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Amir leads flag-hoisting ceremony marking national celebrations

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Moshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah patronized and attended the national flag-hoisting ceremony at Bayan Palace, marking the start of Kuwait's national celebrations.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the President of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary and President of the Court of Cassation Dr. Adel Bouresli, along with senior state officials, were also present.

A 21-gun salute was fired to welcome His Highness the Amir, who was received by members of the Army, Police, and National Guard. His Highness the Amir then raised the national flag, followed by the playing of the national anthem and a musical performance by the military band.

The annual ceremony symbolizes national pride and unity as Kuwait marks the 65th anniversary of its National Day and the 35th anniversary of Liberation Day – occasions that celebrate the nation's rich history and progress. The event also reaffirms the leadership's commitment to strengthening unity as the cornerstone of continued development.

Kuwait's national flag has evolved through several stages before taking its present form, which was officially adopted under a decree issued by the late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah in 1961. The flag was first raised on government buildings on November 24 of that year.

Flag-raising ceremonies are being held across Kuwait's six governorates amid festive atmospheres, accompanied by nationwide activities and celebrations. These events reflect on Kuwait's achievements at both regional and international levels while paying tribute to its independence and honoring the sacrifices made during the 1990 liberation, recognizing all who contributed to restoring the nation's freedom.



His Highness the Amir kisses the Kuwaiti flag in a powerful gesture of national pride and loyalty.

Amiri Diwan photo

Kuwait acts to protect consumers, SMEs

Fixed fees set for delivery platforms

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry on Sunday issued Ministerial Resolution No. 10/2026, marking an unprecedented legislative step in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) by regulating the operation of restaurants and ready-made food delivery services through electronic platforms.

This resolution is in response to the rapid growth and increasing influence of the digital sector on the national economy.

The government asserts that the move underscores its commitment to protect consumers, boost the national commercial sector, and establish a fair and transparent competitive environment in the digital economy. It is intended to align with the growing maturity of the Kuwaiti market and enhance its appeal for sustainable long-term investment.

The ministry explained that the regulation is the result of careful monitoring and in-depth analysis of Kuwait's technologically and operationally mature food delivery market.

However, despite its attractiveness for investment and innovation, field studies uncovered detrimental monopolistic practices and unfair tactics employed by some entities, including unjustified commission hikes, imposition of exclusive contracts, lack of transparency in fee structures, and the use of discriminatory technical mechanisms affecting fair visibility within applications.

In response, the ministry collaborated with stakeholders, including e-commerce platforms, restaurant owners and delivery companies for a period of three months to establish a comprehensive regulatory framework, prioritizing market sustainability and consumer protection.

The ministerial decision stands as the first comprehensive and legally binding Gulf legislation of its kind,

with effective monitoring tools and clear penalties, ranging from warnings to license revocation.

It mandates licensed platform operators to adjust their operations and amend their licensed activity to 'Management of Delivery Services via Electronic Platforms' within two months.

The main provision of the new regulation states that fees and commissions charged by platforms to restaurants must be fixed for a period of three years. This corrective measure aims to restore market stability, allow establishments to plan financially and operationally, and shield small and medium enterprises (SMEs) from unfair financial pressure.

Platforms are mandated to submit their 2026 fees to the ministry within one month.

Service providers are required to adopt a single, ministry-approved annual service schedule, detailing maximum limits for fees and commissions and their calculation mechanisms. The collection of any fees or application of discounts outside this schedule is strictly prohibited, nullifying any parallel side agreements.

The resolution bans the imposition of exclusivity, the use of discriminatory algorithms, or preferential treatment of customers within the same category.

Platforms must document all fees in written contracts and adopt annual price lists, prohibiting price changes throughout the year, and any undocumented fees shall be deemed invalid.

Restaurants have the right to access their data free of charge and are granted the freedom to contract with multiple platforms.

Continued on Page 5

Judicial efficiency in Kuwait soars as 90% cases resolved

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: The recent statistics issued by the Statistics and Research Department at the Ministry of Justice revealed that the Public Prosecution achieved high performance rates in November 2025, with 90.3 percent of pending cases being resolved, thereby, affirming the efficiency of procedures and the speed of completion in various sectors.

The newspaper obtained a copy of the statistics, indicating that the prosecution received 4,441 cases within the abovementioned month, while the number of pending cases reached 3,139 and 2,833 of which were resolved through referral to the court or dismissal, and 306 cases are pending.

The Commercial Affairs Prosecution topped the list in terms of the number of pending cases, with 1,040 and 996 of which were resolved – a success rate of 95.8 percent.

Meanwhile, the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Prosecution recorded the highest number of cases received during the same period, with 713 cases.

The State Security and Financial Markets Prosecution achieved 100 percent completion rate, processing all pending cases. This proves a remarkable level of efficiency and speed in adjudication.

The Farwaniya and Juvenile pros-

ecutions also achieved high completion rates, exceeding 96 percent.

Regarding specialized cases, the Narcotics and Alcohol Prosecution handled 349 pending cases, completing 309. The Media, Information and Publishing Prosecution reviewed 353 cases, resolving 265. The Public Funds and Anti-Money Laundering Prosecution reviewed 17 cases, completing 14.

A number of lawyers agreed that the high completion rates indicate improved judicial performance. They attributed the variation in the number of cases among the prosecution offices to the nature of their jurisdiction and their workload.

Attorney Enam Haidar affirmed that the overall completion rate exceeding 90 percent reflects "the prosecution's ability to manage the large volume of cases without compromising the quality of investigations," indicating that this level of performance contributes to boosting confidence in the fairness and speed of procedures.

Attorney Mohammad Ahmed Al-Rifai explained that the Commercial Affairs Public Prosecution's leading position in terms of the number of cases under review is natural, given "the expansion of economic activity and the increase in commercial and financial disputes."

Continued on Page 5



Haidar



Al-Rifai



Al-Basman

Al-Sager: Confident in National Bank of Kuwait's ability to strengthen its market leadership amid Kuwait's promising growth opportunities

Gulf Bank reports net profit of KD 52.4 million for the full year 2025, with proposed cash dividends of 9 fils per share & 5% bonus share distribution

Home Centre unveils its Ramadan 2026 collection

11

7 NEW MINISTERS JOIN COUNCIL

Amir signs major Cabinet reshuffle

Women's representation in gov't rises to 3

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Moshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Sunday issued Amiri Decree No. 11/2026 announcing a Cabinet reshuffle, which includes one modified appointment and

Continued on Page 5



Osama Khaled Abdullah Boodai, Minister of Commerce and Industry



Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs



Dr. Reem Ghazi Saud Al-Faleej, Minister of State for Development and Sustainability



Dr. Tariq Hamad Nasser Al-Jalahma, Minister of State for Youth and Sports



Abdulaziz Nasser Abdulla Al-Marzouq, Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment



Abdullah Subaih Abdul-Buffai, Minister of Information and Culture



Dr. Yaqoub Al-Sayed Yousef Al-Rifai, Minister of Finance

Newswatch

9 lose citizenship

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: The Cabinet issued a decision to revoke the Kuwaiti citizenship of nine individuals, as well as those who acquired it through dependency, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The decision, published in the official gazette – 'Kuwait Al-Youn' – on Sunday, states that the citizenship revocation is based on Article 21 bis(a) of Amiri Decree No. 15/1959 (Kuwaiti Nationality Law) and its amendments, which stipulate: "The Kuwaiti citizenship certificate shall be revoked if it is found to have been granted unlawfully – based on fraud, false statements or invalid certificates."

The revocation of citizenship shall be by a decision of the Cabinet upon the recommendation of the Minister of Interior. Consequently, the Kuwaiti citizenship shall also be revoked from anyone who acquired it through dependency.

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Kuwait and Switzerland to boost trade, humanitarian cooperation

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1, (KUNA): Ambassador of Switzerland to Kuwait Tiziano Balmelli said the upcoming visit of the Swiss President Guy Parmelin to Kuwait represents a landmark moment in bilateral relations between the two countries.

In a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Ambassador Balmelli noted that the visit constitutes the first and most significant event marking the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and Kuwait, expressing pride in the visit taking place at the highest level.

He explained that the visit aims to honor the long-standing and solid friendship between the two nations, saying that Kuwaitis were among the first from the Gulf region to visit Switzerland and to establish mutually beneficial partnerships with the Swiss people as early as the 1930s. The ambassador added that the visit also is expected to contribute to strengthening and expanding bilateral relations across a wide range of fields and at various levels.



Balmelli

Balmelli pointed out that Switzerland and Kuwait share core values, including the promotion of dialogue and peace as well as a humanitarian work, noting that these issues are of importance not only to both countries but also to the international community as a whole.

He recalled that Switzerland and Kuwait signed an agreement in Bern last May in the field of humanitarian aid and development cooperation to enhance joint efforts in supporting those in need.

Continued on Page 5

Prayer Timings

Fajr 05:16 Asr 15:05
 Sunrise .. 06:38 Maghrib .. 17:26
 Zohr 12:02 Isha 18:45

Local



Participants of the training course.

Staff members take part

KUNA, ICESCO launch course on use of AI in practical field

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1, (KUNA): The KUNA media development center and the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) on Sunday launched a training program titled "uses of Artificial Intelligence in news writing and purposeful media content production."

The program is being held with the participation of staff members from Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) and ICESCO and represents the outcome of cooperation between the two sides.



Al-Wuqayan

He described the cooperation as a significant gain, noting that Kuwait is the second-largest contributing member of ICESCO, which comprises 53 member states.

Al-Wuqayan commended the efforts of ICESCO Director-General Dr. Salem Al-Malik and Acting Director-General of KUNA Mohammad Al-Manai in strengthening cooperation between the organization and the agency.

For his part, Head of the KUNA Media Development Center Thamer Al-Furaih said KUNA is keen to establish partnerships with regional and international organizations, particularly ICESCO, to enhance its media mission and keep pace with rapid technological developments.

He noted that cooperation with ICESCO supports the exchange of expertise, the development of media performance, and the enhancement of human capital efficiency.

Al-Furaih added that the program, which runs until February 5, focuses on leveraging advances in artificial intelligence and new media concepts to raise technical and professional awareness.

Other Voices

The mule and the automobile

By Ahmad alsarraf

The controversial mayor of New York, Zahran Mamdani, announced to the public the decision to install bidets in the restrooms of the official city headquarters, as if asking others to follow his example and reduce their use of toilet paper.

Many people welcomed his idea, especially those who, including myself, suffered from being in the wrong place at the wrong time, after getting used to using the somewhat primitive yet advanced bidet.



alsarraf

This implies that the idea of using toilet paper is advanced and very hygienic compared to what came before. But the funny thing, or perhaps the comfort for most people, is that they co-exist and seem perfectly content with what they have, as long as they do not find anything better. This applies to methods of relieving oneself, bathing, laundry, cleaning the houses and even the food we eat.

The struggle begins when we discover that there are better options, but they are not easily accessible.

Historically, humans used to walk on foot until animals were domesticated for transportation. Then, walking became a struggle. Then, the wheel was invented, which led to the invention of the car, the automobile, the locomotive, and the airplane. People refused to ride animals, even though a mule was once considered a Cadillac.

The use of a bidet is relatively new and not widely known, except in a few countries. More than two-thirds of the world's population still use either toilet paper or other similar cleaning materials.

The most advanced and expensive toilet systems used in public and private restrooms are found in Japan. Similar, less complex and less expensive cleaning methods are used in Turkiye, Egypt and Italy, and are far superior to using toilet paper, plant leaves, straw, smooth stones or small pieces of pottery, which were used in ancient Greece, or clothes and rags that were used and then washed or discarded.

It is worth noting that the West only became familiar with toilet paper in the 19th century, although China had known about it 1,300 years earlier.

In France and some other European countries, the bidet, a low-lying basin of water, was introduced and are still used today. In pre-Christian Rome, a sponge attached to a stick

was used, dipped in water mixed with salt or vinegar, and rotated among users before being returned to the basin.

During the Middle Ages, the Church prohibited bathing, especially frequently. Its relationship with bathing was complex and fluctuating. Its emphasis on cleanliness prompted the to restrict public baths due to the nudity, mingling and frivolity associated with them.

The spread of epidemics, such as the plague from the 14th century onward, reinforced the belief that the opening of the skin's pores by hot baths made the body more susceptible to 'corrupt vapors'. Consequently, bathing declined in Europe for centuries. This contributed to the popular perception of Europe as 'dirty'.

This decline was not solely a theological decision by the Church, but a combination of health anxieties and a monastic morality inclined towards asceticism and minimizing bodily pleasures. As a result, bodily hygiene became a lesser priority in Christian Europe, compared to the emphasis on cleanliness among Muslims.

With the decline of public and private baths, people began disposing waste outside the home, in ditches and open areas, or in latrines that served as toilets within the house.

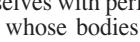
Obstacles to reform multiplied and became more complex due to the Church's insistence on 'excessive modesty', stemming from a superstitious belief linking the devil to bathing.

As a result, epidemics spread and, over time, decimated the populations of villages and cities.

The consequences of the Protestant Reformation in Europe exacerbated the neglect of health, as people feared that the devil would possess the body when exposed to water and soap.

The sanitary infrastructure known to humankind 2,000 years ago was neglected. Even in the grand palaces of Europe, people began to dispose of their waste wherever and whenever they pleased after the era of luxurious Roman baths ended around 500 AD with the fall of the Roman Empire to the barbarians, who destroyed the baths and their terracotta aqueducts.

This, in addition to ignorance prevalent in the Middle Ages, and the Church's focus on the soul over the body, which it considered reprehensible, led to a decline in hygiene, limiting it to the bare necessities, such as concealing body odor. The wealthy masked their odors by spraying themselves with perfumes, unlike the poor, whose bodies were utterly filthy.



e-mail: a.alsarraf@alqabas.com.kw

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Warm with light variable wind to light to moderate southeasterly wind, with speeds of 06-26 km/h with a chance for light fog forming at night and some scattered clouds will appear.

By Night: Rather cold and part-

ly cloudy with light variable wind to light to moderate southeasterly wind, with speeds of 08-32 km/h with a chance for light fog forming over some areas.

Station Max Exp Min Rec
 Kuwait Airport 24 13
 Abdaly 26 09

Bubyan	18	12
Jahra	25	13
Failaka Island	21	12
Salmiyah	20	16
Ahmadi	19	10
Jal Aliyah	24	10
Nuwaib	24	12
Salmy	26	07

NATO-ICI Regional Centre offers training

Course to hone skills on media interaction

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1, (KUNA): The NATO-ICI Regional Centre in Kuwait, in cooperation with the Regional Public Affairs Centre (PARC), is hosting a training course on the fundamentals of public affairs from February 1 to 5, 2026.

The training course is with the participation of 24 representatives from member states of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, and the GCC General Secretariat.

In a speech delivered during the opening of the course, Director of the NATO-ICI Regional Centre Advisor Emad Abdullah Al-Kandari said that the course aims to provide participants with essential knowledge in communication skills and techniques, as well as to familiarize them with public affairs principles and media engagement mechanisms.

Al-Kandari explained that the course seeks to enhance participants' professional capabilities in dealing with the media and to improve institutional communication skills

in the performance of their daily duties.

He added that the training program includes a combination of lectures and practical applications, during which participants receive training on preparing press releases, conducting media interviews, and organizing press conferences.

The program also focuses on developing verbal and non-verbal communication skills, monitoring and analyzing media coverage, and effectively engaging with the media under various circumstances. Al-Kandari noted that organizing the course comes within the framework of the Centre's commitment to supporting capacity-building efforts, enhancing the exchange of expertise among partner countries, and developing national competencies in the field of public affairs.

Al-Kandari

Seniors aged 60 and above take part: official



Winners among men at the podium.

governmental bodies to advance social work for the benefit of senior citizens and all segments of Kuwaiti society.

Ali Hassan, Vice Chairman and General Manager of the Society, confirmed that the marathon aligns with the memoranda of understanding with the Department of Elderly Care.

Hassan clarified that the event was exclusive for senior citizens aged 60 and above, based on the approved classification. He highlighted its significance as the first of its kind, featuring elderly participants who receive care through mobile rehabilitation services, alongside their caregivers and other interested senior walkers. He said the turnout was remarkable and encouraging.

The marathon was launched in a highly organized manner which, Hassan pointed out, reflects the community's recognition of the crucial role of sports in enhancing the physical and mental well-being of senior citizens.

India, Arab countries ties deep-rooted, says minister

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: The Kuwait Charitable Society for the Care and Rehabilitation of the Elderly recently hosted a walking marathon for senior citizens, held under the inspiring banner, "Our Steps Lead to Our Greatness."

This event, a key initiative in the 2026 project lineup of the Society, witnessed a huge turnout of elderly participants.

The marathon took place at the Mishref Walking Oasis, with the full support of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Chairman of the Society Ibrahim Al-Baghi revealed that the event was organized in coordination with

the Department of Elderly Care at the ministry and the Kuwait Walking Committee, which is affiliated with Kuwait Olympic Committee.

This initiative underscores the

commitment of the Society to engage in charitable, social and awareness-raising activities to strengthen partnerships with individuals, civil society, and governmental and non-



Arab countries' foreign ministers who took part in the meeting in New Delhi.

culture and education, amongst others, Jaishankar said.

He also expressed India's ambition to expand the cooperation to contemporary dimensions of cooperation being included, such as digital, space, start-ups, innovation, etc.

About 43,000 families benefit from welfare services – MoSA

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: Around 43,000 families have benefited from family welfare services by the end of 2025, according to sources from the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Sources confirmed that the ministry continues to support needy Kuwaiti families through the Central Aid Platform. Sources said the beneficiaries include those who have repented, foster children, orphans, released prisoners, families of prisoners, those studying abroad, the sick, widows, Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaitis, student families, those facing financial hardship, and other categories.

Launched at the beginning of 2025, the platform is the cornerstone of the family

welfare automation system. Its primary goal is to ensure that social assistance is delivered easily, conveniently and with dignity. The platform provides financial, nutritional, health, and educational support in accordance with the regulations.

Requests for assistance are submitted electronically through a dedicated portal, with a file created for each to track the status. The processing time typically ranges from three days to a week, depending on the completeness of the documents and nature of the case.

This automation system aims to streamline the process for applying for assistance, enhance oversight of aid disbursements, ensure the efficiency of financial transfers, and connect with relevant authorities. These efforts contribute to safeguarding public funds and preventing unjustified expenditures.

Arab contractor flees after robbing Kuwaiti

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: A citizen filed a report at Salmyah Police Station, stating that an Arab contractor swindled him, reported Al-Anba daily.

The complainant revealed that he had an agreement with the accused to supply 20 tons of iron and cement and transferred KD3,060 to him through WAMD. After completing the transfer, he contacted the accused to inform him about the transaction, but he was surprised as the telephone was switched off. Initial investigation revealed that the accused left the country on the same day the money was transferred.

According to the Criminal Investigation Department at the Interior Ministry, it conducted investigations and checked the system of the ministry, which revealed that the accused is wanted by law for involvement in other fraud cases registered in Firdous and Umm Al-Hayman police stations, although no travel ban was imposed on him.

The accused was included on the wanted list, amid concerns that he might not be able to return to the country.

Meanwhile, a security source warned the public against engaging in financial transactions with suspicious individuals or entities, especially in terms of transferring funds for the supply of materials or the execution of work without official contracts or legal guarantees.

Around 3,500 expats deported; Hire Kuwaitis: PAM

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: Around 3,500 expatriates were deported in January, reports Al-Anba daily quoting a source from the security sector.

The source pointed out that this is the result of the intensive security campaigns carried out by the Ministry of Interior.

Meanwhile, Director of the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) Rabab Al-Osaimi unveiled the plan of the Authority to encourage private companies to employ Kuwaitis and to grant special incentives to proactive companies, reported Al-Rai daily.

Al-Osaimi indicated that work is underway to increase the percentage of Kuwaitis employed in the private sector and the number of businesses required to hire nationals.

She stated that the government is taking steps to encourage citizens to work in the private sector by providing them with the necessary privileges and support them in overcoming the challenges they might face in this sector.

She emphasized that PAM is the main supporter of Kuwaitis through the issuance of decisions, regulations and legislation that serve their interests and ensure their job security.

She added that no one is more dedicated and committed than Kuwaitis in supporting and implementing projects.

She reaffirmed PAM's commitment to increase the number of Kuwaitis working in the private sector, and provide them with the required training and the national labor subsidy.

LOCAL

diwaniya

دیوانیة

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

'Gov't must find ways to utilize unused property'

"THE fact that there are 515 unused government properties begs the question: Are these real estate properties not valuable assets that could be utilized?" Eng. **Adel Al-Jarallah Al-Kharafi** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"When you pass by Kuwaiti government buildings, you find them vacant and in a very unsightly state, while there is a need to construct more government buildings in the fields of education, health and services."

Adel Al Kharafi

"Why not utilize the empty buildings, especially since they are located in residential areas? A country like Kuwait needs many new facilities. These empty properties could be used to alleviate the burden on ministries and government centers, bringing them to life, instead of leaving them empty and crumbling due to weather and the passage of time."

"Kuwait is not a poor country, it possesses huge financial resources, yet it suffers from a shortage of cultural and service centers and clinics in many areas."

"The abandoned buildings can be renovated and rehabilitated, and then used to address this deficiency."

"Kuwait has many private museums overflowing with valuable collections that individuals cherish, yet the space does not allow their display."

"Why not transform some of the vacant government buildings into private museums? Undoubtedly, the empty government buildings, whose current state is depressing, could serve many purposes."

"For example, if you pass by the Kuwait University building in Adaiya, you will find it empty, despite the enormous amounts spent on it. The same applies to some kindergartens, schools and other vacant government facilities."

"Has neglect reached this point? Do these properties not have value as part of the ministries' assets?"

"Does this value not decrease every year as the vacant buildings deteriorate without being utilized? This is an utter waste of public funds."

"When I was a member of the National Assembly, I used to witness some of the inter-ministerial disputes regarding this issue."

"When one ministry requests a facility from another, a heated argument ensues between officials. Each party claims ownership of the property, while in reality, it belongs to the State and serves a certain purpose."

