



Kuwait Prime Minister leaves UAE after WGS 2026  
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# KUWAIT REPORTS SHARP DROP IN DRUG TRAFFICKING CASES

## Authorities bust drug kingpin

Security crackdown weakens smuggling networks

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5: The Ministry of Interior has confirmed the remarkable decrease in drug trafficking cases since the implementation of the new law in December.**

Security sources pointed out to the newspaper that this result proves the success of the security policy, which combines firmness in confronting

drug dealers with a humane approach in handling drug users.

Sources revealed that the Drug Control General Department (DCGD) at the ministry handled about 250 drug use reports since the new drug law took effect. They indicated that this number reflects a rise in public awareness and trust in security agencies.

Sources stressed that reports on drug use are handled with utmost confidentiality, focusing on treatment, rehabilitation and psychological support for users in order to rescue them and guide them back to the right path.

Sources said the door to assistance and treatment is open to anyone who comes forward to report a problem or request support, indicating that community security

is a shared responsibility and that cooperation with security agencies contributes to ongoing efforts to protect lives and the future of individuals.

Sources indicated that the incessant efforts of the DCGD, led by Director of the department Brigadier General Mohammad Qabazard, and his assistant, Brigadier General Sheikh Hamad Al-Sabah, resulted in qualitative security strikes that weakened smuggling and promotion networks and tightened the noose on those involved in and outside the country.

Meanwhile, the DCGD has confiscated a large quantity of narcotics -- around

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KUNA photo

Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah and Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait during the meeting.

## Ministers move to align, fortify family protection

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5, (KUNA):** Upon Amiri directives, Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah and Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait discussed on Thursday ways for cooperation regarding the government program for the protection of the family and child.

This comes under the directives and interest of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to enhance institutional work among relevant concerned authorities, said a ministry statement.

During the meeting, both sides emphasized the importance of coordinating and exchanging views, as it contributes to supporting the family, child protection, social stability, and improving the quality of services provided.

Representatives from a number of public benefit associations concerned with family, women, and children attended the meeting, where emphasis was placed on involving them in the plans and benefiting from their expertise.

## Dust, drizzle mark Kuwait's weekend

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5, (KUNA):** The Meteorology Department said the country will experience moderate daytime weather, tending toward cooler conditions, and cold at night during the weekend, with chances of increasing cloud cover, scattered rain, and winds that may stir up dust.

Director of the department Dhirar Al-Ali informed Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that weather maps and numerical models indicated that the country is affected by the extension of a surface high-pressure system, which is gradually weakening, hence, the advancement of a surface low-pressure system on Thursday evening. This is accompanied by a warm and humid air mass, leading to an increase in low and mid-level clouds on Friday and Saturday.

Al-Ali revealed that winds are light to moderate southeasterly, with speeds reaching up to 50 kilometers per hour during the daytime on Friday, stirring dust at times, with a chance of scattered rain that may occasionally be thundery.

He stated that daytime weather on Thursday was moderate and partly cloudy, with northwesterly winds shifting to variable and light to moderate speeds ranging from eight to 30 kilometers per hour. Maximum temperatures ranged between 20 and 22 degrees Celsius, while the sea was light, with wave heights between one and four feet.

He said the nighttime weather tended toward cooler and cold conditions, partly to mostly cloudy, with variable winds that were light in direction and speed ranging between six and 22 kilometers per hour. Minimum temperatures ranged between eight and 10 degrees Celsius, and the sea was light, with wave heights of one to two feet.

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His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad cuts the ribbon at the opening of the 13th British Week in Kuwait.

Event highlights Kuwait-UK trade, investment

## Sheikh Nasser inaugurates 13th British Week

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5:** His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad inaugurated the 13th British Week in Kuwait at Assima Mall on Wednesday, in the presence of Assistant Foreign Minister for European Affairs Ambassador Sadiq Marafi, British Ambassador to Kuwait Qudsi Rasheed, and a number of sheikhs, ambassadors, and prominent public figures.

The 13th British Week in Kuwait covers various sectors, including British industry, automotive, aviation and education. It also features renowned international brands.

In a statement to reporters on the sidelines of the event, British Ambassador to Kuwait Qudsi Rasheed emphasized that the exhibition embodies the strength and depth of the partnership between the United Kingdom and Kuwait -- a partnership built on over a century of cooperation and continuing to evolve in ways that enhance prosperity, security and opportunities for both countries.

He said the event serves as a platform for celebrating bilateral relations, indicating that Kuwaitis know Britain as well as the British themselves, which makes this type of event particularly valuable for both sides.

He revealed that the exhibition highlights the breadth of cooperation between the United Kingdom and Kuwait, ranging from trade and investment to education, culture, defense and emerging technologies. He added that British companies continue to offer their expertise, innovation, and world-class capabilities in many priority sectors in Kuwait.

He added, "Kuwaiti investors and

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A friendly conversation between His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad and Editor-in-Chief of Al-Seyassah and Arab Times newspapers Ahmed Al-Jarallah.



Editor-in-Chief Ahmed Al-Jarallah with a number of guests during the 13th British Week.

Photos by Mohammad Morsi

Friendship on display at National Library

## Exhibition chronicles Kuwait-France historic ties

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5:** Sheikh Hala Bader Mohammad Al-Ahmad underscored the importance of the historical relations between Kuwait and France -- more than 65 years of solid cooperation and friendship.

Speaking on the sidelines of the opening of the Kuwaiti-French Relations Photo Exhibition at the Kuwait National Library, Sheikh Hala Bader stated that Kuwait is keen on strengthening its relations with its friends around the world, especially France, with which it shares long-standing and distinguished ties.

Assistant Foreign Minister for European Affairs Sadiq Marafi, Secretary General of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) Mohammad Al-Jassar and Director General of Kuwait National Library Siham Al-Azmi attended the event.

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KUNA photo

French Ambassador to Kuwait Olivier Gauvin during a tour of the exhibition.

## Work 'schedule' set for Ramadan

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5:** The Civil Service Commission (CSC) on Thursday announced that working hours in the public sector during the holy month of Ramadan will be four and a half hours, indicating that official working hours in government entities will be flexible.

In a press statement, the CSC pointed out that it previously issued External Decision No. 1/2024 on determining the official working hours in government entities during the holy month of Ramadan each year, based on a flexible work schedule. The decision stipulates the applicable timings, rules and regulations.

It disclosed that the start of working hours during Ramadan will be from 8:30 am to 10:30 am, indicating that government entities may set specific start and end times as needed.

It emphasized that government entities must continue to adhere to the fingerprint attendance system as per its

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## News watch

**KUWAIT CITY:** The Supreme Committee for Kuwaiti Citizenship held a meeting on Thursday, chaired by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah.

In a statement, the Committee said it decided to revoke Kuwaiti citizenship from a number of cases, with the matter referred to the Cabinet.

Those citizenships were revoked due to dual citizenship, forgery, fraud, and conflict with the state's supreme interest. (KUNA)

**KUWAIT CITY:** The Information Systems General Department at the Interior Ministry, in cooperation with the Residency Affairs General Department, announced the launching of the passport data update online service for residents through the Sahel application, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The Information Systems General Department pointed out that this service saves time and effort for the residents, as it eliminates the need for them to visit the service centers to update their passport data.

## Kuwait's Health Ministry reports radiology progress

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5:** Minister of Health Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadhi affirmed that the recent statistics on performance indicators demonstrate a marked advancement in radiology services, particularly MRI, with the total number of examinations con-

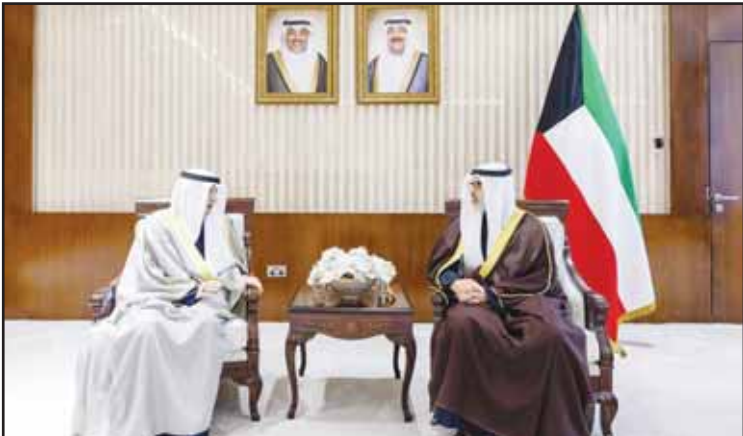
ducted in all radiology departments increasing from 100,183 in 2024 to 113,384 in 2025. In his speech at the annual radiology conference, Al-Awadhi pointed out that the estimated increase of 13.2 percent is the outcome of a carefully planned expansion in the number of diagnostic devices, as well as the diversification of specialized examinations offered to meet the growing

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## FM Sheikh Jarrah receives GCC chief

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5, (KUNA):** Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received on Thursday Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassem Al-Budaiwi.

The meeting, according to a ministry statement, discussed strengthening Gulf cooperation, reviewed upcoming priorities, as views on regional and international developments were exchanged.



MoFA photo

Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs meets GCC Secretary General.



2 When comparison hits a nerve in Kuwait

8 NBK showcases expertise and industry insights at KOGS 2026

8 Alghanim Industries, INJAZ enhance partnership to empower Arab youth



Prayer Timings			
Fajr .....	05:14	Asr .....	15:07
Sunrise ..	06:35	Maghrib ..	17:29
Zohr .....	12:02	Isha .....	18:48

# Local

Weather			
Expected weather for next 24 hrs:			
By Day: Mild and cloudy with light variable wind to light to moderate southeasterly wind, with speeds of 10-32 km/h with a chance for scattered rain.			
By Night: Rather cold and cloudy to partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times southeasterly wind, with speeds of 12-42 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times.			
Station	Max Exp	Min Rec	
Kuwait Airport	22	09	
Abdaly	22	08	
Bubyan	20	05	
Jahra	23	11	
Failaka Island	20	08	
Salmiyah	20	15	
Ahmadi	22	10	
Jal Aliyah	21	09	
Nuwaisib	23	09	
Salmiyah	20	08	

## Amir expresses deep gratitude for UAE's 'brotherhood' move

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable on Thursday, enveloped with profound gratitude and deep appreciation to UAE President Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan for launching the "Celebrating Decades of Brotherhood" initiative.

