Cor-

ner” in cooperative societies as a direct sales outlet. This allows farmers to display their products without intermediaries, with continuous sales periods of no less than one month. The decision is aimed to provide stability for farmers ahead of planting seasons and ensure a guaranteed and fair outlet for marketing their produce.

She emphasized that the decision promotes fairness and sustainability in sup-

porting farmers by empowering them, encouraging the expansion of high-quality agriculture, improving product standards, and protecting the rights of both cooperative societies and consumers.

Minister Dr. Al-Huwailah stated that the decision supports the financial stability of farmers by requiring cooperative societies to adhere to specific payment deadlines and exempting them from any fees or charges, adding that this measure builds trust, encourages increased production and higher quality, and ensures the sustainability of local agricultural supply chains.

She said the decision enhances implementation quality by establishing a committee to support local agricultural products, clarifying that the committee, which comprises representatives from relevant government agencies, oversees the implementation process, addresses complaints, and enforces clear penalties on violators.



Dr Al-Huwailah

Fraudulent incidents pile up

Complex case of fake nationality

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: A recent review of citizenship renunciation cases has uncovered a complex and elaborate case of nationality forgery involving a Kuwaiti citizen who previously renounced his Gulf state nationality. The discovery exposes a web of falsified identities, altered birth dates, and fraudulent family registrations, reports Al-Rai daily.

According to informed sources, the individual in question, whose Kuwaiti records list him as being born in 1935 (making him 90 years old under Kuwaiti law), was actually born in 1953 according to his Gulf state documents, where he is a legitimate citizen. He resides in the Gulf state and has 13 sons and daughters registered under his Kuwaiti citizenship file. Investigations revealed that he falsified his Kuwaiti birth date to include a son born in 1950, despite being only three years older than the child.

Further investigations uncovered that the son born in 1950, when cross-referenced with Gulf nationality records, shared his Gulf name with another individual who had also previously obtained Kuwaiti citizenship fraudulently. DNA testing confirmed that the two men are

in fact brothers in the Gulf state, though they were registered under different, false fathers in Kuwait, an anomaly described by sources as “Brothers in the Gulf... strangers in Kuwait.”

Investigations also involved the alleged brothers of the individual born in 1935, who were summoned for DNA testing. The results confirmed that he was not their sibling, disproving the familial connections recorded in his Kuwaiti citizenship file.

The authorities revealed that the deceased citizen has 179 dependents, including children and grandchildren, while the son born in 1950 alone has 118 dependents. The case highlights an intricate pattern of identity falsification, with multiple layers of forged documents and family records, prompting further scrutiny by officials.

The review of citizenship renunciation cases continues as authorities seek to verify the legality of previous decisions and identify additional instances of forgery or dual nationality misuse.

Sources emphasized that this case reflects the depth and complexity of nationality fraud uncovered during the ongoing investigations.

PAAET Health Sciences expands faculty and academic programs

Dean unveils appointments and quality initiatives

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Dr. Bader Al-Khalaf, Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), revealed a set of measures related to scholarships, academic appointments, departmental needs, student selection mechanisms in specialized health fields, academic accreditation, and quality assurance, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement, Dr. Al-Khalaf explained that the college recently issued a scholarship advertisement covering all academic departments and is currently in the screening and interview phase for applicants. The scholarships target bachelor's degree graduates from PAAET, Kuwait University, or other universities to pursue master's and PhD degrees based on the needs of the scientific departments.

Dr. Al-Khalaf indicated that a new appointment advertisement will be issued soon, detailing departmental requirements for faculty members with master's and doctoral degrees, as well as training staff with bachelor's or diploma degrees in specific specializations.

He stressed that the goal is to reduce reliance on secondments and achieve near self-sufficiency in teaching staff in the coming years.

Dr. Al-Khalaf clarified that the number of available scholarships varies by department, with some specializations requiring four recipients while others need only one. The exact numbers are determined based on departmental future plans spanning ten to fifteen years, developed according to each department's assessment of its academic staffing needs.

Regarding scholarship recipients' obligations, Dr. Al-Khalaf emphasized

that each recipient must serve at PAAET for a period equal to the duration of their scholarship.

He explained that some students stop at the master's level without completing their doctorate, which creates challenges for appointments. In such cases, the institution may appoint them with only a master's degree or place them on a training track instead of a teaching position.

Dr. Al-Khalaf clarified that some departments are predominantly male, with men making up as much as 90 percent of the student body, while in other departments, women account for more than 80 percent.

He affirmed that female students are highly committed, diligent, and excel in grades and academic performance, despite certain challenges.

Dr. Al-Khalaf emphasized that female graduates of the college face no obstacles in securing healthcare positions, particularly in specializations such as anesthesia, respiratory therapy, and emergency medicine.

He said the Graduates Follow-Up Office coordinates with relevant authorities and aligns with labor market needs, providing graduates with ample employment opportunities.

Dr. Al-Khalaf revealed that admission interviews for specialized health fields are conducted in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health, whose representatives participate in the interview committees to assess students' skills, including quick thinking, decision-making, composure under pressure, and effective communication, qualities essential for work in operating theaters and intensive care units.

He affirmed that the Faculty of Health Sciences has a specialized Quality and Academic Accreditation Department, headed by Dr. Nizar Jaafar.

Dr. Al-Khalaf indicated that while some colleges have obtained international accreditations, the Faculty of Health Sciences recently received ABET accreditation for several of its programs and is continuing efforts to secure accreditation for the remaining programs in the next phase.



Farwaniya Governorate photo
Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah receives Qudsi Rashid, the Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Kuwait.

Farwaniya Governor, UK envoy explore strategic partnerships

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah received the Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Kuwait Qudsi Rashid in his office at the governorate on Monday.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, they discussed various topics of mutual interest and ways to enhance cooperation and bilateral relations. They also explored prospects for collaboration in multiple fields to serve the common interests of the two friendly countries.

The governor emphasized the importance of the historical relations between Kuwait and the United Kingdom, highlighting the Kuwaiti leadership's commitment to strengthening cooperation and coordination with friendly nations.

Ambassador Qudsi Rashid expressed his gratitude to Governor Sheikh Athbi for the warm welcome.

He praised Kuwait's regional and international standing, and affirmed his country's commitment to enhancing cooperation frameworks in the coming period.



KUNA photo
His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, delivers a speech at the Gulf-American Summit.

Vision 2035 in focus

Kuwait's 2025 year in review

Continuation

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29, (KUNA): Kuwait witnessed many events throughout 2025, including in the political, economic, security, social affairs and health fields, among which the signing of the completion operations of Mubarak A-Kabeer Port with China. Following are major events of the year.

His Highness the Amir:

May 11: His Highness the Amir receives Lebanese President General Joseph Aoun who was on an official visit to Kuwait.

May 14: His Highness the Amir arrives in Saudi Arabia to attend the Gulf-American Summit in Riyadh.

May 14: During the Gulf-American Summit, His Highness the Amir delivers a speech and said he was looking forward to launching joint initiatives in smart infrastructure investment, innovation and entrepreneurship. He reaffirmed Kuwait's commitment to working within the GCC framework and proposed establishing a Gulf-American forum for cultural and educational dialogue to support academic exchange programs and joint research.

June 1: His Highness the Amir and Syrian President Ahmad Al-Sharaa held official talks during the Syrian President's official visit to Kuwait.

June 24: His Highness the Amir, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, chairs a meeting of the Supreme Defense Council attended by His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to discuss regional developments.

June 30: His Highness the Amir receives at Bayan Palace Michael Jary, Vice Chairman of the King's Foundation in the United Kingdom, and Dr. Simon Sadinsky, Executive Director of Education.

July 13: His Highness the Amir arrived in the French Republic on an official visit. He received the CEO of Gustave Roussy Hospital, Professor Fabrice Barlesi, and the International Adviser to the CEO, Remi Theolier, at his residence in the French capital, Paris.

July 14: His Highness the Amir attended in Paris the Bastille Day military parade celebrating the National Day of the French Republic and the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II, in the presence of President Emmanuel Macron.

July 14: His Highness the Amir and President Macron attended at the Elysee Palace in Paris the signing ceremonies of: A Declaration of Intent between the State of Kuwait and the French Republic regarding the Kuwait-France Strategic Investment Partnership 2025-35, a Declaration of Intent to enhance cooperation in cultural field and to commemorate, in 2026, the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Aug 4: His Highness the Amir signed Decrees accepting the resignation of the Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment, Nora Al-Fassam, and appointed Minister of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy, Dr. Sabeeh Al-Mukhaizeem, as Acting Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment.

Aug 11: His Highness the Amir received at Bayan Palace Hamoud bin Faisal Al-Busaidi, Minister of Interior of Oman.

Aug 19: His Highness the Amir signed a Decree forming the Board of Directors of the Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority for a renewable four-year term.

Aug 19: His Highness the Amir also signed a decree appointing Dr. Faisal Al-Humaidan as Director-General of the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), with the rank of Undersecretary.

Aug 26: His Highness the Amir signed a Decree appointing Dr. Bader Al-Busairi as Undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education.

Aug 28: His Highness the Amir signed decrees appointing: Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah as Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs, with the rank of Minister, effective 1 September 2025, appointing Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah as Chief of the Crown Prince's Diwan, with the rank of Minister, for a four-year term starting 1 September 2025, and appointing Sheikh Abdulaziz Mishal Mubarak Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah as Undersecretary of the Amiri Diwan, effective 1 September 2025.

Aug 31: His Highness the Amir received at Bayan Palace, in the presence of His Highness the Crown Prince, Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs, the Chief of the Crown Prince's Diwan and Undersecretary of the Amiri Diwan on the occasion of their appointment to their new positions.

Sept 2: His Highness the Amir received the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Jassem Al-Budaiwi, at Bayan Palace.

Sept 9: His Highness the Amir signed Decrees promoting Major General Khaled Daraj Al-Shuraian to the rank of Lieutenant General and appointed him Chief of the General Staff of the Kuwaiti Army, and Khaled Amer Al-Ajmi as Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Sept 30: His Highness the Amir received His Highness the Crown Prince at Bayan Palace upon his return from the United Kingdom after an official visit. His Highness the Amir also headed Kuwait's delegation to the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York, US.

Oct 8: His Highness the Amir receives Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, in the presence of His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister, on the occasion of his visit to the country at Bayan Palace.

Oct 14: His Highness the Amir departs for Oman on a fraternal visit.

Oct 21: His Highness the Amir receives Recep Tayyip Erdogan, President of the Republic of Turkey, who was on an official visit.

Oct 27: An Amiri Decree No. 206 of 2025 issued appointing Mona Fajhan Al-Mutairi as Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs with the rank of Undersecretary.

Oct 27: An Amiri Decree No. 207 of 2025 issued appointing Dr. Dalal Dhari Al-Othman as Director-General of the Public Authority for Persons with Disabilities with the rank of Undersecretary.

Nov 2: His Highness the Amir receives the Vice President of the People's Republic of China, Han Zheng, at Bayan Palace on the occasion of his official visit to Kuwait.

Nov 3: His Highness the Amir receives Prince Turki Al-Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, at Bayan Palace during.

Nov 11: His Highness the Amir sponsors and attends the honoring ceremony for outstanding teachers and schools on the occasion of World Teachers' Day for the Academic Years 2023-24 and 2024-25, held at the Sheikh Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Theater at Abdullah Al-Salem University in Shuwaikh.

Nov 17: His Highness the Amir, in presence of His Highness the Prime Minister, receives the Prime Minister of Vietnam, Pham Minh Chinh, on the occasion of his official visit.

Nov 26: An Amiri Decree issued regarding combating narcotics and psychotropic substances and regulating their use and trade. It will come into effect two weeks after publication in the official gazette. The decree consists of 84 articles divided into 13 chapters.

- To be continued tomorrow

Real-time GPS tracking ready

Ministry of Education deploys 200 buses ahead of 12th grade exams

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: With the upcoming end of the 10th and 11th grade exams on Monday, December 29, the Ministry of Education is finalizing preparations for the 12th grade exams, which are set to begin Sunday, January 4, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to educational sources, the ministry has arranged 200 buses to transport the exam papers. Of these, 180 buses will carry the papers from the secure printing facilities in the educational zones to the respective exam centers. The remaining 20 buses will transport papers from the main secure printing facility at the ministry headquarters to the six district printing facilities.

To ensure smooth and uninterrupted exam logistics, 20 reserve buses have also been designated and strategically placed along the main transport routes. The backup buses will

be on standby to respond immediately to any technical malfunction or emergency affecting the primary buses transporting exam papers, ensuring timely delivery without delays. This measure is part of a comprehensive set of organizational steps being implemented by the ministry this year, marking a first in its efforts to enhance the exam transportation system and reduce potential risks.

The sources said distributing the reserve buses along all main routes improves emergency response times and provides teams with greater flexibility to handle unexpected situations, adding that this initiative helps maintain the highest levels of discipline and accuracy during the exam period.

They revealed that all buses are equipped with a GPS live tracking system linked to the exam transportation control room.



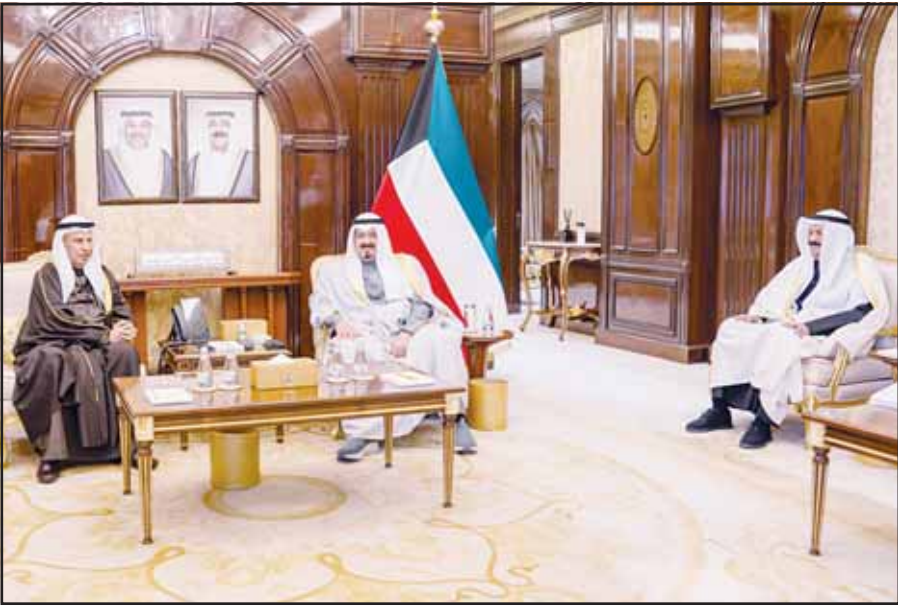




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Prime Minister Diwan photo
His Highness the Prime Minister, Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, receives Saleh Al-Fadhalah, Chairman of the Central System for the Remedy of Situations of Illegal Residents.

PM hosts Chairman of CARIRS

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29, (KUNA): His Highness the Prime Minister, Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, received on Sunday Chairman of the Central System for the Remedy of Situations of Illegal Residents

(CARIRS) Saleh Al-Fadhalah at Bayan Palace. The meeting was attended by the Head of the Prime Minister's Diwan Abdulaziz Al-Dakhil.

Unified public services

Governors hold talks to enhance sustainable development efforts

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah hosted a coordination meeting on Sunday morning at the Farwaniya Governorate headquarters with the rest of the governors. According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, the meeting was aimed at discussing ways to enhance cooperation and unify efforts among the governorates, in line with the aspirations of the political leadership and to contribute to the development of institutional action. The meeting was attended by the Capital Governor Sheikh Abdullah Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governor and acting Hawally Governor Sheikh Sabah Bader Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Jahra Governor Hamad Jassim Al-Habashi, Ahmadi Governor Sheikh Hamoud Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and Director General of the General Directorate of Governorates Affairs Sheikh Nasser Mohammed Jarrah Al-Sabah.

During the meeting, several issues and matters of common interest were discussed, and mechanisms for coordination and integration among the governorates were reviewed. The meeting is expected to have a positive impact on improving services for citizens and residents and enhancing performance efficiency in various service and development sectors. Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser emphasized the importance of continuing these coordination meetings, highlighting their role in exchanging expertise and unifying visions. He also stressed that teamwork among the governorates is a fundamental pillar for achieving sustainable development and serving the nation and its citizens. At the end of the meeting, the governors commended the efforts exerted to strengthen cooperation and joint coordination, affirming their commitment to continue working together to support the development process and serve the public interest.



Farwaniya Governorate photo
Governors convene in Farwaniya to strengthen inter-Governorate collaboration.

Kuwait Diplomatic Institute, OIC forge strategic co-op framework

Partnership strengthens joint Islamic diplomacy

JEDDAH, Dec 29, (KUNA): The Kuwaiti Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Diplomatic Institute signed on Monday a cooperation framework with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to enhance joint cooperation in the diplomatic field, at the organization's headquarters in Jeddah. The cooperation framework was signed on behalf of the Institute by the Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Institute, Ambassador Nasser Al-Subaih, while the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs of OIC, Ambassador Yousef Al-Dubaie, signed on behalf of the OIC. The cooperation framework will support



Ambassador Nasser Al-Subaih and Assistant Secretary-General Ambassador Yousef Al-Dubaie sign the cooperation framework.

aiming to enhance understanding of international issues within the context of joint Islamic action and public diplomacy and address shared challenges facing member states. This marks the first cooperation framework between the institute and the OIC, expanding training opportunities and dialogue on joint diplomatic work. It builds on the institute's role in preparing and training diplomatic personnel and on its record of professional partnerships with global diplomatic and academic institutions. Attending the ceremony were the Consul General of the State of Kuwait in Jeddah and Permanent Representative to the OIC, Yousef Al-Tunib, Deputy Permanent Representative and Counselor at the Kuwaiti Delegation to the OIC Counsellor Turki Al-Daihani, and Diplomatic Attaché at the Saud Al-Sabah Institute Asmaa Al-Hajji.

the training of diplomats from OIC member states and organize capacity-building programs to prepare experts in diplomacy,



KUNA photos
Saud al-Nasser's Sabah Al-Dblumasi Agreement establishes cooperation with the Islamic Cooperation Organization.

MoSA opens children's clubs for investment

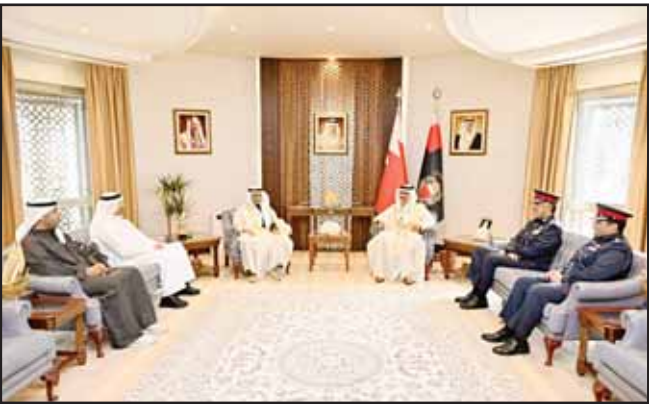
By Fares Ghaleb
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff
KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Dr. Sayed Issa Mahmoud, Assistant Undersecretary for Financial and Administrative Affairs and Cooperation at the Ministry of Social Affairs, revealed that the ministry has obtained approval from the Fatwa and Legislation Department to offer children's clubs in various areas for investment through bidding, in accordance with the regulations and conditions of the Finance Ministry.

Mahmoud explained that following this approval, the Ministry of Social Affairs will conduct an inventory of the clubs and their areas, and study the activities that can be offered for investment. He confirmed that the activities will be diverse, tailored to the needs of each area based on size and the variety of activities. He said there are nine clubs in different parts of the country, and each club will be offered according to its size and capacity to accommodate various activities. He added that after completing the inventory,

the Ministry of Social Affairs will conduct a bidding process in accordance with the directives of the Ministry of Finance, paving the way for investment. He revealed the project will be awarded to the investor with the highest bid. He pointed out that the Ministry of Social Affairs is keen on adopting the most financially viable approach, whether offering the clubs to investors or referring them to Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects (KAPP), while emphasizing the option that generates the highest revenue for the general budget.