"If a facility is no longer used for its intended purpose, it should be repurposed in the interest of the public, regardless of which government entity owns it."

"Therefore, the government should utilize these buildings without harming citizens. This situation cannot continue, and these buildings should not remain empty until they deteriorate, becoming extremely costly for the State and a source of inconvenience to the public."

Also:

"Saudi-Kuwaiti relations date back decades, more than 130 years, and have witnessed a journey of achievements and historical ties between the two brotherly countries," Saudi writer **Ghadir Abdullah Al-Tayyar** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"These relations began when Imam Abdul Rahman Al Faisal Al Saud and his son, King Abdulaziz Al Saud, visited Kuwait before King Abdulaziz recaptured Riyadh in 1902."

"We are indeed pleased with the strong relations between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and the meeting between Prince Khalid bin Salman and Kuwaiti Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. They reviewed the fraternal relations between the two countries, in addition to aspects of bilateral cooperation in the defense field, ways to strengthen and develop it, and the study of current developments and events in the region, efforts being exerted in this regard, and issues of mutual interest."

"Indeed, the Saudi-Kuwaiti diplomatic relations have long been characterized by their historical depth and shared features built on brotherhood and a common destiny. These relations serve as a model of cooperation and understanding between brotherly nations, spanning decades and grounded in shared history and culture. They witness continuous development in various fields, including politics, economics and culture."

"Political relations between the two countries have been strengthened through ongoing coordination on regional and international issues. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit plays a vital role in enhancing cooperation among GCC member states and contributes to resolving shared challenges. Economic relations between Riyadh and Kuwait are robust and diverse, encompassing bilateral trade and joint investments in various sectors, such as oil, gas and industry."

"Both countries strive to strengthen

economic cooperation through agreements and joint projects. Cultural ties have been strengthened through cultural and artistic exchange, including cultural festivals and artistic events that foster closer ties between the two peoples. Overall, Saudi-Kuwaiti relations are considered a model of cooperation and understanding between brotherly nations, contributing to stability and prosperity in the region."

"These relations remain strong and stable, thanks to the wisdom and vision of the leaders of both countries, thereby, ensuring stability and prosperity in the region."

□ □ □

"The recruitment and enlistment of foreigners to fight in armed conflicts outside their home countries is a violation of international law, especially when done through deception or financial inducement," **Hussein Al-Rawi** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Article 47 of Additional Protocol I to the 1977 Geneva Conventions stipulates that a mercenary does not have the status of a combatant or a prisoner of war, meaning they are stripped of any legal protection."

"The 1989 United Nations Convention against the Recruitment, Financing and Use of Mercenaries criminalizes the recruitment, enlistment or financing of mercenaries and holds states legally responsible for such acts."

"On Jan 26, 2026, Iraqi Deputy Foreign Minister, Ambassador Mohammed Hussein Bahr Al-Uloom, affirmed Iraq's categorical rejection of the recruitment of Iraqi youth into the Russian army or any other foreign army during his meeting with the Russian Ambassador to Baghdad, Elbrus Kutrashev. He emphasized that protecting young people from being drawn into conflicts that do not concern Iraq is a national priority."

"This statement cannot be interpreted as a mere protocolary gesture or a message intended for domestic consumption. Rather, it is a political and legal stance articulated publicly, within earshot and sight of the Russian ambassador in Baghdad."

"This context imbues it with a significance that transcends mere moral condemnation, becoming an implicit assignment of political responsibility, or at least an indication of the existence of factors that compelled Baghdad to adopt a clear position."

"Countries do not issue such frank statements in the presence of a representative of a major power unless they perceive the issue as affecting national sovereignty and the safety of their citizens. This makes the Iraqi statement a resounding rejection of any attempt at enticement or recruitment, whether through official channels or clandestine networks."

"Al-Arabiya TV highlighted the phenomenon of recruiting young Arabs, including Iraqis, to fight alongside the Russian army."

"The channel presented a series of field investigations and firsthand accounts that uncovered the secrets of this dangerous humanitarian issue, including reports titled "How a Woman Lured Young Arab Men to Fight in the War," "An Iraqi Artist Falls into the Russian Recruitment Trap," and "The Story of the First Egyptian Prisoner in Ukraine After Being Recruited into the Russian Army," in addition to a report on the visit to a Ukrainian prison holding Arab prisoners who fought with the Russian army."

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Kuwait urges stronger Arab-India partnership

Ambassador Al-Mutairi highlights shared challenges and strategic cooperation

NEW DELHI, Feb 1, (KUNA): The State of Kuwait affirmed on Saturday that the importance of deepening Indian-Arab relations is no longer an option but a necessity imposed by global challenges.

The remarks were made by Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the League of Arab States, Ambassador Talal Al-Mutairi, at the meeting of the Arab-Indian Cooperation Forum, hosted by New Delhi.

He noted that it is an opportunity to assess what has been achieved and to build upon what was agreed upon at the first ministerial meeting held in Manama in 2016 and the subsequent technical and political meetings.

The Kuwaiti representative conveyed the greetings of the State of Kuwait, its leadership, government, and people, and expressed appreciation for the invitation from India to hold this important meeting. He also extended warmest congratulations on the occasion of 77th Republic Day to the leadership and people of India.

Ambassador Talal Al-Mutairi thanked the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States and its Secretary-General for their continuous efforts in supporting the framework of the Arab-India Forum since its inception.

The Kuwaiti official referred to the text of the Manama Declaration, which emphasized the importance of joint cooperation in the areas of political coordination and consultation, including the stability of the Arab region and South Asia, peace-keeping efforts, combating terrorism, Security Council reform, and cooperation in economic and cultural fields, as well as in issues of food security, energy, education, and technological development.

"Our meeting today is a confirmation of our collective conviction in the forum's ability to move to more effective stages in terms of practical projects and institutional follow-up in all sectors. In this regard, we emphasize the importance of establishing a regular schedule for its meetings, given its crucial role in advancing joint work between the two sides," Al-Mutairi stated.

The Permanent Representative of Kuwait to the League of Arab States recalled the close historical relations between the two friendly countries, noting that Kuwait has long served as a bridge for cultural and civilizational exchange between India and the countries in the region. This year marks the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations.

He referred to the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Kuwait in December 2024, which led to a qualitative leap in relations. During the visit, Modi was awarded Kuwait's highest honor, The Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer, by His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Moshel Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the two countries announced the elevation of relations to the level of strategic



KUWAIT photo
Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the League of Arab States, Ambassador Talal Al-Mutairi, delivers his speech during the proceedings of the second session of the Ministerial Meeting of the Arab-Indian Cooperation Forum.

partnership, a step that confirms the shared political will to enhance cooperation to other areas.

Al-Mutairi highlighted the importance of trade exchange between the two sides, noting that the volume of trade between the two countries exceeded USD 10 billion in 2024-2025, and affirmed the existence of significant opportunities to expand mutual investment, especially Indian investments in Kuwait, and the growing cooperation in the technology, artificial intelligence, and technical training sectors.

Al-Mutairi stressed the importance of support and coordination with friendly countries regarding pressing issues, especially in light of the critical circumstances affecting the Arab region and the world, in order to find diplomatic solutions based on the principle of dialogue.

He emphasized the importance of applying international law fairly especially

in the Palestinian cause. Al-Mutairi stated: "In this context, we welcome the outcomes of the Sharm El Sheikh summit and US President Donald Trump's plan to end the war in Gaza while appreciating the efforts of Qatar, Egypt, and Turkey in this regard."

The official expressed Kuwait's unwavering support for the Palestinian cause, saying: "From this platform, we emphasize the State of Kuwait's firm and principled position in supporting the right of the Palestinian people to obtain their legitimate rights and establish their independent state on the June 4, 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with international resolutions and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative."

He also called for an end to unilateral measures that undermine the two-state solution and for compliance with what was agreed upon at the high-level international conference on the peaceful settlement of the Palestinian issue in New York, co-chaired by Saudi Arabia and France in September 2025.

He stressed the importance of implementing Security Council Resolution 2803 and moving from a state of conflict to concrete steps that lead to an early peace and reconstruction phase.

Kuwait reiterated its support for all efforts aimed at consolidating stability and achieving a comprehensive political settlement that ends conflicts and crises and restores security and stability in the Arab region.

Al-Mutairi emphasized the importance of cooperation between India and the Arab world. "The experiences and challenges the world has faced have demonstrated the importance of cooperation between countries in stabilizing supply chains, especially those related to food security. In this context, we are committed to strengthening cooperation in this field to serve our common interests," he said.

He added that India has long been a primary source of food for both Kuwait and the region, and expressed Kuwait's pride in being a key partner of India in meeting its energy needs, affirming Kuwait's interest in developing cooperation in modern technologies in this sector.

Al-Mutairi commended the positive role of the Indian community in Kuwait and the role it plays as an important contributor in various fields and a partner in economic and social development.

The Kuwaiti representative affirmed that strengthening Arab-Indian cooperation is no longer an option but a necessity imposed by global challenges. Therefore, Kuwait affirms its readiness to work with India and Arab countries to activate this forum and transform its outcomes into practical and implementable programs.

He expressed hope that this meeting would be a success. "This is an effective platform that embodies what our people aspire to in supporting everything that strengthens the bonds of cooperation, consolidates constructive partnerships, and achieves common interests," he concluded.

KD1.2bn MPW contracts under SAB review

By Mohammed Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: Four contracts for the Ministry of Public Works, with a total value of KD1.2 billion, have entered the pre-audit and review phase at the State Audit Bureau (SAB).

The ministry submitted these contracts to SAB at different times, awaiting approval for their implementation in accordance with the contractual requirements.

The contracts include the following:

■ Study, design, construction, completion, operation and maintenance of

North Kabad Water Treatment Plant and its associated works, at a cost of KD999.85 million. This plant aims to provide treated water to the northern area for agricultural, oil and other uses.

■ Study, design and supervision of the construction of the Ministry of Information building at a cost of KD2.69 million.

■ Appointment of a consulting firm for the design, licensing and preparation of plans and documents for the medical city project in Sabah Al-Ahmad City, at a cost of KD3.281 million. The aim is to issue a tender for the construction of the city after the completion of the tender process.

■ Provision of security and protection services for the ministry's facilities at a cost of KD418,500.



Weekdays (Saturday - Wednesday)

Price

One night stay in a Queen Bed Cabana for 2 persons with inclusive of Breakfast

BHD 46.000

One night stay in a Two Bedroom Chalet for 4 persons inclusive of Breakfast

BHD 102.148 / Net

Weekends (Thursday & Friday)

Price

One night stay in a Queen Bed Cabana for 2 persons with inclusive of Breakfast

BHD 53.361 / Net

One night stay in a Two Bedroom Chalet for 4 persons inclusive of Breakfast

BHD 119.173 / Net

Terms & conditions apply

Health Minister inspects Wafra Center



Ministry of Health photo
The Minister of Health is briefed on the latest developments in the project.

departments, such as emergency, general clinics, chronic disease clinics, dentistry, X-Ray, laboratory and pharmacy.

Deadlines set for graduates

PAAET opens certificate applications

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammary

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: The Records and Information Department at the Deanship of Admissions and Registration in the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) announced the commencement of receiving applications for certified true copies of graduation certificates for graduates of PAAET colleges.

This coincides with the start of the work of certificate verification committees in government agencies, in an effort to enable graduates to complete their official transactions in a smooth and timely manner.

Deadlines have been set to streamline procedures and expedite the process as per the requirements of various government agencies.

The department emphasized that the acceptance of applications is governed by regulations and procedures to ensure the integrity and accuracy of the data used in

official transactions.

It urged all graduates, who wish to obtain their certificates, to adhere to the deadlines and review the instructions. This will ensure the swift processing of applications, data accuracy, and the highest level of service for beneficiaries.

In a related development, the Deanship of Admissions and Registration confirmed the lifting of the block on student accounts, allowing them to access their electronic systems and easily view the available academic services.

The Deanship indicated that students can now access their online accounts to view registration dates for the semester, transfer results, changes of major, and the schedule for new students.

It emphasized that these measures are part of enhancing digital transformation and facilitating students' access to their academic information, thereby, supporting the smooth operation of the educational process and improving services.



Kuwait University photo
Kuwait University dentistry students pose with faculty members at AEEDC Dubai.

KU dentistry team wins 3rd at EIDEC

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: A team of dentistry students at Kuwait University recently earned a remarkable achievement, securing third place in the competitive student division at the 30th Emirates International Dental Conference (EIDEC), held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

EIDEC is recognized as the largest dental conference and exhibition in the Middle East and the second largest globally.

The successful team consisted of Saleh Hajeih, Duha Al-Dhuwaihi, Fatima Ali, Mohammad Al-Muajjal and Fatima Al-Enezi. Assistant Professor at the Department of General Dentistry Practice Dr. Yaqoub Al-Abouh supervised the team.

Their third-place finish came after a challenging scientific competition involving 14 teams from various dental colleges worldwide.

College of Dentistry officials, includ-

ing acting Dean Dr. Rashid Al-Azmi, acting Assistant Dean for Student and Academic Affairs Dr. Manal Abu Al-Malh and acting Head of the Department of General Dentistry Practice Dr. Dina Kayed, attended the event.

Al-Azmi commended the team's accomplishment, indicating that this victory enriched the history of the College of Dentistry's achievements, as the college previously secured different positions in the same competition over the past years.

He congratulated the winning students for their third-place performance and thanked them for honorably representing both the College of Dentistry and the State of Kuwait on the international stage.

Appreciation was also extended to the faculty members for their support and to Curio Works Company, which generously sponsored the students' attendance and participation expenses.

Kuwait unites under one flag as a symbol of sovereignty

Governors lead flag-raising ceremonies to launch national celebrations

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: The governors expressed their sincere congratulations to 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 His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdulla Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and the entire Kuwaiti populace during the flag-raising ceremony on Sunday.

The governors emphasized that this event strengthens national unity, instills a profound sense of pride in the Kuwaiti identity among citizens, and serves as a powerful symbol of sovereignty, unity and independence.

Speaking at the flag-raising ceremony held in Ahmadi Governorate on Sunday, Ahmadi Governor Sheikh Hamoud Jaber Al-Ahmad underscored the importance of the Kuwaiti flag-raising ceremony, which he described as a national milestone that embodies loyalty and the sense of belongingness. He said the event reflects the nation's history of accomplishments and sacrifices, strengthens national unity, and instills pride in Kuwaiti identity.

He declared that the event marks the beginning of national celebrations, while expressing pride in Kuwait's history, independence and sovereignty.

Officials from various government departments, including representatives of the ministries of Interior, Education and Social Affairs, heads of Kuwaiti oil companies, Public Authority for Disability Affairs, and representatives of other government agencies and public benefit associations attended the ceremony.

Sheikh Hamoud Al-Jaber affirmed that the Kuwaiti flag will endure as a symbol of pride and dignity, testifying to the nation's progress and prosperity in all sectors.

He emphasized that the ceremony serves as an opportunity to renew the oath of allegiance to the wise leadership and to honor the sacrifices of the ancestors who built the nation and safeguarded its security and stability.

He concluded by asserting that the people of Kuwait will remain dedicated to their flag, protecting its achievements and its developmental trajectory.

Meanwhile, during the flag-raising ceremony at the Jahra Governorate on



The Capital Governor during the flag-raising ceremony at the governorate building, marking the start of national celebrations.



Raising the flag at the Capital Governorate, marking the start of the country's national holidays celebrations.



The Governor of Jahra attends the flag-raising ceremony, marking the start of the country's national holidays celebrations.



The Governor of Ahmadi during the flag-raising ceremony in the governorate, marking the start of the country's national holidays celebrations.



The Governor of Mubarak Al-Kabeer and Acting Governor of Hawalli, Sheikh Sabah Bader Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, raises the Kuwaiti flag.

the same day, Governor Hamad Al-Habashi stressed the importance of the event.

He considers the ceremony a moment to honor the sacrifices of past generations and the heroism of the martyrs who defended the nation to ensure its independence and unity under one flag.

He asserted that the occasion embodies the principles of sovereignty, unity and independence, and serves as an affirmation of the deep-rooted loyalty and sense of belonging that unite the people of Kuwait with their homeland and political leadership.

Capital Governor Sheikh

Abdullah Salem Al-Ali stated during the flag-raising ceremony at the Capital Governorate building that this is a national occasion, which reinforces the resilience and unity of the Kuwaiti people.

He regards this day as an important milestone for commemorating the journey of the fore-

fathers who shaped the nation's history and established the foundations for its renaissance under the wise leadership.

He pointed out that the Kuwaiti flag serves as a profound symbol of sovereignty and unity, embodying the spirit of pride and belonging, indicating that this occasion is a day to re-

new loyalty to the nation and its wise leadership.

Governor of Mubarak Al-Kabeer and acting Hawalli Governor Sheikh Sabah Bader Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah asserted that the flag-raising ceremony affirms the spirit of loyalty and belonging, strengthens national unity, and instills these principles in the hearts of the younger generation.

The celebration featured the performance of a national operetta and the recitation of patriotic poems by students from schools in Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational District and various private schools. Several citizens and officials attended the event.

Continued from Page 1

Amir signs

the introduction of seven new ministers, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The decree states the following changes:

Amended Appointment: Omar Saud Abdulaziz Al-Omar as Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology (amendment of Decree No. 73/2024)

New Appointments:

■ Osama Khaled Abdulla Boodai: Minister of Commerce and Industry

■ Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah: Minister of Foreign Affairs

■ Dr. Reem Ghazi Saud Al-Faleej: Minister of State for Development and Sustainability

■ Dr. Tariq Hamad Nasser Al-Jahama: Minister of State for Youth and Sports

■ Abdulaziz Nasser Abdulaziz Al-Marzouq: Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment

■ Abdulah Subaah Abdulla Buftain: Minister of Information and Culture

■ Dr. Yaqoub Al-Sayed Yousef Al-Sayed Hashem Al-Rifai: Minister of Finance

Article Three of the Decree mandates the Prime Minister to implement this decision, which takes effect from the date of issuance and it must be published in the official gazette (Kuwait Al-Yoom).

Meanwhile, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdulla Al-Yahya, Minister of Information and Culture Abdul Rahman Al-Mutairi and Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajil are now out of the Cabinet.

Also, a new portfolio was created -- the Ministry of State for Development and Sustainability, while the Ministry of State for Economic Affairs and Investment is now an independent portfolio, separate from the Ministry of Finance, and Sports was added to the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs.

Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Sheikh Jarrah Al-Jaber assumed the position of minister, returning the portfolio to a member of the ruling family after two years. Abdulla Al-Yahya held the position for two years, while the last member of the family to hold the post was Sheikh Salem Abdulla Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Women's representation in the government increased to three with the addition of Minister of State for Development and Sustainability Dr. Reem Al-Faleej, joining Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan and Minister of Social Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah.

Fixed fees

The executive regulations enshrine fundamental consumer rights, mandating full pricing transparency without hidden fees before order completion.

It guarantees order fulfillment, putting responsibility for service quality and safe delivery on the platform.

The regulation standardizes pricing, preventing consumers from being charged prices higher than those offered by the actual retailer, and establishes clear complaint mechanisms with defined resolution timeframes.

Judicial efficiency

He pointed out that the high completion rate in this type of case demonstrates the presence of specialized teams capable of handling complex files of a technical and financial nature.

Regarding the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Public Prosecution's record of the highest number of incoming cases, Al-Rifai stressed that this is related to "the geographical area, population density, and diversity of reports." He clarified that the huge number of incoming cases does not necessarily indicate slow work, as it rather shows magnitude of pressure put on the prosecution.

On the State Security and Financial Markets Prosecution achieving 100 percent completion rate, Al-Rifai said that the result "reflects the sensitivity of these cases and the clarity of the mechanisms for handling them, in addition to the priority of swift resolution due to their security and economic implications."

Attorney Fadil Al-Basman explained that the high completion rates in the Farwaniya and Juvenile prosecutions confirm the existence of an effective internal organization, especially in juvenile cases, which require particular speed "to consider the social, educational and dimensions."

He added that the diversity of cases in the Narcotics, Media and Public Funds offices explains the varying completion rates, as "some cases require technical reports or external correspondence, which prolongs the investigation period compared to traditional cases."

The lawyers clarified that these figures are not merely statistics, because they reflect a genuine transformation in the performance of the prosecution offices, supported by digital transformation and expertise, thus, achieving swift justice and preserving the rights of all parties involved in cases.

Kuwait and

The first project funded by both countries focuses on assisting civilians affected by the war in Sudan, he stated adding that additional projects are currently under consideration.

He also stressed that both countries

are major contributors to the International Committee of the Red Cross, reflecting their shared commitment to humanitarian principles.

On economic cooperation, the Swiss ambassador said both sides are keen to increase bilateral trade and investment, noting that while the private sector plays a leading role, high-level visits such as this one help boost motivation and ambition.

He noted that the President's visit coincides with the first Swiss-Kuwaiti business days in Kuwait, with around 14 Swiss companies visiting to explore new partnerships, in addition to the "Switzerland Travel Experience" event bringing together more than 20 Swiss tourism operators with local travel agents.

Balmelli also welcomed the recent announcement by Kuwait Airways to operate three weekly direct flights to Zurich starting in June, alongside existing flights to Geneva, describing the move as a significant development that reflects the strength of bilateral relations and supports further cooperation in various fields.

The ambassador described Kuwait as a constructive partner with a positive role in the region, commending Kuwait's policy of peace and dialogue.

He concluded by expressing confidence in the future of Swiss-Kuwaiti relations, noting that strong people-to-people ties and the presence of generations of Kuwaiti families with deep connections to Switzerland form the true backbone of the long-standing friendship between the two countries.

President of the Swiss Confederation, Guy Parmelin, begins an official visit to Kuwait Sunday aimed at strengthening nearly 60 years of bilateral relations and opening broader horizons for joint cooperation between the two countries.

The ambassador described Kuwait as a constructive partner with a positive role in the region, commending Kuwait's policy of peace and dialogue.

He concluded by expressing confidence in the future of Swiss-Kuwaiti relations, noting that strong people-to-people ties and the presence of generations of Kuwaiti families with deep connections to Switzerland form the true backbone of the long-standing friendship between the two countries.