His Highness the Amir also extended his gratitude to UAE Vice President, Prime Minister, and Ruler of Dubai,



HH the Amir

Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum in this regard.

His Highness emphasized that this eventful initiative reflects the

depth of the historic fraternal ties that unite the two countries and embodies the cohesion of the joint Gulf action, as well as the solidarity of its leaders and peoples throughout history.

His Highness, according to an Amiri Diwan statement, wished for continued progress, prosperity, and well-being to the UAE and its people under the wise leadership of His Highness Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah is seen off at the airport by senior UAE officials.



PM Diwan photos

## Kuwait Prime Minister leaves UAE after WGS 2026

DUBAI, Feb 5, (KUNA): His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah departed the United Arab Emirates on Thursday after leading Kuwait delegation to the World Governments Summit (WGS 2026) in Dubai.

His Highness was seen off by UAE Vice

President, First Deputy Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Maktoum bin Mohammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum and Minister of State for Federal National Council Affairs Abdurrahman Al-Owais, as well as Kuwait Ambassador to the UAE Dr. Matar Al-Niadi, Kuwait's Ambassador to UAE Jamal Al-Ghunaim and Consul General in Dubai and

the Northern Emirates Khaled Al-Zaaby.

In press remarks upon departure, His Highness the Prime Minister expressed appreciation for UAE President Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan and the Emirati leadership for organizing the global event, as well as the Emirati people's warm hospitality.

## IOM and Mol conduct course on tackling human peddling

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5: The International Organization for Migration (IOM) – UN Migration in Kuwait, in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior (Mol), successfully concluded today a three day specialized training titled "Indicators for the Identification of Victims of Trafficking in Persons." Held from 3 to 5 February 2026 at the United Nations House in Kuwait, the workshop brought together frontline officers from various Mol departments with the objective of enhancing national capacities in identifying victims of trafficking and strengthening Kuwait's overall counter trafficking response.

This training forms part of the ongoing partnership between IOM Kuwait and the Ministry of Interior. It also comes at a time of significant national progress, including recent measures to strengthen anti-trafficking investigations, expand specialized protection services for vulnerable groups, and enhance coordination among agencies involved in identifying and assisting potential victims.

Throughout the three days, participants engaged in a series of sessions covering key topics such as international and national anti trafficking frameworks, the definition of trafficking in persons, victim identifica-

tion indicators, specialized indicators for vulnerable groups including domestic workers, trauma informed approaches, and victim centered practices. The workshop also featured practical exercises, case studies, and role play simulations to strengthen operational skills and ensure that officers are better equipped to identify and respond to potential cases of trafficking.

Reflecting on the workshop, the IOM Kuwait Chief of Mission, Mazen Aboul-Hosn emphasized that human trafficking is a complex crime requiring coordinated and informed responses. He noted that the training aimed to equip participating officers with the tools necessary to identify victims and respond effectively in line with national legislation and international standards, further supporting the State of Kuwait's continued commitment to combating trafficking and reinforcing the efforts of the National Committee on Counter Trafficking.

This workshop highlights the strong collaboration between IOM Kuwait and the Ministry of Interior and reaffirms their shared commitment to strengthening national capacity, protecting vulnerable individuals, and advancing Kuwait's progress in counter trafficking efforts.



The workshop in progress.

## Kuwait Navy launches first 'Durra' project vessel in UAE

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5: Naval Force Commander Rear Admiral Saif Al-Hamlan attended the ceremony for launching the first vessel in the 'Durra' project, which belongs to the Naval Force, held at the Abu Dhabi Shipbuilding Company in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), reports Al-Anba daily.

This is part of the contract undertaken by EDGE Group and Abu Dhabi Shipbuilding Company to supply the Naval Force with advanced missile boats to modernize its fleet and raise its readiness level, with the

aim of maintaining maritime security and protecting vital interests.

It coincided with the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the founding of Abu Dhabi Shipbuilding Company and the week celebrating friendly relations between the UAE and the State of Kuwait, "UAE and Kuwait ... Brothers Forever." This occasion reflects the depth of fraternal relations and strategic partnership between the two brotherly countries, especially in the fields of defense and maritime industries.

## MoD inaugurates Hugo RAS system at military hospital

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5, (KUNA): Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah launched the Hugo - the latest Robotic-Assisted Surgery (RAS) System, at the Jaber Al-Ahmad Military Hospital on Thursday.

The inauguration of the system took place during the minister's visit to the medical staff of the hospital in the presence of Chief of the General Staff of the Kuwaiti Army Lt.-Gen. Khaled Al-Shuraian and Under-secretary of the Ministry of Defense Sheikh Dr. Abdullah Meshal Al-Sabah. They were accompanied by head of the Army's medical services authority Maj.-Gen Dr. Walid Mandani, according to a statement from the

Ministry of Defense.

Sheikh Abdullah stressed the importance of advancing the military health service system and improving the medial sector on a par with the world's latest standards. He commended the efforts of the medical staff and their noble message in servicing the military personnel and their families.

During his visit to the hospital, the minister attended a video presentation on the missions, achievements and projects related to the development of the healthcare quality.

Sheikh Abdullah also toured the various wards of the hospital, including the ICU which has 14-bed capacity.



KUNA photo  
Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah is briefed on the system.

# Kuwait gov't help brings laurels to inventors club

Over 200 global inventors to take part in Feb 8 exhibition

By Mohammad Ghanem  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5: Chairman of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Science Club Talal Jassim Al-Kharafi said the growing number of participants, sponsors and supporters of the International Invention Fair in the Middle East (IIFME) from year to year proves that the event has established a distinguished reputation at the local, regional and international levels.**

Al-Kharafi affirmed this success has had a positive impact on the Club, as well as the aspiring inventors and innovators.

He made these statements during a press conference held at the headquarters of the Club to review the latest preparations and arrangements for the launching of the 16th edition of the exhibition.

Under the patronage of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and with the support of Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), the exhibition will take place from Feb 8-11, 2026. A total of 213 inventors from various scientific and technological fields around the world will participate in the event, all seeking to market their inventions and move toward production and manufacturing.

Al-Kharafi praised the participation of several organizations affiliated with the Arab League in the exhibition for the second consecutive year, indicating that these entities have allocated awards specifically for Arab innovators and inventors in their respective fields.

He also disclosed that the Secretariat General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) will present three awards to Gulf inventors.

As head of the exhibition's organizing committee, Al-Kharafi explained that the event seeks to fulfill its slogan, "Where Investors Meet

Inventors," by promoting the commercialization of inventions.

In this context, he confirmed that a series of seminars were held in previous years in cooperation with foreign and international chambers of commerce, as well as Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), to explore ways to market the inventors' innovations by introducing them to foreign investors.

He expressed his satisfaction over the initiative of the Kuwaiti Union of Investment Companies (UIC) to participate in the exhibition for the first time this year, stressing that a pavilion will be allocated to the Union. This pavilion, he said, will represent a new starting point for inventors keen on connecting with investors in order to transform their ideas into tangible products.

He added that the exhibition receives support from a number of international organizations, including the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), International Federation of Inventors Associations (IFIA), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Arab League and others. He revealed that the exhibition offers financial prizes totaling about \$60,000.

He said the United Nations, represented by WIPO, puts importance on fostering a culture of creativity and innovation, which explains its annual participation in the event.

He extended his gratitude to His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah for his generous patronage of the exhibition, and to the sponsors, supporters and strategic partners from various Kuwaiti and international institutions and organizations like KFAS, GCC Secretariat General, Geneva Exhibition, WIPO, IFIA and UNESCO.

He also thanked the exhibition's judging panel, chaired by David Farouki, which comprises 65 members representing a distinguished group of university professors and scientific bodies known for their impartiality and integrity.

On the other hand, Abdulrahman Al-Fadhala, Treasurer of the Club and a member of the exhibition's Higher Committee, expressed his thanks and appreciation to all ministries, agencies and State institutions – particularly the ministries of Foreign Affairs, Commerce, Industry and Interior—for their cooperation and for



Kuwait Science Club Board Chairman Talal Jassim Al-Kharafi.



Photos by Samer Shaqair  
Talal Jassim Al-Kharafi and other officials at the event.

providing all the necessary facilities.

Faisal Sarkhouh, Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of the UIC, expressed his pleasure at the Union's participation in the exhibition for the first time this year, describing the event as a prestigious international platform. He emphasized that the exhibition's continuity for the 16th consecutive year underscores its distinction and importance compared to other exhibitions around the world.

Sarkhouh called on member companies within the Union and various economic sectors to support the exhibition, stressing that it is an opportunity to expand cooperation be-

tween investors and inventors.

He also extended his thanks and appreciation to Al-Kharafi, and the board members, for giving the Union the opportunity to participate in the exhibition.

Present at the press conference were Sheikhha Sheikh Jarrah Al-Sabah - Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Club, David Farouki - Head of the Judging Committee, Saja Al-Fadala - Head of the Youth and Science Sector at the Club, Fadwa Darwish - Secretary General of the UIC, several members of the exhibition's Higher Committee, and representatives of the media.

### Other Voices

## When comparison hits a nerve in Kuwait

By Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri

Kuwait often celebrates itself loudly, yet grows defensive when comparisons are made. The problem is not comparison. The problem is what comparison reveals.

One indicator captures the issue, how long ministers stay in office. In many neighboring states, continuity is treated as a governance tool. Officials remain in place long enough to build institutions, set measurable priorities, implement policy, and then be held accountable for results. In Saudi Arabia, the finance minister has served since 2016. In the UAE, the energy portfolio has been held by the same minister since 2013. Regardless of how one views these systems, administrative continuity has helped turn plans into execution.