Bahrain, Kuwait Coast Guards enhance security cooperation

MANAMA, Dec 29, (KUNA): Bahraini Interior Minister Lt. Gen. Sheikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al-Khalifa discussed ways to strengthen coordination and develop joint working mechanisms with Director General of the Kuwait Coast Guard, Commodore Sheikh Mubarak Ali Al-Sabah. According to Bahrain News Agency (BNA), the talks took place during a meeting attended by Bahrain's Deputy Chief of Public Security, Major General Shaikh Hamad bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa. During the meeting, the Bahraini minister received an invitation from Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahad Yousef Al-Sabah to visit Kuwait in the coming period. Sheikh Rashid praised the deep-rooted and longstanding relations between Bahrain and Kuwait, highlighting the importance of continued security cooperation, exchange of expertise, and joint efforts between the coast guards of both countries to enhance maritime security and safety.



KUNA photo
Bahraini Interior Minister discusses with Kuwaiti Coast Guard Director ways to develop joint work mechanisms.

To our colleague

For decades, the advancement of agricultural technology and related field developments has been a recurring topic in the media, promising a path toward more sophisticated agriculture. However, achieving this potential requires strong incentives, particularly in the area of licensing. It is counterproductive to expect farmers, whether in crop cultivation or industrial agriculture, to invest substantial capital when licenses are limited to just one year. Moreover, the risk that even a minor violation could result in restrictive measures or the closure of their operation serves as a major deterrent to investment. Kuwait's economic environment has changed dramatically. There was a time when we could easily export goods like strawberries and roses, thanks to greater freedom of movement and strong incentives. Today, however, the situation is clouded by troubling decisions. These concerns have been repeatedly highlighted in reports by Al-Shall and others, yet despite ongoing discussions, little action has been taken. As one colleague rightly pointed out, the priority must be to curb the outflow of domestic investment. Kuwait remains heavily oil-dependent, grappling with an unproductive economy, unsustainable public finances, and an imbalanced national labor market. The pressing question is whether the country's leadership will finally learn and take the necessary measures. To my dear colleague Hassan Al-Essa, the current stagnation is the inevitable outcome of having officials who neither listen nor review written recommendations. This stands in stark contrast to other nations, where every aspect is carefully monitored, and there is a genuine commitment to adopt

practices that benefit the owners of productive institutions, profitable projects, and those entitled to service plots. Neighboring countries, for instance, have offered substantial incentives to attract global investors. They have revitalized multiple sectors and even transformed agricultural land into tourist destinations. By learning from international experiences, they have become exporters of agricultural products to the region, a foresight that now attracts hundreds of millionaires. Yet, what has our state done to emulate these successful models? Nothing. Instead, we witness only a proliferation of decisions that serve merely to create additional obstacles.

Kuwait simplifies

He affirmed that the law marks a new phase in line with the country's legislative advancements and digital transformation. Brigadier General Al-Mutairi revealed that the residency law was originally issued in 1959 and it was subsequently amended in 1965 and 1987, along with additional ministerial decrees and further updates in 2019. He stated that the General Department of Residency Affairs recognized the need to reorganize and update the law to keep pace with legislative and technological developments and to support Kuwait's goal of becoming a leading financial and economic hub. Brigadier General Al-Mutairi highlighted that entry visas have become clearer and more organized, now categorized into nine types of residency visas and twelve types of visit visas. He highlighted the introduction of new residency visas, including those for foreign investors, temporary government contracts of less than one year, and a work visa specifically for the oil sector. Brigadier General Al-Mutairi said visit visas have been expanded to cov-

er social, cultural, and sports activities, while family and business visit visas continue under the existing regulations. He affirmed that the fees for all types of work and visit visas have been set at KD 10 per month. Brigadier General Al-Mutairi highlighted that the law introduced new residency extensions, including ten-year residency for children of Kuwaiti women and property owners, and up to fifteen-year residency for foreign investors to support the investment climate and attract capital. He explained that a foreign investor is any natural or legal person holding capital approved by the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA). Their case is reviewed by the KIA and submitted to the Council of Ministers. Once officially approved, they are granted a foreign investor residency permit in accordance with the applicable regulations. This category benefits from several privileges, including the ability to reside outside Kuwait indefinitely without losing residency, the right to sponsor their parents, spouse, and children, and exemption from the six-month residency lapse rule. Brigadier General Al-Mutairi highlighted the main differences between the old and new residency laws, noting changes to the permitted absence periods outside Kuwait. Residency permits now expire after six months of absence, except for foreign investors, property owners, and children of Kuwaiti women. The permitted absence for domestic workers has been reduced to four months, and sponsors can now request leave of one month or longer through the Sahel application. Also, residency permit validity is no longer tied to passport validity, as was previously required. A valid passport is now sufficient to submit a residency application. He affirmed that digital transformation is a central feature of the new law, adding that about 85 percent of residency services are now available online 24/7 through apps such as Sahel and Kuwait Visa, with visit visas being issued in less than five minutes.

Justice Ministry

Counselor Al-Sumait highlighted the ministry's continued implementation of training and development programs to enhance the quality of judicial services. It is worth mentioning that applications will be accepted from Monday, December 29, until January 8, 2026, for female employees in the departments of the Court of First Instance, Court of Appeals, Family Court within the Court of First Instance, and the Family Court within the Court of Appeals. The newly selected court clerks will be enrolled in a training course at the Kuwait Institute for Judicial and Legal Studies. Minister Al-Ajeel also praised the collaboration with the Voluntary Work Center, describing it as an effective community partnership that supports national products, empowers entrepreneurs, and strengthens a culture of local production. Meanwhile, Minister Al-Mishari expressed his great satisfaction with the development and growth of the "Pride of National Industries - Third Season" festival, affirming Kuwait Municipality's readiness to host such events at Souk Mubarakia, which is considered a central hub for related activities. He praised the effective role of the Kuwait Municipality's regulatory bodies in ensuring the festival's success. Furthermore, Minister Al-Mishari announced that the relocation of the current fish market at Souk Mubarakia to a new site has been approved and will be formally announced later. He confirmed that Kuwait Municipality is working in coordination with relevant authorities to implement the relocation of the fish market from its current location. In addition, Abdulrahman Al-Farsi,

Vice President of the Volunteer Work Center, stated that the center aims, through the festival, to showcase the capabilities of the local industrial sector by supporting initiatives that build confidence in Kuwaiti industry and drive it toward broader horizons of growth and development. Al-Farsi stressed that the third edition of the festival comes after the success of the first two editions, which were highly praised and well-received by the public. He expressed hope that the festival would help strengthen consumer confidence in national products and enhance cooperation between the public and private sectors to achieve sustainable economic development. It is worth noting that the "Pride of National Industries - Third Season" festival will be held at Souk Mubarakia from December 25, 2025, to January 24, 2026, with the participation of 19 leading Kuwaiti companies from various local industries. Citing PACA Circular No. 31 of 2025 on procedures for entering passenger contact details into booking systems, Al-Rajhi explained that travel agencies and airlines are strictly prohibited from substituting their own contact information in place of the passenger's details. This measure aims to ensure passengers receive all essential flight-related notifications directly, such as delays, cancellations, security alerts, and regulatory notices, without the need for intermediaries. He emphasized the obligation of all concerned parties to fully comply with the circular. Al-Rajhi advised travelers who were not asked to provide contact details at the time of booking to submit a complaint through the Sahel app. This can be done by selecting Civil Aviation, then Electronic Services, followed by Air Transport Market Complaints, and complet-

ing the required information so that PACA can take appropriate action in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and circulars. Kuwait marks Dr. Tarazi explained that the center, in addition to transplants, has implanted 84 Left Ventricular Assist Devices (LVAD) for patients with severe heart failure, acting as a pump to support the left ventricle until a donor heart becomes available or as a long-term treatment option. Teams also successfully implanted 20 IMPELLA 5.5 cardiac support devices to stabilize patients during acute circulatory collapse or complex interventions. He emphasized that this achievement reflects the rapid advancement of the heart transplant program in Kuwait. Dr. Tarazi said it offers a vital treatment option for patients with advanced heart failure, strengthens medical self-sufficiency, and confirms the national teams' capability to perform complex, high-risk surgeries, adding that this milestone marks a strategic step toward establishing a comprehensive and robust national organ transplant system. The Ministry of Health continues to strengthen Kuwait's national presence in heart and organ transplantation, highlighting the country's steady progress toward advanced healthcare services supported by specialized medical teams, skilled professionals, and strategic investments in human capital and medical infrastructure. Kuwait banks Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the Kuwaiti people, and all employees in the banking sector.

Continued from Page 1

Trump says Ukraine and Russia are ‘closer than ever’ to peace after talks with Zelenskyy

US offers Ukraine 15-year security guarantee as part of peace plan

KYIV, Dec 29, (AP): The United States is offering Ukraine security guarantees for a period of 15 years as part of a proposed peace plan, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Monday, though he said he would prefer an American commitment of up to 50 years to deter Russia from further attempts to seize its neighbor’s land by force.

U.S. President Donald Trump hosted Zelenskyy at his Florida resort on Sunday and insisted that Ukraine and Russia are “closer than ever before” to a peace settlement.

Negotiators are still searching for a breakthrough on key issues, however, including whose forces withdraw from where and the fate of the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, one of the 10 biggest in the world. Trump noted that the monthslong U.S.-led negotiations could still collapse.

“Without security guarantees, realistically, this war will not end,” Zelenskyy told reporters in voice messages responding to questions sent via a Whatsapp chat.

Ukraine has been fighting Russia since 2014, when it illegally annexed Crimea and Moscow-backed separatists took up arms in the Donbas, a vital industrial region in eastern Ukraine.

Details of the security guarantees have not become public but Zelenskyy said Monday that they include how a peace deal would be monitored as well as the “presence” of partners. He didn’t elaborate, but Russia has said it won’t accept the deployment in Ukraine of troops from NATO countries.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Monday that Russian President Vladimir Putin and Trump were expected to speak in the near future but there was no indication the Russian leader would speak to Zelenskyy.

French President Emmanuel Macron said Kyiv’s allies will meet in Paris in early January to “finalize each country’s concrete contributions” to the security guarantees.

Trump said he would consider extending U.S. security guarantees for Ukraine beyond 15 years, according to Zelenskyy. The guarantees would be approved by the U.S. Congress as well as by parliaments in other countries involved in overseeing any settlement, he said.

Zelenskyy said he wants the 20-point peace plan under discussion to be approved by Ukrainians in a national referendum.



US President Donald Trump and Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy shake hands at the start of a joint news conference following a meeting at Trump’s Mar-a-Lago club, Sunday, Dec. 28, 2025, in Palm Beach, Fla. (AP)

However, holding a ballot requires a ceasefire of at least 60 days, and Moscow has shown no willingness for a truce without a full settlement.

The president’s statements came after the leaders met for talks following what Trump said was an “excellent,” two-and-a-half-hour phone conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose invasion of Ukraine launched the war nearly four years ago. Trump insisted he believed Putin still wants peace, even as Russia launched another round of attacks on Ukraine while Zelenskyy flew to the United States for the latest round of negotiations.

“Russia wants to see Ukraine succeed,” Trump said during a late afternoon news conference as he stood with Zelenskyy after their meeting. He repeatedly praised his counterpart as “brave.”

Trump and Zelenskyy both acknowledged thorny issues remain, including whether Russia can keep Ukrainian territory it controls, as well as security guarantees for Ukraine to ensure it’s not invaded again in the future. After their discussion, they called a wide group of European leaders, including Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, and the leaders of Finland, France,

Germany, the United Kingdom and Poland.

Zelenskyy said Trump had agreed to host European leaders again, possibly at the White House, sometime in January. Trump said the meeting could be in Washington or “someplace.” Zelenskyy thanked Trump for his work. “Ukraine is ready for peace,” he said.

Trump said he’d follow the meeting with another call to Putin. Earlier Sunday, Putin’s foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov said the Trump-Putin call was initiated by the U.S. side and was “friendly, benevolent and businesslike.” Ushakov said Trump and Putin agreed to speak again “promptly” after Trump’s meeting with Zelenskyy.

But Ushakov added that a “bold, responsible, political decision is needed from Kyiv” on the fiercely contested Donbas region in eastern Ukraine and other matters in dispute for there to be a “complete cessation” of hostilities.

Both leaders identified deciding the future of the Donbas region as a major sticking point.

Trump said the parties were inching closer to agreement. “That’s a very tough issue but one that I think will get resolved,” he said.

Zelenskyy said: “Our attitude is very clear. That’s why President Trump said this is a very tough question and, of course, we have with Russia different positions on it.”

Trump said, however, that he still believes Putin is “very serious” about ending the war, even as Russia continued striking targets in Ukraine as Zelenskyy traveled to the U.S. Trump said, “I believe Ukraine has made some very strong attacks also.”

He held out the possibility that negotiations could still fall apart. “In a few weeks, we will know one way or the other, I think,” Trump said. “We could have something where one item that you’re not thinking about is a big item, breaks it up. Look, it’s been a very difficult negotiation. Very detailed.”

Trump and Zelenskyy’s sit-down underscored the apparent progress made by Trump’s top negotiators in recent weeks as the sides traded draft peace plans to end the fighting. Zelenskyy told reporters Friday that the 20-point draft proposal negotiators have discussed is “about 90% ready” - echoing a figure, and the optimism, that U.S. officials conveyed when Trump’s chief negotiators met with Zelenskyy in Berlin this month.

Travel chaos looms amid blizzard

Winter storm threatens US Midwest, South

GEORGIA, Dec 29, (AP): A potent winter storm threatened blizzard-like conditions, treacherous travel and power outages in parts of the Upper Midwest as other areas of the country braced Monday for plunging temperatures, strong winds and a mix of snow, ice, and rain.

The snow and strengthening winds began spreading Sunday across the northern Plains, where the National Weather Service warned of whiteout conditions and possible blizzard conditions that could make travel impossible in some areas. Snowfall totals were expected to exceed a foot (30 centimeters) across parts of the upper Great Lakes and as much as double that along the south shore of Lake Superior.

“Part of the storm system is getting heavy snow, other parts of the storm along the cold front are getting higher winds and much colder temperatures as the front passes,” said Bob Oravec, a lead forecaster at the National Weather Service office in College Park, Maryland. “They’re all related to each other - different parts of the country will be receiving different effects from this storm.”

The weather service warned of “dangerous wind chills” as low as minus 30 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 34.4 degrees Celsius) in North Dakota and into Minnesota from Sunday night into Monday.

In the South, meteorologists warned severe thunderstorms are likely to signal the arrival of a sharp cold front - bringing a sudden drop in temperatures and strong north winds that will abruptly end days of record warmth throughout that region.

The high temperature in Atlanta was around 72 F (22 C) on Sunday, continuing a warming trend after climbing to 78 F (about 26 C) to shatter the city’s record high temperature for Christmas Eve, the



Heavy snow falls along Nicollet Mall Sunday, Dec. 28, 2025 in Minneapolis. (AP)

National Weather Service said. Numerous other record high temperatures were seen across the South and Midwest on the days after Christmas.

But the incoming cold front was expected to drop rain on much of the South late Sunday night into Monday, and a big drop in temperatures Tuesday. Forecasters said the low temperature in Atlanta to 25 F (minus 3.9 C) by early Tuesday morning. The colder temperatures in the South are expected to persist through New Year’s Day.

In Dallas, Sunday temperatures in the lower 80s (upper 20s C) could drop down to the mid 40s (single digits Celsius). In Little Rock, high temperatures of around 70 (21 C) on Sunday could drop down to highs in the mid-30s on Monday. “We’re definitely going back towards a more winter pattern,” Oravec said.

The storm is expected to intensify as it moves east, drawing energy from a sharp clash between frigid air plung-

ing south from Canada and unusually warm air that has lingered across the southern United States, according to the National Weather Service.

In the South, meteorologists warned of severe thunderstorms expected to signal the arrival of a sharp cold front - sometimes referred to as a “Blue Norther” - bringing a sudden plunge in temperatures and strong north winds that will end days of record warmth around the region.

The snowy holiday season in the Upper Midwest and Northeast comes as springlike warmth continues in much of the nation’s midsection and South, where record high temperatures had Santa sweating in recent days.

Over the next 48 hours, the cyclone is expected to produce heavy snow and blizzard conditions in the Midwest and Great Lakes, freezing rain in New England, thunderstorms across the eastern U.S. and South, and widespread strong winds.

Kosovo PM Kurti set for another term after poll

PRISTINA, Dec 29, (AP): Kosovo’s Prime Minister Albin Kurti appeared set for another term in office after his party on Sunday convincingly won an early parliamentary election in the Balkan country, preliminary results showed.

The Vetevendosje, or Self-Determination, party won nearly 50% of the ballots, far ahead of the opposition Democratic Party of Kosovo with 21%, and the Democratic League of Kosovo with nearly 14%, the state election, authorities said after nearly all the ballots were counted.

“Congratulations on the biggest victory in the history of the country,” a cheerful Kurti said after results were announced. “Now we have a lot of work ahead of us.”

The snap ballot on Sunday was scheduled after the Self-Determination party failed to form a government despite also winning the most votes in a Feb. 9 election, which led to a monthslong political deadlock.

It was not immediately clear whether the Self-Determination party has won 61 seats in the 120-member parliament to be able to rule alone. Kurti said a new parliament and a government will be formed as soon as possible.

“We don’t have time to lose and must move forward together as quickly as possible,” he said.

Hundreds of ruling party supporters gathered outside the party offices in Pristina in celebration, chanting Kurti’s name. The previous postelection stalemate marked the first time Kosovo could not form a government since it declared independence from Serbia in 2008 following a 1998-99 war that ended in a NATO intervention.



Kosovo’s acting Prime Minister and leader of Vetevendosje political party Albin Kurti greets his supporters in Kosovo’s capital Pristina, Sunday, Dec. 28, 2025. (AP)



This photo taken on Dec. 28, 2025 shows cube houses in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. The cube houses, designed by Dutch architect Piet Blom, were built in the 1980s. A total of 38 cube houses resemble an interconnected “Rubik’s Cube” and have become a distinctive architectural landmark in Rotterdam. (Xinhua)

Emergency crews battle flames after crash

Helicopter collision in New Jersey leaves 1 dead

HAMMONTON, N.J., Dec 29, (AP): Two helicopters crashed mid-air in New Jersey on Sunday, killing one person and critically injuring another, authorities say.

Hammonton Police Chief Kevin Friel said rescuers responded to a report of an aviation crash at about 11:25 a.m. Video from the scene shows a helicopter spinning rapidly to the ground. Police and fire crews subsequently extinguished flames that engulfed one of the helicopters.

The Federal Aviation Administration described the crash as a midair collision between an Enstrom F-28A helicopter and Enstrom 280C helicopter over Hammonton Municipal Airport. Only the pilots were on board each aircraft. One was killed, and the other was transported to a hospital with life-threatening injuries.

Sal Silipino, owner of a cafe near the crash site, said the pilots were regulars at the restaurant and would often have breakfast together. He said he and other customers watched the helicopters take off before one began spiraling downward, followed by the other.



Authorities look over the scene after two helicopters crashed in Hammonton, N.J., on Sunday, Dec. 28, 2025.

“It was shocking,” he said. “I’m still shaking after that happened.” Hammonton resident Dan Dameshek told NBC10 that he was leaving a gym when he heard a loud snap and saw two helicopters spinning out of control.

“Immediately, the first helicopter went from right side up to upside down and started rapidly spinning, falling out of the air,” Dameshek told the TV station. “And then it looked like the second helicopter was OK for a second, and then it sounded like another snap or something ... and then that helicopter started rapidly spinning out of the air.”

Hammonton is a town of about

15,000 people located in Atlantic County in the southern part of New Jersey, about 35 miles (56 kilometers) southeast of Philadelphia. The town has a history of agriculture and is located near the Pine Barrens, a forested wilderness area that covers more than 1 million acres (405,000 hectares).

The FAA and National Transportation Safety Board will be investigating the crash, Friel said.