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Bilateral relations between the State of Kuwait and the Swiss Confederation are considered a successful model of diplomatic relations between countries, as the leadership in both nations is keen to consolidate these ties and coordinate cooperation on regional and international issues of mutual interest.

Relations began on June 16, 1966, with the opening of a Swiss consulate in Kuwait City. In the same year, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah was accredited as Consul General of the State of Kuwait to the Swiss Confederation in Geneva, becoming the first to establish a Kuwaiti diplomatic mission in Switzerland.

At that time, the Swiss government assigned its ambassador to Lebanon as a non-resident ambassador to the State of Kuwait. One year later, an honorary consulate of the Swiss Confederation was opened in Kuwait, and the late Murad Yousuf Behbehani was appointed Honorary Consul of Switzerland.

Kuwait was the second Gulf country to establish relations with the Swiss Confederation. Switzerland opened its embassy in Kuwait in 1975, while Kuwait opened its embassy in the Swiss capital, Bern, in 2006.

On October 25, 2025, the new headquarters of the Swiss Embassy in Kuwait was inaugurated in the Qadsia area, with the attendance of His Highness Sheikh Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah, Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs Ignazio Cassis, Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya and Swiss Ambassador Tiziano Balmelli.

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INTERNATIONAL

Judge allows Minnesota immigration operation to continue

Feds won't intervene during protests in Democratic states unless asked to do so: Trump

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE, Feb 1, (AP): US President Donald Trump said Saturday that he has instructed Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem not to intervene in protests occurring in cities led by Democrats unless local authorities ask for federal help amid mounting criticism of his administration's immigration crackdown.

On his social media site, Trump posted that "under no circumstances are we going to participate in various poorly run Democratic Cities with regard to their Protests and/or Riots unless, and until, they ask us for help."

He provided no further details on how his order would affect operations by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement and DHS personnel, or other federal agencies, but added: "We will, however, guard and very powerfully so, any and all Federal Buildings that are being attacked by these highly paid Lunatics, Agitators, and Insurrectionists."

Trump said that in addition to his instructions to Noem he had directed "ICE and/or Border Patrol to be very forceful in this protection of Federal Government Property."

Later Saturday night, Trump said to reporters as he flew to Florida for the weekend that he felt Democratic cities are "always complaining."

"If they want help, they have to ask for it. Because if we go in, all they do complain," Trump predicted.

He predicted that those cities would need help, but said if the leaders of those cities seek it from the federal government, "They have to say, 'Please.'"

The Trump administration has already deployed the National Guard, or federal law enforcement officials, in a number of Democratic areas, including Washington, Los Angeles, Chicago and Portland, Oregon. But Saturday's order comes as opposition to such tactics has grown, particularly in Minnesota's Twin Cities region.

Trump said Saturday night that protesters who "do anything bad" to immigration officers and other federal law enforcement, "will have to suffer" and "will get taken care of in at least an equal way."

"You see it, the way they treat our people. And I said, you're allowed, if somebody does that, you can do some-



From left: Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent speaks as Attorney General Pam Bondi, Labor Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer, Energy Secretary Chris Wright, and Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem listen during a cabinet meeting at the White House on Jan 29 in Washington. (AP)

thing back. You're not going to stand there and take it if somebody spits in your face," Trump said.

Minnesota Attorney General Keith

Ellison and the mayors of Minneapolis and St. Paul have challenged a federal immigration enforcement surge in those cities, arguing that DHS is viol-

ating constitutional protections.

A federal judge says she won't halt enforcement operations as the lawsuit proceeds. State and local officials had sought a quick order to halt the enforcement action or limit its scope. Justice Department lawyers have called the lawsuit "legally frivolous."

The state, particularly Minneapolis, has been on edge after federal officers fatally shot two people in the city: Renee Good on Jan. 7 and Alex Petti on Jan. 24. Thousands of people have taken to the streets to protest the federal action in Minnesota and across the country.

Trump's border czar, Tom Homan, has suggested the administration could reduce the number of immigration enforcement officers in Minnesota - but only if state and local officials cooperate. Trump sent Homan to Minneapolis following the killings of Good and Petti, seeming to signal a willingness to ease tensions in Minnesota.

The president on Saturday night said he intended to speak to Homan and Noem on Sunday and he seemed to endorse the idea of immigration agents

wearing body cameras or having their interactions filmed.

Trump was asked by a reporter if he thought it was a good thing having lots of cameras capturing incidents with law enforcement.

"I think it would help law enforcement but I'd have to talk to them," Trump said.

He went on and added: "That works both ways. But overall, I think it's 80% in favor of law enforcement."

Also:

LOS ANGELES: A US federal judge on Saturday denied Minnesota's request for an emergency order to immediately halt a large-scale immigration enforcement operation in the state, allowing the controversial federal deployment to continue.

US District Judge **Katherine Menezes** ruled that the state of Minnesota and the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul did not meet the legal requirements needed to stop "Operation Metro Surge," despite acknowledging what she described as "profound and even heartbreaking consequences" for communities in the state.

Menefee wins election for House and narrowing GOP slim majority

WASHINGTON, Feb 1, (AP): Democrat **Christian Menefee** won a Texas US House seat in a special election Saturday that will narrow Republicans' already-slim majority, telling President Donald Trump that the Democratic district "top-plies corrupt presidencies."

Menefee, the Harris County attorney, prevailed in a runoff against Amanda Edwards, a former Houston City Council member. He will replace the late Rep. **Sylvester Turner**, a former Houston mayor, who died in March 2025.

The seat representing the heavily Democratic Houston-based district has been vacant for nearly a year. Texas GOP Gov. Greg Abbott didn't schedule the first round of voting until November. Menefee and Edwards were the top vote-getters in a 16-candidate, all-parties primary. They advanced to a runoff because no candidate won a majority of the vote.

Speaking to supporters at his victory party, Menefee promised to fight for universal health insurance, seek to impeach Homeland



Menefee

Security Secretary Kristi Noem over US Immigration and Customs Enforcement operations and "tear ICE up from the roots."

He also addressed Trump directly after noting that one of the district's most storied representatives, Democrat Barbara Jordan, was an eloquent voice for President Richard Nixon's impeachment ahead of his 1974 resignation.

"The results here tonight are a mandate for me to work as hard as I can to oppose your agenda, to fight back against where you're taking this country and to investigate your crimes," Menefee said.

Menefee will fill the remainder of Turner's term, which ends when a new Congress is sworn in to office in January 2027.

Abbott had argued that Houston officials needed the six months between Turner's death and the first round of voting to prepare for the special election, but Democrats criticized the long wait as a move designed to give the GOP a slightly bigger cushion in the House for difficult votes.

While campaigning Saturday, Edwards, 44, referenced the long vacancy in a video she posted to social media, saying voters have gone too long without a voice in Washington. Later, she told supporters at her watch party that the race "never was about winning a particular seat."

WASHINGTON, Feb 1, (AP): US President Donald Trump moved quickly this week to negotiate with Democrats to try and avert a lengthy government shutdown over Department of Homeland Security funding, a sharp departure from last year's record standoff, when he refused to budge for weeks.

Some Republicans are frustrated with the deal, raising the possibility of a prolonged shutdown fight when the House returns Monday to vote on the funding package. But Trump's sway over the GOP remains considerable, and he has made his position clear at a moment of mounting political strain.

"The only thing that can slow our country down is another long and damaging government shutdown," Trump wrote on social media late Thursday.

The urgency marked a clear shift from Trump's posture during the 43-day shutdown late last year, when he publicly antagonized Democratic leaders and his team mocked them on social media. This time, with anger rising over shootings in Minneapolis and the GOP's midterm messaging on tax cuts drowned out by controversy, Trump acted quickly to make a deal with Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York.

"Trump and the Republicans know that this is an issue where they're on the wrong side of the American people and it really matters," Schumer told reporters Friday after Senate passage of the government funding deal.

'It's striking change from last shutdown fight'

US President Trump moves fast to cut funding deal



US President Donald Trump speaks during an event in the Oval Office of the White House on Jan 30, in Washington. (AP)

Senators returned to work this week dealing with the fallout from the fatal shooting of ICU nurse Alex Petti in Minneapolis by federal immigration officers, as well as the killing of Renee Good in the city weeks earlier.

Republicans were far from unified in their response. A few called for the firing of top administration officials such as Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem and Stephen Miller, the White House chief of staff for policy. Most GOP senators tried to strike a balance, calling for a thorough investigation

into Petti's killing while backing the hard-line immigration approach that is central to Trump's presidency.

But many agreed that the shootings threatened public support for Trump's immigration agenda.

"I've never seen a political party take its best issue and turn it into its worst issue in the period of time that it has happened in the last few weeks," said Sen. John Kennedy, R-La. "Some things have to change."

Democrats quickly coalesced around their key demands.

Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., said there "was unanimity" around core principles of enforcing a code of conduct for immigration officers and agents, ending "roving patrols" for immigration enforcement actions and coordinating with local law enforcement on immigration arrests.

It helped that Trump himself was looking for ways to de-escalate in Minneapolis.

"The world has seen the videos of those horrible abuses by DHS and rogue operations catching up innocent people, and there's a revulsion about it," said Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va.

"The White House is asking for a ladder off the ledge," he added.

Republicans are also trying to promote their accomplishments in office as they ready for the November elections and the difficult task of retaining control of both chambers of Congress.

But the prospect of a prolonged shutdown shifted attention away from their \$4.5 trillion tax and spending cuts law, the centerpiece of their agenda. Republicans had hoped the beginning of this year's tax season on Monday would provide a political boost as voters begin to see larger tax refunds.

Republicans are also mindful of the political damage from last year's shutdown, when they took a slightly larger portion of the blame from Americans than Democrats, according to polling from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Europe

Hungarian Roma protest remarks by Lázár: Over 1,000 protesters, many from Hungary's Roma community, held a demonstration in the capital Budapest on Saturday to call for the resignation of a prominent government minister over inflammatory comments that many of those present said they saw as racism.

The demonstrators gathered at the offices of **János Lázár**, a key minister within the right-wing populist government of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. They demanded an apology from Lázár for his comments and that he step down.

Hungary's Roma population, which some estimates put as high as around 1 million or more than 10% of the country's total, represent the largest but most marginalized minority. The Roma have traditionally faced poverty, systemic discrimination, segregation and occasional racial violence. (AP)



Lázár

Danish veterans hold silent march: Thousands of Danish citizens and veterans held a "silent march" in Copenhagen on Saturday afternoon to protest recent controversial remarks made by US President Donald Trump, who had downplayed the contributions of NATO soldiers, said

local media. Carsten Rasmussen, chairman of "Danmarks Veteraner," Danish veterans' association, said "We are disappointed and outraged" by the Trump administration, which deliberately ignores the efforts Denmark has made.

Trump has triggered outrage among NATO allies after questioning whether they would come to Washington's aid in times of need.

Last week, during an interview with Fox News in Davos, Switzerland, Trump dismissed European members' role in NATO, saying that "We've never needed them. We have never really asked anything of them. You know, they'll say they sent some troops to Afghanistan, or this or that. And they did - they stayed a little back, a little off the front lines." (Xinhua)

Latvia sees coldest winter: Latvia was hit with the severest cold spell in 12 years this weekend, as a weather station in Latvia's southeastern city of Daugavpils recorded a temperature of -32 degrees Celsius; the Latvian Environment, Geology and Meteorology Center reported on Saturday.

In most parts of the country, temperatures ranged between -16 and -26 degrees, with the warmest weather, -7 degrees, reported in Kolkka, northwestern Latvia. In the capital Riga, it was -16 degrees early on Saturday morning.

While social network users shared picturesque images of white winter landscapes, and fans of winter sports rushed to try out Latvia's ski slopes and tracks as well as public skating rinks, authorities warned of the dangers extremely low temps can pose to human health and their dwellings. (Xinhua)

Pope gets invitation to visit Peru during Vatican garden party

VATICAN CITY, Feb 1, (AP): Peru's ambassador to the Holy See publicly invited Pope Leo XIV to visit his second homeland on Saturday, as 2026 is shaping up to be an important year for the pontiff's travel with big trips under study for Africa and South America.

In recent days, the president of Equatorial Guinea and the Vatican ambassador in Angola have both confirmed that plans are underway for a papal trip this year, on top of rumored stops in Cameroon and Algeria. No dates have been announced but Vatican officials say the four-country Africa visit would likely take place sometime after Easter.

Leo himself has said he wants his second trip as pope to be in Africa, especially Algeria, which has special significance for Leo's Augustinian religious order. Algeria also plays an important role in Christian-Muslim relations that the Vatican is keen to highlight.

Leo has also said he hoped to visit three countries in Latin America in either 2026 or 2027: Argentina, Uruguay and Peru, where he lived for two decades as a missionary and where he holds citizenship. Argentina especially has been waiting for a papal visit, after Pope Francis never went home after his 2013 election.

On Saturday, Peru's new ambas-



Pope Leo XIV greets artist Lenin Alvarez Medina of Peru in the Vatican Gardens on Jan 31. (AP)

sador to the Vatican, Jorge Ponce San Roman, publicly invited Leo to visit during a ceremony in the Vatican gardens to inaugurate a new mosaic and statue dedicated to the Virgin Mary that Peru sponsored.

With Peru's bishops on hand, Ponce said he and his fellow citizens "hoped to see you very soon in Peru."

Leo didn't respond but in his brief remarks at the ceremony recalled Peru

was "such a beloved country to me."

In a break with usual protocol, Leo then stayed for a buffet lunch that the Peruvian Embassy organized for the invited diplomats and Vatican officials in the gardens. For around an hour, Leo sat with Ponce and the Peruvian bishops in a shady, hidden spot back where the caterers were preparing plates of ravioli with huancaina, the typical Peruvian creamy sauce.



People look at the damage following a rocket attack the city of Kyiv, Ukraine, Feb. 25, 2022. (AP)

Moscow and Kyiv differ deeply over what an agreement should look like.

A central issue is whether Russia should keep or withdraw from areas of Ukraine its forces have occupied, especially Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland called the Donbas, and whether it should get land there that it hasn't yet captured.

Emergency power cuts swept across

several Ukrainian cities as well as neighboring Moldova on Saturday, officials said, amid a commitment from the Kremlin to US President Donald Trump to pause strikes on Kyiv as Ukraine battles one of its bleakest winters in years.

Ukraine's Energy Minister Denys Shmyhal said that the outages had been caused by technical malfunction affecting power lines linking Ukraine and Moldova.

The failure "caused a cascading outage in Ukraine's power grid," triggering automatic protection systems, he said.

Blackouts were reported in Kyiv, as well as Zhytomyr and Kharkiv regions, in the center and northeast of the country respectively. The outage cut water supplies to the Ukrainian capital, officials said, while the city's subway system was temporarily suspended because of low voltage on the network.

Moldova also experienced major power outages, including in the capital Chisinau, officials said.

"Due to the loss of power lines on the territory of Ukraine, the automatic protection system was triggered, which disconnected the electricity supply," Moldova's Energy Minister Dorin Junghietu said in a post on Facebook. "I encourage the population to stay calm until electricity is restored."

On Saturday, Peru's new ambas-

INTERNATIONAL

Early voting for Thailand's House of Representatives election kicks off

BANGKOK, Feb 1, (Xinhua): Early voting for Thailand's House of Representatives election started at 8 am local time on Sunday, with more than 2 million eligible voters unable to cast their ballots on the official polling day of Feb 8 participating in the process.

Voters taking part in early voting received two ballot papers at polling stations: one to elect a constituency candidate for the House of Representatives, and the other to vote for their preferred political party. The early voting concluded at 5 pm on the same day, and all ballots will be counted together after Feb 8.

Over 50 million Thai voters will elect a total of 500 members of the House of Representatives, among whom 400 will be elected from local constituencies and the remaining 100 will be allocated to political parties based on the proportion of their popular votes.

According to statistics from the Election Commission of Thailand, 57 political parties are contesting the House seats and have nominated over 90 candidates for the prime ministerial post. The final official vote count results are required to be released no later than April 9. The new parlia-

ment must convene a session within 15 days to elect a speaker, after which the House of Representatives will vote to select the new prime minister.

In the run-up to the election, participating parties as well as their candidates for parliamentary seats and the premiership have held campaign rallies across the country, with campaign advertisements lining the streets and alleys.

Pre-election opinion polls by multiple institutions show that the conservative Bhumjaithai Party, led by caretaker Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, is neck-and-neck in support rate with the People's Party, the successor to the progressive Move Forward Party, which won the most seats in the last general election. The populist Pheu Thai Party, backed by the family of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, follows closely in the polls.

Mainstream public opinion analysis in Thailand holds that no single party is likely to secure an overwhelming majority of seats, and the formation of the new government will ultimately depend on post-election negotiations between political parties.

Thailand's last general election was

held in May 2023, and incumbent caretaker Prime Minister Anutin is the third prime minister since then. In September 2025, Anutin was appointed prime minister with the support of the People's Party, on the condition that he initiate a constitutional amendment process.

However, a constitutional amendment bill pushed by the People's Party failed to pass in parliament on Dec 11, 2025. The party then tabled a no-confidence motion against Anutin's government, prompting Anutin to dissolve the House of Representatives immediately.

Also:

PHNOM PENH: The three-day Cambodia-Thailand Regional Border Committee (RBC) secretariat meeting over border issues wrapped up on Thursday without reaching any consensus, said a Cambodian defense spokesperson.

Held at the Poipet International Border Checkpoint between Cambodia's Banteay Meanchey province and Thailand's Sa Kaeo province, the meeting was held between Cambodia's 5th Military Region and Thailand's 1st Army Area under the observation of the ASEAN Observer Team.



Thailand's Prime Minister and leader of Bhumjaithai Party Anutin Charnvirakul, attends an election campaign, in Bangkok, Thailand on Jan 30. (AP)

'UN faces imminent financial collapse without urgent action'

United Nations very active in mediating conflicts across the world, says Guterres

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 1, (Agencies): "The United nations is very active in mediating conflicts across the world, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

At a press conference outlining his priorities for 2026, Guterres said in some cases, some warring parties do not want the United nations to mediate in their conflicts, and the world body is very active in "several scenarios," such as in Libya, Sudan, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

"No," the UN chief replied when asked by Xinhua whether he was concerned about the future role of the United nations in maintaining world peace and security.

"There are areas where we are not mediators, because at least one of the parties (to a conflict) does not want us to mediate," the UN chief said.

"Israel never accepted the UN to be mediator, probably because we would mediate based on our values, the values of the (UN) Charter ... those that violate the Charter probably are not interested in the mediation by an entity that is, in itself, the entity that represents the Charter," he said.

Guterres said the United nations has been "extremely active" in trying to avoid the worst scenario in the situation of South Sudan, in the DRC and Myanmar, and "very active" in negotiations related to Western Sahara.

"And I could go on and on and on with the number of situations in which we are extremely active with efforts of mediation, efforts of conciliation of positions, peace processes," he said.

"There is only one thing we do not have, (which) is the instruments of power to force parties to come to the negotiation," said the secretary-general.

Meanwhile, Guterres is warning that the world body faces "imminent financial collapse" unless its financial rules are overhauled or all 193 member nations pay their dues - a message likely directed at the United States and the billions it owes.

Guterres said in a letter to all UN member nations obtained Friday by The Associated Press that cash for its regular operating budget could run out by July, which could dramatically affect its operations.

"Either all member states honor their obligations to pay in full and on time - or member states must fundamentally overhaul our financial rules to prevent an im-



UN Secretary General António Guterres is welcomed by Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer to 10 Downing Street, London on Jan 16. (AP)

minent financial collapse," he said.

While Guterres didn't name any country in the letter, which was reported earlier by Reuters, the financial crisis comes as the US, traditionally the largest donor, has not paid its mandatory dues to the United Nations.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly said the United Nations has potential but has not lived up to it. His administration has withdrawn from UN organizations like the World Health Organization and the cultural agency UNESCO, while pulling funding from dozens of others.

The US now owes \$2.196 billion to the UN's regular budget, including \$767 million for this year and for prior years, according to UN officials, who were not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The US also owes \$1.8 billion for the separate budget for the UN's far-flung peacekeeping operations, and that also will rise.

The country second on the list for not paying dues is Venezuela, which owes \$38 million, the official said. The country, whose economy was struggling before the US military raid this month that deposed then-President Nicolás Maduro, has already lost its right to vote in the General Assembly for being two years in arrears.

Guterres said the UN ended 2025 with a record \$1.568 billion in outstanding dues, more than double the amount outstanding at the end of 2024. The UN official said the Trump administration did not pay any dues last year.

Because so much is owed, the UN's liquidity reserves nearly have been exhausted, Guterres said, and unless payments drastically improve, the UN will not be able to fulfill the \$3.45 billion regular budget for 2026 approved unanimously in December by the assembly's 193 members.

The secretary-general stressed another major problem that he has raised repeatedly: Under UN financial rules, the organization is required to pay back unspent money from the regular budget to member states - even if it hasn't received that money in payments. He urged UN member nations to change the requirement immediately.

"I cannot overstate the urgency of the situation we now face," he said. "We cannot execute budgets with uncollected funds, nor return funds we never received."

The US mission to the UN didn't immediately respond to a message seeking comment.

US special envoy arrives in Caracas

Venezuela government announces amnesty bill

CARACAS, Venezuela, Feb 1, (AP): Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodriguez on Friday announced an amnesty bill that could lead to the release of hundreds of prisoners, including opposition leaders, journalists and human rights activists detained for political reasons.

The measure had long been sought by the United States-backed opposition. It is the latest concession Rodriguez has made since taking the reins of the country on Jan. 3 after the brazen seizure of then-President Nicolás Maduro in a US military attack in Venezuela's capital, Caracas.

Rodriguez told a gathering of justices, magistrates, ministers, military brass and other government leaders that the ruling party-controlled National Assembly would take up the bill with urgency.

"May this law serve to heal the wounds left by the political confrontation fueled by violence and extremism," she added in the pre-taped televised event. "May it serve to redirect justice in our country, and may it serve to redirect coexistence among Venezuelans."

Rodriguez also announced the shutdown of Helicoide, a prison in Caracas where torture and other human rights abuses have been repeatedly documented by independent organizations.