Kuwait, by contrast, frequently changes key port-



Al-Anjeri

folios before strategies can mature. Each new minister inherits unfinished work and incentives to restart rather than complete. This does not always reflect bad ideas. It reflects a structure that rarely gives ideas the time, authority, and performance benchmarks needed to succeed or fail clearly. For foreign dignitaries and international investors, frequent turnover makes commitments harder to interpret. It raises questions about who owns the plan, and whether today's assurances will survive the next reshuffle.

For years, parliament was the default explanation for chronic reshuffles, with oversight tools often turning into political warfare. With parliamentary politics now absent, the more important question is unavoidable. Why does instability persist, and why are top roles treated as rotation rather than responsibility.

For Kuwait, comparison should not be seen as an insult, but treated as a valuable diagnostic tool. Without continuity, development becomes a sequence of resets, and progress falls behind ambition. Otherwise, visions stay on paper, promises outpace delivery, and aspirations never become policy results.

## Fetus thrown in sewage pit

By Munif Naif/Jaber Al-Humoud  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5: Security authorities launched an investigation after the discovery of a fetus inside a sewage pit in Salmiya.

According to a security source, a worker reported finding the fetus in the sewage pit.

Security officers rushed to the location and forensic evidence was collected to kick-start the investigation.

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**Acquittal:** The Criminal Court acquitted a woman accused of misusing communication devices when she allegedly sent photos of her husband's mistress to the latter's brother through WhatsApp, asking him to intervene and separate his sister from her husband in order to protect her family.



## Kuwait needs to do more, up cybersecurity defense

“HUNDREDS of millions of dollars are stolen annually worldwide due to cyber fraud, along with the theft of vital information belonging to individuals and nations. This has prompted many countries to focus more on cybersecurity, appointing skilled citizens in the field of communications technology to their cybersecurity defense. They encourage innovation and development in this area by offering generous financial rewards. They educate their citizens on how to protect their online accounts -- whether financial, personal on social media or the information stored in their telephones,” **Hamad Salem Al-Marri** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

“Although the government launched initiatives to utilize Kuwaiti youths in cybersecurity, such as the ‘Kuwaiti Hackathon’, inviting them to hack into government websites to identify vulnerabilities and leverage the expertise of Kuwaiti youths to develop cybersecurity, some of the winners lack academic qualifications in technology or other fields. These young people, who taught themselves programming and website access skills, became ‘hackers.’

“Despite the government’s announcement of generous bonuses and incentives for young Kuwaitis working in cybersecurity in the public sector, this clashes with its practice of assigning these young people to positions outside their field of specialization.

“Cybersecurity has become an absolute necessity for both the public and private sectors, as technology is now the cornerstone of their operations. Therefore, they need to employ cybersecurity specialists to protect their businesses and assets from theft and cyberattacks. It is only natural that cybersecurity specialists could find employment in any public or private entity. It is only natural that the job market absorbs these young people without the need to assign them to positions outside their original specialization, which stifles their ambition and leaves them regretting the time and effort they invested throughout their years of study.

“Unfortunately, Kuwait suffers from weaknesses in cybersecurity, which has led to its low ranking in the United Nations-based Global Cybersecurity Index. This is due to legal, technical and regulatory shortcomings, as well as the lack of capacity. These issues are linked to weak government coordination, failure to utilize the skills of young Kuwaiti professionals, and the practice of assigning cybersecurity graduates to positions outside their original field of expertise -- a clear indication of this lack of coordination.”

### Also:

“On Aug 4, 1964, two American destroyers entered the Gulf of Tonkin, located between North Vietnam and China. North Vietnam was embroiled in a civil war at the time. In that sea, the destroyers were attacked by missiles fired from a plane and a boat originating from North Vietnam. The US Congress convened and authorized President Lyndon Johnson to take the necessary measures, so America launched a war against that country, which is known as the ‘Vietnam War.’” **Ahmad Al-Dawas** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

“We hope that this incident, and the disasters it brought, will serve as a cautionary tale for the Iranian leadership, so that they may learn from it. War is a terrible thing, and we hope that America will not repeat the mistake that happened in Gulf of Tonkin.

“Currently, the American fleet is near or within the Gulf, threatening to use force against Iran, demanding that it should negotiate to halt its nuclear program and end the violence against its people. Iran has agreed to negotiate with the Americans, with Turkiye acting as a mediator. We wrote this article on Saturday, Jan 31.

“While we are unaware of the current developments, we feel that the two sides may reach some kind of agreement, as war is a terrible thing. The US has also warned Iran against jeopardizing the security of the Strait of Hormuz, lest it disrupt maritime traffic, which will cause chaos in global oil markets and a price surge.

“The Strait of Hormuz is an international waterway, through which the world’s ships pass. Iran does not own it. Iran cannot close the strait to maritime traffic. There is what is known as the ‘Carter Doctrine,’ declared by former US President Jimmy Carter in 1980 after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. He issued a strongly worded, albeit indirect, warning to the Soviets, stating: ‘Any attempt by an outside power to dominate the Persian Gulf region will be considered an attack on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an attack will be resisted by any means necessary, including military force.’

“What is happening in the Gulf is a show of force, aimed at securing certain advantages. We all witness displays of strength among animals and birds. Sometimes, we see a sparrow near its nest preening its feathers in front of two approaching doves, spreading its wings to appear larger in order to intimidate them. This body language conveys the message: ‘I am strong, so do not come near my nest.’

“The same thing will happen once Iran sends warships to patrol the Gulf, either to demonstrate its power or to divert its people’s attention from their suffering.

“Similarly, some countries move their naval fleets in international waters near other nations, such as the entry of the American naval fleet into the Gulf, or when the Chinese fleet moves near Taiwan.

“We mentioned earlier that Iran has expressed its willingness to negotiate with the Americans. The fear of a collapse of the situation in Iran is that each of the Baloch, Kurds, Ahwazi Arabs and Azeris might demand autonomy.

“With a population exceeding 92 million, any widespread unrest in Iran will have a seismic impact, not only within its borders, but also extending its repercussions to the surrounding region.

“If only Iran would learn the lessons of history well. If only it would open a new chapter in its relations with everyone and encourage investments—Gulf, European and American -- to develop the tourism, agriculture and industrial sectors. This would create job opportunities for millions of Iranians, raise their standard of living, and lead to significant development for Iran. It could even compete with European countries in tourism and attracting investment.

“Power today is not military, but economic strength. However, Iran has chosen confrontation and interference in the affairs of neighboring countries. As a result, its people are suffering from crises and their situation has deteriorated despite the country’s vast size, abundant resources, and strategic geographic location.”



“I will recount the story of the hot-tempered, self-important sultan, Mohammad Jalal Al-Din Khwarazmshah, and how his State was destroyed as a result of his decisions and arrogance.” **Mohammad Al-Fawzan** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

“The killing of Mongol merchants within the Khwarazmian Empire is historically known as the ‘Otrar Incident’, and it was the spark that set off the sweeping Mongol invasion.

“In the early seventh century AH (around 1218 CE), Genghis Khan succeeded in uniting the Mongol tribes and establishing a formidable State. He began to promote trade and peaceful relations with neighboring powers, including the Khwarazmian Empire, ruled by Ala Al-Din Mohammad ibn Khwarazm Shah.

“Genghis Khan dispatched a large caravan of Mongol and Muslim merchants, laden with goods, toward Khwarazmian lands for trade, rather than warfare. When the caravan reached the city of Otrar, an important frontier town, its governor, Inalchiq (also known as Gayr Khan), accused the merchants of espionage, although historical sources indicate that this accusation was merely a pretext.

“The caravan’s goods were seized, most of the merchants were killed, and only one or two survived to relay the news back to Genghis Khan.

“Even more serious was the fact that the governor did not act independently, he sought the approval of Khwarazmshah, who sanctioned the killings.

“Despite his fury, Genghis Khan initially attempted to avoid war. He sent official envoys to Khwarazmshah, demanding the surrender of Governor Inalchiq, compensation for the losses, and punishment of those responsible.

“However, Khwarazmshah executed one of the envoys, shaved the beards of the others, and sent them back in humiliation. In Mongol tradition, and indeed in ancient international norms, killing messengers was considered an explicit declaration of war. The catastrophic moment came when Genghis Khan uttered his famous words: ‘Now, I know there is no escape from war.’

“The outcome was a full-scale Mongol invasion (1219–1221 CE), the destruction of great cities such as Bukhara, Samarkand, Merv and Nishapur, the collapse of the Khwarazmian Empire within a few years, the deaths of millions, and the ruin of an entire civilization.

“In conclusion, the killing of the merchants was not a simple accident but a grave political blunder, a misjudgment of Mongol power, and a blatant disregard for diplomatic norms. It was among the major factors that opened the gates of the Islamic world to the Mongol onslaught.

“Mongol leader Genghis Khan arrived with his massive army in the first major campaign to conquer the Khwarazmian Empire. Mohammad ibn Khwarazm confronted him with his forces in 616 AH (1217/1218 CE), just 13 years after the Mongol State was founded in a very small region of Mongolia. By 616 AH (1217/1218 CE), the Mongols already conquered nearly all of East Asia, leaving only the Khwarazmian Empire unconquered.

“The Mongol army clashed with the Khwarazmian army in the eastern regions of the empire, or in western China. The battle raged for four consecutive days east of the Syr Darya River, now known as the Jaxartes.”

— **Compiled by Saeed Mahmoud Saleh**



Hamed Al-Marri



KUNA photo

Global leaders and ministers attended the gathering in Kuwait.

# Kuwait pledges fight against Al-designed misinformation

Pakistan affirms support for DCO mission

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5, (KUNA): Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology Omar Al-Omar stressed Kuwait’s commitment, through its presidency of the Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO), to fight misinformation and foster inclusive growth amid AI risks threatening national security.**

Al-Omar made the remarks while chairing the fifth DCO General Assembly, themed “Digital Prosperity in the Age of AI,” hosted by Kuwait for two days with participation of ministers and international leaders.

He said digital transformation heightens governments’ responsibilities to ensure secure digital services, boost competitiveness, and develop education systems that equip future generations with skills necessary for the future, while protecting digital security.