Investigators will likely first look to review any communications between the two pilots and whether they were able to see each other, said Alan Diehl, a former crash investigator for the FAA and NTSB.

“Virtually all midair collisions are a failure to what they call ‘see and avoid,’” Diehl said. “Clearly they’ll be looking at the out-of-cockpit views of the two aircraft and seeing if one pilot was approaching from the blind side.”

Although it was mostly cloudy at the time of the crash, winds were light and visibility was good, according to the weather forecasting company AccuWeather.

Europe

Southern Spain flood kills 1: A man in his 50s was found dead on Sunday as two others remain missing following torrential rains in southern Spain.

The deceased was traveling in a van near the town of Alhaurin el Grande in the province of Malaga when the vehicle was caught in floodwaters. His death was confirmed by the town’s mayor.

A second passenger from the van, also in his 50s, is still missing. Local emergency services located the empty vehicle, which had been swept away by the swollen Fahala river and left severely damaged, its roof destroyed.

Spanish Prime Minister **Pedro Sanchez** posted a message on social platform X, thanking all emergency services “working for citizens’ safety” and urging the public to take “maximum precaution” in the face of the bad weather. (Xinhua)

□ □ □

Netherlands stabbing injures 2: Two people were injured in a stabbing on Friday evening following a concert by Dutch hip-hop group Broederliefde in Rotterdam, the Netherlands’ second-largest city, Rotterdam Police Unit said.

According to a police statement posted on the social media platform X, the incident occurred as people were leaving the venue. The injured individuals, a 15-year-old boy and a 23-year-old man, were taken to hospital. Dutch public broadcaster NOS reported both men are responsive and their lives are not in danger. No suspects have been arrested, though police believe there was only one perpetrator. Investigations are ongoing. (Xinhua)

□ □ □

Debate over surfing gets gnarly: A debate over how to bring back surfing in Germany’s landmark English Garden escalated on Sunday after city workers removed a beam surreptitiously deployed over Christmas to restore a surfable wave in the river that runs through the park.

For years, the site had been a hot spot for surfers and spectators because of the meter-high (three foot-high) wave created by the strong current of the Eisbach river. But the wave disappeared in October after city workers cleared away accumulated sediment, gravel and debris from the riverbed. That set off discussions between the city and the surfers on how to restore the wave. (AP)

INTERNATIONAL



This photo taken with a mobile phone on Dec. 28, 2025 shows the site of a train derailment accident in Municipality of Asuncion Ixtaltepec, State of Oaxaca, Mexico. (Xinhua)

Mexico interoceanic train jumps tracks, killing 13

MEXICO CITY, Dec 29, (AP): Officials said a train accident in southern Mexico killed at least 13 people and injured dozens, halting traffic along a rail line connecting the Pacific Ocean with the Gulf of Mexico.

The Interoceanic Train linking the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz went off the rails Sunday as it passed a curve near the town of Nizanda.

“The Mexican Navy has informed me that, tragically, 13 people died

in the Interoceanic Train accident,” Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum posted on X, adding that 98 people are injured, five of them seriously.

She said she instructed the secretary of the navy and the undersecretary of human rights of the Ministry of the Interior to travel to the site and personally assist the families. In a message on X Sunday, Oaxaca state Gov. Salomon Jara said several government agencies had reached the site of the accident to assist the injured.



Shoppers tour an exhibition hosted by Summer Palace displaying a giant horse to welcome 2026 Year of the Horse, following the Chinese zodiac, at a shopping mall, in Beijing, Monday, Dec. 29, 2025. (AP)

Trilateral talks aim to lock in ceasefire

China brokers fresh momentum in Thailand-Cambodia peace effort

KUNMING, Dec 29, (Agencies): The China-Cambodia-Thailand foreign ministers’ meeting was successfully held in Yuxi City, southwest China’s Yunnan Province on Monday.

After the trilateral meeting, a press communique was issued, which made it clear from five aspects that Cambodia and Thailand will further enhance communication, deepen understanding, and gradually consolidate the ceasefire situation, restore mutual exchanges, rebuild political mutual trust, achieve a turnaround in relations, and maintain regional peace.

Following the signing of a joint statement agreeing to a ceasefire, Cambodian and Thai foreign ministers are leading delegations to meet in Yunnan from Dec. 28 to 29 at the invitation of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

The trilateral meeting, held in a southwestern Chinese province north of the contested border, came two days after Thailand and Cambodia signed a fresh ceasefire agreement to end weeks of fighting that killed more than 100 people and forced the



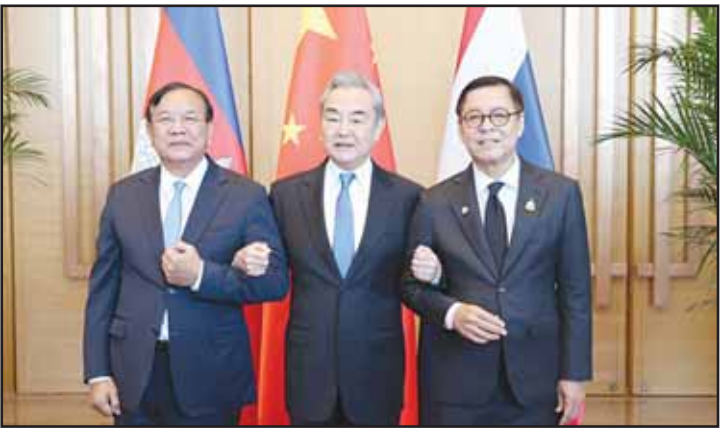
In this photo released by Agence Kampuchea Press (AKP), Cambodia’s Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn, left, shakes hands with Thai counterpart Sihasak Phuangketkeow, right, in front of China’s counterpart Wang Yi in Yunnan province, China, Monday, Dec. 29, 2025. (AP)

evacuation of hundreds of thousands on both sides of the border.

“We haven’t resolved everything, but I think we are making progress in the right direction and we have to keep up the momentum,” Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangket-

keow told reporters after the meeting in Yunnan province. He said chief priorities are to ensure a sustained ceasefire and continue rebuilding trust.

It was noteworthy that the meeting was held in Yunnan, nearer to the



In this photo released by Agence Kampuchea Press (AKP), Cambodia’s Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn, left, Thai counterpart Sihasak Phuangketkeow, right, and Chinese counterpart Wang Yi pose for a photograph in Yunnan province, China, Monday, Dec. 29, 2025. (AP)

dispute and to Southeast Asia, rather than in Beijing, the Chinese capital and seat of government about 2,500 kilometers (1,300 miles) northeast.

The meetings represented China’s latest efforts to strengthen its role as an international mediator and, in par-

ticular, its influence in Asian regional crises. As China grows into an economic and political force globally, Beijing has spent the past decade and more working in various ways to increase its voice as a third party in diplomatic matters.

During the meeting Monday, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi called for joint efforts to promote regional peace, stability and development - language typical for China in such situations.

“Allowing the flames of war to be reignited is absolutely not what the people of the two countries want and not what China, as your friend, wants to see. Therefore, we should resolutely look ahead and move forward,” Wang said.

Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn said he believed the latest ceasefire would last and would create an environment for both nations to resume previously agreed-upon ways to settle differences, according to a Chinese interpreter. Sihasak also expressed hopes for peace with neighboring countries.

After the meeting, Chinese official news agency Xinhua quoted Wang as saying the three nations reached a consensus to move forward with the ceasefire without reversal, maintain dialogue and restore ties between the two Southeast Asian countries step by step.

Guinea votes in 1st election since 2021 coup with junta leader set to dominate polls

CONAKRY, Dec 29, (AP): Guineans voted on Sunday to choose a new president in the country’s first election since a 2021 coup, as analysts say a weakened opposition will result in a likely win for junta leader Gen. Mamadi Doumbouya.

Sunday’s election was the culmination of a transition process that began four years ago after Doumbouya ousted President Alpha Condé. The junta leader has proceeded to clamp down on the main opposition and dissent, critics say, leaving him with no major opposition among the eight other candidates in the race.

Despite Guinea’s rich mineral resources - including as the world’s biggest exporter of bauxite, used to make aluminum - more than half of its 15 million people are experiencing record levels of poverty and food insecurity, according to the World Food Program.

“This vote is the hope of young people, especially for us unemployed,” said Idrissa Camara, an 18-year-old resident of Conakry, who said he has been unemployed since graduating from university five years ago. “I’m forced to do odd jobs to survive. I hope this vote will improve the standard of living and the quality of life in Guinea,” he added.

While voting was largely smooth across the country, the voter turnout was low in many polling stations due in part to opposition parties who were not on the ballot calling on voters to boy-



An official holds up a ballot paper at a polling station as polls close during the presidential election in Conakry, Guinea, Sunday, Dec. 28, 2025. (AP)

cott the election.

Voting officially closed at 7 p.m. local time as electoral officials started counting votes across the polling units. The election results are expected within 48 hours and there will be a runoff if no candidate wins a majority of the votes.

The election was held under a new constitution that revoked a ban on military leaders running for office and extended the presidential mandate from five to seven years. That constitution was overwhelmingly approved in a September referendum despite opposition parties asking voters to boycott it.

Beijing sends stern message through large-scale exercises

Chinese military stages drills around Taiwan

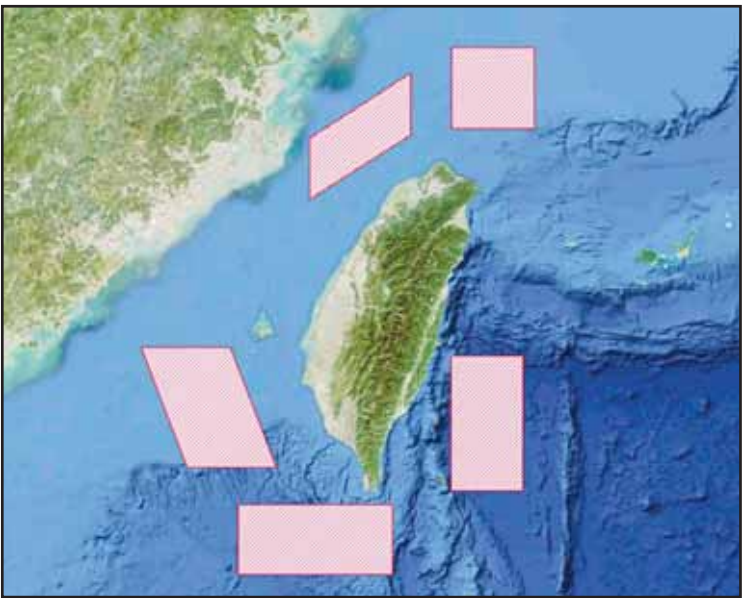
HONG KONG, Dec 29, (AP): China’s military on Monday dispatched air, navy and rocket troops to conduct joint military drills around the island of Taiwan, a move Beijing called a “stern warning” against separatist and “external interference” forces. Taiwan said it was placing its forces on alert and called the Chinese government “the biggest destroyer of peace.”

The drills came after Beijing expressed anger at U.S. arms sales to the territory and a statement by Japan’s prime minister, Sanae Takaichi, saying its military could get involved if China were to take action against Taiwan, the self-governing island that the world’s second-biggest economy says must come under its rule. But the Chinese military did not mention the United States and Japan in its statement on Monday morning.

Taiwan’s Defense Ministry said in a post on X that rapid response exercises were underway, with forces on high alert to defend the island. In a separate statement, it said it had deployed appropriate forces in response, conducting combat readiness drills.

“The Chinese Communist Party’s targeted military exercises further confirm its nature as an aggressor and the biggest destroyer of peace,” the ministry said.

Senior Col. Shi Yi, spokesperson of China’s People’s Liberation Army’s Eastern Theater Command, said



This photo shows a sketch map released by the Eastern Theater Command of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to indicate the areas involved in joint exercises conducted around Taiwan Island. (Xinhua)

the drills would be conducted in the Taiwan Strait and areas to the north, southwest, southeast and east of the island.

Shi said the activities will focus on sea-air combat readiness patrol, “joint seizure of comprehensive superiority” and blockades on key ports. It was also the first large-scale military drill where

the command publicly mentioned one of the goals was “all-dimensional deterrence outside the island chain.”

“It is a stern warning against ‘Taiwan independence’ separatist forces and external interference forces, and it is a legitimate and necessary action to safeguard China’s sovereignty and national unity,” Shi said.

China and Taiwan have been governed separately since 1949, when a civil war brought the Communist Party to power in Beijing. Defeated Nationalist Party forces fled to Taiwan. The island has operated since then with its own government, though the mainland’s government claims it as sovereign territory.

The command on Monday deployed destroyers, frigates, fighters, bombers and unmanned aerial vehicles, alongside long-range rockets, to the north and southwest of the Taiwan Strait. It carried out live fire exercises against targets in the waters as well. Drills to test the capabilities of sea-air coordination and precise target hunting were also conducted in the waters and airspace to the east of the strait.

It said major military drills were scheduled to happen between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. on Tuesday, saying it would organize live firing activities then, and its exercises would cover five areas around the island.

The command released themed posters about the drills online accompanied by provocative wording. One poster depicted two shields with the Great Wall alongside three military aircraft and two ships. Its social media post said the drills were about the “Shield of Justice, Smashing Illusion,” adding that any foreign interlopers or separatists touching the shields would be eliminated.

Subcontinent

India train tragedy kills passenger: A 75-year-old passenger was killed after a fire broke out inside two coaches of a train early Monday in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, police said.

The fire inside Tatanagar-Ernakulam Express broke out near Elamanchili in Anakapalle district, about 313 km northeast of Amaravati, the capital city of Andhra Pradesh.

“Both the coaches, B1 and M2 were fully gutted in the fire. Belongings of passengers in these two coaches were also destroyed,” a police official said. “All the other passengers are safe.”

The railway staff also acted swiftly and informed the fire brigade personnel, who reached the spot to douse the fire.

“Two affected coaches were separated from the train, and two other coaches were attached in their place,” a railway official said. “The train was thoroughly inspected and allowed to proceed after a seven-hour delay.”

In view of the accident, rail traffic on the Visakhapatnam-Vijayawada route was temporarily suspended, leading to widespread delays.

Meanwhile, police have registered a case and ordered an investigation into the fire incident to ascertain the cause behind it. (Xinhua)

Police are investigating a hoax security alert involving a passenger aircraft that arrived at Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA) on Sunday morning, police said.

The alert was triggered by an email sent to the airport’s official address claiming that four individuals on board a



Pomegranates for sale are pictured in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Dec. 28, 2025. Afghanistan has exported pomegranates from Kandahar province to Qatar for the first time, as a significant step in efforts to expand the country’s agricultural products to new international markets, local media Tolo news reported Saturday. (Xinhua)

flight from Doha, Qatar, were preparing to carry out an explosion. The aircraft landed at BIA at 8:27 a.m. with 245 passengers.

Airport authorities contacted the pilot after receiving the message, who replied that no security threat was identified on board. Despite this, officials followed standard safety protocols and directed the aircraft to a secure isolation area after landing, where passengers and crew were disembarked, police said.

A comprehensive inspection of the aircraft was carried out with the assistance of the bomb disposal unit and other security agencies, police said. No suspicious items were found during the search.

Following the clearance, the aircraft was returned to normal operations at the airport and later departed for Doha at 1:07 p.m., police added.

Police said the incident was a hoax, similar to a false bomb threat reported on Dec. 26 at the Kandy District Secretariat. Preliminary investigations indicate that both electronic messages originated from outside Sri Lanka. (Xinhua)

44 suspected drug smugglers held: Afghan counter-narcotics police have arrested 44 individuals alleged of involvement in illicit drug activities across nine of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces, the Ministry of Interior Affairs said on Monday.

According to the ministry, the suspects were arrested on charges of drug smuggling, sale, and purchase during a se-

ries of coordinated operations conducted in the provinces of Kunduz, Balkh, Ghazni, Paktia, Khost, Faryab, Wardak, Kapisa, and Nimroz.

During the operations, law enforcement officers also discovered a quantity of illicit drugs, including 33 kg of hashish, along with heroin and other narcotics.

In a separate announcement, the ministry stated that police detained 18 additional suspects for criminal activities, including theft and disrupting public order, in the provinces of Badakhshan, Ghazni, Sar-i-Pul, Samangan, and Herat.

The Afghan government has ramped up its anti-narcotics crackdown, targeting illicit drugs and those involved in the business, with a firm commitment to eradicating poppy cultivation across the country. (Xinhua)

More than 17m receive e-ID cards: More than 17 million Afghan nationals have received electronic national identity cards since the program launched in May 2018, said a statement of the National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) on Monday.

“Since the beginning of the electronic ID card distribution process, a total of 17,068,000 Afghans have received their electronic national ID cards,” the statement added.

Out of the figure, 10,621,000 are men and 6,447,000 others are women, the statement further said.

Authorities earlier estimated the country’s population to be as high as 36.4 million. (Xinhua)

Boursa ends Monday’s session lower

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait closed trading on Monday with a modest downturn, as the general market index slipped 19.68 points, or 0.22 percent, to settle at 8,963.86 points. Trading activity totaled 182.8 million shares across 12,776 cash transactions, with a combined value of KD 52.9 million (ap-

proximately USD 161.3 million). The Main Market Index edged down 5.26 points, or 0.06 percent, to end at 8,317.84 points. A total of 91.7 million shares changed hands through 6,489 transactions, generating KD 20.5 million (about USD 62.5 million) in value.

In line with its commitment to spreading financial awareness and enhancing trust in the banking sector

NBK organizes session for KNPC and KIPIC employees about fraud prevention and cybersecurity awareness

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: National Bank of Kuwait organized a specialized awareness session for employees of the Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) and the Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC), with the aim of raising awareness about the risks of fraud and digital threats that target the banking sector, in addition to introducing them to the basic concepts of cybersecurity and methods of protection from digital risks. This session reflects NBK’s longstanding relationship with the oil sector institutions and their fruitful partnerships which have always stood on mutual support.

Among the main topics explored in the session was the concept of fraud and its various methods and impact on individuals and institutions. Digital fraud is not limited to financial losses; it extends to affecting customer trust and creating challenges in the business environment. Therefore, recognizing these risks is a fundamental step in enhancing security awareness because it helps employees deal with them proactively and enhances their ability to protect sensitive data and prevent the exploitation of loopholes on which scammers rely to make their attacks.

Moreover, the session delved into the most prominent methods of fraud in the digital age, including phishing, which relies on fake messages that persuade victims to disclose their data, and identity theft, which aims to hack personal and banking accounts, in addition to fake advertisements that promote fictitious products or services. Another method is fake trading platforms that exploit individuals’ desire to invest and make quick profits. In this light, the NBK team provided real-life examples of these methods, explaining how to detect them and avoid falling victim to them.

Additionally, the NBK team noted that the bank



Abdulwahab Al-Duaij

Al-Duaij:

- Cybersecurity is no longer an option but a necessity to face any potential risks with high efficiency and resilience.
- We have a specialized team working around the clock all week to handle emergencies quickly and efficiently.
- We coordinate with official authorities to ensure a fast and effective response to any threats or attempts of fraud.
- Spreading awareness is the first line of defense against fraud and cyberattacks.
- We are committed to empowering our partners to utilize AI tools safely and effectively.

has a specialized team working around the clock all week long to deal with emergencies quickly and efficiently. The bank also offers many programs and awareness campaigns for customers and employees through various digital channels to educate them about the latest methods of fraud and how to avoid them.

NBK also coordinates with official entities and agencies such as the Public Authority for Civil Information, the Public Authority for Communications and Information Technology, the Ministry of Interior, and the Public Prosecution to ensure an effective and rapid response to any threats or fraud attempts, which enhances the national protection system and confidence in the banking sector.

During the session, the team also provided tips to help employees protect themselves, most notably avoiding sharing sensitive information via phone or email, using only official channels to access banking services, and contacting the bank immediately if exposed to any fraud attempt, in addition to following the bank’s official social media channels to stay

informed about the latest fraud methods.

On this occasion, **Mr. Abdulwahab Al-Duaij**, AVP - Head of Enterprise Fraud Control, commented: “We believe that cybersecurity is no longer an option but a strategic necessity amid the rapid technological developments. This is why we are always keen to equip participants with the awareness and tools necessary to confront threats and build a secure digital environment that supports innovation and sustainable growth, because spreading a culture of awareness is the first line of defense against fraud”.