The facility, she said, will be transformed into a sports, social and cultural center for police and surrounding neighborhoods.

Rodriguez made her announcement before some of the officials that former



prisoners and human rights watchdogs have accused of ordering the abuses committed at Helicoide and other detention facilities.

Relatives of some prisoners livestreamed Rodriguez's speech on a phone as they gathered outside Helicoide. Some cried. Many chanted "Freedom! Freedom!"

"God is good. God heard us," Johana Chirinos, a prisoner's aunt, said as tears rolled down her face.

Opposition leader and Nobel Peace

Subcontinent

4 killed in Pakistan road accident: At least four people were killed and 27 others injured when a truck collided with a passenger bus in Pakistan's eastern Punjab province on Saturday night, local authorities said.

The accident occurred on Jalalpur Road in Lodhran district, where the bus was carrying wedding guests, according to state-run Rescue 1122.

Rescue authorities said the victims included men, women and children. The force of the collision badly damaged the bus, resulting in multiple casualties among passengers.

Rescue and police teams rushed to the scene shortly after the accident and launched relief operations. The injured and the bodies of the deceased were shifted to nearby hospitals for treatment and medico-legal procedures.

Police said an investigation had been launched to determine the cause of the crash. (Xinhua)



Men gather during a funeral procession for victims of a house collapse in Jalalabad, Afghanistan on Jan 29. (AP)

A huge cache of ammunition, including AK-47 rifles, was also recovered from the site.

The encounter between security forces and the armed rebels took place in Bijapur area when a search operation was carried out.

This year, over 20 armed rebels had been killed in India, while nearly 300 were eliminated last year. (Xinhua)

SLCG rescues 21 from drowning: The Sri Lanka Coast Guard (SLCG) has rescued 21 local and foreign tourists from drowning during lifesaving operations conducted in January, SLCG said in a press release on Saturday.

The coast guard said it operates 17 lifesaving posts at key tourist beaches around the island. Rescue missions from these have saved 15 foreign nationals and six Sri Lankans from strong currents and rough seas.

Since its establishment in 2010, coast guard lifesavers have rescued 2,568 people, including 1,179 foreign nationals, according to official data. (Xinhua)

2 armed rebels killed in India: Indian security forces killed at least two armed rebels in an encounter that took place in the country's central state of Chhattisgarh on Thursday.

Afghanistan roof collapse kills 4: Four people, all members of the same family, were killed as the roof of a house collapsed in southern Afghanistan's Kandahar province on Saturday, a local official said.

The official, Abdul Salam Omar, said the deadly incident took place in Daman district in the early hours of Saturday, killing three children and an elderly man. He provided no further details.

This is the second incident of its kind since Thursday.

Earlier, a similar incident claimed seven lives and injured another person in Jalalabad city, the capital of eastern Nangarhar province, on Thursday morning. (Xinhua)

W.African, Sahel nations eye 'hot-pursuit' deals to combat cross-border terror

ACCRA, Feb 1, (Xinhua): The governments in West Africa and the Sahel region late Friday announced a multipronged approach to combating terrorism and violent extremism, which have become a major worry to their countries.

The governments said in a communique at the end of a two-day Consultative Conference on Regional Cooperation and Security held in Ghana that they are resolved to strengthen regional cooperation to address the evolving peace, security, and governance challenges to rebuild regional stability.

They also highlighted the need to shift toward a human security approach underpinned by regional solidarity, respect for sovereignty, and a people-centered, gender-responsive approach to peace-building, security, and counterterrorism.

Recognizing the inextricable link between transnational organized crimes and violent extremism, the countries also agreed to strengthen regular meetings of states in the region to review peace and security commitments and strengthen intelligence and information sharing to enhance surveillance to preempt these crimes.

Moreover, the West African nations also agreed to reinforce the harmonized



Omar Touray, president of the ECOWAS Commission, (left), Gambia's President Adama Barrow, (center) and Nigeria Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yusuf Tuggar pose for a photo, prior to the start of the ECOWAS meeting in Abuja, Nigeria on June 22, 2025. (AP)

harmonization of legal frameworks to enhance the cross-border prosecution of terrorism-related offenses while safeguarding human rights.

This high-level conference is committed to considering adopting hot-pursuit bilateral and multilateral agreements to support the fight against transnational crimes," said the communique read by Ghana's Foreign Minister Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa.

Furthermore, member states agreed to design a foundational memorandum of understanding and protocols on cooperation and security within six calendar months after the high-level consultative conference to serve as the basis for further agreements.

Twenty contenders are seeking the presidency, but Fernández is the only one who has consistently polled in

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica, Feb 1, (AP): Costa Rican voters choose Sunday between continuing the policies of outgoing conservative populist Rodrigo Chaves by electing his selected successor or giving a new chance to parties seeking to shed a self-serving, establishment image.

The historically peaceful Central American nation's crime surge in recent years could be a deciding factor for many voters. Some fault Chaves' presidency for failing to bring those rates down, while many see his confrontational style as the best chance for Costa Rica to tame the violence.

Laura Fernández, the Sovereign People's Party's candidate, was Chaves' former minister of national planning and economic policy and more recently his minister of the presidency.

Promising to continue Chaves' political program, she has maintained a comfortable lead in polls, but Sunday will determine whether she wins outright with 40% or more of the vote or has to face the second-highest vote-getter in a runoff on April 5.

Costa Ricans also will elect a new 57-seat National Assembly. Chaves' party is expected to make gains, but perhaps not achieve the supermajority he and Fernández have called for, which would allow their party to choose Supreme Court magistrates, for example.

Twenty contenders are seeking the presidency, but Fernández is the only one who has consistently polled in

double figures.

Far behind are a cluster of five candidates, including economist Álvaro Ramos of the National Liberation party and former first lady Claudia Dobles, the candidate for the Citizen Agenda Coalition, who could all potentially make the second round if Fernández does not wrap it up Sunday.

Costa Rican presidential candidate Laura Fernandez greets supporters during a campaign rally in San Jose, Costa Rica on Jan 24. (AP)

double figures.

Far behind are a cluster of five candidates, including economist Álvaro Ramos of the National Liberation party and former first lady Claudia Dobles, the candidate for the Citizen Agenda Coalition, who could all potentially make the second round if Fernández does not wrap it up Sunday.

On the sidelines of the 2025 Analyst Conference

Al-Sager: Confident in National Bank of Kuwait's ability to strengthen its market leadership amid Kuwait's promising growth opportunities

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: Mr. Isam Al-Sager, Vice Chairman and Group Chief Executive Officer of National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), expressed his confidence in the Bank's ability to further strengthen its leadership in the domestic market, as Kuwait's evolving economic landscape continues to present promising growth opportunities.

Speaking on the sidelines of the 2025 earnings conference call, Al-Sager noted that, supported by NBK's deep domestic roots and long-standing client relationships, the Bank is well positioned to achieve sustainable growth across both the corporate and consumer segments.

Al-Sager stated that the Bank recorded a net profit of KWD 575.6 million for the financial year ended 31 December 2025, noting that profitability was affected by the implementation of the new tax regime applicable to multinational entities, which led to an increase in the effective tax rate from 8.2% in 2024 to 16.0% in 2025.

He added that, excluding this impact, profit before tax increased by 5.4% year-on-year to reach KWD 734.6 million in 2025, supported by lower credit loss provisions and impairment charges, as well as growth in operating surplus.

Moreover, Al-Sager noted that the Group's core performance indicators remained solid during the year, with return on average assets reaching 1.33% and return on average equity standing at 13.4%. He further pointed out that the Board of Directors has proposed a cash dividend of 35 fils per share for 2025, representing a payout ratio of 53% of profits attributable to shareholders, in addition to proposing the distribution of 5% bonus shares (five shares for every 100 shares owned), subject to approval by the upcoming General Assembly.

Al-Sager stressed that NBK continues to maintain a lucrative dividend policy alongside conservative capital management practices, ensuring that capital levels remain in line with the Bank's strategic objectives.

Innovation & Digitalization

"At NBK, our focus on innovation and digital banking continues to enhance how we serve our customers, supported by evolving digital platforms, strengthened mobile capabilities, and an expanding suite of digital products. These efforts have enabled more personalized experiences, higher digital adoption and deeper engagement, reinforced customer loyalty, and strengthened our connection with Kuwait's youth and the growing digitally driven population," Al-Sager said.

He explained that NBK continues to prioritize diversification as a key pillar of its strategy, strengthening operational efficiencies and supporting the delivery of sustainable returns. In the meantime, the Bank seeks to



Isam Al-Sager

■ Supported by our deep domestic roots and long-standing client relationships, NBK is well positioned to drive sustainable growth across both corporate and consumer segments
■ We maintain a lucrative dividend policy along with conservative capital management practices, ensuring that capital levels remain aligned with our strategic objectives
■ Our returns remained strong during the year, with return on average assets reaching 1.33% while return on average equity reached 13.4%
■ We prioritize diversification as a key pillar of our strategy and continue to expand cross-selling activity across our regional and international locations
■ We have achieved approximately 60% of our USD 10 billion sustainable assets target for 2020
■ More than half of the 13.1% year-on-year growth in the loan portfolio was generated by our international operations
■ The government's pledge to advancing its development agenda reinforces its commitment to financing Kuwait Vision 2035 priorities and advancing infrastructure development

■ We are optimistic that the mortgage law may see the light soon.
■ Egypt remains among the Group's most profitable markets in local currency; benefiting from government reforms and the growth in economic activity
Ronghe:
■ NBK's resilient and well-diversified business model, allowed us to continue effectively navigating the uncertainties prevailing in the global economic environment
■ The 5.4% growth in profits before tax reflects increased momentum in the Group's operations and robust growth in business volumes
■ The strong contribution of NBK's key business segments to net profits confirms the success of our diversification strategy and the resilience of the Group's earnings
■ NBK's balance sheet remains strong with stable credit quality, comfortable liquidity and solid capital base
■ We expect loan growth during 2026 to be in the low double-digit range

expand cross-selling activity across its regional and international locations, contributing to improved service delivery and deeper client relationships across different markets.

Al-Sager noted that, in parallel, NBK Wealth, the Group's wealth management division, continues to leverage its expertise to offer a comprehensive range of portfolio management, advisory, and investment solutions. At the same time, Boubyan Bank, the Group's Islamic banking arm, continues to reinforce its strong domestic presence, contributing to the diversification and resilience of the Group's profitability streams.

Furthermore, Al-Sager reaffirmed NBK's strong commitment to sustainability and to advancing its environmental, social, and governance (ESG) agenda, noting that during the past year the Bank surpassed its GHG operational emission reduction target ahead of schedule, achieving a 25% reduction well before 2025-end. He added that NBK also made significant progress in sustainable finance, with approximately 60% of the USD 10 billion sustainable assets target for 2030 already achieved.

He noted that these milestones, combined with notable improvements in ESG ratings, reinforce NBK's position among leading regional banks.

With regard to the growth of NBK's loan portfolio by around 13.1% year-on-year in 2025, Al-Sager explained that more than 50% of this growth stemmed from the Group's international operations, while the remainder came from its domestic operations in Kuwait, including Boubyan Bank.

"We ended 2025 with adequate capital position in line with our internal targets for capital buffers across all capital tiers. That said, we are expecting another year of strong growth in loans as the outlook in both our domestic market as well as overseas operations is positive," Al-Sager added.

He explained that NBK will continue to closely monitor the key drivers of growth on its balance sheet and reflect on these trends in its capital planning process. He added that

the Bank adopts an efficient capital management approach that strikes a balance between maximizing shareholder returns through sustainable payout policy and building adequate capital buffers that enable it to capture growth opportunities.

With regard to the Egyptian market, Al-Sager stated that Egypt remains among the Group's most profitable markets in local currency; benefiting from government reforms and the growth in economic activity. He noted that risk levels have declined significantly following the reforms implemented in the Egyptian economy.

The Kuwaiti Economy

Commenting on the performance of the Kuwaiti economy, Al-Sager said: "Economic momentum has remained supportive, with GDP growth expected to return to positive territory in 2025 at around 2.3%, and to accelerate further to 4.5% in 2026. This recovery is underpinned by a rebound in oil production alongside continued resilience in the non-oil sectors."

He noted that credit growth strengthened during 2025, driven by solid business lending and stable household activity, while public spending and ongoing reform initiatives continued to support economic activity.

With regard to project activity, Al-Sager explained that the value of projects awarded in 2025 exceeded KWD 4 billion, representing an increase of 61% compared to the previous year. He added that this momentum has been further supported by the government's return to the debt markets following the passage of the public debt law which has led to the upgrade of Kuwait's sovereign ratings to AA- by S&P Global.

"The outlook continues to be supported by a sizable pipeline of large-scale infrastructure and development projects estimated to be worth more than KWD 11 billion. In addition, the government's pledge to advancing its development agenda, especially in the absence of major political gridlocks reinforces its commitment to financing Vision 2035 priorities and advancing infrastructure development," Al-Sager added.

Regarding the mortgage law, Al-Sager said that it is advancing towards its final stages, expressing optimism that it may see the light soon.

Operating Momentum

In the meantime, Mr. Sujit Ronghe, Group CFO at NBK, said: "The 5.4% growth in operating profit before tax in 2025 reflects increased momentum in the Group's operations and robust

growth in business volumes."

He explained that the general operating environment in Kuwait and the GCC during 2025 has been relatively stable though global and regional geopolitical situation remained unstable. Macro-economic uncertainties and concerns regarding US tariffs are affecting the global operating environment adversely. Nonetheless, NBK's resilient and well-diversified business model, enabled the bank to continue effectively navigating the uncertainties prevailing in the global economic environment.

Ronghe added that the strong contribution of NBK's key business segments to 2025 net profits confirms the success of the diversification strategy and the resilience of the Group's earnings.

He also noted that NBK Group continues to benefit from its unique position among Kuwaiti banks in terms of geographical spread and the ability to conduct business in both Conventional and Islamic Banking.

Moreover, he highlighted that the net operating income, at KWD 1.3 billion, is 3.6% higher than the previous year, boosted by a sound contribution from both non-interest income and net interest income, with their mix remaining stable during the year.

Ronghe stated that total non-interest income stood at KWD 297 million in 2025, representing a growth of 9.6% compared to 2024. Fees and commission income grew by 5% to reach KWD 217 million, reflecting robust contributions across the Group's different lines of business and geographies.

With regard to provisions, Ronghe said: "Total credit provisions and impairment losses for 2025 were KWD 65 million in 2025, compared to KWD 86 million in 2024. Significant amount of recoveries of specific provision during 2025 have resulted in a lower-than-normal cost of risk of 0.15%.

He further highlighted that the Group's balance sheet remains strong, with stable credit quality and comfortable liquidity. He noted that the

Bank's solid capital base, along with its ability to generate healthy operating profits, provides a strong credit loss-absorption capacity.

"Group total assets reached KWD 45.6 billion as of Dec 25, a 13.1% increase over December 2024. Group loans and advances at KWD 26.8 billion registered a strong y-o-y growth of KWD 3.1 billion i.e. 13.1%. Loan growth was recorded in Kuwait across both conventional and Islamic banking segments, alongside growth in the Group's international operations, which accounted for more than 50% of total loan growth. This expansion was achieved across the Group's network in different geographies and sectors, reinforcing the success of its diversification agenda and contributing to the mitigation of concentration risks," Ronghe added.

Ronghe stated that the Group maintained a strong and stable capital adequacy ratio of 17% as at the end of 2025, significantly above the minimum regulatory requirements.

With respect to asset quality, Ronghe said that the non-performing loan (NPL) ratio remained stable at 1.36%, while the loan loss coverage ratio stood at 240%, reflecting the Group's conservative provisioning policy.

Furthermore, Ronghe noted that following the passage of the Public Debt Law in Kuwait, the Central Bank of Kuwait has issued KWD 2.2 billion in Kuwait Government Treasury Bonds since June 2025. He expressed his expectation that future debt issuances will continue, enabling the Bank to deploy its KWD more profitably.

With respect to loan growth, he highlighted that the Group continues to benefit from a strong pipeline of approved credit facilities and, accordingly, expects loan growth in 2026 to be in the low double-digit range.

As for the cost of risk, Ronghe explained that, amid the continued global economic uncertainty, NBK maintains a cautiously optimistic outlook, with the underlying cost of risk expected to remain around 40 basis points, which is considered as normal.



NBK Headquarters

Norway fund's Kuwait equity holdings increase 15% in '25

By Inas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: Norway's sovereign wealth fund—the largest in the world in terms of assets under management—continued to expand its presence in Boursa Kuwait by the end of 2025, underscoring the growing investment significance of the Kuwaiti market in the global institutional investment arena.

According to reports issued by the Norwegian sovereign wealth fund (Norges Bank Investment Management-NBIM), which detailed the fund's holdings along with their geographical and sectoral distributions, the value of its investments in Kuwaiti equities reached about \$838.58 million, spread in 13 listed companies.

This marks an annual increase of 14.87 percent compared to about \$729.9 million at the end of 2024, indicating Kuwait's evolution from a promising emerging market into a stable investment destination within the portfolios of the world's largest sovereign investors.

A Bloomberg report citing the Boursa Kuwait Trading, Liquidity and Foreign Inflows Statistics for 2024-2025 pointed out that this persistent global expansion reflects rising confidence in the resilience of the Kuwaiti economy, the stability of its financial market, and its capacity to deliver sustainable long-term returns.

This confidence is evident in light of the regulatory reforms implemented by Boursa Kuwait in recent years, which enhanced standards of governance, disclosure and transparency. The trend is consistent with the Norwegian fund's global investment strategy, which focuses on diversifying investments in different sectors and regions to mitigate risks and improve return stability, while prioritizing markets with strong regulatory frameworks and well-established financial institutions.

On the ranking of Gulf markets in terms of foreign inflows and sectoral trading volumes, the Norwegian fund concentrated its Kuwaiti investments in the bank-

ing sector, which is regarded as the backbone of the national economy due to its solid capital base and stable profitability. This focus is complemented by carefully selected investments in the real estate, investment, logistics and consumer services sectors, which are among the sectors most capable of generating sustainable operating returns.

This growth is not a temporary or exceptional surge, because it is part of a sustained upward trajectory. The Norwegian fund's investments in Kuwaiti equities increased from around \$333.5 million in 2020 to \$838.58 million in 2025, showing cumulative growth of nearly 151 percent over a five-year period.

This path confirms that Kuwait has become a strategic destination within the fund's global asset allocation framework, which is governed by strict standards related to governance, sustainability and responsible investment.

The fund's expansion coincided with a strong performance year for Boursa Kuwait, which recorded net foreign inflows of around \$1.5 billion, ranking third among Gulf markets after Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi.

Trading volumes also surged by 71.3 percent to reach 117.3 billion shares in 2025, compared with 68.5 billion shares in 2024, while the value of trades rose to about \$86.6 billion, up from \$48.4 billion the previous year, clearly demonstrating improved liquidity and greater market depth.

The share of Boursa Kuwait of the total Gulf trading climbed to 14.3 percent, reflecting growing interest from foreign institutional investors, driven by regulatory reforms, market infrastructure development, and the expansion of the listed companies' base.

This comprehensive performance reinforces the standing of Boursa Kuwait as one of the most attractive Gulf markets for long-term investment, and confirms that international confidence is now grounded not only in potential, but in concrete results and solid data that put Kuwait among the region's leading markets.

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) intends to coordinate with foreign companies in the oil sector for various reasons, say reliable sources.

Sources cited the reasons as follows:

■ Introduction of foreign expertise into local operations to boost oil and gas production through more innovative methods, particularly since major international companies have the most advanced technologies.
■ Availability of financial liquidity to implement oil projects without putting pressure on the budget of KPC.
■ Difficulty of extracting oil from the northern fields, especially since the involvement of international

companies will help overcome the challenges associated with complex reservoirs.

■ Realize the objective to raise production to four million barrels of oil per day by 2035 and to maintain this level until 2040.

■ Age of some oil reservoirs, which affected the smooth flow of oil, compared to the early stages of exploration.

■ The need to dispose excess water associated with oil extraction, which has increased significantly since the oil field fires were extinguished following the liberation of Kuwait in 1991.

Sources indicated that although Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) has pioneering experience in extracting oil from complex reservoirs, there is still a need to benefit from foreign expertise.

Sources were quick to stress that KOC is exerting tremendous efforts and achieving success in both

offshore and onshore explorations, in addition to its work to increase Jurassic gas wells.

Sources explained that the involvement of foreign companies is necessary to restore oil flow from the reservoirs to its previous level.

Sources pointed out that the proposal to attract foreign companies to develop the northern oil fields dates back 1999 to 2000. Sources said a technical study was conducted and reviewed by the Ministry of Oil, Supreme Petroleum Council, KPC and several other concerned entities. "The study focused on engaging or hiring foreign companies, not participation-based arrangements," sources elaborated.

Sources clarified that the involvement of foreign companies will be limited to contracting agreements covering the intensification of well-drilling operations, development of oil reservoirs, laying of pipelines, and introduction of advanced technology.

Highlights importance of saving and responsible money management

Gulf Bank partakes in Al-Bayan Bilingual School Carnival in support of financial literacy and youth empowerment

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: As part of its ongoing commitment to community engagement, youth empowerment, and financial literacy, Gulf Bank participated in the Al-Bayan Bilingual School Carnival, reaffirming its strategic focus on building financially aware and responsible future generations.

This participation aligns with Gulf Bank's financial literacy strategy, which aims to introduce essential financial concepts at an early age and equip children and youth with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed and responsible financial decisions throughout their lives. The Bank firmly believes that financial education is a critical life skill and a key pillar in supporting long term economic stability and individual empowerment.

Gulf Bank's presence at the carnival also reflects its alignment with the nationwide financial awareness campaign "Let's Be Aware," launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait, which seeks to enhance financial awareness across all segments of society. Through its initiatives, Gulf Bank supports the campaign's objectives by promoting sound financial behavior, encouraging responsible banking practices, and raising awareness of the importance of saving, budgeting, and future planning from an early age.