He pointed out that the DCO has activated the

Ministerial Committee on Online Misinformation, chaired by Kuwait, to develop technical tools and practical guidelines that enhance digital content integrity and support implementable policies.

Minister Al-Omar said Kuwait’s 2025 council presidency offered a broad view of DCO progress, highlighting its maturity and members’ shift from dialogue and frameworks to concrete decisions and implementation.

DCO Secretary-General Deemah Al-Yahya praised Kuwait’s leadership as host and 2025 Council Chair, citing its support and vision in steering the organization during a pivotal phase of the global digital economy.

Al-Yahya said the organization, founded five years ago to build a balanced digital economy, now includes 16 member states and over 60 observers across a growing global network.

Jordan’s Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship Minister Sami Smeirat said Jordan’s chairmanship of the fourth General Assembly saw adoption of the 2025-2028 Strategic Agenda, stronger partnerships, and the launch of the International Digital Cooperation Forum.

He said the period marked a shift from vision to implementation, strengthening the organization’s strategic direction and its role as a practical platform for digital cooperation.

Pakistan’s Information Technology and Telecommunications Minister Shaza Khawaja affirmed her country’s support for the DCO mission during the fifth General Assembly in Kuwait, as Pakistan prepares to assume the council presidency in 2026.

She emphasized the importance of digital cooperation in bridging the digital divide and promoting inclusive and responsible digital growth.

Saudi Arabia’s Communications and Information Technology Minister Abdullah Al-Swaha highlighted achievements under Kuwait’s presidency, including forming the Ministerial Committee to Combat Misinformation, launching data and responsible AI frameworks, and supporting regional digital innovation and startups.

Al-Swaha said Saudi Arabia seeks closer cooperation with members to develop digital talent, smart infrastructure, and AI governance, stressing trust and transparency for sustainable, inclusive digital growth.

## KNG concludes exercise for combat, support units

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5, (KUNA):** Kuwait National Guard (KNG) concluded its “Lion of the Island 7” drills and the Nasr 21 Command Centre Exercise (CPX), the largest drills in the National Guard at the level of combat and support units.

The drills were concluded with the presence of the Chief of General Staff of the Kuwaiti Army, Lieutenant General Khaled Al-Shuraian, Deputy National Guard Commander Lieutenant General Hamad Al-Burjas, along with high-level international delegations and military attaches, stated the National Guard.

The drills are among the largest field exercises aimed at assessing the technical levels and combat proficiency of the forces and ensures their readiness to carry out missions and safeguard the country’s security.

The activities were carried out in conditions similar to real combat operations to evaluate the level of ability to deal with various events and threats.



KUNA photo

Kuwait National Guard concludes its ‘Lion of the Island 7’ drills and the Nasr 21 Command Centre Exercise (CPX).



Farwaniya Governor photo  
Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Atthbi Al-Sabah receives Kuwaiti inventor, Mishari Hamoud Al-Mutairi.

## Kuwaiti ‘inventor’ wins praise for bagging gold

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5:** Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Atthbi Al-Sabah on Thursday met Kuwaiti inventor, Mishari Hamoud Al-Mutairi, on the occasion of winning the gold medal for his ‘Smart Cart’ project at the Bangkok International Intellectual Property, Invention, Innovation and Technology Exposition (IPITEx).

During the meeting, Al-Mutairi explained the idea behind the project, its operational mechanism, and its objectives to ease user experience and develop smart solutions.

The Governor praised this achievement, which reflects the capabilities of Kuwaiti youths in the fields of innovation and technology, affirming that he is proud of the creativity of Kuwaiti inventors.

He said the Governorate remains committed to supporting and encouraging young inventors, considering their positive impact on community development and promoting innovation.

Meanwhile, Al-Mutairi expressed his gratitude to the Governor for the warm reception and support, stressing that this kind of attention motivates him to continue his work, innovation and development.

## ‘Nazaha’ refers top men for probe in funds scam

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5:** Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) announced that it has referred two supervisors and another official of the Public Authority for Disabled Affairs (PADA) to the Public Prosecution on suspicion of committing and facilitating the embezzlement of public funds, in addition to forgery of official documents, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Nazaha stressed its commitment to continue its efforts and procedures related to the examination of information, collection of evidence, and investigation of all credible and complete reports it receives.

It also praised the role of whistleblowers and their contribution to enabling it to obtain the required information and data in corruption cases. It commended them for performing their national duty and reaffirmed its commitment to ensure the highest level of protection and confidentiality for whistleblowers, in accordance with the law and its executive regulations.

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# Kuwait drives Gulf’s smart infrastructure momentum

Al-Mashari urges robust project frameworks

By Mohammad Ghanem  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5: The 27th Gulf Engineering Forum and its accompanying scientific conference titled, “Investment Challenges and the Sustainability of Smart Infrastructure Projects,” were held Tuesday under the patronage and in the presence of Minister of State for Municipal and Housing Affairs Abdullatif Al-Mashari, with the participation of leading Gulf and Arab engineers and experts.

Al-Mashari emphasized that the forum serves as a strategic platform for discussing one of the most important development issues in Gulf countries -- investment and sustainability of smart infrastructure projects, amidst the intensifying global competition to attract advanced technologies and major investment projects.

He stated that Kuwait, under the guidance of its political leadership, is witnessing an advanced stage of achievement on its development path.

He said the ministry and the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) are keen on implementing innovative engineering solutions and modern work methods based on quality and efficiency, thereby, enhancing the attractiveness of major projects for investment in line with the ‘Kuwait 2035’ vision.

Meanwhile, head of Kuwait Society of Engineers Mohammad Al-Subaie revealed that the forum is a well-established annual platform for exchanging engineering expertise in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. He pointed out that the inclusion of the scientific conference is now a tradition for discussing engineering issues of regional and global importance, thus, supporting decision-makers through the provision of scientific insights and ad-



Photo by Mohammad Morsi  
Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Housing Affairs Abdul Latif Al-Mashari during his opening speech at the 27th Gulf Engineering Forum.

vanced experiences.

He explained that choosing the topic of investment in smart infrastructure aligns with the directions of the State of Kuwait in its new development phase, considering the attention given to investment in smart infrastructure by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, as per his speech during the Gulf-US Summit in May 2025.

He asserted that Kuwait is witnessing a remarkable development leap in line with the ‘Kuwait 2035’ vision, supported by political stability and bold decisions to implement major infrastructure projects.

He emphasized the necessity of developing investment frameworks and ensuring the sustainability of projects to achieve long-term economic and social returns.

He disclosed that the conference aims to showcase global and regional experiences in implementing and investing in infrastructure projects, as well as to introduce the latest technologies and scientific research to contribute to the localization of expertise and the application of best practices in the GCC countries.

He touched upon the historical role of the Kuwait Society of Engineers in supporting infrastructure and smart city projects, affirming its continuous role as a supportive partner in official efforts to achieve comprehensive development.

He stressed the importance of leveraging the mega-projects implemented by the State in partnership with international companies to open broader horizons for Kuwaiti engineers, especially the fresh graduates, and to increase the percentage of nationals working in the private sector to shorten the job waiting lists.

Secretary General of the Gulf Engineering Union Mu’jab Al-Ajmi stated that the forum, which was launched about three decades ago, is a professional umbrella representing engineers in the GCC countries, reflecting a shared engineering vision that is presented to decision-makers in support of development initiatives.

He highlighted the Union’s remarkable achievements, including its acceptance as member of the World Federation of Engineering Organizations (WFEO), its efforts to launch the Gulf Engineer Membership, and the activation of specialized committees, particularly in the areas of professional accreditation and the unification of Gulf engineering standards.

He expressed his hope for official Gulf support to place the Union under the umbrella of the GCC Secretariat General.

The opening events concluded with an emphasis on the importance of strengthening cooperation among Gulf engineering associations and bodies, and activating professional volunteer work, which contributes to achieving sustainable development and serving the engineering profession.

Moreover, the winners of the Gulf Engineering Union’s Excellence and Innovation Award were announced at the forum as follows: Kuwait for the Sulaibiya Wastewater Treatment Plant project, the Kingdom of Bahrain for Salman Housing City project, the Sultanate of Oman for Green Hydrogen Plant project at Muscat International Airport, and the State of Qatar for the Lusail Integrated Cognitive Platform project of Qatari Diar.

## Other Voices

### Qattaa Al-Naal... and the bank checkbook

By Ahmad alsarraf

In the late 1960s, Hassan, an Arab national known as ‘Qattaa Al-Naal’, insisted on carrying out all deposits and withdrawals from his account in the bank where I was employed exclusively through me, deliberately bypassing my colleagues. At the time, I had no idea what motivated this behavior.

One day, he came to the bank and handed me a check to deposit into his account. He complained of a severe headache, so I invited him to the canteen, where we had coffee. During our conversation, he told me that he recently acquired Kuwaiti citizenship, but under a different name, and that he possessed all the required documents. He asked for my assistance in changing his name and status in the bank’s records. I was taken aback by his request and apologized, explaining that such a change would be difficult to carry out. I advised him instead to close his account and open a new one at another bank under his new name and nationality. He agreed, left and I never saw him again.

I was reminded of Hassan, ‘Qattaa Al-Naal’, after the recent serious revelations concerning the forgery of national identification cards, which later turned out to have started at a very early stage. At that time, like many others, I was completely unaware of what was happening around us.

That deliberate violation and distortion of national identity came back to mind as I reflected on the rejection by a majority of National Assembly members of a proposal to form a committee to investigate violations related to naturalization during the session held on April 16, 2019.

That outcome confirmed the strong suspicions surrounding the existence of large-scale and alarming cases of forgery.

I should also mention that ‘Qattaa Al-Naal’ accumulated his wealth by employing hun-

dreds of women and girls to collect small stones from the Kuwaiti desert, which were then sold to road construction companies and concrete factories.

□ □ □

The entire Lebanese population, along with hundreds of thousands of foreigners, were subjected to the massive theft of their bank deposits in all Lebanese banks—an unprecedented scam in history.