Al-Duaij added: “Developments in the field of Artificial Intelligence pose new challenges, as they allow attackers to utilize advanced methods, but at the same time they give us unprecedented capabilities in the field of protection and proactive analysis, and we are working to enable our partners to benefit from these technologies in a safe and effective manner”.

Al-Duaij also noted that NBK will continue supporting the “Let’s Be Aware” banking awareness

campaign, which aims to promote financial and security literacy among various segments of society. The bank is doing so by regularly organizing educational events and programs that highlight the risks of fraud and digital threats, in addition to providing employees and customers with guidance that helps them protect their data and maintain a safe banking environment.

Finally, Al-Duaij emphasized that the relationship between NBK and KNPC is a model strategic partnership that benefits the national economy and is constantly growing. This cooperation, which has spanned decades, is a fundamental pillar of the bank’s strategy that aims to support vital sectors in the country and provide an added value beyond traditional banking services.

It should be noted that NBK has a record of regularly delivering sessions and presentations on financial crimes and fraud in the financial sector to numerous government institutions. These sessions stem from the bank’s responsibility to share its strong expertise in addressing constantly changing security challenges, making it a trusted knowledge partner in protecting the national infrastructure.

It is also worth noting that NBK is a supporter and key partner of all initiatives aimed at raising financial awareness and spreading banking education among all segments of society. As a leading financial institution in the region, NBK has consistently organized various events that contribute to raising community awareness of all issues of concern to the banking sector. It also organizes numerous training courses for its employees to enhance their expertise in combating fraud and financial crimes, in addition to raising awareness of the risks of cybercrime and fraud through its electronic channels and social media platforms.

Private sector leads decline

Real estate transactions drop sharply in late Dec

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: The real estate market witnessed a decline in trading activity from Dec 21-25, with 136 transactions valued at KD69.85 million, compared to 149 transactions worth KD156.3 million in the previous week -- a qualitative decrease of 55.3 percent and a quantitative decrease of 8.7 percent.

The newspaper obtained a copy of the weekly report from the Real Estate Registration and Documentation Departments at the Ministry of Justice, indicating that the private sector accounted for 83.2 percent of the total number of transactions, with 114 transactions valued at KD48.7 million. This marks a significant decrease in transaction value of 53.7 percent (KD56.6 million) compared to 113 transactions worth KD105.3 million in the previous week.

Investment properties witnessed a

significant decline as well, with 19 transactions totaling KD15.2 million or 48.6 percent decrease in value (KD14.4 million) and 36.6 percent decrease in the number of transactions (11 transactions).

This indicates that investors are awaiting stability in the real estate market, following the implementation of the new real estate legislation.

Commercial properties also experienced a downward trend, with only two transactions totaling KD5.3 million, compared to five transactions totaling KD20.1 million in the previous week. This entails 60 percent decrease in the number of transactions (three transactions) and 73.6 percent decrease in value (KD14.8 million).

The coastal strip sector recorded only one transaction during the week, valued at KD650,000, while other sectors such as warehouses, crafts, shops, showrooms and banks remained unchanged.

Inflation soars to 42%

Iran merchants protest as rial plunges to record low

TEHRAN, Dec 29, (AP): Iranian traders and shopkeepers staged a second day of protests Monday after the country’s currency plummeted to a new record low against the U.S. dollar.

Videos on social media showed hundreds taking part in rallies in Saadi Street in downtown Tehran as well as in the Shush neighborhood near Tehran’s main Grand Bazaar, which played a crucial role in the 1979 Islamic Revolution that ousted the monarchy and brought Islamists to power.

Witnesses told The Associated Press that traders shut their shops and asked others to do the same. The semiofficial ILNA news agency said many businesses and merchants stopped trading even though some kept their shops open.

There was no reports of police raids though security was tight at the protests, according to witnesses.

On Sunday, protest gatherings were limited to two major mobile market in downtown Tehran, where the demonstrators chanted anti-government slogans.

Iran’s rial on Sunday plunged to 1.42 million to the dollar. On Monday, it traded at 1.38 million rials to the dollar.

The rapid depreciation is compounding inflationary pressure, pushing up prices of food and other daily necessities and further straining household budgets, a trend that could worsen by a gasoline price change in-

roduced in recent days.

According to the state statistics center, inflation rate in December rose to 42.2% from the same period last year, and is 1.8% higher than in November. Foodstuff prices rose 72% and health and medical items were up 50% from December last year, according to the statistics center. Many critics see the rate a sign of an approaching hyperinflation.

Reports in official Iranian media said that the government plans to increase taxes in the Iranian new year that begins March 21 have caused more concern.

Iran’s currency was trading at 32,000 rials to the dollar at the time of the 2015 nuclear accord that lifted international sanctions in exchange for tight controls on Iran’s nuclear program. That deal unraveled after U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States from it in 2018. There is also uncertainty over the risk of renewed conflict following June’s 12-day war involving Iran and Israel. Many Iranians also fear the possibility of a broader confrontation that could draw in the United States, adding to market anxiety.

In September, the United Nations reimposed nuclear-related sanctions on Iran through what diplomats described as the “snapback” mechanism. Those measures once again froze Iranian assets abroad, halted arms transactions with Tehran and imposed penalties tied to Iran’s ballistic missile program.

During a campaign running until 14 Feb

KFH expands benefits for Oasis Club cardholders

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: As part of its ongoing commitment to enhancing customer experience while travelling and shopping, Kuwait Finance House (KFH) offers exclusive benefits to holders of KFH Oasis Club co-branded Mastercard credit and prepaid cards under the More Miles with Mastercard Oasis Club Cards campaign.

The initiative, which runs until 14 February 2026, provides cardholders with a unique opportunity to earn Oasis Clube miles when making international e-commerce and in-store transactions in foreign currencies. They can redeem the earned Oasis miles for tickets or flight upgrade on Kuwait Airways.

Speaking about the campaign, KFH Deputy General Manager Cards, **Talal AlArbeed**, said: “The campaign offers customers an ideal opportunity to boost their Oasis Club miles balance while shopping and traveling abroad. To benefit from this offer, customers must spend the equivalent of KD 600 on international purchases during the campaign period. The offer applies to all foreign-currency transactions conducted through point-of-sale terminals or e-



Talal AlArbeed

payment gateways, excluding cash withdrawals from international ATMs. The additional miles will be credited to customers’ Oasis Club accounts within 30 days following the end of the campaign.”

He added that KFH Oasis Club cards offer a

wide range of benefits, including bonus miles upon card activation, in addition to an earning rate starting from two miles per Kuwaiti dinar spent locally and three miles per Kuwaiti dinar spent internationally. The cards also provide an instant 15% discount on Kuwait Airways flights, as well as the option to convert KFH Rewards points into Oasis Club miles, at a rate of 130 miles for every 1,000 rewards points.

“This offer underscores KFH’s commitment to providing innovative banking solutions that meet customers’ evolving needs and grant them exceptional benefits across all transactions, further reinforcing the Bank’s leading position in the Kuwaiti banking sector,” said AlArbeed.

It is worth noting that KFH has a strategic collaboration with Kuwait Airways through the Oasis Club program. Under this collaboration, KFH offers co-branded banking cards (Mastercard World and Mastercard World Elite) that integrate purchasing benefits with the accrual of Oasis Club miles on every purchase, enabling customers to redeem these miles for exclusive travel benefits such as airline tickets and flight upgrades on Kuwait Airways.

Jazeera Airways pioneers flights at Amman City Airport

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Jazeera Airways, Kuwait’s leading low-cost carrier, has signed a strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Amman City Airport, marking a significant milestone in regional aviation. Under the agreement, Jazeera Airways is set to become the first airline to operate scheduled commercial flights at the airport, further strengthening the air bridge between Kuwait and Jordan.

The MoU was officially signed by Barathan Pasupathi, Chief Executive Officer of Jazeera Airways, and Eng. Ahmed Azzam, CEO of Jordan Airport Company (JAC).

This partnership, designed to facilitate seamless travel between the two countries is expected to alleviate pressure on regional hubs, provide passengers with more convenient access to the heart of Amman, while bolstering tourism and trade ties between the two nations.

Commenting on the signing, Barathan Pasupathi, CEO of Jazeera Airways, said:

“As we celebrate 20 years of flying, we also honor two decades of connecting Kuwait to Amman. By signing this MoU, we are honored to be the first airline to establish operations at Amman City Airport. This agreement is a testament of our commitment to the Jordanian market. Operating from this strategic location, we will offer passengers more choice and a faster route into the city, reinforcing our mission of accessible and efficient travel. We also bring our signature T5 airport experience directly to Amman, delivering a fast, affordable, and hassle-free journey that prioritizes our customers’ most valuable assets: both time and money.”

Eng. Ahmad Azzam, CEO of JAC, added:

“The signing of this MoU represents a key strategic step in the development of Amman City Airport and in strengthening its role as a vital gateway for regional air traffic. We are pleased to welcome Jazeera Airways as the first airline to launch sched-

uled commercial operations at the airport, reflecting the strong partnership and shared vision between both parties. This collaboration will enhance passenger choice, ease congestion at primary airports, and contribute to boosting tourism and economic ties between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the State of Kuwait, in line with our strategy to develop a flexible and future-ready airport infrastructure.”

Operations from Amman City Airport are expected to commence next month, following the completion of necessary technical and regulatory arrangements.

Jazeera Airways has maintained a robust presence in Jordan since its inception, having launched its first flights to Amman in 2005. Over the past 20 years, the airline has played a pivotal role in connecting families, business travelers, and tourists, consistently expanding its frequency to meet the growing demand between the two countries.



Kuwait-Jordan air bridge strengthens with new MoU.



Warba Bank crowns Rowad 6.0 winners in London.

25 students from Kuwait and GCC participate in the finale

Warba’s Rowad program concludes with London showcase

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Concluding an intensive training program aimed at nurturing the skills of university students in the fields of economy and technology and mentoring them to develop financial solutions under the supervision of specialists from the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), Warba Bank crowned the winning team of the sixth edition of its flagship program, “Rowad 6.0.” The program brought together 25 Kuwaiti and GCC students studying at European universities, who presented their projects during the final showcase day held in the British capital, London.

The program reaffirmed its social significance as a leading regional platform that invests in the leaders of tomorrow and serves as a tangible embodiment of the Bank’s vision, “Let’s Own Tomorrow”. Warba also organized a dedicated training day that brought together the program team and participating students to enhance their skills in delivering impactful messages. This six-hour session was held prior to the final presentation day to ensure that projects were presented in a comprehensive and clear manner.

Final Showcase in London: A Global Platform for the “Leaders of Tomorrow”

The final showcase day of “Rowad 6.0” was held at Queen Mary University of London. The day went beyond the presentation of projects, serving as a celebration of the collective efforts of participating students, who demonstrated outstanding performance across all the competencies the program sought to develop. These included effective teamwork, constructive analysis of challenges and developments, creative and forward-looking thinking that anticipates future needs, and the acquisition of knowledge essential for entering the labor market and competing on a global level.

During the judging process, students presented their projects before a panel comprising the Deputy CEO for Support Services and Treasury and several Group Heads at Warba Bank, in addition stakeholders and specialists. This provided objective project evaluation, opened potential funding opportunities, and offered participants a unique chance to present their ideas in a

global capital renowned for its finance and innovation sectors, thereby enhancing their international exposure. The day marked the moment when theoretical concepts were transformed into viable, applicable prototypes, embodying the core objective upon which Warba Bank established the “Rowad 6.0” program.

Warba’s Message: Investing in Development to “Own Tomorrow”

Commenting on the conclusion of the program, Mr. Anwar Bader Al-Ghaith, Deputy CEO for Support Services and Treasury at Warba Bank, emphasized the strategic importance of the initiative, stating:“Twenty-five students, twenty-five passionate individuals, twenty-five innovatorsand twenty-five promising talents who will, God willing, raise the flag of Kuwait and the GCC high. The conclusion of the sixth edition of the ‘Rowad’ program in London is not merely the end of a training journey; it is the starting point for a new generation of innovators and leaders who will shape the future of the region.”

He added:“Over the course of eight weeks, we witnessed a tangible transformation in the participants’ capabilities, as they moved from focusing on sharpening academic skills to becoming fully empowered to lead innovation and develop sustainable solutions that meet future needs. This development was clearly reflected in the feedback of the judging panel, which praised the ambition and promising visions presented by these young talents. Such recognition confirms that our investment in ‘Rowad’ for the sixth consecutive year is an investment with multiplied returns that will become evident in the near future.”

Al-Ghaith further stated:“At Warba Bank, we view the ‘Rowad’ program as a strategic investment that transcends traditional training to become a cornerstone in building the knowledge-based economy of our region. The program does not merely prepare a generation of specialists in technology and innovation; it acts as a catalyst for creating a stimulating environment capable of attracting investments and developing advanced technology-driven industries. We have wit-



Anwar Bader Al-Ghaith

nessed a qualitative leap in the participants’ capabilities as they reached a stage of full empowerment to lead innovation and develop sustainable solutions for tomorrow. With this tangible progress, acknowledged by the judging panel, we reaffirm that our continued investment in ‘Rowad’ embodies our firm belief in our vision, ‘Let’s Own Tomorrow’.”

From a Local Initiative to a Regional and Global Platform: The Rowad Journey

The sixth edition, “Rowad 6.0,” represents a significant milestone in the program’s evolution. What began as an internal initiative to develop Bank employees has gradually transformed into a comprehensive platform that attracts top Kuwaiti and GCC students studying at leading European universities. This edition brought together 25 participants from Kuwait and three GCC countries, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the Sultanate of Oman, who are pursuing critical specializations such as fintech, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity at globally renowned institutions.

This evolution reflects Warba Bank’s ambitious vision to transform the program into a bridge connecting GCC talent with global expertise, while supporting regional

economic development by focusing on future-oriented disciplines. Over the past five years, nearly 100 young men and women have graduated from the “Rowad” program, successfully transforming more than 25 ideas into applied projects across areas such as digital banking solutions and artificial intelligence.

Strategic Partnership with the DIFC Innovation Hub

Al-Ghaith emphasized that the partnership with the DIFC Innovation Hub is a cornerstone of the success of “Rowad 6.0,” as this strategic collaboration ensures participants gain access to the highest levels of global expertise in fintech and artificial intelligence.

One of the most valuable aspects of this partnership was students’ engagement with a dynamic ecosystem that includes ambitious startups, leading financial institutions, and technology experts. This exposure expanded their professional networks and enriched their experiences, in addition to benefiting from high-level mentorship provided directly by international fintech experts. Such hands-on exposure enables participants to develop practical, market-ready solutions aligned with the latest industry trends, supported by advanced educational content that equips them with essential applied knowledge.

Program Background: Intensive Training and Advanced Curriculum

The program featured diverse educational tracks, including training on the latest artificial intelligence technologies and their applications in banking, learning programming fundamentals and application development, understanding technology ethics and cybersecurity, and developing entrepreneurship skills within a collaborative environment. These components were designed to provide participants with a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities shaping the fintech landscape.

The Winning Team

A team of five students was crowned the winner, comprising Sulaiman Al-Mukhaizeem, Yousef Al-Aqeel, Abdulaziz Al-Zanki, Khaled Al-Mazeedi, and Bader Al-Enezi, for their project in the field of financial technology.

Reflecting on their experience, the team stated that participating in “Rowad 6.0” was a true turning point that exceeded their expectations in terms of knowledge and skill development. They emphasized the importance of the program’s framework, which fostered teamwork, collaboration, and idea-sharing among students from diverse academic backgrounds and universities, alongside mentorship that provided deep insight into market requirements and real-world practices.

They added:“We are proud of this achievement, which stands as proof that Gulf youth possess the capabilities to lead global innovation. We are ready to contribute to a better tomorrow, and we thank Warba Bank for providing this unique and impactful opportunity.”

Warba’s Investment in Human Capital: A Comprehensive Vision

Warba Bank firmly believes that investing in human capital is a strategic investment with multiplied returns that benefits the Bank, society, and the Kuwaiti economy as part of its social responsibility. The Bank focuses on empowering youth as a key driver of sustainable growth, making this approach an integral part of its strategy to ensure continuous innovation and develop national competencies capable of leading transformation and keeping pace with global changes.

Through flagship initiatives such as the Rowad Program and PULSE Academy, Warba Bank enhances the competitiveness of young talent, contributing directly to the development of a strong knowledge-based economy in Kuwait that is capable of competing globally and achieving sustainable development.

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

Driven by strategic diversification and digital transformation

Middle East M&A activity surges 260% despite market volatility

DUBAI, Dec 29: Middle Eastern mergers and acquisitions (M&A) have demonstrated remarkable resilience and strategic focus, with deal values surging 260% to \$53 billion in the first nine months of 2025 compared to the same period last year. This exceptional growth comes despite experiencing its lowest levels since the COVID shock earlier in the year, according to BCG’s annual Global M&A Report 2025 released today. The region’s performance is driven by a select group of experienced dealmakers making disciplined, strategic investments amid continued global market volatility.

Monthly data reveals that Middle East M&A activity over the past three years has consistently exceeded historical averages, recovering strongly from the pandemic dip. BCG’s M&A Sentiment Index, a forward-looking indicator of deal activity, shows increasingly positive sentiment across all sectors, with confidence reaching its highest levels in technology and energy. While Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia recorded a 6% increase in aggregate deal value, the region continues working to surpass its 10-year average.

“The Middle East’s M&A landscape in 2025 reflects a sophisticated approach to capital deployment, where strategic diversification meets digital ambition,” said Samuele Bellani, Managing Director & Partner at BCG. “We’re witnessing experienced dealmakers making highly disciplined investments that simultaneously strengthen traditional energy capabilities while building new pillars of economic growth in technology and industrial services.”

M&AEnergy Sector Consolidation Drives Regional M&A Leadership

Energy transactions remained the cornerstone of Middle Eastern M&A activity throughout 2025, as state-backed entities pursued aggressive domestic consolidation while simultaneously expanding their international footprint through strategic acquisitions. A landmark \$13.4 billion acquisition reinforces the UAE’s ambitious international expansion strategy in the chemicals sector, while a \$693 million purchase in power generation and utilities exemplified the ongoing consolidation within the sector. These strategic moves underscore sector resilience while supporting the region’s gradual but determined pivot toward renewable energy sources, positioning national champions for the global energy transition.

- Middle East deal values surged 260% to \$53 billion in the first nine months of 2025, showcasing remarkable regional resilience despite experiencing volatility earlier in the year.
- The broader Africa, Middle East, and Central Asia region recorded a 6% increase in aggregate deal value, though activity remains below the 10-year average, according to BCG’s 22nd Annual Global M&A Report.
- Cross-border acquisitions by Middle Eastern investors continue to demonstrate exceptional strength, maintaining elevated activity levels since 2021 with strategic focus on digital transformation, industrial infrastructure, and energy transition investments.

The industrial sector emerged as a central pillar of the Middle East’s economic diversification strategy, with governments and sovereign wealth funds systematically building capabilities beyond traditional hydrocarbon dependencies. A \$925 million acquisition highlights the accelerating consolidation of critical supply chain infrastructure across the region. This transaction reflects a broader, long-term initiative to establish the Middle East as a premier hub for industrial and logistics services, fundamentally reducing dependency on energy revenues while enhancing the region’s global competitiveness across multiple sectors.

Digital Transformation Fuels Technology Sector Emergence

Technology, media, and telecommunications gained unprecedented momentum in 2025, establishing itself as an emerging pillar of regional

deal activity and signaling a fundamental shift in investment priorities. A transformative \$3.5 billion acquisition, representing one of the largest digital entertainment transactions globally, demonstrates the region’s serious ambitions to become a global leader in gaming and digital entertainment. A \$855 million acquisition strategically expanded the Middle East’s telecommunications influence into European markets. These high-profile transactions clearly demonstrate that Middle Eastern acquirers are strategically deploying substantial capital to capture growth opportunities across digital platforms, connectivity infrastructure, and entertainment services, aligning perfectly with broader national digital transformation agendas.