Educational institutions are considered strategic partners in advancing financial literacy, as they play a vital role in shaping values, habits, and decision-making skills among young individuals. Through its participation in the Al-Bayan Bilingual School Carnival, Gulf Bank

tailored specifically for children and youth, addressing their needs at different life stages. These offerings are designed not only to provide banking services, but also to serve as practical tools that help young customers understand financial concepts in a simple and age-appropriate manner.

The Bank introduced its red packages, a modern digital banking solution designed to empower young people with tools that encourage financial independence, responsible spending, and effective money management.

The account offers features that support day-to-day banking while promoting healthy financial habits aligned with today's digital lifestyle.

In addition, Gulf Bank presented the neo Children's Savings Account, which focuses on instilling a culture of saving among children through a secure and parent-guided experience. The account helps introduce basic financial concepts, such as saving and goal setting, in an engaging and accessible way, fostering early awareness and positive financial behavior.

Through its participation in the Al-Bayan Bilingual School Carnival, Gulf Bank reaffirmed its commitment to supporting educational institutions, advancing financial literacy, and contributing to national efforts led by the Central Bank of Kuwait. These initiatives reflect the Bank's broader vision of empowering individuals with the knowledge needed to make sound financial decisions and supporting the development of a financially informed generation capable of contributing to a more sustainable and prosperous future.

aimed to engage directly with students, parents, and educators in an interactive and educational environment that complements classroom learning and supports holistic development.

During the event, Gulf Bank highlighted the importance of saving, financial planning, and responsible money management by showcasing its banking solutions

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During the event, Gulf Bank highlighted the importance of saving, financial planning, and responsible money management by showcasing its banking solutions

Financial results for year-end 2025

Gulf Bank reports net profit of KD 52.4 million for the full year 2025, with proposed cash dividends of 9 fils per share & 5% bonus share distribution

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: Gulf Bank K.S.C.P. ("Bank") announced its financial results for the full year ending 31 December 2025. The Bank reported a net profit of KD 52.4 million for the full year 2025, with an earning per share of 13 fils for the year, compared to a net profit of KD 60.2 million and earnings per share of 15 fils for the same period in 2024.

Accordingly, the Bank's Board of Directors is recommending a cash dividend distribution of 9 fils per share, representing a 68% cash payout ratio in addition to a 5% bonus share distribution, all of which are subject to shareholder approval at the Annual General Meeting scheduled for March 2026.

Furthermore, Gulf Bank recorded an operating income of KD 188.9 million for the full year 2025, marking a decrease of 5.2% compared to the previous year. Operating profit before total provisions and impairments reached KD 94.6 million, reflecting a decline of 11.4% compared to 2024.

The decline in net profit for the full year 2025 is attributed to the decline in net interest income of KD 10.2 million or 6.5%, coupled with a slight increase in operating expenses of KD 1.7 million or 1.8%, compared to the same period of 2024. However, these declines were partially offset by the improvement in total provisions and impairments, which declined by KD 4.2 million or 9.6% year-on-year, reaching KD 39.3 million for the full year 2025.

Now looking at the financial performance of the fourth quarter of 2025, the Bank reported a net profit of KD 14.0 million, with an operating income of KD 48.3 million, and operating profit before total provisions and impairments of KD 25.6 million.

The Bank's proactive risk management approach has effectively mitigated risks and maintained the quality of its loan portfolio. As of 31 December 2025, the Bank's non-performing loans (NPL) ratio stood at 1.1%, compared to 1.3% at the end of the previous year. Additionally, the Bank continues to have ample NPL coverage ratio, which reached 370%, inclusive of total provisions and collateral, providing a solid buffer against any potential credit losses.

As of 31 December 2025, total credit provisions reached KD 256 million, whereas IFRS 9 accounting requirements (i.e., ECL or expected credit losses) were KD 166 million. This results in a substantial excess provision level of KD 90 million, over and above what is mandated by IFRS 9 accounting requirements.

In comparison to 31 December 2024, Gulf Bank's total assets increased by 2.9% to reach KD 7.7 billion, with net loans and advances rising by 7.2% to KD 5.9 billion. Additionally, total deposits grew by 2.2% to reach KD 5.7 billion, while shareholders' equity increased by 2.5% to reach KD 854 million for the year ended 2025.

The Bank's capital position remains robust, supported by strong internal capital generation. As of 31 December 2025, the Bank's regulatory Tier 1 capital ratio stood at 14.8%, exceeding the regulatory minimum of 12% by 2.8%. Additionally, the Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) was 16.9%, surpassing the regulatory minimum of



Ahmad Mohammad Al-Bahar:

■ Gulf Bank continued to strengthen its position in Kuwait's banking sector, underpinned by a competitive business model and robust governance.
 ■ Kuwait's economic landscape showed signs of improvement, supported by fiscal reforms and renewed development activity.
 ■ Our financial performance reflects our balanced approach to meaningful growth, while maintaining a high-quality loan portfolio.
 ■ Gulf Bank marks its 65th anniversary with a clear focus on the future, guided by institutional maturity and a strong foundation.



Sami Mahfouz:

■ During the year, Gulf Bank maintained a strong financial position, driven by robust balance sheet growth and the advancement of key operational initiatives.
 ■ Gulf Bank's newly launched 2030 strategy provides a roadmap to Sharia-compliant conversion and acceleration of business growth.
 ■ We advanced our operational readiness to support the planned transition to Islamic Banking, including systems, governance, and people capabilities.
 ■ The strong credit ratings in 2025 reflect Gulf Bank's financial strength and its competitive position in the banking sector.

mum of 14% by 2.9%.

Measured progress

Commenting on the financial results, Gulf Bank Chairman Mr. Ahmad Mohammad Al-Bahar stated: "The year 2025 represented a period of measured progress, focused on strengthening Gulf Bank's foundations and advancing key strategic priorities. This was achieved in an economic environment that combined both global uncertainty and gradual domestic momentum. Locally, Kuwait's economic landscape showed signs of improvement, supported by fiscal reforms and renewed development activity. Against this backdrop, Gulf Bank continued to strengthen its position in Kuwait's banking sector, underpinned by a competitive business model and robust governance."

He added: "Our financial performance during 2025 reflects our balanced approach towards meaningful growth, while maintaining a high-quality loan portfolio. This is supported by disciplined underwriting standards and proactive risk management."

Mr. Al-Bahar continued: "During the year, we advanced our planned transition to a Sharia-compliant Bank following the Central Bank of Kuwait's initial approval to proceed with this transformation. This

represents an important milestone in the Bank's strategic evolution that supports a strong financial profile, customer service excellence, and long-term value creation. Moreover, the Bank continued to explore strategic opportunities, both organically and inorganically, aimed at enhancing long-term shareholder value. This includes the ongoing evaluation of a potential merger with Warba Bank."

Operational initiatives

Commenting on the operational performance of Gulf Bank for the year 2025, Acting Chief Executive Officer Mr. Sami Mahfouz said: "The year 2025 was characterized by disciplined execution amid a challenging operating environment. Despite ongoing external pressures, Gulf Bank maintained a strong financial position, driven by robust balance sheet growth, and the advancement of key operational initiatives aligned with its long-term strategic aspiration."

He added: "We launched our 2030 five-year strategy, which provides a clear roadmap centered on completing the Bank's conversion to a Sharia-compliant Bank, accelerating growth across retail and corporate businesses, and selectively expanding into untapped opportunities."

On the latest updates regarding the conversion to a

Sharia-compliant Bank, Mr. Mahfouz said: "During the year, the management focused on preparing the Bank for the planned transition to a Sharia-compliant operating model, following the Central Bank of Kuwait's preliminary approval to initiate conversion activities. Dedicated governance arrangements and cross-functional working groups are in place to manage implementation covering operations, legal, technology, and product development."

Credit Ratings and Recognitions

In 2025, Gulf Bank's creditworthiness continued to be well-recognized by leading international credit rating agencies. During the year, Fitch Ratings reaffirmed the Bank's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating at 'A', while Moody's affirmed its long-term deposit rating at 'A3'. Capital Intelligence Ratings also reaffirmed the Bank's Long-Term Foreign Currency rating at 'A+', in addition to maintaining the rating on the Bank's Basel III-compliant Tier 2 Subordinated Bonds at 'BBB+'. All ratings were assigned Stable Outlooks, underscoring Gulf Bank's resilient financial position, well-diversified and stable funding base, and robust domestic franchise.

Gulf Bank's achievements were also celebrated on the global stage with multiple independent recognitions from leading international bodies. The Bank was recognized for excellence in digital banking, customer experience, wealth management, social media engagement, and sustainability. These acknowledgements reinforce Gulf Bank's position as a leading financial institution in Kuwait and provide independent validation of its competitive advantage.

Appreciation

Mr. Al-Bahar concluded his remarks by saying: "As Gulf Bank marks its 65th anniversary, we do so with a clear focus on the future. More than six decades of continuity and contribution have provided the Bank with a strong foundation from which to move forward with confidence and maturity. We remain focused on positioning Gulf Bank for its next phase of growth. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank our shareholders for their continued trust, our employees for their dedication, our regulators for their ongoing support and guidance, and our customers for their loyalty."

Key Financial Indicators for the year end 2025:

- Full year 2025 net profit of KD 52.4 million.
- Full year 2025 operating income of KD 188.9 million.
- Net loans and advances grew by 7.2% year on year to reach KD 5.9 billion.
- Non-performing loan ratio as of 31 December 2025 is 1.1%, with an ample non-performance loan coverage ratio of 370%, inclusive of total provisions and collateral.
- Capital ratios as of 31 December 2025, Tier 1 ratio was 14.8% and Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) was 16.9%, both ratios above regulatory minimum requirements.

52.4

Million KD Net Profit

for Full Year 2025



Cash Dividends Per Share⁽¹⁾ **9 Fils** | Bonus Shares⁽¹⁾ **5%** | Capital Adequacy Ratio **16.9%** | NPL Ratio **1.1%**

A3
MOODY'S
RATINGS
Stable

A
Fitch Ratings
Stable

A+
CAPITAL
Intelligence
Stable

بنك الخليج
GULF BANK

⁽¹⁾2025 proposed cash dividends per share and bonus shares distribution are subject to shareholder approval at the Annual General Meeting scheduled for March 2026.

Note: As of or for the full year ending 31st December 2025.

Bank offers a comprehensive suite of innovative banking services

KFH enables gold bullion collection across 11 smart branches

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) offers through its smart branches a comprehensive suite of innovative banking services that are convenient, secure, and seamless, ensuring the highest standards of excellence.

Through its network of electronic branches across Kuwait, customers are able to access a wide range of interactive banking services such as receiving 10 gram gold bullions, Murabaha transactions, requesting credit and prepaid cards, updating personal data and mobile number, activating cards, instant cheque book printing, instant card issuance, opening accounts, buying and selling gold, and cardless cash withdrawals via mobile using a QR code, civil ID, or mobile number, among other fast and secure financing and banking transactions.

These efforts affirm KFH's leadership in digital transformation and innovation, enabling the Bank to offer digital financial and banking solutions that add value to customer experience.

KFH is keen to strengthen the presence of its smart branches, which are currently 11 spreading across Kuwait. Customers can find these branches in The Avenues and the co-op societies of Shabibiya, Jabiya, Mangaf, Sabah Al-Ahmad, Al-Salam, and Abu Fatira. The branches are also located in Shuwaikh KFH Auto Showroom, Al-Khiran Mall branch, as well as Abdullah Al-Salem and Airport branches.

Thanks to their success and ease of access to various banking transactions, KFH aims to increase the number of its smart branches to meet the needs of customers in most areas of Kuwait.

Additionally, KFH continues to strengthen its service delivery channels through smart branches, KFHOnline application, social media platforms, as well as through robotic and AI technologies, among many other innovative alternatives to traditional banking channels.

Affirming its leadership in digital innovation, KFH comprehensively updated its ATMs and KFHOnline mo-

bile app, featuring a sleek modern design and smart services. Currently, KFHOnline provides over 200 banking services.

The e-banking transactions also include instant virtual prepaid card issuance, checking the PINs of the credit and debit cards, opening an additional bank account online without having to visit the branch, temporarily suspending cards, opening deposits, adding beneficiaries, balance inquiry, requesting financing, checking the financing obligations and the number of installments, reviewing investment plans, receiving account balances and deposits summary, in addition to managing children's accounts through Baiti account, in addition to many other online e-services.

It is worth noting that the fully automated smart branches which operate 24/7 reflect the significant progress in the retail banking industry amid the growing users' reliance on technology for quick and highly efficient banking services.



KFH branch

Convenient payments for better lifestyle choices

stc partners with Taly to introduce 'Shop Now, Pay Later' solutions for customers



Abdulaziz Al-Dawish and Bader Al-Bader are pictured between officials from both companies during the signing ceremony of the cooperation agreement.

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its partnership with Taly, a regional "Shop Now, Pay Later" service provider. The collaboration aims to introduce flexible and convenient payment solutions for stc customers, as part of the Company's commitment to enhancing customer experience through innovative and customer-centric offerings.

Through this partnership, stc customers will be able to benefit from Taly's installment-based payment solutions when purchasing selected devices and services, allowing them to spread payments over four equal installments with 0% profit. The service is designed to provide customers with greater financial flexibility and accessibility, while maintaining a seamless and transparent purchasing experience across stc's digital channels, who will also be able to purchase devices through installments using the stc website, or through the mystic mobile application.

The introduction of Taly's payment solutions aligns with stc's ongoing efforts to expand its portfolio of value-added digital solutions and enhance affordability for customers. Offering alternative payment methods will enable stc customers to purchase their favorite devices conveniently and with ease.

In a statement, stc highlighted that the partnership with Taly reflects the Company's strategic focus on delivering integrated digital solutions that go beyond traditional connectivity. stc emphasized that providing flexible financial options forms a key part of its approach to improving customer journeys and enabling access to advanced products and services through innovative digital platforms.

Additionally, stc reaffirmed its commitment to collaborating with local and regional partners that contribute to enriching the digital ecosystem in Kuwait. Working with fintech and payment solution providers such as Taly enables stc to introduce services that enhance convenience, drive adoption of digital solutions, and support the broader objective of enabling digital transformation in Kuwait.

The Company also expressed that it will continue to explore partnerships and initiatives that focus on delivering practical and innovative solutions tailored to the needs of its diverse customer base, while maintaining its position as a trusted digital pioneer in the market.

About stc

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

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

Tourism recovery supports diversification

Gulf countries rank 9th in GDP globally with \$2.3 tn

MUSCAT, Feb 1, (KUNA): Gulf countries ranked ninth globally in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at current prices in 2024, reported GCC-Stat on Sunday, with a total output of approximately USD 2.3 trillion, confirming its position as an influential economic power at the international level.

The publication "GCC Countries' Statistics at a Glance 2024", issued by GCC-Stat, highlighted a wide range of indicators reflecting the resilience of Gulf economies and their progress in international rankings, alongside notable improvements across population, social, energy and tourism sectors.

The data also showed continued growth in GDP per capita compared to the global average during the period 2016-2024.

The GCC recorded advanced global rankings in external trade indicators, placing among the world's largest exporting and importing economies in 2024.

It achieved a significant merchandise trade surplus of USD 109.7 billion, reflecting the strength of the export base and the resilience of Gulf supply chains.

Government public finance indicators showed total revenues reaching around USD 659.3 billion, against government expenditure of USD 670.2 billion in 2024, resulting in a limited budget deficit.

This reflects the ability of GCC countries to manage their fiscal policies efficiently amid global economic fluctuations.

The total population of GCC countries reached approximately 61.5 million in 2024, registering an annual growth rate of 3.3 percent during the period 2020-2024, with males accounting for 62.7 percent of the total population.

DUBAI, Feb 1, (KUNA): The UAE-Kuwait Economic Forum will take place on Monday (February 2) as part of the week marking fraternal relations between the UAE and the State of Kuwait, which lasts until February 4.

Coming under the direction of both sisterly countries' wise leaderships, the forum mainly aims at enhancing economic, trade and investment bonds and highlighting deep historical relations, as reported by the UAE's official news agency (WAM).

The gathering is deemed an ideal platform to explore investment opportunities, develop trade exchange in vital sectors, share views on economic environment evolutions and open new horizons of joint cooperation, it said.

It is also intended to promote business bonds and highlight both nations'

success stories and tackled the future of UAE-Kuwait relations in a way that reflects firm historical economic ties between the UAE and Kuwait.

The agency quoted UAE Minister of Foreign Trade Thani Al Zeyoudi as saying that the deep-rooted fraternal relations between the UAE and Kuwait form a solid foundation for developing deeper and more sustainable trade and investment cooperation.

He added that this contributes to building quality partnerships between the business communities in the two countries, opening up broader horizons for investors, and enhancing the integration of supply chains in such sectors as trade, industry, the new economy, renewable energy, and logistics.

Regarding cooperation with China, Alshehry said SDAIA is working to establish technical partnerships with leading Chinese companies, including Huawei in the fields of data centers, cloud computing and AI capacity building, as well as Alibaba Cloud in cloud computing, big data analytics and AI platforms.

In addition to exchanging expertise in data governance and AI ethics," he said that such cooperation

contributes to enhancing the national digital infrastructure, localizing advanced technologies, and facilitating knowledge transfer.

On the Digital Silk Road vision proposed by China, Alshehry said SDAIA views it as an international framework that supports greater connectivity between the two friendly countries, and as an opportunity to deepen cooperation with partners in China and Asia in data centers, cloud computing and AI applications.

The framework, he noted, could also help link Saudi Arabia's digital infrastructure with regional and international digital systems and strengthen the kingdom's position as a regional hub for data and artificial intelligence.

Saudi Arabia considers China key partner in AI, data computing sectors, says official

RIYADH, Feb 1, (Xinhua): China is an important partner for Saudi Arabia in advancing artificial intelligence (AI) and data computing technologies, given its advanced expertise and globally leading technological ecosystem, Majid Alshehry, spokesman of the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA), has said.

In a recent interview with Xinhua, Alshehry noted that SDAIA is working to build technical partnerships with major Chinese companies and institutions.

Established in 2019, SDAIA has enabled Saudi Arabia to develop advanced digital infrastructure, build qualified national talent, and launch government digital solutions that have become global

benchmarks, according to Alshehry.

He noted that one of SDAIA's key initiatives is the national "Istishraf" platform, which has supported decision-makers through advanced data analytics and generated economic savings exceeding 13.6 billion U.S. dollars over recent years.

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Syrian economy sees revival amid factory reopenings

DAMASCUS, Feb 1, (Xinhua): Syria has restarted hundreds of factories and brought thousands of workshops back into operation, said Syrian economy and industry authorities chief Mohammad Nidal al-Shaar on Friday.

Speaking in a special interview aired on Syria's Al-Ikhbariya TV, al-Shaar said the authority is working to accelerate economic recovery through a "guided free-market" model.

It is pursuing partnerships with foreign companies and planning to construct a new oil refinery in the central province of Homs, he said, adding that some oil wells could be brought back into operation within six to nine months.

Al-Shaar also warned that the economic recovery is "cumulative and does not appear immediately," noting that progress requires time amid limited resources, liquidity constraints and years of disrupted production.

Commenting on recent developments in northeastern Syria, Al-Shaar said the return of the Jazira region would pave the way for a new phase of reconstruction and economic revival. He also highlighted Raqqa province as having significant potential for agricultural and agro-industrial development.

The Syrian interim authority and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces agreed on Friday to end hostilities and begin integrating their military and administrative structures in northern Syria.

Inspired by tradition, comfort, and celebration

Home Centre unveils its Ramadan 2026 collection

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: As homes across Kuwait prepare to welcome the holy month of Ramadan, Home Centre has unveiled its latest Ramadan collection "Your Ramadan Answered," thoughtfully designed to reflect the season's spirit of togetherness, generosity, and meaningful gatherings at home.

Ramadan is a time when homes take on a deeper role. Spaces transform into hosting longer evenings, shared meals, and quiet moments of reflection. Recognizing this shift, Home Centre's Ramadan collection has been curated to support the way families truly live during the season, blending comfort with elegance, tradition with modern design, and beauty with everyday practicality.

Guided by a deep understanding of home life in Kuwait, Home Centre continues to design collections that feel lived-in and authentic. Rather than focusing on seasonal aesthetics alone, the brand approaches Ramadan as an experience shaped by connection, warmth, and the moments that unfold around the home.

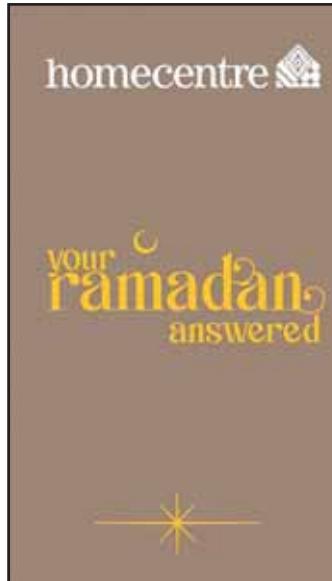
This year's collection is introduced through three distinct design narratives, each offering its own interpretation of Ramadan living.

Dahab draws inspiration from regional heritage and timeless elegance, characterized by warm tones, subtle gold accents, and rich textures. The collection creates a sense of grounded sophistication, ideal for hosting gatherings that feel both welcoming and refined.

Raqiya reflects balance and calm, designed for everyday comfort throughout the month. With its clean lines, soft finishes, and understated elegance, the collection supports spaces that adapt effortlessly to family living, from quiet mornings to intimate evening gatherings.

Fanous captures the festive spirit of Ramadan through light and atmosphere. Inspired by the symbolism of the traditional lantern, the collection introduces decorative touches that add warmth, glow, and a celebratory feel to the home, enhancing the ambience of Ramadan nights.

Commenting on the launch, Roshit Nanda, Executive Vice President and Country Head – Kuwait at Landmark Group, said: "Ramadan is a deeply meaningful time for families, where homes become the heart of connection and shared moments.



At Home Centre, our approach has always been to design for real life. This collection reflects how people in Kuwait live, gather, and celebrate during the month, creating spaces that feel warm, comfortable, and welcoming. Our aim is to support those moments that truly matter, in a way that feels natural and authentic.

The Ramadan collection is now available across Home Centre stores in Kuwait and online, offering customers accessible design solutions that bring both meaning and comfort into their homes throughout the holy month.