Brother ‘Abu Zirafa’, one of the victims of this deception, estimated his losses at tens of millions. He vowed to take revenge against the bank and did, in fact, file a lawsuit through one of its branches in a European capital.

A ruling was issued in his favor, and he flew to Beirut, overjoyed, demanding that the bank implement the judgment. The bank complied—literally—by issuing him a check for the full amount. The problem was that the check was drawn on a bankrupt bank.

The story of ‘Abu Zirafa’ reminded me of an incident that took place at the bank where I worked. A customer once presented a government check to a distant branch, requesting that it be cashed because the branch did not have sufficient cash on hand. After some effort, the customer was persuaded to open an account and rely on the check system for withdrawals, instead of receiving cash.

Because the customer was illiterate, the branch manager assisted him in writing his checks and stamped them on his behalf.

Everything proceeded smoothly for several months until the account balance was exhausted. When the final check was cashed, it resulted in an overdraft of KD500.

The manager summoned the customer and asked him to settle the outstanding amount. After several attempts, the customer eventually came to the branch and asked about the issue, which was explained to him.

In response, the customer took out his checkbook and threw it onto the manager’s desk in protest, saying, “Write the amount you want and cover the overdraft!” He did so, because he believed that the paper in a checkbook is not different from a bank note.

□ □ □

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



KUNA photo  
KUNA Center for Media Capacity Development concludes training program on Artificial Intelligence and the Making of Purposeful Media Content.

### KUNA concludes AI training program

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5, (KUNA): KUNA Training Center concluded on Thursday its training program on applications of artificial intelligence in news writing and producing media content, which began on February 1, with participation from members of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) and KUNA staff.

The program, led by AI director Abdulrahman Al-Khamis, focused on enhancing

participants’ skills in creative AI applications, including transforming images into videos, generating voiceovers, and other related techniques.

Established in December 1995, the KUNA Media Training Center is one of Kuwait’s leading media training institutions. It has offered hundreds of programs across various media fields, aiming to develop professional capabilities and advance the quality of media work.

## Faculty appointments approved

### Abdullah Al-Salem University OKs academic, administrative reforms

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5: Dr. Mona Al-Ahmad, Director of Abdullah Al-Salem University, chaired the University Council meeting on Wednesday, with the council members in attendance.

During the meeting, Al-Ahmad greeted everyone on the occasion of the National Day and Liberation Day.

Meanwhile, Dr. Adel Al-Hussainan, acting Secretary General of the University, disclosed that the Council approved the following:

■ Regulations for appointing teaching assistants who were part of a scholarship program to faculty positions

upon completion of their studies.

■ General academic framework for obtaining a Doctor of Medicine (MD) degree at the College of Medicine and Health Sciences, outlining the three stages required to achieve this degree.

■ Curriculum for the first stage of the MD program at the College of Medicine and Health Sciences.

■ Degree titles: Doctor of Medicine (MD) and Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Applied Medical Sciences.

■ Regulations for the admission of international students at their own expense.

■ Proposed memorandum of understanding between the University and the Medical Liability Authority.

### KFAS opens nominations for Young Researchers Award ’26

KUWAITCITY, Feb 5, (KUNA): Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) on Monday opened nominations for the 2026 Jaber Al-Ahmad Young Researchers Award (37th edition), dedicated to Kuwaiti PhD holders in six scientific fields.

In a press statement, KFAS said the award carries a prize of KD 15,000 (about USD 48,000) for each field, in addition to a gold medal and a certificate of appreciation. It aims to promote constructive competition among academics and encourage distinguished scientific output by Kuwaiti researchers.

KFAS noted the award, launched in 1988 under the name “Scientific Production Award,” reflects the importance of nurturing Kuwaiti scientists and researchers and encouraging research, authorship and translation across various branches of knowledge.

It said the six fields include natural sciences and mathematics (physics, chemistry, geology, mathematics, statistics and com-

puter science), engineering sciences in all branches, and biological sciences (agriculture, livestock and veterinary sciences).

The fields also include medical and allied health sciences, social and humanities sciences, and administrative and economic sciences (business administration, accounting, economics and insurance).

On eligibility, KFAS said applicants must be Kuwaiti nationals holding a PhD or an accredited medical fellowship, be no older than 45 at the time of the award announcement, and must not have won the award previously. KFAS added that evaluation is based primarily on papers published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, requiring submission of at least 12 papers published after obtaining the PhD, while adhering to academic integrity standards.

It invited interested candidates to fill out the application form via its website, noting submissions will be accepted until Sunday, May 31.



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Envoy calls initiative a milestone

‘UAE & Kuwait - Brothers Forever’ week strengthens fraternal bonds

ABU DHABI, Feb 5, (KUNA): Kuwait’s Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, Jamal Al-Ghunaim, on Thursday praised the UAE initiative marking the “UAE & Kuwait - Brothers Forever” week.

Al-Ghunaim described it as a positive milestone that highlighted the depth of the historic and humanitarian ties between the two brotherly countries and peoples.

In a statement to KUNA on the conclusion of the event, Ambassador Al-Ghunaim said the week reflected the highest values of fraternity and solidarity, and conveyed a clear message of appreciation that underscores the UAE leadership’s commitment to strengthening bilateral relations.

He expressed Kuwait’s appreciation for the initiative, noting the wide official and public participation it received, adding that the Kuwaiti Embassy and Consulate closely followed the events.

The celebration also served as a platform to explore future prospects for cooperation between Kuwait and the UAE in various fields, particularly economic, educational, and cultural sectors, Al-Ghunaim said,



Jamal Al-Ghunaim, Kuwait’s Ambassador to UAE

stressing that its outcomes would positively impact bilateral partnership and coordination.

He commended the efforts of all government and private entities involved in organizing the events that reflected the spirit of joint cooperation and the strength of the bilateral relations.

Arab Charter panel adopts all of Kuwait human rights responses

Jawaher lauds legislative and social reforms

CAIRO, Feb 5, (KUNA): Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights, Ambassador Sheikhha Jawaher Ibrahim Al-Sabah, announced that the Arab Charter Committee on Human Rights has adopted all of Kuwait’s responses related to its second periodic report.

The report was submitted to the committee last month and addressed progress achieved in implementing Kuwait’s legal obligations under the provisions of the Arab Charter on Human Rights.

In a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) following her chairing of Kuwait’s delegation to the 57th session of the Permanent Arab Committee on Human Right, she explained that Kuwait’s second report, submitted last month, was discussed during the current session’s proceedings.

Sheikha Jawaher noted that the committee’s chair informed the Kuwaiti delegation of the approval of all responses provided by Kuwait to the questions and recommendations raised during the dialogue.

She affirmed Kuwait’s continued cooperation with the committee in preparing its third periodic report over the coming four years.

She added that Kuwait received wide commendation from committee members, particularly for its recent legislative measures, transparent engagement, and implementation of plans enhancing human rights systems.

These efforts included women’s empowerment, child rights protection, and expanded safeguards for persons with disabilities.

She also highlighted Kuwait’s promotion of the right to health and its humanitarian and developmental role through aid and contributions via the Kuwait Fund since 1961.

She concluded by expressing aspiration for further progress in freedoms and human rights in the coming phase.



KUNA photo  
Ambassador Sheikhha Jawaher Ibrahim Al-Sabah, Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights, during the 57th session of the Permanent Arab Committee on Human Rights.

Minister Al-Huwailah emphasizes nation’s achievements

MoSA celebrates National Day, reaffirms commitment to society

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5: “The Kuwaiti Flag is the banner of a proud nation, a symbol of steadfast sovereignty and a testament to strong unity, and it depicts a glorious history and a national journey filled with giving and achievements,” says Minister of Social, Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah.

In her speech during the National Day and Flag-Raising ceremony held Wednesday at the Social Welfare Center, Al-Huwailah asserted that “feelings of loyalty and pride are renewed under our wise leadership, headed by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, who guide national progress with an astute vision and unwavering determination towards more advancement and prosperity. This approach puts human beings at the heart of development and its ultimate goal, enhancing security, well-being and dignity for all those who live on this blessed land.”

She confirmed that her ministry continues to fulfill its national and humanitarian mission in line with the vision of the State, through initiatives and programs aimed at empowering individuals, supporting families, protecting all segments of society, and strengthening social cohesion, stemming from a firm belief that the strength of nations lies in the unity of their so-



Minister of Social, Family and Childhood Affairs poses for a group photo.

cieties.

She pointed out that the flag-raising ceremony is a renewal of the commitment to responsibility and teamwork, and reinforces the values of good citizenship in the hearts of future generations, continuing the legacy of the founding

fathers towards a brighter future.

On the other hand, Assistant Undersecretary for Social Welfare and Development Eman Al-Enezi affirmed that national holidays renew the meaning of patriotism in the hearts and minds of the people. She stressed that belongingness is not just a slogan to be raised, but a firm commitment to the nation’s principles and sincere loyalty to its wise leadership.

She stated that this occasion is a milestone in the journey of a nation that forged its history with wisdom and established its foundations as a state of institutions.

She expressed her pride in the wise political leadership, represented by His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince, citing their responsible vision, firm positions and approach in guiding the nation’s progress.

She said this approach is aimed at preserving sovereignty, consolidating the state of institutions, and enhancing the status of the Kuwaiti citizen as the foundation and ultimate goal of development.

She stressed that the Social Welfare and Development Sector is participating in this national celebration while feeling the great trust and responsibility placed upon it, believing that serving the groups under its care is not reduced to an administrative framework, but rather embodies an authentic national and humanitarian duty that reflects the civilized face of the State of Kuwait.



Ministry of Social Affairs photos  
Minister of Social, Family and Childhood Affairs during the flag-raising ceremony.

Strategic reform

Kuwait advances higher education

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5: Undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education Dr. Bader Al-Basiri disclosed that the higher education development strategy of the country is in line with the directive of the wise leadership and the vision of the State to establish a flexible and advanced higher educational system, which can keeps pace with global developments and meets labor market needs, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Al-Basiri made the statement during his participation in a panel discussion that is part of the Educational Technology Conference, with leaders of various higher education institutions, the ministry, Kuwait University, Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), local and international institutions in attendance.