“What we’re seeing is a fundamental transformation in how Middle Eastern investors approach M&A,” said Samuele Bellani, Managing Director & Partner at BCG. “The region’s sovereign wealth funds are not just engines of deal flow – they’re architects of a new economic paradigm that balances traditional energy strengths with cutting-edge technological capabilities and world-class industrial infrastructure.”

As 2025 enters its final months, the Middle East has distinguished itself as one of the world’s most active and strategically focused M&A markets. Sovereign wealth funds continue providing an exceptionally deep pool of liquidity capable of sustaining robust deal flow regardless of global economic cycles or market volatility. Government-led strategies persistently drive consolidation across industrial and technology sectors, creating unprecedented resilience against the region’s historical reliance on hydrocarbon revenues. The combination of steady foreign interest across TMT, financial services, and healthcare sectors demonstrates the region’s unique dual advantage of supporting sustainable growth while accelerating economic diversification initiatives.

The sustained momentum in Middle Eastern M&A activity reflects a mature understanding of global market dynamics, where strategic patience combines with decisive action to create lasting competitive advantages across multiple sectors and geographies.

China leads humanoid robot race over US

Humanoid robots take center stage at Silicon Valley summit, but skepticism remains

MOUNTAIN VIEW, Dec 29, (AP): Robots have long been seen as a bad bet for Silicon Valley investors - too complicated, capital-intensive and “boring, honestly,” says venture capitalist Modar Alaoui.

But the commercial boom in artificial intelligence has lit a spark under long-simmering visions to build humanoid robots that can move their mechanical bodies like humans and do things that people do.

Alaoui, founder of the Humanoids Summit, gathered more than 2,000 people this week, including top robotics engineers from Disney, Google and dozens of startups, to showcase their technology and debate what it will take to accelerate a nascent industry.

Alaoui says many researchers now believe humanoids or some other kind of physical embodiment of AI are “going to become the norm.”

“The question is really just how long it will take,” he said.

Disney’s contribution to the field, a walking robotic version of “Frozen” character Olaf, will be roaming on its own through Disneyland theme parks in Hong Kong and Paris early next year. Entertaining and highly complex robots that resemble a human - or a snowman - are already here, but the timeline for “general purpose” robots that are a productive member of a workplace or household is farther away.

Even at a conference designed to build enthusiasm for the technology, held at a Computer History Museum that’s a temple to Silicon Valley’s previous breakthroughs, skepticism remained high that truly humanlike robots will take root anytime soon.

“The humanoid space has a very, very big hill to climb,” said Cosima du Pasquier, co-founder of Haptica Robotics, which works to give robots a sense of touch. “There’s a lot of research that still needs to be solved.”

The Stanford University postdoctoral researcher came to the conference in

Mountain View, California, just a week after incorporating her startup.

“The first customers are really the people here,” she said.

Researchers at the consultancy McKinsey & Company have counted about 50 companies around the world that have raised at least \$100 million to develop humanoids, led by about 20 in China and 15 in North America.

China is leading in part due to government incentives for component production and robot adoption and a mandate last year “to have a humanoid ecosystem established by 2025,” said McKinsey partner Ani Kelkar. Displays by Chinese firms dominated the expo section of this week’s summit, held Thursday and Friday. The conference’s most prevalent humanoids were those made by China’s Unitree, in part because researchers in the U.S. buy the relatively cheap model to test their own software.

In the U.S., the advent of generative AI chatbots like OpenAI’s ChatGPT and Google’s Gemini has jolted the decades-old robotics industry in different ways. Investor excitement has poured money into ambitious startups aiming to build hardware that will bring a physical presence to the latest AI.

But it’s not just crossover hype - the same technical advances that made AI chatbots so good at language have played a role in teaching robots how to get better at performing tasks. Paired with computer vision, robots powered by “visual-language” models are trained to learn about their surroundings.

One of the most prominent skeptics is robotics pioneer Rodney Brooks, a co-founder of Roomba vacuum maker iRobot who wrote in September that “today’s humanoid robots will not learn how to be dexterous despite the hundreds of millions, or perhaps many billions of dollars, being donated by VCs and major tech companies to pay for their training.” Brooks didn’t attend but his essay was frequently mentioned.

Also missing was anyone speaking for Tesla CEO Elon Musk’s develop-

ment of a humanoid called Optimus, a project that the billionaire is designing to be “extremely capable” and sold in high volumes. Musk said three years ago that people can probably buy an Optimus “within three to five years.”

The conference’s organizer, Alaoui, founder and general partner of ALM Ventures, previously worked on driver attention systems for the automotive industry and sees parallels between humanoids and the early years of self-driving cars.

Near the entrance to the summit venue, just blocks from Google’s headquarters, is a museum exhibit showing Google’s bubble-shaped 2014 prototype of a self-driving car. Eleven years later, robotaxis operated by Google affiliate Waymo are constantly plying the streets nearby.

Some robots with human elements are already being tested in workplaces. Oregon-based Agility Robotics announced shortly before the conference that it is bringing its tote-carrying warehouse robot Digit to a Texas distribution facility run by Mercado Libre, the Latin American e-commerce giant. Much like the Olaf robot, it has inverted legs that are more birdlike than human.

Industrial robots performing single tasks are already commonplace in car assembly and other manufacturing. They work with a level of speed and precision that’s difficult for today’s humanoids - or humans themselves - to match.

The head of a robotics trade group founded in 1974 is now lobbying the U.S. government to develop a stronger national strategy to advance the development of homegrown robots, be they humanoids or otherwise.

“We have a lot of strong technology, we have the AI expertise here in the U.S.,” said Jeff Burnstein, president of the Association for Advancing Automation, after touring the expo. “So I think it remains to be seen who is the ultimate leader in this. But right now, China has certainly a lot more momentum on humanoids.”

Stocks open slightly weaker on Wall Street as 2025 winds down

Gold, silver retreat after record highs

NEW YORK, Dec 29, (AP): Stocks are opening lower on Wall Street, while crude oil prices are rising and gold and silver prices are pulling back after recent sharp gains. The S&P 500 fell 0.2% in the first few minutes of trading Monday. With just three trading days left in 2025, the S&P 500 is up more than 17% for the year. The index is on track for its eighth monthly gain in a row. The Dow Jones Industrial Average slipped 44 points, or 0.1%. The Nasdaq composite eased 0.3%. Treasury yields fell in the bond market. European and Asian markets were mixed.

Shares in Europe and Asia were mostly lower in thin holiday trading as China staged military exercises near the island of Taiwan.

The prices of gold and silver fell back after recent gains, while oil prices jumped more than \$1. U.S. futures were little changed.

Shares in Taiwan were higher even after China’s military said it was conducting the drills around the self-governed island that Beijing claims as its territory.

In early European trading, Germany’s DAX slipped 0.2% to 24,296.81, while the CAC 40 in Paris was nearly unchanged at 8,100.83. Britain’s FTSE 100



People walk in front of Tokyo Stock Exchange building, Monday, Dec. 29, 2025, in Tokyo. (AP)

likewise barely budged, at 9,874.80.

The future for the S&P 500 fell 0.2% while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average was flat.

China said its combined forces drills were intended to warn against what it called separatist and “external interference” forces. Taiwan placed its military on alert and called the Beijing government “the biggest destroyer of peace.”

The drills came after Beijing expressed anger at U.S. arms sales to the territory. That followed a comment by Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi that Japan’s defense forces could get involved if China were to take action against Taiwan. The Chinese statement did not mention the United States and Japan.

Taiwan’s benchmark Taiex gained 0.9%, but the Hang Seng in Hong Kong gave up early gains, falling 0.7%

to 25,635.23. The Shanghai Composite index was virtually unchanged at 3,965.28.

Tokyo’s Nikkei 225 slipped 0.4% to 50,526.92.

In South Korea, the Kospi jumped 2.2% to 4,220.56, less than 2 points off its all-time record reached in early November. A 6.8% jump for SK Hynix due to a regulatory change that lifted an investment warning for its stock helped boost the benchmark. Samsung Electronics advanced 2.1%.

Australia’s S&P/ASX 200 gave up 0.4% to 8,725.70.

The price of gold fell 1.3% to \$4,494 per troy ounce, while silver slipped 2.3% to \$75.40. It has jumped to record levels on supply constraints, as both precious metals have been favored by investors seeking safe havens outside of stocks and bonds.

Earlier surges in gold prices also partly reflected worries during the U.S. government shutdown. Expectations that the U.S. Federal Reserve will cut interest rates further in the new year, weakening the dollar against other currencies, have further fueled buying of gold.

Silver, which like gold is used in many industries, has been influenced by other factors, too. China, which refines about two-thirds of global supplies, has scrapped an export quota system, replacing it with an export licensing system effective Jan. 1.

“Scarcity is no longer theoretical,” Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management said in a report. “China sits at the center of global silver refining, and when the world’s top refiner starts tightening the valve, downstream users feel it immediately.”

Reopening Friday from the Christmas holiday, the S&P 500 index fell less than 0.1% and the Dow Jones Industrial Average also fell less than 0.1%. The Nasdaq composite fell 0.1%.

With three trading days left in 2025, the S&P 500 has climbed nearly 18% this year, helped by the deregulatory policies of the Trump administration and investor optimism about the future of artificial intelligence.

Trading has been light, with institutional investors largely closed out for the year.

In other dealings early Monday, U.S. benchmark crude oil gained \$1.13 to \$57.87 per barrel, while Brent crude, the international standard, advanced \$1.13 to \$61.37 per barrel. On Friday, U.S. crude oil fell 2.8% and Brent crude fell 2.6%.

The U.S. dollar fell to 156.30 Japanese yen from 156.56 yen. The euro rose to \$1.1779 from \$1.1770.

Oversaving for education? New 529 options explained

529 education savings plans are powerful tools to help pay for the mounting costs of an education. Yet some people hesitate to use them.

One common concern is oversaving. You can only use 529 funds for only cover qualified education expenses without incurring a tax penalty, but it can be hard to pinpoint how much money you actually need.

Many parents open 529s for their children at birth, when there’s no way to know whether their kids will earn a scholarship or go to college at all. Fortunately, parents with multiple children can change the beneficiary of a 529 plan.

But what do you do if you still have money left over after covering education expenses?

Thanks to Secure 2.0 Act, you can now roll over unused 529 fund to a Roth IRA. But the 529 rollover isn’t a loophole to save extra for retirement; rules limit the conversions.

Here’s what you should consider when converting 529 funds to a Roth IRA.

The Roth IRA receiving the funds must be in the name of the 529 plan beneficiary.

The 529 plan must be open for at least 15 years.

You cannot convert 529 contributions made within the past five years (or the earnings on those contributions).

The 529 funds you roll over count toward your IRA annual contribution limit.

You can move a maximum of \$35,000 from a 529 plan to a Roth IRA during your lifetime.

529 funds must be converted by paying the amount directly to a Roth IRA-you can’t pay yourself and then deposit the money into the Roth IRA later.

You can contribute to a Roth IRA only if you have earnings from a job, so the 529 beneficiary must have eligible earnings when the 529-to-IRA conversions occur.

Roth IRA income limits do not apply to 529 rollovers.

While avoiding the Roth IRA income limits is a retirement-saving perk for those with higher income, the remaining rules around rolling over excess 529 funds are designed to ensure that people use 529 plans for education as intended. The annual contribution limits and the lifetime cap on conversions mean that you can’t double up on your retirement funding.

So, what’s the bottom line?

The ability to convert unused 529 funds to a Roth IRA can ease potential concerns about oversaving for education. Still, don’t count on your 529 as a means to save for retirement. Instead, consider funding your Roth IRA separately.

Families with a child with disabilities can roll their 529 account over into an ABLE account, a tax-favored way to save for the needs of a person with a disability while maintaining eligibility for government assistance. It uses the same legal framework as 529 plans, and it works similarly. Contributions are made with aftertax dollars to a plan with a set menu of investment choices. Earnings compound tax-free, and withdrawals to pay for qualified expenses are tax-free, too.

You can transfer funds from a 529 plan to an ABLE account, up to the ABLE annual contribution limit of \$19,000, without incurring tax penalties. The ABLE account must have the same designated beneficiary as the 529.

ABLE account eligibility is limited to individuals with significant disabilities, the onset of which occurred before they turned 46. ABLE accounts have a broader set of qualified expenses including education, housing, health care, employment training and support, and legal fees.

Individuals’ needs and circumstances change throughout their lifetimes, often in ways we can’t anticipate. The ABLE account rollover provides families with additional flexibility if a 529 account beneficiary is diagnosed with a disability or becomes disabled because of accident or injury. (AP)

Seoul commits to halve emissions despite gas deals

South Korea’s coal phaseout conflicts with US gas drive

SEOUL, Dec 29, (AP): South Korea is promising to shrink its reliance on coal power as part of its pledge to reduce carbon emissions that contribute to climate change, but that ambition is at odds with the Trump administration’s push for more U.S. natural gas exports.

At recent United Nations climate talks, South Korea’s new Ministry of Climate, Energy and Environment announced plans to retire most of the country’s coal-fired power plants by 2040 and to at least halve its carbon emissions by 2035.

Experts say this shows that South Korea, a major coal importer with one of the world’s largest fleets of coal plants, wants to speed up its renewable energy transition, which lags behind its neighbors and global averages.

But as part of trade deals with President Donald Trump, Seoul is raising imports of U.S. liquefied natural gas, or LNG. Climate activists contend such plans may conflict with the country’s pledges to help curb climate change and could lock South Korea into a fossil fuel-dependent future.

Talks are underway for South Korea to invest \$350 billion in U.S. projects and purchase up to \$100 billion worth of U.S. energy products, including LNG, a natural gas cooled to liquid form for easy storage and travel. It burns cleaner than coal, but still causes planet-warming emissions, especially of methane.

South Korea’s overall LNG imports may not increase if it offsets purchases of more U.S. natural gas by reducing imports from other sources such as Australia and the Middle East.

Still, it’s unclear how South Korea will “manage and consolidate all this somehow contradictory planning regarding its energy sector,” said Michelle Kim, an energy specialist for the U.S.-based Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.

South Korea’s liberal President Lee Jae Myung, who won a snap election in June, campaigned for stronger climate commitments. They had softened under his conservative predecessor Yoon Suk Yeol, who was ousted after a short-lived martial law declaration.

“As the global temperature rises, we all need to responsibly take climate action and Korea will have a stronger sense of responsibility in tackling the climate crisis,” Kim Sung-hwan, the inaugural Minister of Climate, Energy and Environment, said in an interview with The Associated Press.

South Korea’s goal to cut carbon emissions by 53% to 61% of its 2018 level, fell short of climate activists’ expectations. Business lobbies representing major manu-



Workers board large-sized liquefied natural gas (LNG) carriers under construction at the Daewoo Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering facility in Geoje Island, South Korea, Dec. 7, 2018. (AP)

facturers had proposed a 48% emissions reduction target.

“This range presents an effort by the government to accommodate two very different ways of thinking about the economic and climate future of the nation,” said Joojin Kim of the Seoul-based advocacy group, Solutions for Our Climate.

The South Korean government made the ambitious commitment to increase its clean energy use even after Trump’s sweeping ‘America First’ tariffs spurred energy negotiations between Seoul and Washington.

As part of its broader efforts to avoid higher tariffs, South Korea offered to import more LNG from the U.S., but the final trade deal has not been announced.

The agreement still under negotiation could last between three to 10 years, according to industry analysis and U.S. federal documents. Depending on the deal’s duration, South Korea may import between 3 million to 9 million tons of American LNG a year.

LNG made up almost a fifth of South Korea’s total energy supply last year, according to the International Energy Agency, or IEA. The government’s target was to cut that to 10.6% by 2038.

South Korea risks its climate goals if the pending trade deal increases the total volume of imported LNG, which will likely lead to an oversupply issue and the excess burning of gas to justify the deal, said Insung Lee, with Greenpeace in Seoul.

“If we just replace coal plants with LNG, that means the coal exit actually doesn’t lead to a green transition and merely shifts Korea’s addiction from coal to gas, which undermines the whole spirit of climate action,” Lee said.

Renewable energy generated 7% of South Korea’s domestic power in 2022, according to the IEA. South Korean government data show that had increased to 10.5% last year, still one of the lowest levels among leading

economies.

Japan, with an economy more than twice as big, generates 21% of its power from renewable sources. Spain, whose economy is about the same size as South Korea’s, gets 42% of its power from renewable sources.

Clean energy provided about 30% of global electricity production in 2023.

Nuclear power produces a major share of South Korea’s domestic energy, with government data showing that nuclear sources accounted for 31% of total electricity generation last year.

“We will transition into a new energy system that focuses on renewables and nuclear, while phasing out coal,” said Kim, the energy minister. He said South Korea will use LNG as a “complementary or emergency energy source” to make up for irregularities in renewable energy supplies.

In early December, South Korea set another goal of boosting its offshore wind power capacity to 4 gigawatts, about 10 times the current level.

South Korean companies that don’t cut back on carbon emissions may find that to be a competitive disadvantage, said Michelle Kim of the IEEFA.

Many global industries, including shipping and aviation, face pressure to reduce their emissions by providing incentives for low emitters and creating deterrents for high ones, she said.

“This is a lot of risk,” she said. “South Korea needs to speed up renewable energy deployment and come out from high dependency on the fossil fuel industry.”

At last month’s climate talks, South Korea joined the Powering Past Coal Alliance, a group of businesses, organizations and governments promoting the green energy transition.

That’s mainly a symbolic move, said Bruce Douglas, with the Global Renewables Alliance. “But it signifies very clear government intention to move away from fossil fuels and towards clean power.”

South Korea imports virtually all its coal, largely from Australia, Indonesia and Russia, and the switch to renewables is bound to impact regional markets.

The pledge to retire 40 of South Korea’s 61 coal sites by 2040 may be “an enforced transition” for coal exporters in the Asia-Pacific region, said James Bowen, with Climate Analytics. “It’s a reality that they’re going to have to face this downturn in the market.”

“The writing’s on the wall,” Bowen said. “One of the biggest importers in the world, one of the biggest customers, is starting to move away from coal.”

What's On

SPOTLIGHT

Got a birthday or event?



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

More than 200 participants take part in the event

IMA Kuwait hosts inspiring kids & parenting workshops



A group photo of the event.



Photos of the event.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Indian Muslim Association (IMA), under the patronage of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs (Foreign Relations Department), successfully conducted a Kids Workshop followed by a Parenting Workshop at JamiatulIslah Auditorium, Rawdha, Kuwait, attended by more than 200 participants, including Children, Parents, and Community Members.

The Workshops were led by Renowned Life Coach and Motivational Speaker Mr. Ateequr Rahman (A Visiting Scholar from India), and organized in coordination with IMA's Weekend Islamic School, Children Circle, and Pearls of Islam Units, reaffirming IMA Kuwait's commitment to Community Development, Ethical Upbringing, and Family Empowerment.

Kids Workshop – Building Character and Leadership

The Kids Workshop, convened by Mr Osaib (Coordinator, Children Circle), included several Interactive and Engaging Activities designed to connect with Young Participants in a meaningful manner.

During the session, the Speaker, Mr. Ateequr Rahman, emphasized Key takeaways for Children, including:

- Leading Life on the Righteous Path, guided by Islamic Values and Good Character
 - Developing Leadership Skills at a young age, such as Confidence, Responsibility, and Positive Decision-Making
 - Understanding the importance of Obedience and Respect toward Parents, Teachers, and Elders
 - Practicing Discipline, Honesty, and Kindness in daily life.
 - Setting a goal for the kids at an early stage to focus on it later on
- The Children actively participated throughout the Workshop, making the Session both Educational and Enjoyable, while reinforcing strong Moral Foundations.
- Parenting Workshop – Navigating Challenges of the Digital Age**
- The Parenting Workshop, convened by Mr. Musab Siddiqui, addressed Critical Issues faced by Parents in today's rapidly changing Digital Environment. Speaker Mr. Ateequr Rahman delivered Practical Guidance and Actionable Insights on Modern Parenting Chal-

lenges. Key takeaways from the parenting session included:

- Understanding the Impact of Excessive Mobile Phone and Screen Usage on Children's Mental, Emotional, and Social Development
- Practical Strategies to Limit Unhealthy Digital Habits while promoting balance and discipline
- Encouraging Responsible and Positive use of Technology for learning and personal growth
- Strengthening Parent-Child Communication based on Trust and Emotional Bonding
- The importance of Parents acting as Role Models in Behavior, Digital Usage, and Moral Conduct

Mr. Mohammed Umar Falahi, the President of the Indian Muslim Association of Kuwait, while delivering his Concluding Speech and Vote of Thanks, expressed that building the future of a child by a parent is actually building a nation. The parents must deliver their due responsibilities towards their children, keeping in mind the fact that they will be asked by Allah in life after death. The supplication of the parents plays a vital role in the build-

ing and growth of their children's careers. He further appreciated all the Participants for their active involvement and extended Special Gratitude to Mr. Ateequr Rahman for conducting such well-structured, Relevant, and Impactful Workshops.