As part of Landmark Group, Home Centre continues to strengthen its role as a trusted home destination for families in Kuwait, delivering value-driven collections that evolve with the way people live, celebrate, and connect.

About Home Centre:

Offering outstanding value, quality products, and exceptional customer experience, Home Centre is the largest omnichannel retailer for home furnishings in the Middle East, North Africa & the Indian sub-continent. Established in 1995 with its first store in the UAE, today Home Centre has a wide network of over 160 stores across GCC, North Africa and India. Easy to navigate and serving as a one-stop solution for all home furnishing, the Home Centre e-commerce platform provides customers an extensive range of over 14,000 products at the tip of the fingers. Complying with international standards, Home Centre

houses products sourced from over 50 countries worldwide. Home Centre's in-house team of designers and buyers draw inspiration from latest global trends and bring stylish and innovative furniture, customised to suit local preferences. www.homecentre.com | [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/homecentre_kuwait/) | [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/homecentrekuwait) | [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/homecentrekuwait)

About Landmark Group:

Founded in 1973 in Bahrain, Landmark Group has grown to become one of the largest and most successful omnichannel retail and

hospitality conglomerates, with presence across 17 countries in the Middle East, Africa, India and Southeast Asia. Based in the UAE since 1990, the Group owns and operates 22 established homegrown brands across an extensive network of more than 2,200 outlets, encompassing a gross leasable area of 33 million square feet.

Landmark Group's success is driven by its diverse portfolio of established brands, across multiple retail categories, offering a comprehensive range of products across

fashion, groceries and electronics. These include Centreport, Max Fashion, Home Centre, Babyshop, Splash, Shoemart, Lifestyle, Viva, Emax, HomeBox, Styli, Shoeexpress, Spar and Easybuy. Beyond retail, Landmark Group has diversified into the leisure, fitness and hospitality sectors with brands like Fitness First, Citymax, Fun City, Fun Ville, Zafran and Carluccio's. The Group boasts unparalleled logistics capabilities, owning the MENA region's largest privately-owned distribution hub Omega Logistics and Logistiq,

which offers state-of-the-art third-party logistics services.

Landmark Group places a strong emphasis on delivering exceptional value and achieving customer satisfaction throughout its comprehensive product range. The company has a dedicated workforce of more than 53,000 employees and continues to be certified as a Great Place to Work (GPTW) since 2017.

For more information, visit our website or follow us on our social media pages on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram.

ABK launches limited-edition Kuwait flag-themed ABK Visa Platinum Advantage 1.2.3 prepaid card to celebrate National & Liberation Days

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) has announced the launch of its limited-edition flagship ABK Visa Platinum Advantage 1.2.3 prepaid card in a special design inspired by the colours of the Kuwaiti flag. Timed to coincide with Kuwait's National and Liberation Day celebrations, the card will be available for free from the beginning of February for a limited period, reinforcing ABK's commitment to innovation while celebrating national pride.

The limited-edition prepaid card is the first and only product of its kind in Kuwait to combine two major customer benefits: unlimited cashback and participation in a major enterprise loyalty program. Cardholders enjoy unlimited 1% cashback on all purchases, both locally and internationally, with no

minimum spend and no monthly cap, while simultaneously earning Advantage Loyalty Program tokens on every transaction. Customers earn two Advantage Tokens for every KD 1 spent locally and three Advantage Tokens for every KD 1 spent internationally, creating a dual-reward structure that maximizes value on everyday spending.

In addition to the unlimited cashback offering, cardholders can benefit from exceptional cashback opportunities of up to 1%, credited directly to their prepaid card wallets. This compelling rewards proposition is designed to empower customers to make the most of their daily spending while enjoying greater control, security, and flexibility through a prepaid solution.

Commenting on the launch, Johair Marafi, General Manager of



Johair Marafi, General Manager of Retail Banking at ABK

Retail Banking at ABK, said "At ABK, we continuously strive to deliver innovative products that

combine real value with meaningful experiences for our customers. The limited-edition ABK Visa Platinum Advantage 1.2.3 prepaid card reflects our commitment to rewarding everyday spending while celebrating Kuwait's National and Liberation Days in a way that resonates with our customers."

She added, "This card is the first prepaid offering in Kuwait to bring together unlimited cashback and a major enterprise loyalty program under one solution. By doing so, we are providing customers with a powerful, flexible, and inclusive alternative that rewards them every time they spend, whether locally or internationally."

The card's distinctive design features the iconic green, white, red, and black colours of the Kuwaiti flag, serving as a visual tribute to the coun-

try during one of its most significant celebrations. This national-themed re-launch further strengthens ABK's market positioning by combining innovation with emotional connection and national pride.

Mohamed Reyad, Visa's Country Manager for Kuwait, commented, "Visa is delighted to support ABK in introducing this Visa prepaid product that not only enhances everyday spending but also helps bring unbanked and underbanked consumers into the digital economy. As Kuwait celebrates its National and Liberation Days, this card offers a secure, inclusive way for everyone to participate in the festivities while benefiting from modern, rewarding payment experiences."

For more information, customers may visit ABK's official website or contact the bank directly.



ABK Visa Platinum Advantage 1.2.3 Prepaid Card

'Oil squeeze will force Cuba talks'

Trump targets Cuba as oil supplies tighten

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE, Feb 1, (AP): President Donald Trump said the United States was beginning to talk with Cuban leaders as his administration puts greater pressure on the communist-run island and cuts off key oil supplies.

He made the comment to reporters on Saturday night as he was flying to Florida. It comes in the wake of his moves in recent weeks to cut off supplies of oil from Venezuela and Mexico, which he suggested Saturday would force Cuba to the negotiating table.

His goals with Cuba remain unclear, but Trump has turned more of his attention toward the island after his administration in early January captured Venezuela's then-President Nicolás Maduro and has been more aggressive in confronting nations that are adversaries of the U.S.

Trump has predicted that the Cuban government is ready to fall.

The Republican president did not offer any details on Saturday about what level of outreach his

administration has had with Cuba recently or when, but simply said, "We're starting to talk to Cuba."

His recent moves to cut off its oil supplies have squeezed the island.

This past week, Trump signed an executive order to impose a tariff on any goods from countries that sell or provide oil to Cuba. The move put pressure on Mexico, which Cuba became dependent on for oil after Trump halted oil shipments from Venezuela in the wake of Maduro's ouster.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum warned that it could cause a humanitarian crisis. She said on Friday that she would seek alternatives to continue helping Cuba.

"It doesn't have to be a humanitarian crisis. I think they probably would come to us and want to make a deal," Trump said Saturday. "So Cuba would be free again."

He predicted they would make some sort of deal with Cuba and said, "I think, you know, we'll be kind."

Manufacturing spend ramps up across seven sectors

India budget prioritizes investment, fiscal discipline

NEW DELHI, Feb 1, (AP): Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government presented its annual budget to Parliament on Sunday, focusing on sustaining the country's economic growth despite volatile financial markets and trade uncertainty.

In a speech introducing the budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the government plans to boost investments in infrastructure and domestic manufacturing while sticking to fiscal prudence.

The budget for the 2026-27 financial year, which starts April 1, comes as major economies grapple with high interest rates, geopolitical tensions and renewed protectionism that has weighed on global trade and capital flows.

India has so far withstood high tariffs imposed by the U.S., largely by frontloading some exports and diversifying shipments to new destinations.

The finance ministry's economic survey, which was released on Thursday ahead of the budget, forecast India's economy to grow between 6.8% and 7.2% in the next fiscal year buoyed by increasing domestic consumption.

Despite plans for higher spending in some areas, the government reiterated its commitment to fiscal consolidation, targeting a deficit of 4.3% of the GDP next year, down slightly from the 4.4% of GDP deficit the government is on track to achieve in the fiscal year ending in March.

Here are some key takeaways from the bud-

get:

Sitharaman offered no populist giveaways, saying New Delhi will focus on building resilience at home while positioning itself more firmly in the global supply chain.

Last year's budget wooed the salaried middle class with steep tax cuts after Modi secured a landslide victory in the national polls.

"India will continue to take confident steps towards Viksit Bharat (Developed India), balancing ambition with inclusion," Sitharaman said.

The focus will be on structural reforms, mainly in the manufacturing sector, while also stepping up investments in niche industries such as biopharma and artificial intelligence, she added.

The budget call for the government's capital expenditure for the next fiscal year to reach 12.2 trillion rupees (\$133 billion), mainly on infrastructure, up from 11.2 trillion rupees last year.

This comes at a time when many advanced economies are cutting back public investments due to high debt and tightened monetary policy. India will use state spending to prop up growth.

Sitharaman said the government will scale up manufacturing in seven strategic sectors including biopharma, semiconductors, electronics components and rare earth magnets. To reduce import dependency, three chemical production parks will be set up.

Recognizing global concerns over slowing

job creation, especially in manufacturing, the budget announced additional credit support and a growth fund for micro, small and medium enterprises.

Sitharaman outlined steps to deepen India's financial markets, including measures to strengthen the corporate bond market and ease certain rules for foreign investors.

With global capital increasingly selective amid higher interest rates in the West, emerging markets are competing for stable and long-term investment.

"I propose a comprehensive review of the Foreign Exchange Management (Non-debt Instruments) Rules to create a more contemporary, user-friendly framework for foreign investments, consistent with India's evolving economic priorities," Sitharaman said.

Sitharaman said India plans to promote environmentally sustainable travel with seven high-speed rail corridors between key cities such as Mumbai-Pune, Hyderabad-Bengaluru, Pune-Hyderabad, and Chennai-Bengaluru.

For cargo movement, an unspecified number of new dedicated freight corridors will be set up and 20 new waterways operationalized over the next five years, she said.

Dedicated freight corridors will also be set up for rare earths to promote mining, processing, research and manufacturing.

In addition, she said that the government will develop ecologically sustainable mountain and coastal trails to promote ecological tourism.

Breathnach is marvelous and a talent to watch

Statham sticks close to formula as a lethal former spy in 'Shelter'

NEW YORK, Feb 1, (AP): Jason Statham lives in a Scottish lighthouse when we meet him in "Shelter" and that's pretty good analogy for Statham's usual movie role these days: Tall, cold, alone, tough, quiet and only intermittently illuminating.

Statham may appear to be just a grim-faced lighthouse keeper, but he's really a hero laying low, like he was when he was cosplaying a construction laborer in "Working Man" and a honey collector in "The Beekeeper." Statham is Hollywood's go-to guy for sidelined-waiting-to-pounce-again action stars. Gruff, with a heart of gold and a strong moral compass, he's our lighthouse: Protecting us from danger and guiding us to safety while being very, very distant and very bearded-forward.

This time, you'll notice that the lighthouse isn't actually working, so Statham is just a dude off the grid. He has a lovely dog, so we know he's

cool. He draws and plays chess, so we know he's smart and arty, too. But there's no internet, no Netflix. Just a lot of staring at the horizon in a big coat.

When a young woman who has been delivering his lighthouse with supplies - maybe more sodas than Cheerios - suddenly needs his help, he's thrust back into the modern world. And it gets worse: A whole lot of folk want him dead. The hunt is on.

Turns out, Statham's character is a lethal former MI6 operative and he's part of a covert, extra-judicial conspiracy that goes straight up to the British prime minister. Has he been hiding out for decade on a Scottish rock because he did something bad? Or good? (Remember, he has a sweet dog.)

Bohdie Rae Breathnach, looking not unlike a young Saoirse Ronan, plays the young girl and she's marvelous, a talent to watch. Bill Nighy plays a venal spycraft master who

also is surprisingly good at computer coding. For his part, Statham is classic Statham, never getting out of first gear. His dog emotes more.

Statham has always been an artist who uses his fists to express himself and "Shelter" is all about letting that inner Picasso out. Some of the deaths he inflicts here are done by boat oar, glass stem, industrial hook, boulder, fire, fork, factory chain and nail gun.

Ward Parry's screenplay is really just a jumble of other action movie tropes, with plenty of military-speak like "kill on sight" and "eliminate" and he leans into the tired "True Grit" to "The Last of Us" theme of lone wolf and cub. "Stay down and hold on," is some of our hero's best advice to his new ward.

The swiftness with which the girl and Statham bond is quite sudden. "Just promise me you're not going to die," she wails in a line that only



This image released by Black Bear shows Jason Statham, center, in a scene from 'Shelter.' (AP)

could exist in the movies. One says to the other: "I have to save you." The other replies: "You saved me already."

Will anyone please save us from this drivel?

Director Ric Roman Waugh has a

nice, gritty visual style and the fists and bullets land hard here, less stylish balletic and more thump thump. There's a car chase through the countryside that's all straining steel and revving engines and a sequence in a London nightclub - every action movie apparently needs one - that shows off close-quarter murder beautifully choreographed as clueless dancers sway.

"Shelter" is everything you expect a Jason Statham movie to be, no more and no less. Now we just wait until the next one, when the gruff but amiable dog surfing instructor next door turns out to have a secret past, an English accent and an ability to kill people with a nail gun.

"Shelter," a Black Bear Pictures released in theaters Jan. 30, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for violence and some language. Running time: 107 minutes. Two stars out of four.

25 new inductees

'Clueless,' 'Karate Kid' join Nat'l Film Registry

LOS ANGELES, Feb 1, (AP): As if they'd leave "Clueless" off the list.

Cher Horowitz fans, rejoice: Amy Heckerling's 1995 teen comedy is one of 25 classic movies chosen this year by the Library of Congress for its National Film Registry.

And if "Clueless" wasn't your jam - whatever! - maybe this will send you deep into your dreams: Christopher Nolan's mind-bending "Inception" is in the mix. Other films chosen for preservation include "The Karate Kid," "Glory," "Philadelphia," "Before Sunrise," "The Incredibles" and "Frida." There are four documentaries, including "Brooklyn Bridge" by Ken Burns. From old Hollywood, there's the 1954 musical "White Christmas," and the 1956 "High Society," Grace Kelly's last movie before marrying into royalty.

Since 1988, the Library of Congress has selected 25 movies each year for preservation due to their "cultural, historic or aesthetic importance." The films must be at least 10 years old.

The oldest of the 2025 picks dates from 1896, filmmaker William Selig's "The Tramp and the Dog." The newest of the group is from 2014: Wes Anderson's "The Grand Budapest Hotel," which, the registry noted, involved "meticulous historical research at the Library of Congress to create visually striking scenery."

Turner Classic Movies will host a TV special March 19 to screen a selection of the films.

"The Tramp and the Dog" (1896): Once deemed lost, but discovered in 2021 at the National Library of Norway, Selig's silent film tells the story of a tramp who tries to steal a pie from a backyard windowsill - and is foiled by a dog. The registry notes it's an early example of "pants humor" - "where a character loses (or almost loses) its pants during an alteration."

"The Maid of McMillan" (1916): This 15-minute silent film, a "whimsical silent romance" shot by students at a drama club at Washington University in St. Louis, tells the story of the track team captain, Jack, who's in love with Myrtle, "a pretty coed," according to the university's library. It is known, the registry says, as the first student film on record.

"Ten Nights in a Barroom" (1926): A silent film featuring an all-Black cast, it's based on a stage melodrama adapted from "Ten Nights in a Barroom and What I Saw There," an 1854 "temperance novel" written to discourage readers from drinking alcohol.

Documentary

"High Society" (1956): In what the registry calls "the last great musical of the Golden Age of Hollywood," Bing Crosby appeared with Frank Sinatra and Grace Kelly, in her last movie before retiring and marrying Prince Rainier of Monaco. Louis Armstrong appeared with his band. Kelly wore her Cartier engagement ring during filming, the registry notes.

"Brooklyn Bridge" (1981): Ken Burns' first documentary broadcast on PBS, in which the filmmaker recounted the building of the iconic landmark. "More than just a filmmaker, Burns has become a trusted public historian," the registry says.

"The Big Chill" (1983): Lawrence Kasdan's era-defining story of a group of friends reuniting after a suicide features Glenn Close, William Hurt, JoBeth Williams, Kevin Kline, Jeff Goldblum and Meg Tilly in an ensemble that "portrays American stereotypes of the time - the yuppie, the drug dealer, the TV star - and deftly humanizes them."

"The Karate Kid" (1984): The first film in the franchise, starring Ralph Macchio and Pat Morita, is "as American as they come," the registry says - a "hero's journey, a sports movie and a teen movie - a feel-good movie, but not without grit."

"Glory" (1989): Denzel Washington won an Oscar as Private Trip in this story of the 54th Regiment, a unit of Black soldiers who fought in the Civil War. The cast also included Morgan Freeman, Matthew Broderick, Cary Elwes and Andre Braugher.

"Philadelphia" (1993): Tom Hanks starred - and won an Oscar - in one of the first big studio movies to confront the HIV/AIDS crisis. The film is also known for Bruce Springsteen's Oscar-winning song, "The Streets of Philadelphia."

"Before Sunrise" (1995): The first film of Richard Linklater's deeply romantic "Before" trilogy, starring Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy. The registry notes Linklater's "innovative use of time as a defining and recurring cinematic tool."

"Clueless" (1995): Heckerling's teen comedy, starring Alicia Silverstone, was a loose adaptation of Jane Austen's "Emma" and forever enshrined the phrase "As if!" into popular culture. The registry hails "its peak-1990s colorful, high-energy, sound-track-focused on-screen dynamism."

"The Wrecking Crew" (2008): Danny Tedesco's documentary - not to be confused with the 2026 buddy cop movie of the same name - looks at a group of Los Angeles studio musicians who played on hits of the '60s and '70s like "California Dreamin'" and "The Beat Goes On."

"Inception" (2010): In a movie that asks whether it's possible to influence a person's thoughts by manipulating their dreams, Nolan "once again challenges audiences with multiple interconnected narrative layers while delivering thrilling action sequences and stunning visual effects."

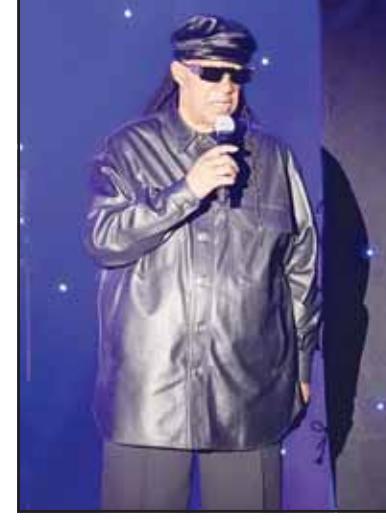
Music



Jennifer Hudson performs during the Pre-Grammy Gala on Saturday, Jan. 31, 2026, at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Beverly Hills, Calif. (AP)



Pusha T, (from left), John Legend, and Malice on stage during the Pre-Grammy Gala on Saturday, Jan. 31, 2026, at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Beverly Hills, Calif. (AP)



Stevie Wonder speaks during the Pre-Grammy Gala. (AP)



Laufey performs during the Pre-Grammy Gala. (AP)



Art Garfunkel speaks during the Pre-Grammy Gala. (AP)

Chaka Khan, Cher, Whitney Houston, and Fela Kuti celebrated

Grammys honor music icons with Lifetime Awards



Chaka Khan accepts the lifetime achievement award during the Recording Academy's Special Merit Awards on Saturday, Jan. 31, 2026, at the Wilshire Ebell Theatre in Los Angeles. (AP)

important for world peace and the struggle."

The audience gave a collective moan of disappointment when academy President Harvey Mason Jr. said Cher wasn't there. She spoke in a very short video.

"The only thing I ever wanted to be was a singer. When I was 4 years old I used to run around the house naked, sing-

ing into a hair brush," she said. "Things haven't changed all that much."

Santana also spoke on video, after his son, Salvador, accepted his trophy.

"The world is so infected with fear that we need the music and message of Santana to bring hope, courage and joy to heal the world," Carlos Santana said.

Elton John's longtime lyricist Bernie Taupin paid tribute to Simon, calling him "the greatest American songwriter alive."

Taupin was there as one of the recipients of the Grammys Trustees Award, which honors career contributions outside of performing.

Despite co-writing the vast majority of John's hits, Taupin has somehow never won a competitive Grammy, though he's nominated for one Sunday.

"I've been waiting 57 years for one of these," he said, looking at his honorary trophy.

Taupin read a list of the songwriting principles he's always followed. They included "avoid clichés," "never write songs in cubicles" and "don't say you're going to die if she leaves you - because you're not."

Eddie Palmieri, a pianist, composer and bandleader who was a great innovator in Latin jazz and rumba, also got a Trustees Award.

Palmieri, who died last year at 88, became the first Latino to win a Grammy Award, in 1975.

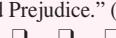
Another trustee honoree was Sylvia Rhone, the first Black woman to head a major record label.

John Chowning, whose work as a Stanford professor in the 1960s was essential to the synthesizer sounds that dominated the 1980s, won the Technical Grammy Award.

Jennifer Jimenez, a band director from South Miami Senior High School, won the Grammys Music Educator Award, and "Ice Cream Man" by Raye got the Harry Belafonte Song for Social Change Award.

naghy's "Wild Dark Shore."

Narrators for the best book finalists include Oscar-nominated actors Glenn Close, Marianne Jean-Baptiste and Jessie Buckley on "Pride and Prejudice." (AP)



LOS ANGELES: Bruce Springsteen is dedicating his new song to the people of Minneapolis, criticizing President Donald Trump's ongoing immigration enforcement operations in the city.

The lyrics of "Streets of Minneapolis," released Wednesday, describe how "a city afame fought fire and ice 'neath an occupier's boots," which Springsteen calls "King Trump's private army."

Springsteen in a statement said he wrote and recorded the song over the weekend and released it in response to a second deadly shooting by federal immigration agents in Minneapolis.

"It's dedicated to the people of Minneapolis, our innocent immigrant neighbors and in memory of Alex Petti and Renee Good," he wrote, naming the two victims. (AP)

Variety

THE HAGUE: The Netherlands Authority for Consumers and Markets (ACM) announced on Friday that it has launched an investigation into online gaming platform Roblox over potential risks faced by minors in the European Union (EU).

In a statement, ACM said it will assess whether the platform takes sufficient measures to protect children and young users on its service.