The panel discussion tackled the development of education and integration of artificial intelligence into the curricula.

Al-Basiri stressed that the ministry operates based on the strategy being implemented in line with the directive of Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Nader Al-Jalal. He said the objective is to enhance the quality of academic outputs, reinforce institutional accreditation and quality systems, develop academic programs in line with future specializations, and support scientific research and innovation.

In this context, Mohammed Al-Otaibi, Director of the General Department of Guidance, Research and Curricula at the Ministry of Education, affirmed that the ministry has been working hard for several years to implement an integrated educational development plan aimed at achieving a qualitative shift in the educational system.

He said the plan aims to move away from limited, phased solutions toward a sustainable institutional framework based on scientific planning, governance and quality assurance. He revealed that the plan was launched based on a clear strategic vision, and it has achieved notable progress in various implementation stages.

He added “the plan is founded on a set of integrated pillars, as the ministry worked hard to modernize curricula in line with 21st-century requirements by emphasizing the development of critical thinking, problem-solving and innovation skills, while linking educational content to the reality and the needs of society.” He pointed out that this approach contributes to building a balanced personality capable of lifelong learning.

Authorities bust

10 kilograms of pure heroin and methamphetamine valued at KD200,000.

In a press statement, the ministry disclosed that the concerned teams apprehended the suspect, an Asian, who was in charge of an organized criminal operation for the smuggling and distribution of narcotics.

Investigations revealed that the suspect acted on directives from his partner -- a major drug trafficker residing abroad and wanted internationally.

The suspect possessed six kilograms of pure heroin and four kilograms of methamphetamine, which were intended for distribution in the country.

According to the ministry, a thorough search of the suspect’s residence led to the discovery of a laboratory with highly dangerous tools and materials. He used this laboratory to mix heroin with other substances to increase the quantity and maximize profits.

The ministry stressed that this activity poses serious risks due to the use of hazardous and toxic materials.

Four scales of varying sizes, used for weighing the narcotics before distribution, were also seized during the operation.

The accused and the confiscated items were referred to the competent authority for legal action.

Dust, drizzle

He added that daytime weather on Friday will be moderate and mostly cloudy, with winds shifting to southeasterly, light to moderate in speed, ranging between 10 and 32 kilometers per hour, with a chance of scattered rain. Maximum expected temperatures will range between 20 and 22 degrees Celsius, and the sea will be light to moderate, with wave heights between one and four feet.

He indicated that on Friday evening, the weather will be cooler, mostly cloudy, with light to moderate southeasterly winds that may become active at times, ranging between 12 and 42 kilometers per hour, with a chance of scattered rain that may occasionally be thundery. Minimum expected temperatures will range between 12 and 14 degrees Celsius, and the sea will be light to moderate, with wave heights rising from two to six feet.

Work ‘schedule’

decision stipulating the rules, regulations and controls regarding official work.

On the official working hours of government entities in the evening, the CSC said it will be four and a half hours, including a 15-minute grace period at the beginning of the workday, in addition to the 15-minute grace period allocated for female employees at the end of the workday.

Sheikh Nasser

institutions maintain a significant and valued presence in the dynamic and globally connected economy of the United Kingdom. Educational and cultural ties remain at the heart of this partnership, strengthening year after year, thanks to the many Kuwaiti students, their families, and visitors who choose the UK as their second home.”

On His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad’s patronage of the event, the ambassador explained that he is a distinguished figure, and he has been honored to meet him and benefit from his advice since his arrival in the country, expressing his delight that His Highness is the supporter of the exhibition. He praised the generous patronage of His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad for this event, which highlights not only past achievements but also the great potential of the future.

About the number of participating companies, Rasheed stated that he did not have the exact figure but participation appeared broad and diverse, encompassing several sectors such as education, automotive, banking and others.

He also commended the initiatives undertaken by Kuwaiti investors and businesspeople in strengthening relations between the two countries, affirming that the partnership between Kuwait and Britain contributes to the prosperity of both sides.

He said Kuwaiti investors possess in-depth knowledge of the British market, both in terms of investment opportunities and bringing British brands to the local market, citing the success of various sectors like food and beverages, automotive and banking.

The Ambassador then extended his congratulations to the State of Kuwait on its National Day and Liberation Day celebrations, congratulating His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and the government.

He also mentioned his participation in the flag-raising ceremony with the governor of the Capital Governorate, describing it as a special moment, as it was his first national celebration since assuming his post. He expressed his anticipation of participating in the remaining events in the coming period.

Meanwhile, Chairman of the Organizing Committee Ahmed Ismail Behbehani said “His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad’s patronage of the event underscores the depth and history of Kuwaiti-British relations and His Highness’ keenness to support events and activities that strengthen these historical ties with Britain.”

He pointed out that Kuwaiti-British relations represent a distinguished model of relations built on solid foundations, based on a historical

friendship that began more than 250 years ago when the British East India Company rerouted mail through Kuwait.

He said this historical depth was further solidified when HH the late Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah signed the Kuwaiti-British Treaty in 1899, which affirmed Kuwait’s independent decision-making and distanced it from major international conflicts.

He indicated that these distinguished relations have continued and strengthened in political, economic, military and cultural fields.

He stated that the visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad to the United Kingdom in January 2025 confirmed the depth of the historical and strategic relations and the strength of the firmly established ties between Kuwait and the United Kingdom. “It also reflected the special relationship between the ruling family of Kuwait and the royal family of the United Kingdom,” he asserted.

He added the 13th British Week in Kuwait is exceptional as it coincides with the celebration of the 65th Independence Day and 35th Liberation Day of Kuwait, making it a special occasion for all participants in the event.

Exhibition chronicles

Sheikha Hala Bader also pointed out the role of France in supporting Kuwait and its participation in the liberation of the latter, reflecting the depth of the partnership between the two countries and the necessity of continuing to solidify it through cultural and diplomatic events.

She expressed her admiration for the exhibition’s collection of photographs, documents and historical events that chronicle the history of relations between the two countries.

She affirmed that some of the exhibited events introduce the public to aspects that may not have been previously known, while the exhibition beautifully showcases the history of Kuwaiti-French friendship and cooperation over the years.

She added that such exhibitions contribute to solidifying shared memory and strengthening cultural ties between the two peoples, hoping that similar events will continue to support Kuwait’s relations with countries around the world and deepen the bonds of friendship between them.

Meanwhile, French Ambassador to Kuwait Olivier Gauvin pointed out that the exhibition does not only present a collection of images, as it also documents a living memory of the exceptional relationship between France and Kuwait -- a relationship forged by history and strengthened by mutual trust.

On bilateral relations between the two countries, Gauvin stated that France and Kuwait share 65 years of diplomatic relations and more than 200 years of friendship and human connection.

He asserted that over the past decades, the two countries have succeeded in building a strong and reliable partnership based on respect for sovereignty, a commitment to stability, and a belief in the value of fruitful cooperation that is

beneficial for everyone.

He pointed out that this path witnessed historical milestones, particularly in the early 1990s, when solidarity and loyalty laid the foundation for a deep and lasting alliance between the two nations.

Moreover, Secretary General of NCCAL Dr. Mohammad Al-Jassar said the Kuwaiti-French relations are considered a model of historical friendship and mutual cooperation, indicating that this relationship is not limited to the political aspect as it extends to the cultural, social and economic dimensions.

Kuwait’s Health

and evolving clinical needs.

He then stated that the theme of the conference this year, “From Vision to Precision,” embodies the remarkable progress achieved through rapid scientific and technological developments in radiology and medical diagnostics. He described the conference as a major scientific milestone that underscores the health sector’s commitment to continuous development and to keep pace with global advancements.

He affirmed that radiology is the cornerstone of the modern healthcare system, playing a vital role in achieving accurate diagnoses, supporting clinical decision-making, and monitoring patients at various stages of care, thereby, enhancing patient safety and improving the quality of treatment outcomes.

He stated that the conference is a leading scientific platform for showcasing the latest innovations, exchanging expertise among specialists, promoting continuing medical education, and supporting the development of national talent by developing their professional and scientific capabilities.

He added that this year’s conference focuses on musculoskeletal injuries – especially sports injuries – due to their prevalence and the advanced role of radiological techniques in accurately diagnosing such conditions and selecting the most appropriate treatment plans.

He explained that musculoskeletal examinations account for around 60 percent of all MRI scans, highlighting the vital role of diagnostic radiology, particularly MRI, in the assessment of sports injuries, as well as chronic and complex conditions.

He also confirmed the notable reduction in waiting times, as a result of the strategy to expand capacity, enhance operational efficiency, and optimize appointment scheduling systems.

He stressed the importance of exchanging expertise and drawing on international best practices to further develop radiology services and expand access to specialized diagnostic examinations in multiple hospitals.

He emphasized the need to keep pace with modern developments, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies, as a supportive tool for doctors in enhancing diagnostic accuracy, expediting procedures, and improving the overall quality of healthcare services.



Annual gathering celebrates unity and Kuwaiti heritage

# Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber hosts Azayez farm open day



Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber welcomes the attendees



Abdulaziz Al-Ghannam, Abdulaziz Al-Dughaishim, Editor-in-Chief Ahmed Al-Jarallah, and Abdullah Ahmed Al-Ghannam

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5: Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber hosted the annual open day at his Azayez farm in Abdally, under the slogan “February... the People of Kuwait,” reports Al-Seyassah daily.

This long-standing tradition is a social gathering designed to cultivate love and camaraderie among Kuwaitis in a relaxed and friendly setting.

The event witnessed a huge turnout from diverse segments of the population, generating a spontaneous and relaxed mood that showcased the values of social connection and unity inherent in the people of Kuwait.

Welcoming his guests, Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber stated, “Azayez is your home. This open day is an annual tradition where we strive to bring together the people of Kuwait in a spirit of love and camaraderie... Welcome everyone.”

Adding flair to the special atmosphere, a folk arts troupe provided entertainment with traditional songs and chants. This performance infused the gathering with joy and interaction, embodying the authentic Kuwaiti heritage.