IMA Kuwait gratefully acknowledged the generous support of Al Faisal Bakery for sponsoring Children Snacks Boxes.

The program concluded on an inspiring note, reinforcing IMA Kuwait's ongoing mission to nurture morally grounded Children, support Parents, and strengthen Families within the Community.

IMA Kuwait, an Indian socio-religious organization, operates under the patronage of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Kuwait. It focuses on providing a platform for the spiritual and social enhancement of expatriates living in Kuwait through various programs and social gatherings. It looks forward to organizing more beneficial programs in the future, catering to the needs of the expatriate community, especially the Indian diaspora.

ONCP Kuwait commemorates legacy of Thomas Chandy

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: ONCP Kuwait National Committee remembered the sixth death anniversary of Thomas Chandy MLA, the NCP State President and former Transport Minister of Kerala state.

The event was welcomed by ONCP Kuwait Committee President Jeeves Erinjeri and Presided by ONCP Global Treasurer Biju Stephen. Babu Francis, NCP Overseas

Cell National Convenor & Norka- Loka Kerala Sabha representative delivered the remembrance speech.

Vice Presidents Sunny Miranda (Karnataka) and Prince Kollappillil, Treasurer Ravindran, and Executive members Sunny K Alice, Abdul Aziz, and Jinu Vakattam led the ceremony. Joint Secretary Ashokan thanked the attendees at the ceremony



Representative delivers the remembrance speech.



Officials pose for a group photo.

New council elected as outgoing team honored

IDAK holds successful General Body Meeting with strong member turnout

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The Indian Dentists Alliance in Kuwait (IDAK) successfully conducted its General Body Meeting at Hotel Costa Del Sol, with an impressive turnout of members, underlining the association's strong engagement and unity. The meeting was financially supported by Al Mulla Exchange, Philo Pharma, and Mango Hyper.

The meeting began with a welcome address by Vice President Dr. Roshila Mathew, who said that the strong participation reflected the members' continued faith in IDAK and its activities. General Secretary Dr. Jijan Sam Thomas presented a comprehensive activity report of the past two years, detailing the wide range of academic, cultural, and sports programmes organised during the term.

Representing Treasurer Dr. Srikanth Reddy, President Dr. George P. Alex presented the audited account statement, which was audited by IDAK Auditor Dr. Shaheer Malik. The accounts were placed before the General Body and were unanimously approved. The event was smoothly conducted by Joint Secretary Dr. Amrita Geevarghese, who served as the Master of Ceremonies. In his farewell address, President Dr. George P. Alex thanked the Executive Committee members for their unwavering support. "The theme of our Council, 'I Can't, But We Can,' became a reality only because of the collective effort and dedication of the entire team," he said, while also enumerating the packed schedule of events organised during the 2024-25 term.

The outgoing President and his team received a standing ovation, led by Past President Dr. John Joy, stating, "Dr. George P. Alex and his Council have had an excellent tenure and IDAK is proud of them." As a mark of appreciation, the outgoing Council honoured the contributions of various committees with mementos and gifts. Immediate Past President Dr. Thomas Thomas later announced the election results for the IDAK Council for the 2026-27 term.

The newly elected office bearers are: President: Dr. Shalin Anna Simon; Vice President: Dr. Aju Wilson; General Secretary: Dr. Dilip George; Treasurer: Dr. Sudhin Kurien Thomas; Joint Secretaries: Dr. Fawwaz Khan & Dr. Bankima Malhotra; President Elect: Dr. E. T. Roy

In her acceptance speech, incoming President Dr. Shalin Anna Simon said, "My team and I will work together to take IDAK to greater heights, and we seek the wholehearted support of all our members." She also unveiled the theme of the new Council, "Enriching Lives, Elevating Potential."

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks proposed by Joint Secretary Dr. Asheel Mohammed, who acknowledged the support of sponsors, members, and the outgoing Council. The formal proceedings were followed by a gala dinner, allowing members to interact and celebrate the successful completion of the term. The current Council will continue in office until 31 December 2025, with the new Council assuming charge from 1 January 2026.



Farewell speech by President Dr. George P. Alex



Acceptance speech by incoming President Dr. Shalin Anna Simon



Present and incoming Council.

Heritage



An array of ancient artifacts.



A collection of images and scenes from Jeddah and Makkah.



Red Sea Museum – A complete cultural journey.



Red Sea Museum housed in the historic Bab Al-Bunt Building in Central Jeddah.



Red Sea Museum: An immersive cultural experience showcasing the heritage, nature, and history of the Red Sea Region.



Massive ship anchor displayed as a centerpiece in a maritime museum, highlighting naval history and engineering.

Discover Jeddah’s Red Sea Museum: A journey through heritage and history

JEDDAH, Dec 29, (KUNA): Located in the iconic Bab Al-Bunt building in the heart of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, the Red Sea Museum preserves the rich heritage and history of the region. Spanning 23 exhibition halls, the museum offers a comprehensive cultural experience, showcasing thousands of

artifacts and exhibits. Visitors can explore historic Hajj photographs, rare books, ancient manuscripts, and other significant relics, making the museum a vibrant testament to the area’s longstanding cultural legacy.

Film



This image released by 20th Studios shows Varang performed by Oona Chaplin in a scene from ‘Avatar: Fire and Ash’. (AP)

Cameron’s latest trip to Pandora dominates ticket sales

‘Avatar,’ ‘Marty Supreme’ propel strong ticket sales to wrap a turbulent ‘25

NEW YORK, Dec 29, (AP): Hollywood wrapped up a turbulent year with big ticket sales for “Avatar: Fire and Ash” and a box-office hit for Timothée Chalamet with “Marty Supreme” over a busy holiday weekend in movie theaters.

As expected, James Cameron’s latest trip to Pandora dominated ticket sales, collecting \$88 million over the four-day Christmas-to-Sunday period and \$64 million on the weekend, according to studio estimates Sunday. Though “Fire and Ash” initially opened notably softer domestically than its 2022 predecessor, “Avatar: The Way of Water,” it held better in its second weekend. It dipped just 28%, whereas “Way of Water” fell 53%.

In two weeks, “Fire and Ash” has quickly amassed \$217.7 million in North America for The Walt Disney Company. But the \$400 million-budgeted film has been a massive draw internationally, grossing \$542.7 million thus far overseas. To reach the box-office heights of the previous films, both of which rank among the biggest blockbusters ever, “Fire and Ash” will need to sustain business through New Year’s and early January. If it does, “Avatar” could become the first franchise with three \$2 billion movies.

But much of the heat in theaters over Christmas and on the weekend belonged to “Marty Supreme,” A24’s biggest budget release, Josh Safdie’s 1950s-set table tennis drama collected \$27.1 million over the four-day weekend, a smash success for the indie studio.

Chalamet went to great lengths to promote the acclaimed release, including appearing atop the Sphere in Las Vegas. The strong opening proved that the 30-year-old star has drawing power beyond most of his contemporaries, and it marked a rare box-office win for a wholly original film. Safdie’s film carries a price tag of about \$70 million.

“Marty Supreme” even bested the film most analysts expected to rank number two: Sony Pictures’ “Anaconda.” The big-screen comedy, starring Jack Black and Paul Rudd, collected \$23.7 million over the four-day holiday weekend. That’s still good for comedy, a genre most studios have abandoned in recent years. But “Anaconda” (50% fresh on Rotten Tomatoes) was surely dinged by poor reviews.

Hollywood is ending the year with its best Christmas Day box office since before the COVID-19 pandemic, a celebratory final note in what’s been a rough year for the film industry. Going into the year, expectations were high for the industry’s first year this decade not marred by pandemic or strike.



This image released by Sony Pictures shows Jack Black (left) and Rudd in a scene from ‘Anaconda’. (AP)

“It was a really solid end to a tumultuous year,” said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for Comscore. “It’s been a roller-coaster ride. I think the best news for the industry - I know we kind of say this every year - but if you look at the lineup for 2026, it’s pretty incredible.”

But domestic ticket sales on the year are ending roughly on par with the disappointing \$8.75 billion in 2024. With three days left in 2025, the box-office total is \$8.76 billion, according to Comscore. By comparison, in 2019, that total was \$11.4 billion. That’s a worrying development for theaters, which are now

nervously watching Netflix attempt to buy one of Hollywood’s most storied studios in Warner Bros. The highest grossing film of the year was a Chinese production, the \$2 billion-generating “Ne Zha 2.” The most-watched movie of 2025 was “KPop Demon Hunters,” a movie Sony Pictures sold to Netflix. Even the Oscars are headed to YouTube.

What worked in 2025? PG-rated movies. For the second year in a row, PG-rated movies outperformed PG-13 ones. Domestically, PG films generated \$2.87 billion, according to Comscore, while PG-13 movies collected \$2.78 billion.

The three biggest Hollywood blockbusters were all PG-rated: “Zootopia 2” (\$1.42 billion globally), “Lilo & Stitch” (\$1.04 billion) and “A Minecraft Movie” (\$958.2 million).

“Zootopia 2” even outranked the newcomers over the traditional weekend. In its fifth weekend, it earned another \$20 million. Propelled by “Zootopia 2,” “Lilo & Stitch” and “Avatar: Fire and Ash,” Disney became the first studio since 2019 to cross \$6 billion worldwide in the year.

Yet expectations are already growing for a rebound year at the box office in 2026. Among the major titles upcoming are “The Super Mario Galaxy Movie,” “Spider-Man: Brand New Day,” the live-action “Moana,” “Toy Story 5” and “The Mandalorian and Grogu.” The coming week, when schools are out and many people are off work, should be one of the busiest weeks of the year in theaters. Aside from the top films, a number of other releases will hope to capitalize.

That includes Lionsgate’s “The Housemaid,” the Paul Feig thriller starring Sydney Sweeney and Amanda Seyfried (\$46.7 million in two weeks); “David,” the animated David and Goliath film from Angel Studios (\$49.8 million in two weeks); Paramount Pictures’ “The SpongeBob Movie: Search for SquarePants” (\$38.2 million in two weeks); and Focus Features’ “Song Sung Blue.”

“Song Sung Blue” may be particularly well-positioned for strong legs. The Craig Brewer-directed film, starring Kate Hudson and Hugh Jackman as members of a Neil Diamond cover band, debuted over the holiday weekend with a four-day haul of \$12 million. Audience scores (an “A” CinemaScore) have been excellent.

With final domestic figures being released Monday, this list factors in the estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore:

1. “Avatar: Fire and Ash,” \$64 million.
2. “Zootopia 2,” \$20 million.
3. “Marty Supreme,” \$17.5 million.
4. “The Housemaid,” \$15.4 million.
5. “Anaconda,” \$14.6 million.
6. “David,” \$12.7 million.
7. “The SpongeBob Movie: Search for SquarePants,” \$11.2 million.
8. “Song Sung Blue,” \$7.6 million.
9. “Wicked: For Good,” \$5.3 million.
10. “Five Nights at Freddy’s 2,” \$4.4 million.

Lunar missions, solar eclipses and rare celestial alignments

The moon and sun figure big in new year’s lineup of cosmic wonders

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida, Dec 29, (AP): The moon and sun share top billing in 2026.

Kicking off the year’s cosmic wonders is the moon, drawing the first astronauts to visit in more than 50 years as well as a caravan of robotic lunar landers including Jeff Bezos’ new supersized Blue Moon. A supermoon looms on Jan. 3 and an astronomical blue moon is on the books for May.

The sun will also generate buzz with a ring-of-fire eclipse at the bottom of the world in February and a total solar eclipse at the top of the world in August. Expect more auroras in unexpected places, though perhaps not as frequently as the past couple years.

And that comet that strayed into our turf from another star? While still visible with powerful backyard telescopes, the recently discovered comet known as 3I/Atlas is fading by the day after swinging past Earth in December. Jupiter is next on its dance card in March. Once the icy outsider departs our solar system a decade from now, it will be back where it belongs in interstellar space.

It’s our third known interstellar visitor. Scientists anticipate more.

“I can’t believe it’s taken this long to find three,” said NASA’s Paul Chodas, who’s been on the lookout since the 1980s. And with ever better technology, “the chance of catching another interstellar visitor will increase.”

Here’s a rundown on what the universe has in store for us in 2026:

NASA’s upcoming moonshot commander Reid Wiseman said there’s a good chance he and his crew will be the first to lay eyeballs on large swaths of the lunar far side that were missed by the Apollo astronauts a half-century ago. Their observations could be a boon for geologists, he noted, and other experts picking future landing sites.

Launching early in the year, the three Americans and one Canadian will zip past the moon, do a U-turn behind it, then hustle straight back to Earth to close out their 10-day mission. No stopping for a moonwalk - the boot prints will be left by the next crew in NASA’s Artemis lunar exploration program.

More robotic moon landings are on the books by China as well as U.S. companies. Early in the year, Amazon founder Bezos is looking for his Blue Origin rocket company to launch a prototype of the lunar lander it’s designing for NASA’s astronauts. This Blue Moon demo will stand 26 feet (8 meters), taller than what delivered Apollo’s 12 moonwalkers to the lunar surface. The Blue Moon version for crew will be almost double that height.

Back for another stab at the moon, Astrobotic Technology and Intuitive



This photo provided by NASA shows the Moon’s shadow covering portions of Canada and the U.S. during a total solar eclipse as seen from the International Space Station, on April 8, 2024. (AP)

Machines are also targeting 2026 landings with scientific gear. The only private entity to nail a lunar landing, Firefly Aerospace, will aim for the moon’s far side in 2026.

China is targeting the south polar region in the new year, sending a rover as well as a so-called hopper to jump into permanently shadowed craters in search of ice.

The cosmos pulls out all the stops with a total solar eclipse on Aug. 12 that will begin in the Arctic and cross over Greenland, Iceland and Spain. Totality will last two minutes and 18 seconds as the moon moves directly between Earth and the sun to blot out

the latter. By contrast, the total solar eclipse in 2027 will offer a whopping 6 1/2 minutes of totality and pass over more countries.

For 2026, the warm-up act will be a ring-of-fire eclipse in the Antarctic on Feb. 17, with only a few research stations in prime viewing position. South Africa and southernmost Chile and Argentina will have partial viewing. A total lunar eclipse will follow two weeks after February’s ring of fire, with a partial lunar eclipse closing out the action at the end of August.

Six of the solar system’s eight planets will prance across the sky in a must-see lineup around Feb. 28. A

nearly full moon is even getting into the act, appearing alongside Jupiter. Uranus and Neptune will require binoculars or telescopes. But Mercury, Venus, Jupiter and Saturn should be visible with the naked eye shortly after sunset, weather permitting, though Mercury and Venus will be low on the horizon.

Mars will be the lone no-show. The good news is that the red planet will join a six-planet parade in August, with Venus the holdout.

Three supermoons will lighten up the night skies in 2026, the stunning result when a full moon inches closer to Earth than usual as it orbits in a not-

quite-perfect circle. Appearing bigger and brighter, supermoons are a perennial crowd pleaser requiring no equipment, only your eyes.

The year’s first supermoon in January coincides with a meteor shower, but the moonlight likely will obscure the dimmer fireballs. The second supermoon of 2026 won’t occur until Nov. 24, with the third - the year’s final and closest supermoon - occurring the night of Dec. 23 into Dec. 24. This Christmas Eve supermoon will pass within 221,668 miles (356,740 kilometers) of Earth.

The sun is expected to churn out more eruptions in 2026 that could lead

to geomagnetic storms here on Earth, giving rise to stunning aurora. Solar action should start to ease, however, with the 11-year solar cycle finally on the downslope.

Space weather forecasters like Rob Steenburgh at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration can’t wait to tap into all the solar wind measurements coming soon from an observatory launched in the fall.

“2026 will be an exciting year for space weather enthusiasts,” he said in an email, with this new spacecraft and others helping scientists “better understand our nearest star and forecast its impacts.”

Want to read more in 2026? Here’s how to revive your love of books

By Adithi Ramakrishnan

NEW YORK, Dec 29, (AP): People stop reading in adulthood for lots of reasons. But it’s never too late to turn the page on old habits and start again.

Curling up with a good book can reduce stress, increase creativity and boost empathy. A recent analysis of U.S. government data found that the percentage of Americans who read for pleasure during an average day has fallen to 16% in 2023 from 28% in 2004. That includes not just books but audiobooks, e-books and periodicals like magazines.

Some people say they’re fatigued from years of assigned reading in school. Others don’t have the time or would rather zone out by doom-scrolling on social media. And many just got out of the habit.

“It’s difficult for people who are really tired and busy to think about getting into reading if it’s not something they’re used to,” said Jacqueline Rammer, director of Menomonee Falls Public Library in Wisconsin.

For those looking to set reading goals or resolutions in 2026, here’s how to get back into the habit.

This article is part of AP’s Be Well coverage, focusing on wellness, fitness, diet and mental health. Read more Be Well.

Choose the right book

When picking your next book, avoid dense nonfiction or a 500-page doorstop.

“Your first book should be something that you think will be joyful,” said Jocelyn Luizzi, a software engineer from Chicago who blogs about books.

Everyone’s taste is different, so get recommendations from a variety of places including friends, booksellers and online communities like BookTok.

Rammer and her staff ask library visitors: What was the last book, TV show or movie that you really enjoyed? Then, they look for similar genres or themes.

Many libraries offer access to



A woman reads a book in the afternoon sun on a bench outside South Station in Boston, on May 31, 2024. (AP)

a service called NoveList which suggests “read-alikes” for various books and authors.

Set a reading routine

To create a habit that sticks, “start by scheduling reading into your day,” said Gloria Mark, an attention span expert with the University of California, Irvine. Read five pages during a lunch break or right before bed.

If you’re reading a physical book, Mark said to avoid distractions by keeping phones and laptops out of sight.

But experimenting with other formats can make reading more convenient. E-books are portable and audiobooks are a good candidate to accompany chores or the morning commute. You can likely access both for free by downloading an app called Libby and signing in with a library card.

Try to read in a quiet setting, but don’t be afraid to make it a social activity. Many cities in the U.S. and around the world host silent book clubs where people read their own books together in coffee shops and libraries.

Setting a reading goal for the year or joining a local library’s winter reading challenge can help with mo-

tivation – but if it feels like added pressure, don’t do it.

Shannon Whitehead Smith, a book blogger from the Atlanta area who also works in marketing, says scrolling through lists of other people’s reads on social media and trackers like StoryGraph encourages her to keep the habit.

“Seeing all these other people reading motivates me to put my phone down and pick up this book that’s sitting beside me,” she said.

Feel free to skip a read

If a book feels particularly sluggish, it’s OK to put it down and start another. Reading “shouldn’t feel like a burden,” said Jess Bone with University College London, who analyzed the survey data about American adults reading for pleasure.

Routine readers say the habit helps them stay curious and release the stress of the day. Rammer, the library director, reads mysteries rife with twists and turns, and romances that cycle through roller coasters of emotions.

Most of all, she likes books that end with a “happily ever after.”

“I think the guarantee of knowing that things are going to end up OK is really reassuring,” Rammer said.

Hits 72-qubit power with 99.92% accuracy

Russian scientists create 1st domestic 7-level ion-based quantum computer

MOSCOW, Dec 29, (Xinhua): Russian scientists have created the country’s first ion-based quantum computer using a new type of quantum unit that works with seven energy levels, the Russian Quantum Center (RQC) was quoted by TASS as saying on Monday.