"ACM sees sufficient reason to launch an official investigation into Roblox for possible violation of the rules," the statement said.

The regulator will examine whether Roblox is doing enough to protect users. Under the European Union Digital Services Act (DSA), companies must take measures to protect the privacy and safety of minors. (Xinhua)



NEW YORK: Cher, Tina Knowles and the late Rob Reiner

are among the finalists for the 31st annual Audie Awards, which honor the audio editions of fiction and nonfiction books.

Cher's narration of "Cher: Part One" brought her a nomination for best biography/autobiography, the Audio Publishers Association announced last Thursday.

The other finalists are Knowles for "Matriarch," which she narrated along with daughters Beyoncé and Solange among others; the late Virginia Giuffre's memoir about her harrowing years with Jeffrey Epstein, "Nobody's Girl," narrated by Thérèse Plummer and Gabra Zackman; a recording of the late Maya Angelou's "The Heart of a Woman," narrated by Uzo Aduba; and Scott Payne's "Code Name: Pah Horse," narrated by Payne and collaborator Michelle Shephard.

Suzanne Collins' latest "Hunger Games" novel, "Sunrise on the Reaping," is a nominee for audiobook of the year, along with a new audio edition of Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice"; crime novelist S.A. Cosby's "King of Ashes"; Garrett M. Graff's "The Devil Reached Toward the Sky"; Devney Perry's "Shield of Sparrows"; and Charlotte McCo-

nagh's "Wild Dark Shore."

Narrators for the best book finalists include Oscar-nominated actors Glenn Close, Marianne Jean-Baptiste and Jessie Buckley on "Pride and Prejudice." (AP)



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'If a machine is expected to be infallible, it cannot also be intelligent'

AI's errors may be inevitable ... what that means for health care

By Carlos Gershenson

Binghamton University, State University of New York

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

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In the past decade, AI's success has led to uncurbed enthusiasm and bold claims - even though users frequently experience errors that AI makes. An AI-powered digital assistant can misunderstand someone's speech in embarrassing ways, a chatbot could hallucinate facts, or, as I experienced, an AI-based navigation tool might even guide drivers through a corn field - all without registering the errors.

People tolerate these mistakes because the technology makes certain tasks more efficient. Increasingly, however, proponents are advocating the use of AI - sometimes with limited human supervision - in fields where mistakes have high cost, such as health care. For example, a bill introduced in the US House of Representatives in early 2025 would allow AI systems to prescribe medications autonomously. Health researchers as well as lawmakers since then have debated whether such prescribing would be feasible or advisable.

How exactly such prescribing would work if this or similar legislation passes remains to be seen. But it raises the stakes for how many errors AI developers can allow their tools to make and what the consequences would be if those tools led to negative outcomes



Chat GPT app icon is seen on a smartphone screen, Aug 4, 2025, in Chicago. (AP)

- even patient deaths.

As a researcher studying complex systems, I investigate how different components of a system interact to produce unpredictable outcomes. Part of my work focuses on exploring the limits of science - and, more specifically, of AI.

Over the past 25 years I have worked on projects including traffic light coordination, improving bureaucracies and tax evasion detection. Even when these systems can be highly effective, they are never perfect.

For AI in particular, errors might be an inescapable consequence of how the systems work. My lab's research suggests that particular properties of the data used to train AI models play a role. This

is unlikely to change, regardless of how much time, effort and funding researchers direct at improving AI models.

As Alan Turing, considered the father of computer science, once said: "If a machine is expected to be infallible, it cannot also be intelligent." This is because learning is an essential part of intelligence, and people usually learn from mistakes. I see this tug-of-war between intelligence and infallibility at play in my research.

In a study published in July 2025, my colleagues and I showed that perfectly organizing certain datasets into clear categories may be impossible. In other words, there may be a minimum amount of errors that a given dataset produces, simply because of the fact

that elements of many categories overlap. For some datasets - the core underpinning of many AI systems - AI will not perform better than chance.

For example, a model trained on a dataset of millions of dogs that logs only their age, weight and height will probably distinguish Chihuahuas from Great Danes with perfect accuracy. But it may make mistakes in telling apart an Alaskan malamute and a Doberman pinscher, since different individuals of different species might fall within the same age, weight and height ranges.

This categorizing is called classifiability, and my students and I started studying it in 2021. Using data from more than half a million students who attended the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México between 2008 and 2020, we wanted to solve a seemingly simple problem. Could we use an AI algorithm to predict which students would finish their university degrees on time - that is, within three, four or five years of starting their studies, depending on the major?

We tested several popular algorithms that are used for classification in AI and also developed our own. No algorithm was perfect; the best ones - even one we developed specifically for this task - achieved an accuracy rate of about 80%, meaning that at least 1 in 5 students were misclassified.

We realized that many students were identical in terms of grades, age, gender, socioeconomic status and other features - yet some would finish on time, and some would not. Under these circumstances, no algorithm would be able to make perfect predictions.

You might think that more data would improve predictability, but this usually comes with diminishing returns. This means that, for example, for each increase in accuracy of 1%, you might need 100 times the data. Thus, we would never have enough students to significantly improve our model's performance.

Additionally, many unpredictable turns in lives of students and their families - unemployment, death, pregnancy - might occur after their first year at university, likely affecting whether they finish on time. So even with an infinite number of students, our predictions would still give errors.

To put it more generally, what limits prediction is complexity. The word complexity comes from the Latin plexus, which means intertwined. The components that make up a complex system are intertwined, and it's the interactions between them that determine what happens to them and how they behave.

Thus, studying elements of the system in isolation would probably yield misleading insights about them - as well as about the system as a whole.

Take, for example, a car traveling in a city. Knowing the speed at which it drives, it's theoretically possible to predict where it will end up at a particular time. But in real traffic, its speed will depend on interactions with other vehicles on the road. Since the details of these interactions emerge in the moment and cannot be known in advance, precisely predicting what happens to the car is possible only a few minutes into the future.

These same principles apply to prescribing medications. Different conditions and diseases can have the same symptoms, and people with the same condition or disease may exhibit different symptoms. For example, fever can be caused by a respiratory illness or a digestive one. And a cold might cause cough, but not always.

This means that health care datasets have significant overlaps that would prevent AI from being error-free.

Certainly, humans also make errors. But when AI misdiagnoses a patient, as it surely will, the situation falls into a legal limbo. It's not clear who or what would be responsible if a patient were hurt. Pharmaceutical companies? Software developers? Insurance agencies? Pharmacies?

In many contexts, neither humans nor machines are the best option for a given task. "Centaurs," or "hybrid intelligence" - that is, a combination of humans and machines - tend to be better than each on their own. A doctor could certainly use AI to decide potential drugs to use for different patients, depending on their medical history, physiological details and genetic makeup. Researchers are already exploring this approach in precision medicine.

But common sense and the precautionary principle suggest that it is too early for AI to prescribe drugs without human oversight. And the fact that mistakes may be baked into the technology could mean that where human health is at stake, human supervision will always be necessary. (AP)

Experts open 'window to brain' with new cancer tech

Scientists design flexible patch for precision drug delivery to organs

BEIJING, Feb 1, (Xinhua): Imagine a microscopic "drug courier" that doesn't flood the whole body but instead knocks gently on the doors of only sick cells, and then slips medicine directly inside them. This vision is now one step closer to reality, thanks to a breakthrough bioelectronic patch that hugs organs like a second skin.

An international team, led by scientists from Beihang University in Beijing, has developed an ultra-flexible bioelectronic patch capable of conforming to irregularly shaped organs, such as ovaries and kidneys, for precise and localized drug or gene delivery.

Dubbed POCKET, the device mimics a "smart electronic garment" that wraps tightly around organs, overcoming a major limitation of traditional systemic drug administration, which tended to be characterized by off-target effects and poor cellular uptake, according to a study published on Tuesday in the journal *Cell*.

Their work was inspired by heart-breaking clinical dilemma, namely the need for women carrying hereditary BRCA1 mutations to have both ovaries and fallopian tubes removed to prevent cancer, thus permanently sacrificing their fertility. "Isn't there any other way?" Patients often ask tearfully when faced with this difficult choice.

Notably, existing gene therapies, like viral vectors, carry risks of integrating

into germ line genomes and contaminating the human gene pool, rendering them prohibited for use in dealing with sensitive reproductive organs.

The research team pivoted to a physical approach, with electric fields employed to open cell membranes, thereby enabling precise depth control to target only somatic cells on the ovarian surface, while avoiding contamination of germ lines.

However, the ovary's rugged, highly irregular surface prevents conventional devices from achieving conformal contact.

In trying to solve this challenge, the researchers drew inspiration from the art of paper cutting. They engineered a customizable patch that achieves over 95 percent surface coverage on complex anatomies.

The four-layered device integrates nanopores, a drug-loaded hydrogel reservoir, silver nanowire electrodes and a flexible substrate, all patterned via femtosecond laser processing.

When a low-voltage current is applied, the nanopores generate localized electric fields that temporarily open microscopic channels in adjacent cell membranes, allowing therapeutics to enter cells directly, the study notes.

This method boosts delivery efficiency by nearly 1,000-fold compared to passive diffusion, while avoiding damage to deeper tissues.

In preclinical trials, the patch success-

fully delivered BRCA1 gene therapy to the surface cells of ovaries in mice without affecting reproductive cells, during cancer risk and restoring fertility.

In kidney transplant models, localized delivery of anti-inflammatory medicine using POCKET protected renal function and eliminated systemic side effects like osteoporosis and immunosuppression, which are seen when oral steroids are used.

This technology offers a new paradigm for treating diseases in sensitive or structurally complex organs, said Chang Lingqian from Beihang University, the paper's co-corresponding author.

The platform could be adapted for treating diabetes, retinal disorders, rheumatoid arthritis and beyond, Chang added.

Meanwhile, scientists in Australia have developed a diagnostic device that can tell how deadly brain tumors respond to treatment from a simple blood test, in what they describe as a "window to the brain."

The new device, called a Phenotype Analyzer Chip, developed in the laboratory of Professor Matt Trau at Australia's University of Queensland (UQ), reads tiny biological particles in a patient's bloodstream to get fast and accurate information on glioblastoma, the most common and deadly brain cancer, said a UQ statement on Saturday.

This method boosts delivery efficiency by nearly 1,000-fold compared to passive diffusion, while avoiding damage to deeper tissues.

In preclinical trials, the patch success-

Will winter linger or spring arrive early?

Punxsutawney Phil prepares to issue his 'Groundhog Day' weather verdict

NEW YORK, Feb 1, (AP): The groundwork has been laid for a sunrise ceremony Monday when international woodchuck celebrity Punxsutawney Phil's annual long-term weather forecast will be announced - six more weeks of winter or an early spring.

Tens of thousands of revelers will be descending on Gobbler's Knob in rural Pennsylvania to witness this year's prognostication, which will be made after groundhog Phil gets brought to the stage from his hatch on a tree stump.

Last year's announcement was six more weeks of winter, by far Phil's more common assessment and not much of a surprise during the first week of February. His top-hatted handlers in the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club insist Phil's "groundhog" of winks, purrs, chatters and nods are being interpreted when they relate the meteorological marmot's musings about the days ahead.

Groundhogs are generally solitary creatures that emerge in midwinter to find a mate. When Phil is deemed to have not seen his shadow, that is said to usher in an early spring. When he does see it, there will be six more weeks of winter.

This is the first Groundhog Day for Phil's new "zoo" at Gobbler's Knob, where he splits time when he's not inside his longstanding home beside the town library.

The national popularity of Groundhog Day was supercharged by the 1993 Bill Murray film of the same name. Mostly it's a few hours of harmless, early morning fun at the site after a series of unfortunate incidents.

"We just like to remind people that there's a lot of serious things in this world and this life, and Groundhog Day is not one of them," said home appraiser Dan McGinley, a member of the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club's Inner Circle for about a decade. "We



Groundhog Club handler A.J. Dereume holds Punxsutawney Phil, the weather prognosticating groundhog, during the 139th celebration of Groundhog Day on Gobbler's Knob in Punxsutawney, Pa., Feb. 2, 2025. (AP)

take not taking ourselves too seriously, seriously. But seriously, this is not a serious thing."

Groundhog Day has also become a marketing juggernaut. Phil was brought out for an online news conference last week at which he and a couple tuxedo-wearing club members fielded questions about the event, its history and the planning that goes into it.

Michael Venos, a 46-year-old database administrator from Roxbury, New Jersey, has been collecting stories of Groundhog Day events and their weather predictions for about a decade. A groundhog who lived behind his boyhood home became a sort of unofficial family pet, and Venos was further inspired by seeing the popular movie.

"Plus the underdog-ness of the holiday. It's not quite at your A-level holiday. So that kind of appeals to me, too," said Venos, who has tallied more than 300 Groundhog Day prognostica-

tors since the 1880s. His own Groundhog Day routine? Venos' family usually makes groundhog cupcakes and he and his daughters hold a backyard prediction ceremony with groundhog sock puppets.

Last year alone there were more than 100 weather predictions, Venos said. Along with the many groundhogs, the winter forecasts were credited to an armadillo, ostriches, and Nigerian dwarf goats. His website lists their memorable names - among them Cluxatawney Henrietta (New York), Lucy the Lobster (Nova Scotia), Scramble the Duck (Connecticut) and Snerd (North Carolina).

Punxsutawney club members say there are two types of people who show up at Phil's spot about 80 miles (128 kilometers) northeast of Pittsburgh - those seeking to validate their beliefs and doubters who want to confirm their own skepticism.

Forgetting things?

Why we misplace things, how to remember better

NEW YORK, Feb 1, (AP): With a scarf dangling from your coat pocket and those gloves left behind at the coffee shop, there are simply more things to lose in winter. That's not counting your misplaced keys at home or those exasperated moments looking for your phone when you say, "I just had it!"

Try not to beat yourself up. Even Mark McDaniel, who has been studying human memory and learning for almost 50 years, left a hat under his chair recently at a restaurant. He doesn't usually wear hats, so he forgot it.

"I should know how to remember to remember, but at the moment, you don't think you're going to forget," said McDaniel, professor emeritus of psychological and brain sciences at Washington University in St. Louis.

Luckily, there are strategies. If you can remember to implement them, here's how to stop losing things.

Daniel L. Schacter, a Harvard University psychology professor and author of "The Seven Sins of Memory," said losing things is something everyone is prone to, to varying degrees. It depends on life circumstances that pull the mind away from the present.

Rather than having a bad memory, it might be a breakdown at the interface of memory and attention," Schacter said. "That's what's responsible, based on research, based on personal experience, for a lot of the memory failures that would result in losing things."

Memory occurs in three phases in the brain: encoding, storage and retrieval. Schacter likened losing your keys to drivers who arrive at their destination safely without remembering how they got there.

In both cases, the memory of the action is not encoded because people were thinking of something else, which makes it harder to retrieve the memory later.

"You have to do a little bit of cognitive work," Schacter said. "At the time of encoding, you have to focus your attention."

It helps to not have to remember where some things are.

Schacter suggested identifying problem items such as your phone, wallet or keys and creating a structure that becomes automatic with practice. He always leaves his reading glasses in a specific spot in the kitchen. When he goes golfing, his phone always goes into the same pocket in his golf bag.

"Maybe not always, but, you know, a very high percentage of the time," he said.

If there is a noticeable increase in losing things compared to the recent past, accompanied by other memory problems that interfere with your normal function, it might be time to see a doctor, Schacter said.

McDaniel said that the brain does a better job at remembering things when it receives several bits of information that can later be connected. Among memory researchers, it's known as elaboration.

One way to stop losing objects you don't habitually use - but often lose, like a hat - is to say out loud where you put it when you put it down. Verbalizing does two things that help with retrieval.

"Saying it out loud creates a better encoding because it makes you pay attention, and the verbalization creates a richer memory," McDaniel said.

The more detailed the elaboration, the more connections in the brain there will be to help you remember.

An extreme version of elaboration is the "memory palace" that memory competitors use during championships. To remember a series of numbers and other challenges, they visualize a familiar, structured environment like a house or route, imagining the numbers in particular places.

For something like your hat, imagine it in the location and connect it to a reason and a consequence: "I put my hat under the chair because I didn't want to get it dirty on the table, but I left it behind last time."

NCDs cases

Philippines sees deaths rise in '24

MANILA, Feb 1, (Xinhua): The Philippines recorded a total of 701,884 deaths in 2024, a 1 percent increase from the 694,821 deaths registered in 2023, according to data released by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The figure corresponds to a crude death rate of 6.2, or about six deaths per 1,000 population, unchanged from the previous year, the PSA said on Friday.

PSA data showed that the number of registered deaths fluctuated from 2015 to 2024, with notable declines in 2017, 2020 and 2022. Over the 10 years, the total number of registered deaths rose by 25.2 percent, from 560,605 in 2015 to 701,884 in 2024.

NCDS: Cambodia recorded a significant increase in the cases of non-communicable diseases in 2025, said a Ministry of Health's annual report on Saturday.

Non-communicable diseases include diabetes, cancer, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and mental health illnesses.

A total of 292,197 new cases of diabetes were diagnosed last year, a year-on-year rise of 26.8 percent, the report said.

Total of 10 clubs representing Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and India participated in event

Expatriate Bangladeshis crowned champions in Kuwait Summer League Cricket Tournament



KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: Bangladesh Friends Sporting Club, a team of expatriate Bangladeshis, won the title of the Kuwait Summer League Cricket Tournament 2025, organized by the Bangladesh Cricket Association in Kuwait. The tournament concluded after a competitive three-month run, with the final held on Friday, January 30, at Al Rai Cricket Ground.

The final was conducted under the chairmanship of Md. Suhrawardy, Acting President of the Bangladesh Cricket Association in Kuwait, and moderated by Ismail Sobhan and Atiurzaman. Tournament Advisor Md. Main Uddin attended as the chief guest. Special guests included Operation Chairman Mir Mosharraf Hossain, President of the Bangladesh Press Club and Advisor to the organization, journalist Moin Uddin Sarkar Sumon, Tournament Advisor Akhter Uzzaman Mohammad Shams,

Shafiqul Islam, Golden Salim Khan, Vice Presidents Kashedul Hossain and Abul Hashem, General Secretary Moazzam Hossain, Organizing Secretary Anwar Kalam, along with many cricket-loving expatriates.

A total of 10 clubs representing

Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and India participated in the tournament. The teams included Gujarat Cricket Club, J.K. Warriors, Alfa Cricket Club, Gulf Caval, Jleeb Probashi Club, Shaha G11 Cricket Club, Bengal Avengers, Comilla Victorians,

Bangladesh Friends Sporting Club, and Jleeb Knight Riders. Foreign players praised the event, noting the excellent organization by the Bangladeshi expatriate community.

After winning the toss, Jleeb Knight Riders elected to bat first

and posted 194 runs for 8 wickets in their allotted 20 overs. In reply, Bangladesh Friends Sporting Club faced early pressure but staged a strong comeback in the latter stages, led by an outstanding performance from Sohag Jasim. He scored a brilliant 80 runs off just

36 balls and was named Man of the Match for his match-winning innings.

Bangladesh Friends Sporting Club chased down the target successfully, scoring 198 runs in 18.1 overs to win the final by three wickets.

The organizers expressed optimism that, with continued support from the expatriate community, even bigger and better tournaments could be organized in the future. Following the match, the guests presented the championship trophy to the winners.

Addressing the gathering, chief guest Md. Main Uddin said the event demonstrated how Bangladeshis abroad continue to uphold the country's image through sports. He praised the initiative for promoting friendship, harmony, and unity, an effort that was also widely appreciated by expatriate players from other participating nations.



Top and above: Photos from the Kuwait Summer League Cricket Tournament.

Hazlewood and David included

Cummins out of Australia WC squad



Australia's Cameron Green bats during the second T20 cricket match between Pakistan and Australia, in Lahore, Pakistan. (AP)

MELBOURNE, Australia, Feb 1, (AP): Star paceman Pat Cummins has been ruled out of Australia's T20 World Cup campaign in Sri Lanka and India, failing to recover from a long-term back injury ahead of the final squad deadline.

Cricket Australia confirmed Saturday that Cummins, who has struggled with the ailment for six months, will be replaced in the 15-man squad by left-arm all-rounder Ben Dwarshuis.

"With Pat needing more time to recover from his back injury, Ben is a ready replacement who offers a left arm pace option as well as dynamic fielding and late order hitting," Australia selector Tony Dodemaide said.

"We believe his ability to swing the ball at good pace along with clever variations will be well suited to the conditions we expect and overall structure of the squad."

Matt Short has also been omitted in favor of Matthew Renshaw, who only made his T20 international debut two days ago against Pakistan.

Josh Hazlewood and Tim David have both been retained in the final squad as they continue their comeback trail from hamstring injuries.

Steve Smith remained absent from the final roster despite a stellar season in Australia's domestic Big Bash League for the Sydney Sixers had led to calls for the veteran to be included in the final squad.

ICC rules permitted squad changes until Jan. 31.

Australia opens the tournament on Feb. 11 against Ireland in Colombo then plays Zimbabwe in Colombo on Feb. 13, followed by matches in Kandy against Sri Lanka on Feb. 16 and Oman on Feb. 20.

The team will travel to India for at least some of their Super Eights games if they qualify.

The Aussies are currently in Pakistan as part of a three-match warmup series where they trial 2-0 with one match to play.

Australian squad: Mitch Marsh (captain), Xavier Bartlett, Cooper Connolly, Tim David, Ben Dwarshuis, Cameron Green, Nathan Ellis, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Matthew Kuhnemann, Glenn Maxwell, Matthew Renshaw, Marcus Stoinis, Adam Zampa

Best of the Rest

Cavs acquire Ellis and Schroder: The Cleveland Cavaliers acquired guards Keon Ellis and Dennis Schroder from Sacramento in a three-team deal that sends forward De'Andre Hunter to the Kings.

A person familiar with the trade said Saturday night that the Chicago Bulls will get forward Dario Saric from Sacramento along with two second-round picks. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the teams hadn't announced the trade. ESPN first reported the deal.

The trade helps Cleveland save salary and money in the luxury tax and gives it more depth with both Ellis and Schroder. The Cavs are currently in fifth place in the Eastern Conference after winning seven of the last nine games.