Khaled Al-Dughaishim, Jawad Boukhamsin, Al-Jarallah, Emad Boukhamsin, Abdulwahab Al-Wazzan, Anwar Boukhamsin, and Abdulaziz Al-Dughaishim



Saud Al-Farhan, Al-Jarallah, Faisal Al-Gharib, and Abdullah Al-Muhayani



Ahmed Al-Aqab, Al-Jarallah, and Mohammed Al-Barjas



Nasser Al-Aiji and Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber



Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber, Saud Al-Farhan, Anwar Al-Yassin, Bassam Al-Qassas, Muhammad Al-Yassin and Ahmed Al-Jarallah



Muhammad Al-Yassin and Ahmed Al-Jarallah



Ardha band



'Azayez' welcomes its guests.

## Legacy of 'Abu Faisal'

### Azayez Farm: Where nature meets nobility

By Mohammad Al-Barjas

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5: The anniversary of Azayez farm is a celebration of the natural masterpiece meticulously transformed by His Highness Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad, a creation adorned with beauty and ingenuity.

Known as 'Abu Faisal', His Highness has consistently sought to share the farm's creative excellence and beautiful offerings with all visitors, ensuring that its thorough organization and its natural beauty are appreciated.

Boasting breathtaking natural scenery and equipped with all the necessary amenities and recreational facilities, Azayez is an ideal destination, especially popular for visits during the National Day and Liberation Day celebrations in February.

For more than three decades, Sheikh Ali has been upholding a tradition of hosting special days -- one for the political leadership, another for the Kuwaiti diwanias (traditional gathering places), and the final day for the diplomatic corps.

The enthusiasm with which guests accept his generous invitation is a testament to the high regard and affection held for Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad. His noble values and virtues, gifts from Allah, make him a welcoming host who effortlessly makes guests feel completely at home, like family.

Thus, Azayez has become synonymous with the month of February, its beauty further enhanced by the warmth and devotion of its owner, who spares no effort in ascertaining the comfort and enjoyment of every guest.





US House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (center), flanked by Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (left), and Rep Katherine Clark, House minority whip, speaks to reporters during a news conference at the Capitol in Washington on Feb 4. (AP)

Republicans need to get serious: Schumer

## US Dems demand ‘dramatic changes’ for ICE

WASHINGTON, Feb 5, (AP): Democrats are threatening to block funding for the Homeland Security Department when it expires in two weeks unless there are “dramatic changes” and “real accountability” for US Immigration and Customs Enforcement and other law enforcement agencies who are carrying out President Donald Trump’s campaign of federal immigration enforcement in Minnesota and across the country.

Congress is discussing potential new rules for ICE and US Customs and Border Protection after officers shot and killed two Minneapolis protesters in January. Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer and House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries reiterated their party’s demands Wednesday, with Schumer telling reporters that Congress must “rein in ICE in very serious ways, and end the violence.”

Democrats are “drawing a line in the sand” as Republicans need their votes to continue the funding, Jeffries said.

The negotiations come amid some bipartisan sentiment that Congress should step in to de-escalate tensions over the enforcement operations that have rocked Minnesota and other states. But finding real agreement in such a short time will be difficult, if not “an impossibility,” as Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said Tuesday.

President Donald Trump last week agreed to a Democratic request that funding for the DHS be separated from a larger spending bill and extended at current levels for two weeks while the two parties discuss possible requirements for the federal agents. House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said this weekend that he was at the White House when Trump spoke with Schumer and that they were “on the path to get agreement.”

But it’s unclear if the president or enough congressional Republicans will agree to any of the Democrats’ larger demands that the officers unmask and identify themselves, obtain

judicial warrants in certain cases and work with local authorities, among other asks. Republicans have already pushed back.

And House GOP lawmakers are demanding that some of their own priorities be added to the Homeland Security spending bill, including legislation that would require proof of citizenship before Americans register to vote. South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham and other Republican senators are pushing for restrictions on sanctuary cities that they say don’t do enough to crack down on illegal immigration. There’s no clear definition of sanctuary jurisdictions, but the term is generally applied to state and local governments that limit cooperation with federal immigration authorities.

It’s also uncertain if Democrats who are furious over the Trump administration’s increasingly aggressive immigration enforcement operations would be willing to compromise.

9 killed as dump truck plunges into ravine

## Philippine lawmakers find bid to impeach Marcos to be ‘insufficient in substance’

MANILA, Philippines, Feb 5, (Agencies): Philippine legislators dismissed two impeachment complaints Wednesday against President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. that accused him of an array of crimes, including involvement in largescale corruption, that were all declared “insufficient in substance.”

Marcos and Vice President Sara Duterte were separately facing impeachment complaints before the House of Representatives, which is dominated by the president’s allies. At least two impeachment complaints have been filed against Duterte mainly for alleged corruption but it’s unclear when they would be tackled.

The two leaders were former allies that later became embroiled in bruising political disputes, deepening divisions in one of Asia’s most unwieldy democracies.

After days of deliberations, the House justice committee voted to dismiss the impeachment complaints filed by left-wing activists and a lawyer against Marcos. A majority of its 46 members argued that most of the allegations would either be difficult to validate, did not directly implicate

the president or did not fall squarely under the constitutional grounds for impeachment and threw them out “for insufficiency in substance.”

One of the allegations cited a former House lawmaker, Zaldy Co, who accused the president of receiving huge kickbacks from flood control projects in videos he posted on Facebook. Co, who has been implicated in the corruption scandal, could not be located. He has denied any wrongdoing but has been hunted by the police in the country and abroad after an anti-corruption court issued a warrant for his arrest last year.

Marcos welcomed the decision. “We’re happy that the process was followed and that the lawmakers recognized the real truth,” Communications undersecretary Claire Castro said.

Renato Reyes, one of the complainants from the left-wing political alliance Bayan, said the House decision “derailed accountability.”

“We were prepared to present evidence at the next stage,” Reyes said. “What was only required at the current stage was a recital of the offenses that constitute betrayal of public trust.”

Under Philippine law, opponents



Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, waves during his keynote speech at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) CEO summit in Gyeongju, South Korea on Oct 31, 2025. (AP)

seeking to impeach any top official would have to wait for a year before being allowed to seek another impeachment attempt.

Last year, the House voted to impeach the vice president and sent the

Duterte survived last year’s impeachment attempt over the legal technicality. Two groups of opponents then re-filed separate impeachment complaints against her on Monday after the one-year prohibition period lapsed.

The complaints centered on her alleged illegal use and mishandling of 612.5 million pesos (\$10.3 million) in confidential funds from the vice president’s office, and also from her time as education secretary under Marcos. She has generally denied any wrongdoing but has refused to provide detailed explanations in past congressional inquiries.

Duterte’s threat in an online news conference in November 2024 to have the president, his wife and House of Representatives speaker killed by an assassin if she were killed amid their disputes was also cited in the one of the impeachment complaints.

The vice president is the daughter of ex-President Rodrigo Duterte, who oversaw bloody anti-drug crackdowns while in office from 2016 to 2022. He was arrested and detained in the Netherlands by the International Criminal Court last year for alleged crimes against humanity.

**Also:**

**MANILA:** Nine people were killed after the dump truck they were riding in plunged into a ravine in **Negros Oriental** province in the central Philippines on Wednesday, police said.

Police identified the victims as male government employees who were traveling to conduct field work for **Bayawan City’s** agriculture office when the crash occurred on Wednesday morning.

Initial investigation showed the dump truck, which was also carrying five drums of crude oil, suffered brake failure while navigating a sharp descent.

Police told local reporters that the driver lost control, causing the vehicle to smash through a concrete safety barrier before tumbling more than 50 meters into a ravine and landing in a river below.

Police said that emergency teams from the local fire department and rescue units rushed to the scene and extricated the victims from the mangled wreckage. The victims were taken to a local hospital, but were all declared dead on arrival by the attending physician.

## South Sudan hospital hit by government airstrike, says MSF

NAIROBI, Kenya, Feb 5, (AP): Humanitarian group Doctors Without Borders said one of its hospitals in South Sudan was hit by an airstrike carried out by government forces.

The incident, on Tuesday night, marks the 10th attack in 12 months on a medical facility in the country run by the group, which is also known as Médecins Sans Frontières, or MSF.

The hospital is located in Lankien, a town in the state of Jonglei where opposition-held areas have been at the center of renewed fighting in recent weeks between government troops and opposition forces.

Lankien had been evacuated hours before Tuesday airstrike after MSF received information about a possible attack. One staff member was injured, and the hospital’s main warehouse was destroyed along with medical supplies, the group said in a statement.

“MSF shared the GPS coordinates of our facilities with the government and other parties to the conflict,” operations manager

Gul Badshah said. “The government of South Sudan armed forces are the only armed party with the capacity to perform aerial attacks in the country.”

Government spokesman **Ateny Wek Ateny** and army spokesman Maj. Gen. Lul Ruai Koang did not respond to requests for comment.

In a separate incident earlier on Tuesday, a MSF facility in the village of Pieri was looted by “unknown assailants,” the group said. Pieri is also in opposition-held Jonglei.

MSF said the two facilities were the only health provider for about 250,000 people.

On Jan. 25, the army launched “Operation Enduring Peace,” which it said aimed to recapture towns that had been recently seized by opposition forces and “restore law and order.”

Civilians were ordered to evacuate three counties in Jonglei immediately, and aid groups were told to leave within 48 hours.

In December, a coalition of opposition forces seized a string of government outposts in central Jonglei, homeland of the Nuer ethnic group and a longtime opposition stronghold.

Some of those forces are loyal to opposition leader Riek Machar, while others consider themselves part of an ethnic Nuer militia called the White Army.

## Argentina requests extradition of Maduro from US on crimes against humanity charges

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina, Feb 5, (Agencies): An Argentine judge on Wednesday requested the extradition from the United States of former Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, who was captured by the U.S. military last month and now faces federal charges of narco-terrorism and conspiracy to import cocaine in New York.