The new technology makes the system equal in power to a 72-qubit quantum processor and allows it to perform important calculations with very high accuracy, the RQC press service said.

Maxim Ostras, head of the RQC, said that researchers began testing this multi-level approach in 2021 with a much smaller system.

“Over just four years, we have greatly increased the computing power and created a prototype equal to 72 qubits,” he said.

Most existing quantum computers are built using qubits, which are quantum versions of classical computer bits. A normal qubit has only two possible energy levels, similar to an artificial atom.

However, scientists are now developing more complex quantum units such as three-level and four-level systems, and even higher-level ones, because they can store and process more information using fewer particles. These systems are more powerful but also more difficult to



Russian scientists have developed a 70-qubit quantum computer (a device that uses the principles and phenomena of quantum mechanics, such as quantum superposition and quantum entanglement, to process data), based on ytterbium ions, according to the Russian news agency TASS, citing Rosatom Quantum Technologies. (Xinhua)

control.

The new Russian quantum computer uses 26 calcium ions, with each ion acting as a seven-level quantum unit that can take values from zero to six. To build the system, the research team, led by RQC scientist Kirill Lakhmanskii, developed special laser equipment and a complex optical structure that allows them to precisely control the quantum states and perform key logical operations.

Tests showed that the processor can perform single-qubit operations with 99.92 percent accuracy and two-qubit operations with 96.5 percent accuracy, which is a record level for quantum systems of this size.

Lakhmanskii said the team plans to soon use the new quantum computer to run algorithms for combinatorial optimization, which are widely used in network design and other complex planning tasks.

Japan reports avian influenza in Hokkaido

TOKYO, Dec 29, (Xinhua): Japan’s agriculture ministry said on Monday that genetic testing has confirmed an outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza at a farm in Hokkaido Prefecture, marking the 11th bird flu outbreak in the country this season.

According to a statement released by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the outbreak occurred at a poultry farm in Yuni Town, Hokkaido, leading to the culling of over 6,000 egg-laying chickens.

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

Japan’s avian influenza season typically runs from autumn until the



Egg-laying chickens inside a Hokkaido farm affected by the latest outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza. (Xinhua)

following spring. The previous 10 outbreaks this season have already led to the culling of nearly 3.65 mil-

lion chickens. The country’s first case was confirmed in Hokkaido on Oct. 22.

Bangladesh reports 102,562 dengue cases

DHAKA, Dec 29, (Xinhua): Bangladesh witnessed another deadly year of dengue outbreak as the South Asian country recorded 102,562 cases and 412 deaths so far in 2025.

Of the total, according to data released on Sunday by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), 8,165 cases were reported in December, following a total of 24,535 cases in November.

According to the DGHS, the deaths

included 30 in December, 104 in November and 80 in October.

Bangladesh recorded more than 100,000 dengue cases and 575 deaths in 2024. The South Asian nation logged 1,705 dengue-related deaths in 2023, marking the highest annual death toll.

Dengue fever, typically a monsoon-season illness in Bangladesh, is now spreading beyond its usual June-September period.

Dengue fever is a viral disease trans-

mitted through the bite of infected Aedes mosquitoes. The disease causes an acute illness with symptoms such as headache, high fever, exhaustion, severe muscle and joint pain, swollen glands, vomiting and rash.

In order to fight the rising number of dengue cases, Bangladeshi health authorities have strengthened measures to check the breeding of mosquitoes and conduct anti-larval operations.

Shiffrin extends World Cup slalom streak

Swiss world champion Rast claims second

SEMMERING, Austria, Dec 29, (AP): After dominating the first four World Cup slaloms this season, Mikaela Shiffrin has only just managed to keep her winning streak intact ahead of the 2026 Olympics.

Not that night slalom in Austria, the final event of the calendar year, could make the American ski star particularly happy.

Shiffrin came from half a second behind in the first run to edge out world champion Camille Rast of Switzerland, but then slammed race conditions on the Panorama course.

"I have to say this: It was not safe to ski for the girls," Shiffrin told Austrian TV. "For me, don't question it, bib 4 on the first run, it's not a problem, right. But for these women who were starting bib 13, 15, 18, in the 60s (start numbers), this is not OK."

The recent mild weather affected the course and organizers attempted to harden its surface by injecting water and salt beforehand.

However, the surface broke on an increasing number of spots during the afternoon run, which started at 2.15 p.m.

Conditions then slightly improved for the evening session 3½ hours later, when temperatures dropped.

"It was a very challenging and distracting day," Shiffrin said. "My understanding is that there were no big injuries, but the way the surface was breaking ... The second run was a bit better, for sure, but I am frustrated with how that went for these women."

Only 40 out of the 77 starters completed the first session and a deficit of 5.94 seconds was still enough to qualify for the final run.

"It should be a good show, but it



United States' Mikaela Shiffrin speeds down the course during an alpine ski, women's World Cup slalom in Semmering, Austria. Inset: United States' Mikaela Shiffrin, winner of an alpine ski, women's World Cup slalom, poses with the trophy in Semmering, Austria. (AP)

should be something that the athletes want to do and are not terrified on the start, looking at the first two turns with these enormous holes. There is a way to do it better, and that's that," Shiffrin said.

Doing it better is certainly what Shiffrin did in her final run.

The American was fourth, more than half a second off the pace, in the opening session on the rapidly dete-

riorating course, but posted the fastest time in the evening to beat first-run leader Rast, who finished 0.09 seconds behind. Italian-born prodigy Lara Colturi, 19, who competes for Albania, was 0.57 back in third.

"It was a really hard day today, tough conditions, a really big fight, and the pressure's on. And oh, I did my best, best possible run," Shiffrin said in a course-side interview after

her record-extending 106th career win.

"It didn't feel like good. I didn't expect to come down with the green light. It's been one of those days, it's like: 'Let's refocus and be positive and try'."

Five wins in a row to begin a season matches Shiffrin's personal best start from 2018-19.

She won the final race of last sea-



Switzerland's Camille Rast celebrates on the podium her second place in an alpine ski, women's World Cup slalom in Semmering, Austria, Sunday, in an alpine. (AP)

son and then dominated the first four slaloms of the current Olympic campaign, winning them by an average margin of 1.5 seconds, before adding Sunday's narrow win.

In the first run, Shiffrin was one-hundredth of a second ahead of Rast halfway down the course but lost considerable time on the Swiss racer in the bottom section.

"It's a pretty tough one. I think, probably, a little bit like overskiing, too round, compared to what's possible," said Shiffrin, who was the 2014 Olympic champion and holds the women's World Cup record of 69 slalom victories.

She extended her lead over second-placed Colturi to 220 points in the

slalom standings. The World Cup schedule includes three more slaloms in January before the Milan Cortina Winter Olympics, and then two in March. A race win is worth 100 points.

Croatia's Zrinka Ljutic, who won the race last season and went on to take the slalom globe, was a massive 3.75 seconds behind in eighth.

Shiffrin's teammate Paula Molzan was seventh after the first run but straddled a gate in the second, a day after she crashed and fell on her back and head in a giant slalom on the same hill. That race was won by Austria's Julia Scheib, who does not compete in slalom.

The women's World Cup travels to Slovenia for a giant and slalom in Kranjska Gora next weekend.

I'd like to come back to just playing golf again: Tiger

The shot-maker like no other: Woods turns 50

WASHINGTON, Dec 29, (AP): Talk to any golfer who played against Tiger Woods and there is sure to be at least one story about one shot so sublime they were certain it could not be hit by them or anyone else.

He was just different. Better.

The 2-iron Woods hit into the par-5 10th hole at the TPC Sugarloaf led Stewart Cink to say, "This is a skill set I don't have." Padraig Harrington once saw Woods hit an 8-iron so majestic at Firestone that it got in his head and led to the Irishman making triple bogey.

Nick Price played the opening two rounds with Woods at St. Andrews in the 2000 British Open and felt the tournament already was over. Mark O'Meara played a practice round with him at Pebble Beach before the 2000 U.S. Open and told his wife before the championship started, "Tiger is going to win. And not only is he going to win, he's going to blow away the field." Woods won by 15.

For all those years, so many greats in the game could never relate to Woods. And now, finally, they can.

Not even Woods can beat time. He turns 50 on Tuesday.

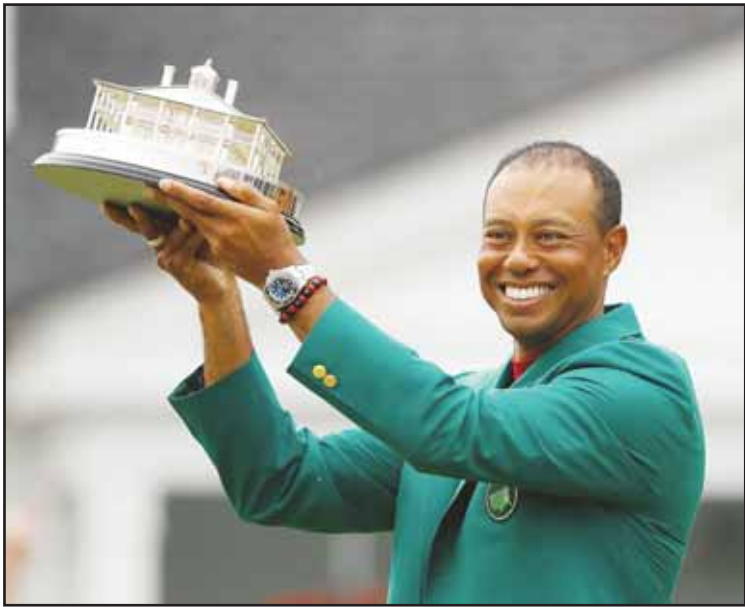
It's a milestone for anyone, but it's different in golf because the sport can be played well after the age when athletes have long retired in other sports. Phil Mickelson won a major at 50. Jack Nicklaus made an early Sunday charge at the Masters when he was 58.

With Woods, it's complicated.

He now is eligible for the 50-and-older PGA Tour Champions. He also has had more surgeries than the 15 majors he won. This is the first year he didn't play a single tournament, the result of a ruptured Achilles tendon in March and a seventh back surgery in September.

"I'm probably going to play 25 events on both tours and I think that should cover most of the year, right?" Woods quipped in the Bahamas when asked about turning 50.

He won the U.S. Open just eight days before reconstructive surgery on his left knee. He won the Masters two years after surgery to fuse his lower back. But he hasn't been the same since that 2021



In this file photo, Tiger Woods wears his green jacket holding the winning trophy after the final round for the Masters golf tournament in Augusta, Ga. (AP)

car crash in Los Angeles. Woods has played 11 times the last five seasons, finished only four of those tournaments and hasn't been closer than 16 shots to the winner.

"Come back to what point?" Woods said. "I'd like to come back to just playing golf again."

And so this celebration is more about looking back than forward.

Ernie Els was most prescient in 2000 at Kapalua when he was on the losing end again - no one finished second to Woods more than the Big Easy. They matched eagles on the 18th in regulation, birdies on the 18th in a playoff and Woods got him with a 40-foot birdie putt on the second extra hole. Vintage Tiger.

"I think he's a legend in the making," Els said that day. "He's 24. He's probably going to be bigger than Elvis when he gets into his 40s."

That's up for debate, of course. Undeniable is the impact Woods has left

on golf.

Popularity soared and prize money skyrocketed. Woods made golf look different and he made it cool. And perhaps his greatest legacy is he unwittingly trained a generation of players who wanted to be like him. Scottie Scheffler said nothing inspired him more than watching the intensity of Woods when he was out of contention at the 2020 Masters. Woods made a 10 on the 12th hole and followed with five birdies over his last six holes. He tied for 38th.

"Tiger was just different in the way he approached each shot. It was like the last shot he was ever going to hit," Scheffler said. It was the only time they played together. Scheffler now is coming up on three years at No. 1 in the world, the longest stretch since Woods.

But it started with that skill set unlike any other.

"He's the only guy I've ever known who continually exceeded expectations," Tom Lehman said. "No matter

how much you heaped on him, he found a way to exceed them."

Lehman recalls one moment at the Memorial on the 17th hole, a green so rock-hard it felt impossible to get it close. Lehman hit 5-iron as high and far as he could and was pleased to see it roll out 25 feet from the cup.

"He hits this shot way up in the air and it was coming down like a parachute," Lehman said. "Lands by the cup and bounces 2 feet and stops. I figure he must have hit a 7-iron. I said, 'Tiger, what club was that?' He said, 'That was a little, three-finger 5-iron.' He just filleted it in there."

"When I think of him, that's what I think of. Only one guy could hit that shot. And he did it often."

Woods had the career Grand Slam at age 24, the youngest of anyone. He had 50 wins worldwide and 10 majors before he turned 30.

It wasn't as easy as he could make it look. The late Dan Jenkins once said when Woods was in peak form, "Only two things can stop Tiger - injury or a bad marriage." Turns out it was both. His path was derailed at the end of 2009 by revelations of multiple extramarital affairs, and the injuries kept piling up. He still made it back to No. 1 in the world in 2013 and he ran his PGA Tour victory count to 82, tied with Sam Snead.

"If he never got injured, he'd have 25 majors and 125 wins," Fred Couples said.

Matt Kuchar saw it differently. He felt the injuries contributed to the legend of Woods, particularly that 2008 U.S. Open win at Torrey Pines.

Woods was playing that week on shredded ligaments in his left knee and two stress fractures in his left leg. Often overlooked is that Woods had not walked 18 holes since the Masters until the opening round at Torrey Pines.

"The legacy is bigger because of the injuries," Kuchar said. "What he did at Torrey Pines, what he did at the (2019) Masters is sort of Hoganesque. At some point I, like most everybody, counted him out. And then he wins again."

Other Voices

Jassim and Hamad ... The secret behind Qatar's sporting success

By Ahmed Al-Fadhli

In every Qatari achievement that captures global attention, and in every moment of pride experienced by Doha, there stand behind the scenes leaders who chose to work quietly, away from the spotlight, believing that true impact requires no noise – only a clear vision and meticulous execution.

Among the most prominent of these figures is Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad, a name that has become synonymous with wise leadership, balanced decision-making, and deep strategic planning that consistently precedes achievement. It is a comprehensive sporting vision, managed with strategic foresight and translated on the ground into a continuous stream of accomplishments, without theatrics or self-promotion.

Alongside him stands Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa, Minister of Sports, as the executive force and key pillar of international engagement. A man of action and global relations, Sheikh Hamad has formed with Sheikh Jassim an exceptional leadership duo – one that seamlessly combines vision with execution, ambition with discipline. Together, they have built an integrated sporting and media ecosystem unprecedented in the region's history.

Doha did not become a global capital of sport by coincidence. While many countries can host events, it is the quality of organization, attention to detail, and professionalism that distinguish the Qatari experience. World-class stadiums, advanced infrastructure, international-standard hotels, a modern transportation network, and top-tier logistical support – all led by passionate and highly capable young Qatari professionals – operate under the wise leadership of His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, with direct support from Sheikh Jassim and professional execution led by Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa.

Qatar's ability to host simultaneously the FIFA U-17 World Cup, the Gulf U-23 Championship, the Intercontinental Cup for Clubs, the Arab Cup, along-



Ahmed Al-Fadhli

side several other global sporting events across different disciplines and within the same timeframe, represents a rare organizational feat – one that would be nearly impossible even for major nations, yet has become a tangible reality in Qatar.

It is a complete tableau of creativity and precision, an organizational symphony performed with professionalism and mastery by this leadership team, reaffirming that success is never accidental but the result of sustained institutional effort.

Among these milestones, Qatar's qualification for the World Cup stands out as a historic achievement, dedicated to all those who stood behind this journey and to everyone who believed that investing in people and vision is the shortest path to reaching the summit.

It is a unique duet between Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad, the architect of sporting achievements and visionary leadership, and Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa, the man of execution and international openness, who has made Qatar a vibrant and welcoming hub for athletes and media professionals from around the world.

Qatar, with its youth and sporting leadership, is fortunate to have a model that believes glory is built through action, not rhetoric; through commitment, not slogans.

Congratulations to Qatar on these achievements. It will continue – as it always has – to be a role model for quiet leadership, sustained excellence, and sincere loyalty to this great nation.

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Yeshey spins 8-wicket record in T20I

GELEPHU MINDFULNESS CITY, Bhutan, Dec 29, (AP): A 22-year-old spinner from Bhutan has become the first bowler to take eight wickets in an international T20 cricket match.

Left-arm spinner Sonam Yeshey achieved the feat on Friday when he picked up 8-7 from his four overs against Myanmar in a T20 game in Bhutan. Myanmar was bowled out for 45 in reply to Bhutan's 127-9 to lose the game by 82 runs.

Malaysian bowler Syazrul Idrus and Ali Da-

wood of Bahrain held the previous record of most wickets in a T20 international. Syazrul took 7-8 against China in 2023 and Dawood picked up 7-19 against Bhutan this year.

Yeshey made his T20 international debut in 2022 against Malaysia when he took 3-16 in his first match. Since then he has taken 37 wickets in 34 matches. In domestic T20 cricket only two bowlers have picked up seven wickets in an innings.

MCG pitch slammed after two-day Ashes shock

MELBOURNE, Australia, Dec 29, (AP): The pitch used for the fourth Ashes test that finished inside two days has been rated as "unsatisfactory" by cricket's world governing body.

No batter scored a half-century and 36 wickets fell across six sessions at Melbourne Cricket Ground as England beat Australia by four wickets in just 142 overs of play.

"The MCG pitch was too much in favor of the bowlers," Jeff Crowe, the International Cricket Council's match referee for the test, said Monday.

"With 20 wickets falling on the first day, 16 on the second day and no batter even reaching a half-century, the pitch was

'Unsatisfactory' as per the guidelines and the venue gets one demerit point."

James Allsopp, chief of cricket at Cricket Australia, expressed his disappointment for those fans who had bought tickets for Days 3 and 4 that the "pitch did not provide the MCG's customary balance between bat and ball."

Those comments came after Matt Page, the curator of the pitch at the MCG, acknowledged that leaving 10mm of grass on the surface proved excessive. "I've never been involved in a test match like it," Page said, "and hopefully never involved in a test match like it again."

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‘Sponsorship reflects our commitment to ensuring the success of major events in Kuwait’

Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait sponsors the Amir Cup football final

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced its sponsorship of the final match of HH the Amir of Kuwait Football Cup, which brought together Kuwait Sports Club and Al-Arabi Sports Club. This sponsorship comes within the framework of the Bank’s social responsibility, its interest in supporting sports, and its commitment to contributing to the success of major events taking place in Kuwait across all sectors.

The sponsorship is part of the partnership between ABK and the Kuwait Football Association, reflecting the Bank’s keenness to support football as the most popular sport in Kuwait and around the world.

During the event, the Bank introduced the public to its various banking products and solutions and showcased awareness videos addressing topics from the ‘Let’s Be Aware’ banking awareness campaign, reflecting its role as a responsible banking institution in the Kuwaiti market and its commitment to strengthening its competitive position at all levels.

On this occasion, Mohammed Talib Behbehani, Assistant General

Manager at ABK, “The sponsorship of the final match of HH the Amir of Kuwait Football Cup comes in light of the great interest in football among all segments of Kuwaiti society, and as part of our focus on sports, which we consider a key pillar of our annual social responsibility program. Through this program, we cooperate with many partners to ensure the success of various activities throughout the year.”

He added that ABK is proud to participate in major events such as HH the Amir of Kuwait Football Cup and others, noting that the Bank has sponsored many important matches in previous years and will continue to sponsor more in the future as part of its cooperation with the Kuwait Football Association, contributing to the success of the various tournaments held in Kuwait each sports season.

He further noted that sponsoring the match adds to the many sports-related activities in which ABK participates, including its sponsorship of Al-Arabi Football Club, organizing several tournaments, such as padel and futsal competitions, supporting teams in various



Mohammed Talib Behbehani, ABK's Asst. GM

corporate tournaments, and providing support to numerous academies each year.