Ellis is in the final year of a three-year \$5.1 million and gives Cleveland a good defender and 3-point shooter. Ellis' playing time had diminished this season with the Kings but is a 41.6% shooter from 3-point range in his career. He is averaging 5.6 points in 17.6 minutes per game.

The 32-year-old Schroder signed a three-year, \$44.4 million contract this summer. He is averaging 12.8 points and 5.3 assists per game this season. (AP)

Hornets extend win streak as NBA suspends George 25 games for violating anti-drug policy

Rockets edge Mavericks



Houston Rockets center Alperen Sengun (28) shoots as Dallas Mavericks guard Max Christie, center, and center Daniel Gafford defend during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Houston. (AP)

CHARLOTTE, N.C., Feb 1, (AP): Brandon Miller scored 26 points, Collin Sexton made all five 3-point attempts off the bench and finished with 21 points and the Charlotte Hornets held on to beat the San Antonio Spurs 111-106 on Saturday to extend their winning streak to six games.

LaMelo Ball 16 points, eight rebounds and eight assists to help give the Hornets their longest win streak in nearly a decade. Charlotte won seven straight games in March 2016.

Dylan Harper scored 20 points to lead the Spurs. Victor Wembanyama was held in check for most of the game, finishing with 16 points on 6-of-15 shooting and eight rebounds.

Charlotte's 17-point lead in the third quarter disintegrated after Harrison Barnes hit back-to-back 3s and the Spurs turned a Sexton turnover into a De'Aaron Fox layup to cut the lead to two with less than five minutes to play.

But the Spurs could never regain the lead. With 36 seconds left and Charlotte leading by three, officials initially whistled Fox for a foul on a Miller 3-point attempt. But after reviewing the call, it was overturned and resulted in a jump ball, which the 7-foot-4 Wembanyama easily won.

Wembanyama launched a hurried 3-point shot moments later and the Hornets snagged the rebound. Down 3, the Spurs inexplicably allowed 15 seconds to elapse before fouling Miller, who made both free throws with 10.6 seconds left to seal the game.

76ers 124, Pelicans 114

In Philadelphia, Joel Embiid had 40 points and 11 rebounds to help Philadelphia win hours after Paul George was suspended 25 games for violating the NBA's anti-drug policy, beating the 76ers.

The NBA did not disclose the nature of the violation or the substance that was involved, and George released a statement to ESPN saying he took something that was "improper."

Without George, the 76ers couldn't shake the 13-win Pelicans until the final minutes.

Tyrese Maxey scored 18 points and one of his four 3-pointers that gave the Sixers a 117-111 lead and Embiid and VJ Edgecombe followed with consecutive 3s for the 123-113 lead.

Embiid heard "M-V-P! M-V-P!" chants as he stepped to the free-throw line with 11.3 seconds left. He sank his first one to hit the 40-point mark.

Kelly Oubre Jr. scored 19 points and

the 76ers hit 17 3-pointers to end the night on a high note after they learned they would have to make a playoff push largely without George.

Saddiq Bey led the Pelicans with 34 points and Zion Williamson had 11.

Rockets 111, Mavericks 107

In Houston, Amen Thompson had 21 points, nine assists and eight rebounds to lead Houston to a victory over Dallas.

An alley-oop dunk by Thompson put Houston up four with under two minutes left before the Mavericks scored the next four points, with baskets from rookie Cooper Flagg and Naji Marshall, to tie it about a minute later.

Alperen Sengun's layup put Houston on top with 28.6 seconds left before Flagg missed a shot in the lane on the other end. The Rockets grabbed the rebound and a dunk by Tari Eason made it 111-107 with 14.4 seconds remaining.

A 3-point attempt by Flagg bounced off the rim after that to end it.

Flagg led the Mavericks with 34 points and 12 rebounds a game after the 19-year-old set the NBA record for points by a teenager with 49 in a loss to Charlotte on Thursday night. Saturday was the fifth game this season with at least 30 points for the No. 1 pick in last year's draft. Jabari Smith Jr. added 19 points for the Rockets and Sengun had 14 points and 14 rebounds.

Pacers 129, Hawks 124

In Indianapolis, Andrew Nembhard scored 26 points, Pascal Siakam added

25 and Indiana held off Atlanta.

Indiana nursed a single-digit lead for much of the third quarter and led 103-100 entering the fourth. It was tight the rest of the way before Siakam hit a crucial 12-foot jumper with 18.6 seconds remaining to push the Pacers ahead 127-123.

Aaron Nesmith added 23 points, Nembhard had 10 assists and Siakam shot 11 of 15 from the field. The Pacers won despite 23 turnovers.

Atlanta dropped its second straight game despite Jalen Johnson's eighth triple-double of the season. The forward finished with 33 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists. Nickeil Alexander-Walker added 21 points.

The Pacers have won seven of their past 12 games, enjoying a solid stretch of basketball after starting the season with a 6-31 record. Indiana has played all year without star guard Tyrese Haliburton, who tore his right Achilles tendon in Game 7 of the NBA Finals last season.

Indiana jumped to an 80-73 lead by halftime, spurred by a 45-point second quarter. Johnson led the Hawks with 21 points before the break while Nembhard also had 21 for the Pacers.

Timberwolves 131, Grizzlies 114

In Memphis, Anthony Edwards scored 33 points, Julius Randle added 27 points and seven assists, and Minnesota won its fourth straight, beating Memphis.

Minnesota's winning streak was punctuated by a wire-to-wire victory

over the defending champion Oklahoma City Thunder on Thursday night. All four wins have been by double-digits. Naz Reid and Jaden McDaniels had 20 points apiece for the Timberwolves, Reid adding nine rebounds. Rudy Gobert grabbed 16 boards and added a pair of blocks.

Ty Jerome, playing in his first game of the season after recovering from a right calf strain, led Memphis with 20 points and six assists but could not prevent the Grizzlies from losing their sixth straight.

GG Jackson added 19 points and Jaylen Wells had 15.

Bulls 125, Heat 118

In Miami, Ayo Dosunmu scored a season-high 29 points and short-handed Chicago topped Miami.

Dosunmu added nine assists and eight rebounds. Matias Bulezis scored 21 points and Isaac Okoro added 20 for the Bulls, who hit 20 3-pointers.

Pelle Larsson scored 22 and Bam Adebayo had 15 of his 21 in the fourth quarter for Miami, which tied the game four times in the final 3:37 but didn't reclaim the lead in any of those instances. Jaime Jaquez Jr. scored 20 for Miami.

The teams play again in Miami on Sunday. It'll be the first time since Baltimore and Houston in 1972 that two NBA teams play three consecutive games in the same regular season against one another; the Heat won at Chicago in a rescheduled game on Thursday night.

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Demonstrators in Milan protest ICE unit at Winter Olympics

MILAN, Feb 1, (AP): Hundreds of demonstrators gathered Saturday in Milan to protest the deployment of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents during the upcoming Winter Olympics, unbothered by the fact that agents would be stationed in a control room and not operating on the streets.

The protest in Piazza XXV Aprile, a square named for the date of Italy's liberation from Nazi fasci

in 1945, drew people from the left-leaning Democratic Party, the CGIL trade union confederation and the ANPI organizations that protect the memory of Italy's partisan resistance during World War II, along with many other people.

Organizers handed out plastic whistles, which participants blew as music blared from a van. The protest was as much against the news that agents from a division of ICE would

participate in security for the U.S. delegation as against what many of those present said they saw as creeping fascism in the United States.

"No thank you, from Minnesota to the world, at the side of anyone who fights for human rights," read one banner. "Never again means never again for anyone," read another, and "Ice only in Spritz," a reference to a popular aperitif, read yet another.

The ICE agents to be deployed to Milan are not from the same unit as the immigration agents cracking down in Minnesota and other U.S. cities.

News of the deployment of ICE agents has provoked a backlash in Italy. Milan Mayor Giuseppe Sala has said they were not welcome. Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi has been called to Parliament to testify about the deployment this week.

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Kuwait sends 69 athletes to 8th Arab Women's Club Games in Sharjah



Kuwait delegation taking part in the 8th Arab Women's Club Games.

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: The Kuwait national team is taking part in the 8th Arab Women's Club Games, being held in the Emirate of Sharjah from February 2 to 12, with a delegation of 69 female athletes competing across nine different sports.

Fatima Hayat, member of the Kuwait Olympic Committee and head of its Women's Committee, emphasized that all athletes are committed to achieving the best results while representing Kuwait with pride and professionalism, highlighting the growth and progress of women's sports

in the country.

Hayat extended her thanks to Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, President of the Kuwait Olympic Committee, and Bashir Abdullah, Acting Director General of the Public Authority for Sports, for facilitating participation and removing any obstacles to ensure Kuwait's success in the tournament.

This year's participation is notable for the increased number of athletes and the wider range of sports, giving the players more opportu-

nities to showcase their talents and perform honorably on the Arab stage.

Kuwaiti athletes are representing clubs including the Kuwait Shooting Sports Club, Kuwait Marine Sports Club, Al-Fatah Sports Club, Salwa Al-Sabah Sports Club, and the Kuwait Fencing Academy.

They will compete in shooting, archery, beach rowing, basketball, volleyball, table tennis, taekwondo, athletics, and fencing.

Al-Awadhi wins Police Show Jumping Championship

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: Kuwaiti rider Abdullah Al-Awadhi was crowned champion of the International Police Show Jumping Championship, held at the Police Union's racetrack in Sôhan. The competition, featuring riders from Kuwait as well as Arab, Gulf, and European countries, will continue until Saturday evening, showcasing intense contests among male and female riders competing for top honors.

The three-day event, organized by the Police Sports Union, was held under the patronage of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousuf, and attended by Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Major General Abdualwahab Al-Wuhaib, President of the Kuwait Olympic Committee Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and Director of the Police Academy Brigadier Ali Jassim Al-Wuhaib.

Brigadier General Sheikh Mubarak Ali Al-Yousuf Al-Sabah, President of the Police Sports



Al-Wuhaib, Sheikh Al-Nasser, and Brigadier General Sheikh Mubarak Ali stand among the champions.

Union, expressed his sincere gratitude to Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousuf for his continuous support of sports and efforts to advance the country's athletic initiatives.

In the Grand Prix round, with obstacles set at 145 cm, Al-Awadhi secured first place with a flawless jump-off in 43.47 seconds. He was followed by Hamad Al-Hajri, Ali Al-Kharafi, Chad Fellows (UK), Fawaz Al-Subaie, Anaz Al-Anaz, Rakan Al-Hasawi, and Zain Shadi Samir.

Kuwait eyes maximum qualifying spots for 2028 Los Angeles Olympics

Kuwait Shooting Federation honors champs, highlights excellence in recent competitions



Officials pose with the honored shooters.

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: Duaij Al-Otaibi, President of the Kuwaiti and Arab Shooting Federation, praised the outstanding performances of Kuwait's male and female shooters, noting that their recent successes in international competitions reflect the strength and excellence of Kuwaiti shooting on the global, continental, and regional stage.

The Federation held a ceremony to honor the national team's achievements, celebrating seven medals at the Asian Shotgun Championship in Qatar (January 2026), nine medals at the Arab Pistol and Rifle Championship in Oman (December 2025), and four medals at the West Asia Archery Championship in Qatar (November 2025).

Al-Otaibi emphasized that these accomplishments are the result of continuous support from Kuwait's political leadership, dedicating the victories to the leadership, the Kuwaiti people, and all members of the shooting community. He also commended the shooters for their dedication, discipline, and professionalism, which helped raise Kuwait's flag at these prestigious competitions.

Looking ahead, Al-Otaibi stated that the Federation aims to prepare its shooters to secure maximum qualifying spots for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic Games, expressing confidence in their ability to succeed. He also acknowledged the support of Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, officials from the Public Authority for Sports, and Kuwait Olympic Committee President Sheikh Fahad Nasser Al-Sabah.

Speaking at the event, Mohammed Al-Dihani, gold medalist in the individual skeet event and silver medalist in the team competition at the Asian Shotgun Championship, expressed his gratitude for the recognition. He credited his success to his hard work and the guidance of the technical and administrative staff and described the honor as a motivation for all Kuwaiti shooters to achieve further victories in future competitions.

The ceremony was attended by Obaid Al-Asimi, Secretary-General of the Kuwaiti Shooting Federation, several board members, the honored athletes and their families, and numerous media representatives.

Al-Mutawa recognized for outstanding career with Qadsia and national team

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: Businessmen Ahmed Al-Ridaan and Fahad Al-Bakr hosted an official ceremony to honor Bader Al-Mutawa, star player of Qadsia Club and the Kuwait national team, recognizing his remarkable performances with Qadsia's first team and his ongoing contributions to both his club and the national team.

During the ceremony, Al-Ridaan and Al-Bakr praised Al-Mutawa's career for its commitment, discipline, and professional-



Al-Ridaan and Al-Bakr honor Bader Al-Mutawa.

Kuwait's young squash stars dominate Arab Championship

MANAMA, Feb 1: Kuwait's Under-13 national squash team delivered an outstanding performance at the 31st Arab Squash Championship in Bahrain, sweeping the top four positions in the competition. Salman Al-Saleh captured the gold medal without dropping a match, defeating teammate Saud Al-Fawzan in an all-Kuwaiti final, while Saqar Al-Kandari and Khaled Al-Methen shared the bronze medals.

The remarkable results highlight the exceptional level of Kuwait's young players and reinforce confidence that the future of Kuwaiti squash is in safe hands.

In the Under-17 category, Kuwait continued its strong showing, with Abdullah Hani earning the silver medal and Abdulrahman Al-Kandari claiming bronze.

Team events also began on Tuesday, with Kuwait securing victories over Qatar in both age groups. The Under-13 team featured Salman Al-Saleh, Saud Al-Fawzan, Abdullah Al-Ali, and Yazan Al-Ahmad, while the



The Kuwaiti squash delegation. Under-17 squad included Abdullah Hani, Abdulrahman Al-Kandari, Abdullah Maayouf, and Saleh Al-Kandari.

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Sports

Entertaining draws mark opening of first Kuwaiti-Emirati School Football Challenge



KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1, (KUNA): The inaugural Kuwaiti-Emirati "Challenge" School Football Tournament kicked off on Saturday at Sulaibikhat Sports Club, under the patronage of Minister of Education Sayed Jalal Al-Tabtabai.

The opening match saw Kuwait A and UAE B share the spoils in an entertaining 3-3 draw, while the second fixture between Kuwait B and UAE A also ended level at 2-2.

The tournament is played in a six-a-side format, with matches held on reduced-size pitches to suit the smaller number of players. Each game lasts 50 minutes.

The competition brings together high school students, with two teams representing Kuwait and two representing the UAE, and will continue until February 3.



Top and above: Photos from the event.

Habib appointed Salmaia coach, handball league returns Friday

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: In a bid to strengthen Salmaia Club's handball team, the club has appointed national coach Hussein Habib to lead the first team for the remainder of the current season.

Habib is one of Kuwait's most respected coaches, known for his impact on every team he has managed. He has previously coached Al-Arabi and Al-Sulaibikhat, achieving sixth place in the league, and Burgan, where he guided the team to a league runner-up finish and secured its first-ever qualification for the Asian Club Championship. He has also coached Qadsia's handball squad.

Commenting on his new role, Habib thanked the Salmaia Club board and handball staff for their trust and confidence. He described Al-Samawi as one of Kuwait's leading handball clubs, with a long-standing history of domestic and international achievements, and expressed his determination to succeed in his new position.

The Kuwaiti Handball Premier League resumes this Friday with Round 9 matches, including Salmaia vs. Burgan and Al-Arabi vs. Al-Nasr. The following day, Kazma faces Al-Sulaibikhat, while Kuwait Club clashes with Qadsia in the round's marquee matchup.

Currently, Kuwait Club leads the standings with 16 points from 8 wins, followed by Kazma with 11 points. Burgan sits third with 8 points, edging Qadsia in fourth on goal difference. Al-Sulaibikhat is fifth with 7



Hussein Habib, the new coach of Salmaia.

points, Al-Arabi sixth with 6 points, Salmaia seventh with 6 points, and Al-Nasr is eighth with 2 points.

The Premier League follows a three-group format, with the championship awarded to the team with the most points. The team finishing eighth is relegated to Division One, while the seventh-place team will face the second-place Division One team to determine promotion.

The league had been suspended since October due to Kuwaiti clubs' participation in international competitions and the national team's involvement in the Asian Championship, which concluded last week in Kuwait. Kuwait secured third place, while Bahrain defeated Qatar to claim the title.

Meanwhile, Qadsia Club has strengthened its roster ahead of the league's return by signing Mohammed Al-Anzi, Abdullah Al-Mutawa, and Faraj Salem to the first team.

Alcaraz rewrites history with career Grand Slam

Djokovic's 25th major title remains elusive

MELBOURNE, Australia, Feb 1, (AP): Carlos Alcaraz is the youngest man ever to complete a career Grand Slam after securing the Australian Open title against Novak Djokovic, who had never lost in his 10 previous finals at Melbourne Park.

The top-ranked Alcaraz dropped the first set Sunday as Djokovic went out hard in pursuit of a record 25th major title, but he dug deep to win 2-6, 6-2, 6-3, 7-5.

As he was leaving the court, he signed the lens of the TV camera with a note of recognition: "Job finished. 4/4 Complete."

The 22-year-old Spaniard scrambled to retrieve shots that usually would be winners for Djokovic, and he kept up intense pressure on his 38-year-old rival. There were extended rallies where each player hit enough brilliant shots to usually win a game, with neither player willing to give an inch or

concede.

Once he secured victory, Alcaraz let his racket slip out of his hand and fell to the ground on his back, putting his hands to his head.

He stayed there for a few seconds before going to the net to shake hands with Djokovic. Both players exchanged a few words and Djokovic smiled as he congratulated Alcaraz. The new champion then ran to hug his coaches in the courtside chairs and later his dad and other team members in the stands.

After paying tribute to Djokovic for being an inspiration, Alcaraz turned to his support team. He parted ways with longtime coach Juan Carlos Ferrero at the end of last season and Samuel Lopez stepped up to head the team.

"Nobody knows how hard I've been working to get this trophy. I just chased this moment so much," Alcaraz said. The pre-season was a bit of a roller-coaster emotionally.

"We just did the right work, you were pushing me every day to do all the right things," he added. "I'm just really grateful for everyone I have in my corner right now."

Djokovic joked about this showdown setting up a rivalry over the next 10 years with Alcaraz, but then said it was only right to hand the floor over to the new champion.

"First and foremost, congratulations to an amazing tournament and amazing couple of weeks," Djokovic said at the trophy presentation. "What you've been doing, the best word to describe is historic, legendary, so congratulations. I wish the best of luck in the rest of your career."

Both players were coming off grueling five-set semifinal wins and showed phenomenal fitness, athleticism and stamina for just over three hours in pursuit of their own historic achievements.

Neither player was willing to relent on the big points - and there were many of them. In the end, Alcaraz was able to convert 5 of the 16 breakpoints he set up. Djokovic converted two of his six.



Novak Djokovic of Serbia plays a forehand return to Carlos Alcaraz of Spain during the men's singles final at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia. (AP)



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain holds the Norman Brookes Challenge Cup after defeating Novak Djokovic of Serbia in the men's singles final at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

Djokovic's push for an unprecedented 25th Grand Slam singles title has now been blocked by Alcaraz or Jannik Sinner for nine majors.

Djokovic edged Sinner in the semifinals and was aiming to be the oldest man to win a Grand Slam title in the Open era, but didn't quite make it against Alcaraz.

Djokovic and Rafael Nadal played some epic matches, including the lon-

gest match ever at the Australian Open in a five-set final that lasted almost six hours in 2012.

Nadal was watching from the stands on Sunday night, and both players addressed the 22-time major winner.

"I want to speak to the legendary Rafa, who is on the stands," Djokovic said. "Obviously, it feels very weird to see you there and not here, you know?"

"But thank you for being present."

It's too many Spanish legends... It felt like it was two against one tonight, you know, it wasn't fair, but OK."

Alcaraz said it was a privilege: "I know you were watching me when I was like 15, 14 years old, so it's been a long time. But, yeah, for me, it's such an honor playing in front of you."

At 22 years and 272 days, Alcaraz is the youngest man to complete a set of all four major singles titles. He broke

the mark set by Don Budge in the 1938 French championships, when he was 22 years and 363 days.

Alcaraz now has seven major titles - his first in Australia along with two each at Wimbledon and the French and US Opens.

He's the ninth man to achieve the career Grand Slam, a list that also includes Djokovic, Nadal and Roger Federer.

Mbappé's last-gasp penalty lifts Real Madrid to win over Rayo Vallecano

MADRID, Feb 1, (AP): Kylian Mbappé converted a penalty kick deep into stoppage time as Real Madrid salvaged a 2-1 win over Rayo Vallecano to get back within a point of Spanish league leader Barcelona.

Vinícius Júnior also scored for Madrid after again being jeered by fans at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium. Jude Bellingham, also booted when the lineup was announced, had to be replaced 10 minutes into the match because of an apparent left hamstring injury.

Madrid was coming off a 4-2 loss against Benfica that dropped the team out of

the eight automatic spots for the round of 16 of the Champions League. It will face Benfica again in the playoffs.

Mbappé scored his eighth goal in his last five matches with Madrid with the last-gasp penalty that allowed Alvaro Arbeloa's side to keep pace with Barcelona, which won 3-1 at Elche on Saturday.

The boos toward Vinícius were subdued after he scored in the 15th minute with a superb goal. The Brazil international cleared three defenders before sending a right-footed shot into the top corner.

Rayo, which played a man down from the 80th after Pathé Ciss was sent off with a straight red card for a hard foul, equalized with Jorge De Frutos in the 49th.

Vallecano, which threatened at times at the Bernabeu, also saw Pep Chavarría shown a second yellow in the final minutes of added time.

Yamal scored in the sixth minute and passed for Marcus Rashford to put the victory beyond doubt late in the second half. Elche pulled level briefly in the first half before Ferran Torres re-established a 2-1 advantage just before halftime at Martínez Valero Stadium.