Behbehani concluded by reaffirming ABK’s commitment to further developing its social responsibility program in the future through participation in more events, with the



Kuwait SC and Al-Arabi SC in action during the game.

aim of engaging with the public, understanding their needs, and meeting them by innovating banking solutions, services, and products that keep pace with ongoing developments in the banking industry.

Artech CC crowned champions of Falcons Premier Cup T20



Falcons celebrate T20 Premier Cup victory.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Artech CC were crowned champions of the Falcons Premier Cup T20 2025–26 (Edition 1), powered by Al Muzaini Exchange, after a dominant performance in the final against Stack CC played last night. Showcasing their all-round strength on the big stage, Artech CC lifted the inaugural trophy with a convincing seven-wicket victory.

Batting first, Stack CC struggled to build momentum against a disciplined Artech bowling attack and were restricted to 142 runs. Prasanth was outstanding with the ball for Artech CC, claiming 3/23 in just two overs, while Lahiru picked up three crucial wickets and Naveenraj added two to keep Stack CC under pressure throughout the innings.

In reply, Artech CC made light work of the chase, reaching the target in just 12.2 overs. The run chase was powered by an explosive knock from Clinto Anto, who smashed 63 off just 27 deliveries, including six towering sixes. He was well supported by Sankar, who scored a rapid 32 off 12 balls, and Shiraz, who finished the game unbeaten with 16 off nine deliveries.

Nimish Latheef was deservedly named Player of the Match for his outstanding all-round contribution, returning figures of 3/23 from his four overs and adding a handy 16 off 15 balls with the bat.

The triumph marked a memorable end to a competitive tournament, with Artech CC emerging as deserving champions of the Falcons Premier Cup T20 2025–26.

Al-Jazeera seeks win after Burgan draw

Al-Yarmouk aims to claim the First Division lead



Al-Yarmouk players cheered as they scored.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Al-Yarmouk will aim to seize the top spot in the First Division, at least temporarily, when they takes on Al-Shamiya at Abdullah Al-Khalifa Stadium at 5:30 PM today in the ninth round of the league. Today’s action also features Sporty facing Al-Jazeera at Al-Sahel Stadium at the same time.

The round will continue with two additional fixtures: Burgan vs Al-Sahel, and Al-Sulaibikhat vs Khaitan.

Second-placed Al-Yarmouk, with 18 points, enters today’s match with a strong chance to extend its winning run and claim the league lead, particularly if current leader Al-Sahel (20 points) slip up against Burgan tomorrow.

Al-Yarmouk will likely find the task manageable against a struggling Al-Shamiya side, which sits second-to-last in seventh place with only 3 points.

Meanwhile, fourth-placed Al-Jazeera, on 14 points, will look to bounce back after a 3–3 draw with Burgan in the previous round. A win today would allow it to challenge the league leader. It faces bottom-placed Sporty, who has lost all eight of its previous matches, giving Al-Jazeera a favorable opportunity to secure the full three points.

Broos blasts lack of ‘AFCON vibe’ at Africa Cup in Morocco

RABAT, Morocco, Dec 29, (AP): South Africa coach Hugo Broos isn’t getting that usual Africa Cup of Nations feeling in Morocco.

Broos, who led Cameroon to the title in 2017 in Gabon and took South Africa to third place at the 2023 edition in Ivory Coast, said there was a lack of enthusiasm for the 35th Africa Cup.

“In the Ivory Coast and in Gabon, every second of the tournament you felt that you were in a tournament,” Broos said. “The people were - when we went with the bus to train - the people were waving and they were with flags, and here you see nothing. So, I don’t know, but yeah, there is no vibe, there is no typical AFCON vibe. I don’t feel it here.”

Organizers have struggled to fill stadiums and the weather hasn’t helped. There has been heavy rainfall every day of the tourna-

ment, except for Thursday when there were no games on the Christian holiday of Christmas Day. Morocco is a predominately Muslim country.

The tournament was originally scheduled for the summer, but it was pushed back to winter so it wouldn’t clash with FIFA’s new Club World Cup played in the United States.

Even Morocco games, which were all sold out, have featured empty seats with touts blamed for snapping up tickets, frustrating fans’ efforts to get access to the near 70,000-capacity Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium, where the home team is playing all its group games.

Security at other stadiums has allowed fans free entrance after kickoff to increase attendance. It has led to supporters without tickets waiting outside on the assumption they will be allowed in.

“Nobody came to see the game South Africa-Angola,” Broos said after criticizing the arrangements for his team’s subsequent match against Egypt. “It was chaos before the game ... they blocked everyone, even people with tickets. They couldn’t enter in the stadium because there was a crowd of people who didn’t have a ticket and who were allowed to come in.”

Broos praised the “nice stadiums” - all nine were newly constructed or renovated for the tournament - but said the atmosphere at the 2025 Africa Cup was uncharacteristically “cool.”

“If they don’t let the people free in the stadium, there is nobody,” he said. “Nobody is coming to watch the game South Africa-Zimbabwe.”

Morocco is also a co-host for the 2030 World Cup.

Al-Nasr edges Al-Sahel

Al-Qadsia wins over Al-Qurain, keeps semifinal hopes alive

By Hassan Mosa
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Al-Qadsia took a major step toward securing a place in the basketball league’s semi-finals after recording a convincing 103–92 victory over Al-Qurain in the ninth round of the competition. The round also featured Al-Nasr’s 93–83 win against Al-Sahel.

The victory lifted Al-Qadsia’s tally to 16 points, placing them temporarily at the top of the standings, while Al-Qurain remained on 14 points.

Al-Qadsia avenged its earlier defeat to Al-Qurain, who had beaten it 93–85 in the first round. The encounter was closely contested early on, with both teams trading baskets in an intense opening quarter that ended 21–19 in favor of the “Yellow.”

The turning point came in the second quarter, as Al-Qadsia asserted control through the outstanding performance of American scorer Jamaro Brown, who finished the game with 40 points, supported by fellow American DeQuan Jones. Its efforts helped extend the lead to 13 points by halftime (55–42).

Al-Qadsia maintained its dominance in the third quarter, despite repeated attempts by Al-Qurain to close the gap, stretching the margin to 83–69.

It completed the job in the final quarter, comfortably closing out the contest with a deserved 103–92 win.

In the day’s other match, Al-Nasr



Al-Qadsia player fires the ball into the hoop.

climbed to sixth place with 12 points after defeating Al-Sahel 93–83, while Al-Sahel stayed seventh on 10 points.

Abdulrahman Al-Jumaa led Al-Nasr with 17 points as his team held the advantage throughout the game, leading 25–20 after the first quarter, 54–45 at halftime and 77–66 after three quarters before sealing the victory.

The league is played in a three-phase round-robin format, with the top four teams advancing to the semifinals, where they compete in a best-of-three playoff series.

Best of the Rest

Coates to extend Nacional deal: Former Liverpool center-back Sebastian Coates is set to extend his contract with Uruguay’s Nacional for another year, the Montevideo club said.

Coates’ current deal is due to expire this month but the club made clear its intention for the 35-year-old to continue.

“The captain will carry on for a while yet,” Nacional said in a social media post along-side images of the defender celebrating the club’s 50th league title last month.. (Xinhua)

Carrascal linked with Marseille move: Colombia international midfielder Jorge Carrascal could leave Flamengo to join Marseille in Europe’s January transfer window, according to media reports.

The French Ligue 1 side has submitted an initial bid of 15 million euros for the 27-year-old, Brazilian news outlet Esporte News Mundo reported.

It added that Flamengo is seeking at least 20 million euros to release the playmaker, who is contracted to the Rio de Janeiro club until June 2029. (Xinhua)

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NEWS



Inter Milan's Lautaro Martinez celebrates after scoring a goal during the Serie A soccer match between Atalanta and Inter in Bergamo, Italy. (AP)

Sports

Kuwait Club and Al-Arabi keep title race alive

By Hassan Mosa
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The battle for the Zain Premier League title remains intense as Kuwait Club and Al-Arabi continued their push following the completion of two postponed sixth-round matches. Al-Arabi, the "White," cruised to a 5-0 win over Al-Fahaheel, the "Green," earned a hard-fought 2-1 victory against Al-Tadamun.

Kuwait Club now has 23 points, trailing Al-Arabi by three points, keeping the championship race tight.

Kuwait Club President Khaled Al-Ghanem praised his team's performance against Al-Fahaheel, noting that "the opponent is a strong team with talented players and a competent coaching staff."

He highlighted the club's long-standing achievements, saying: "Kuwait Club's success began in 2002 under former president Marzouq Al-Ghanem, continued under Abdulaziz Al-Marzouq, and has reached this stage today. Our administrative and sports system is functioning effectively."

Al-Ghanem confirmed that Faisal Zayed will remain with Kuwait Club, adding, "Zayed has a three-year contract with the club. Our relationship is more

than just contractual."

He also expressed hope that the club's rising ranking will improve its chances of participating in the AFC Champions League. Regarding his presence at Mohammed Al-Hamad Stadium, he said, "I have returned to my rightful place after the law supported me. My return to the stadiums is unquestionable."

Al-Arabi coach Nasser Al-Shatti admitted that the team faced a tough challenge against Al-Tadamun. "We knew this match would be difficult, especially after losing the Amir Cup final," he said. He also noted that the upcoming schedule will be demanding due to limited player availability caused by injuries.

Despite the challenges, Al-Shatti expressed confidence in his squad, believing they can continue to deliver strong results. He also warned that the January transfer window would be "challenging," citing the need to replace under-performing foreign players and the upcoming expiration of contracts for several local players who may seek opportunities with other clubs.

Shabab Club assistant coach Malik John confirmed that the team's goalkeeper, Al-Qannai, will not be allowed to move to Al-Qadsia, rejecting his request to leave for the rival club.



Kuwait Club and Al-Fahaheel players fight for the ball.

Ivory Coast, Cameroon share honors, Algeria goes through



Ivory Coast's goalkeeper Yahia Fofana clears the ball during the Africa Cup of Nations Group F soccer match between Ivory Coast and Cameroon, in Marrakech, Morocco. (AP)

Zidane watches again as Riyadh continues fine form in AFCON

RABAT, Morocco, Dec 29, (AP): Defending champion Ivory Coast and five-time winner Cameroon drew 1-1 after a mighty tussle at the Africa Cup of Nations on Sunday, while Algeria reached the last 16 with prominent fan Zinedine Zidane again watching on.

Cameroon forward Bryan Mbeumo might have won the late game with the last kick, only to be thwarted by Ivorian defender Odilon Kossounou, who threw himself in front of the ball and received its full force between his legs.

Neither team backed down. Cameroon's performance showed the team is united under new coach David Pagou, after predecessor Marc Brys was fired weeks before the tournament as federation president Samuel Eto'o brought their public dispute to a conclusion, with a list of grievances against the Belgian coach.

The Cameroon players danced their way into the stadium in Marrakech, where TV cameras showed Barcelona defender Jules Koundé and Real Madrid midfielder Aurélien Tchouaméni - both French internationals - sitting side by side to watch the game, with France superstar Kylian Mbappé also in attendance.



Algeria's fans wait for the start of the Africa Cup of Nations Group E soccer match between Algeria and Burkina Faso in Fez, Morocco. (AP)

They had to wait till the 51st minute for Amad Diallo to break the deadlock with his second goal in two games for Ivory Coast, a sweet strike curled inside the post.

Cameroon replied five minutes later when Junior Tchemadeu's shot took a deflection from Ivorian defender Ghislain Konan to loop over the goalkeeper. It was deemed an own goal from the left back.

Both teams, on four points in Group F, can be confident of reaching the last 16. The top two in each group and the four best third-place teams progress.

There were some moments of silence before the game for former Ivory Coast coach Jean-Louis Gasset, who

died last week.

Earlier, Mozambique boosted its hopes of progression with a 3-2 win over Gabon, which has been eliminated after two losses.

Zidane watched again and Riyadh Mahrez scored again as Algeria reached the last 16 with a 1-0 win over Burkina Faso.

The 34-year-old Mahrez took his tally to three goals in two games with a penalty in the 23rd minute. The ball went one way, the goalkeeper the other, and it was enough for the Fennec Foxes to advance to the knockout stage with a maximum six points in Group E.

It came as a relief for the many Algerian fans who had made the relatively

short trip to the Moulay El Hassan Stadium in Rabat. The team went out after the group stage in both subsequent editions after winning the 2019 title in Egypt.

"The goal was for us to qualify and not really individual awards," said Algeria youngster Ibrahim Maza, 20, who praised his colleagues' teamwork.

Zidane's son Luca did not have much to do in the Algeria goal until he was tested by Lassina Traoré in the 83rd.

Cyriaque Irié might have equalized in stoppage time but his header went straight to the Algeria goalkeeper, who has been given a chance to shine for the country of his grandfather because of a knee injury to Alexandre Oukidja, who would likely have started.

There was a cheer when the big screens showed the senior Zidane, the France great, watching while well wrapped up against the cold. He was also present for Algeria's opening win over Sudan.

Burkina Faso stayed second in the group on three points, after its opening win over Equatorial Guinea.

Earlier, Sudan - which is playing despite a brutal war at home - revived its chances of progression with a 1-0 win over Equatorial Guinea in Casablanca.

"Our ambition is to win the title, not just to achieve a single victory," Sudan coach James Kwesi Appiah said.

Sudan faces Burkina Faso in their final group game on Wednesday with a place in the last 16 at stake. Equatorial Guinea, with two defeats, was eliminated.

Lakers end skid with win over Kings

Leonard scores career-best 55 as Clippers top East-leading Pistons

INGLEWOOD, Calif., Dec 29, (AP): Kawhi Leonard scored a career-high 55 points, James Harden added 28 and the Los Angeles Clippers extended their winning streak to a season-high four games with a 112-99 victory over the Detroit Pistons.

Leonard went 17 of 26 from the floor, including 5 for 10 from 3-point range, and made 16 of 17 free throws, with his only blemish of the game a missed free throw in the third quarter that ended his run of 64 straight from the line, all this month. He scored 26 of his points in the third quarter.

Nicolas Batum scored 12 points, while Leonard added 11 rebounds and five steals for Los Angeles, which lost 10 of 11 games before its four-game run.

Lakers 125, Kings 101

In Los Angeles, Luka Doncic scored 34 points, LeBron James had 24, and the Los Angeles Lakers snapped their three-game losing streak with a win over the Sacramento Kings.

Nick Smith Jr. had 21 off the bench for the Lakers, who had dropped four of six and all by at least 13 points, including a 23-point demolition at the hands of Houston on Christmas Day in their previous game.

DeMar DeRozan had 22 for the Kings, who have won consecutive games just once this season. Maxime Raynaud finished with 16, as Sacramento had six players in double figures.

Raptors 141, Warriors 127 OT

In Toronto, Scottie Barnes scored 23 points, matched a Raptors franchise record with a career-high 25 rebounds and added 10 assists for his seventh career triple-double as Toronto beat the Golden State Warriors in overtime.

Immanuel Quickley scored 27 points, Brandon Ingram had 26 and Ja'Kobe Walter added a season-high 18 for the Raptors, who snapped a five-game home losing streak.

Stephen Curry scored 14 of his 39 points in the third quarter but didn't score in overtime. Draymond Green had 21 and Jimmy Butler added 19 but it wasn't enough for the Warriors.

Barnes matched Bismack Biyombo's 2016 franchise record for rebounds in a game. The triple-double was his first of the season.

Thunder 129, 76ers 104

In Oklahoma City, Chet Holmgren

had 29 points and nine rebounds, and the Oklahoma City Thunder pulled away in the second half for a victory over the Philadelphia 76ers, ending a two-game skid.

Holmgren made 12 of 17 shots, including 2 of 4 from 3-point range, for Oklahoma City (27-5), which was coming off consecutive losses to the San Antonio Spurs.

The Thunder shot 50 for 87 (57%). Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 27 points, five assists and two steals, and Jalen Williams added 14 points and six assists for the NBA-leading Thunder (27-5).

Trail Blazers 114, Celtics 108

In Portland, Shaedon Sharpe scored 26 points including 5 of 8 from 3-point range and the Portland Trail Blazers snapped a three-game losing streak with win over the Boston Celtics.

Deni Avdija added 24 points, 10 assists and seven rebounds for the Blazers, Toumani Camara scored 20 points, and Donovan Clingan had 18 points and 18 rebounds. Caleb Love added 18 points off the bench.

The Celtics, whose four-game winning streak was snapped, were led by Jaylen Brown with 37 points on 14 of 23 shooting. It was Brown's ninth game in a row with 30 or more points, tying Larry Bird for the franchise record of consecutive 30-plus point games. Paul Pierce is third with seven.

Wizards 116, Grizzlies 112

In Washington, Alex Sarr scored 20 points and blocked a career-best six shots to help the Washington Wizards to victory over the Memphis Grizzlies.

CJ McCollum added 16 points for Washington (7-23), which earned its first back-to-back victories of the season and second win over Memphis in nine days. McCollum scored six in the fourth quarter.

The Wizards outrebounded the Grizzlies 54-42 and overcame 19 turnovers - eight alone by Bub Carrington. Washington's Justin Champagnie had 10 points and 12 rebounds.

Jaren Jackson Jr. scored 31 points and Ja Morant added 21 for Memphis (15-17), which failed to reach the .500 mark for the first time since the Grizzlies were 3-3 following a loss to the Los Angeles Lakers on Oct. 31.

They also fell short of reaching .500 in their 130-122 home loss to Washington on Dec. 20.



Los Angeles Clippers forward Kawhi Leonard, center, Detroit Pistons guards Ausar Thompson (9) and Cade Cunningham vie for the ball during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Inglewood, Calif. (AP)

Joshua involved in car accident in Nigeria

LAGOS, Nigeria, Dec 29, (AP): Anthony Joshua, the Nigerian-British boxer and former world heavyweight champion, was involved in a car accident that killed two other passengers in Nigeria on Monday.

The Lagos state commissioner for information, Gbenga Omotoso, confirmed the accident in a post on X, adding that the government had sent ambulances to the crash site. Local media reports say the boxer has been transferred to a hospital.

According to a statement by Olusegun Ogungbemi, spokes-

person for the Federal Road Safety Corps, preliminary investigations indicate the vehicle "to be travelling beyond the legally prescribed speed limit on the corridor, lost control during an overtaking manoeuvre and crashed into a stationary truck well packed by the side of the road." Photos on social media show the boxer being extricated from a wrecked vehicle while he was winning in pain.

The accident occurred on a major thoroughfare linking Ogun state, a nearby city, to Lagos, the country's economic center.

Villa is the big surprise in Premier League this season

LONDON, Dec 29, (AP): When Aston Villa was on a five-match winless run to start the Premier League season, the team looked more like a potential relegation candidate than a title contender.

Manager Unai Emery was describing his players as "lazy." Villa's big names - including England internationals Ollie Watkins and Morgan Rogers - were showing no form at all. There were major concerns about the club's lack of activity in the summer's transfer window.

How, then, to explain the position Villa finds itself in heading into its final game of 2026?

On the back of 11 straight victories in all competitions, Villa is on its best winning streak in more than a

century and is being viewed as a legitimate challenger for the Premier League title.

Indeed, beat first-place Arsenal on Tuesday and Villa will be tied on points with the Gunners at the top of the league halfway through its campaign. They and Manchester City have broken away from the rest and are separated by three points after 18 of 38 games, with Liverpool a further seven points back in fourth place.

And Villa will not be scared of Arsenal. After all, just three weeks ago, Villa scored a last-gasp goal to defeat the leaders 2-1 at home and keep its winning run going. That continued on Saturday with a come-from-behind

2-1 triumph at fifth-place Chelsea, secured thanks to two second-half goals by Watkins. Much of the team's success is being put down to Emery, the Spanish coach whose savvy tactics, well-timed substitutions and belief in his players leaves no task insurmountable.

Like when Villa trailed - and was being outclassed - at Stamford Bridge at the weekend, before Watkins' entrance off the bench. Or when Villa twice went behind at West Ham two weeks earlier before winning 3-2. Or when Villa went 2-0 down at Brighton on Dec. 3, only to fight back for a 4-3 victory. Two weeks before that, Villa conceded early at Leeds and rallied for a 2-1 win.