The inquest from Argentina, whose judges have aggressively pursued human rights abuse cases beyond its borders, accuses Maduro of having committed crimes against humanity in overseeing a harsh crackdown on protesters and political opponents as president.

“The urgent translation of the international request and the documentation attached thereto is hereby ordered,” said the warrant, which was signed by Argentine federal judge Sebastián Ramos and seen by The Associated Press.

Plaintiffs include Venezuelans who suffered torture, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance, among other abuses, at the hands of Venezuelan security forces and intelligence agents.

The case, filed in Buenos Aires in 2023 by human rights organizations representing the victims, relies on the principle of universal jurisdiction, a legal concept that allows for the prosecution in Argentina of anyone from any country who commits crimes like genocide or terrorism anywhere in the world.

Argentina’s foreign ministry must now present the request to the Trump



Congressman Nicolas Maduro Guerra, the son of deposed former Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, speaks during a pro-government march to demand the release of his father and deposed first lady Cilia Flores, a month after U.S. forces captured them, in Caracas, Venezuela on Feb 3. (AP)

administration, which is unlikely to comply as Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores await trial in a Brooklyn jail on charges that they worked with drug cartels to facilitate the shipment of thousands of tons of cocaine into the U.S. over a 25-year period.

Even so, one of the organizations that filed the case hailed the request as an important milestone “for Argentina, for justice, and above all, for Venezuelans who dared to speak out.”

“Beyond this specific resolution, there remains the satisfaction of having

Judge Ramos to request the extradition for the crimes-against-humanity investigation.

As one of just a handful of countries whose law permits the investigation of crimes-against-humanity cases beyond its borders, Argentina has increasingly taken center stage in lawsuits ranging from the torture of dissidents under Franco’s dictatorship in Spain to atrocities committed by the military against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar.

President Javier Milei of Argentina, the region’s most prominent right-wing leader and ally of President Donald Trump, has cheered the US military seizure of Maduro.

**Also:**

**CARACAS:** Venezuela’s Defense Minister **Vladimir Padrino Lopez** said on Wednesday that authorities are investigating the events surrounding the Jan 3 US military operation, which resulted in the seizure of President **Nicolas Maduro** and his wife.

In his statement, the military chief did not specify the type or scope of the investigation, but indicated that the ongoing investigation will allow the country “to learn, evaluate and make adjustments” to the transformation plan for Venezuela’s Bolivarian National Armed Forces, adding that “extremely high technology” was involved.

The remarks were made on Venezuela’s National Dignity Day, an event viewed as a symbol of resistance and political transformation.

## S.Africa’s DA leader withdraws from party leadership race

JOHANNESBURG, Feb 5, (Agencies): South African Democratic Alliance (DA) leader John Steenhuisen announced on Wednesday that he will not seek re-election as party leader at the DA’s Federal Congress scheduled for April.

Speaking at a media briefing in Durban, Steenhuisen, who also serves as minister of agriculture, said he would concentrate fully on addressing the severe foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) outbreak affecting South Africa’s livestock sector, which he said is “not a part-time job.”

“It would not be fair to the incredible farmers of South Africa for me to split my time between battling the worst FMD outbreak ever on the one hand, while also running an internal campaign for the next three months and then leading a local government election campaign, on the other hand,” he said.

Highlighting the party’s entry into the Government of National Unity (GNU) after the 2024 general election as a significant milestone, the DA leader said the party’s national polling has



Opposition Democratic Alliance party leader John Steenhuisen waves at supporters in Pretoria, South Africa on Feb 17, 2024, for their national manifesto launch in anticipation of the 2024 general elections. (AP)

strengthened, rising from around 16 percent to roughly 30 percent, reflecting an expanded political presence.

Steenhuisen affirmed he will remain in cabinet and support the DA’s ongoing

role in government, while paving the way for new party leadership.

The DA is preparing for a leadership contest at its April congress ahead of the 2026 local elections.

### Subcontinent

**India revokes direct rule in Manipur:** India’s federal government on Wednesday revoked the direct rule imposed in the restive northeastern state of Manipur in February last year, the state-run broadcaster All India Radio (AIR) said.

Yumnam Khemchand Singh, a Bharatiya Janata Party leader, took oath as the new chief minister of Manipur on Wednesday evening.

Earlier in the day, Khemchand Singh met the state’s Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla and staked a claim to form a new local government in the state.

Last year in February, the then chief minister **N Biren Singh** resigned, two years after deadly ethnic violence broke out in the northeastern state, which claimed 258 lives and displaced over 60,000. (Xinhua)



Singh

**‘216 terrorists killed in SW Pakistan’:** At least 216 terrorists were killed as Pakistan’s security forces have concluded an anti-terrorist operation in the country’s southwestern province of Balochistan, the military said on Thursday.

A total of 22 personnel of the security forces and law enforcement agencies and 36 civilians were also killed in the attacks launched by the terrorists, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of the Pakistani army, said in a statement.

The operation began on Jan. 29, following credible and verified intelligence indicating the presence of terrorists posing an imminent threat to the local population.

Subsequently, security forces repelled a series of attacks by the outlawed Balochistan Liberation Army, the ISPR said.

This was followed by an expanded campaign of intelligence-based operations across multiple areas to dismantle terrorist sleeper cells through sustained combing and sanitization efforts, said the statement.

A substantial cache of foreign-origin weapons, ammunition, explosives and other equipment was also recovered during the operations, according to the statement. (Xinhua)

**‘261 Afghan inmates freed from jails’:** A total of 261 Afghan prisoners have been released from jails in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Pakistan, Afghan government ministries announced in separate statements on Thursday.

According to a statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, sustained diplomatic efforts by Afghanistan’s embassy in the UAE resulted in the release of around 108 Afghan detainees by Emirati authorities. The release coincided with the UAE’s National Day, with some inmates already returned and others scheduled for repatriation following the completion of legal formalities.

In a parallel development, the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation announced that 153 Afghans imprisoned in various Pakistani cities have been released and safely returned to Afghanistan through the Spin Boldak border crossing in southern Kandahar province. Their prison terms had ranged from one day to two months. (Xinhua)

**Road accident kills 4 in Afghanistan:** Four commuters were killed and another was injured due to head-on collision in the northern Balkh province of Afghanistan on Wednesday night, said a statement of provincial police office on Thursday.

The deadly accident took place on a road linking the provincial capital Mazar-i-Sharif to the border town of Hairatan when a car collided with a tractor coming from the opposite direction, the statement added.

Blaming reckless driving for the deadly mishap, the statement called upon drivers to respect traffic rules when driving on the highways. (Xinhua)



## Kuwait oil price surges to \$65.17 pb

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5, (KUNA): The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by USD 1.65 to USD 65.17 per barrel on Wednesday, compared to USD 63.52 the previous day, reported the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on

Thursday.

In global markets, the price of Brent crude went up USD 2.13 to reach USD 69.46 per barrel, while the West Texas Intermediate increased USD 1.93 to reach USD 65.14 pb.

# Business

Underscoring partnership between finance and oil sectors in energy transition

## NBK showcases expertise and industry insights at KOGS 2026



Emad Al-Ablani with the speakers at the session.



Emad Al-Ablani speaking at one of the sessions.



Emad Al-Ablani, Pradeep Handa, Khalid Al-Humaidi, and Faisal Al-Abdulmuhsen with the bank's team during the conference.

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5: Over three days at the Kuwait Oil & Gas Show and Conference (KOGS 2026), National Bank of Kuwait took part in dynamic networking activities, expert-led discussions, and targeted knowledge-sharing engagements, reaffirming its growing influence in supporting Kuwait's sustainable energy transition.

Mr. Emad Al-Ablani, Group Chief Human Resources Officer at NBK, participated in this conference, speaking on a keynote panel titled "Shaping a Responsible Future: People, Planet, and Principles" exploring how companies are embedding ESG principles into their operations, alongside Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives, within governance frameworks, environmental protection efforts, and operational processes.

In this session, Al-Ablani reviewed the role of these principles in enhancing performance, building trust with stakeholders, and establishing resilient institutions ready for the future, especially in sectors undergoing rapid transformations.

In addition, Mr. Faisal Al Abdulmuhsen, Associate Vice President - Sustainability, joined a dedicated technical session where he highlighted NBK's multidisciplinary capabilities in sustainable finance, climate mitigation, and ESG risk management. During the session, NBK delivered a presentation on the transformation of the global energy landscape and the growing importance of sustainable finance for Kuwait's oil and gas sector. The presentation also highlighted the Bank's issuance of Kuwait's first green bond in 2024, valued at USD 500 million, alongside its ongoing efforts to strengthen sustainability governance, climate risk assessment, stress testing, and risk-based pricing frameworks to support clients in their transition toward sustainable practices.

The presentation also emphasized that Kuwait's transition requires a partnership with the oil and gas sector, which provides technical expertise, while financial institutions provide capital, financing structures, and risk insights.

- Albani reviewed NBK's efforts in implementing environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles.
- The Group's Human Resources team highlighted its efforts in developing an inclusive work environment and reinforcing diversity and inclusion-related initiatives.
- From the Bank's Sustainability team, Faisal Al-Abdulmuhsen emphasized its capabilities in supporting clients' organizational resilience against climate change.

Meanwhile, the Human Resources team showcased the NBK RISE program, the Bank's flagship women empowerment initiative, underscoring NBK's commitment to building a leading and sustainable institution supported by world class academic

partnerships.

The discussions highlighted the program, which aims to address the leadership gap issue by developing high-potential women through shaping skills, changing mindsets, and applying inclusive leadership practices, in addition to highlighting the program's design mechanisms, which were created by women for women, with a focus on real regulatory challenges, leadership development, guidance, and experimental learning.

Moreover, the NBK RISE initiative also aligns with NBK's strategy for diversity, equity and inclusion, the UN Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly gender equality and inclusive growth.

The KOGS 2026 conference is one of the most prominent regional forums in the energy sector, bringing together a select group of industry leaders from around the world to contribute to shaping the future of energy.

It is worth noting that this year's conference focused on the transformation of the

energy sector, innovation, and sustainable economic development, which are themes that align with NBK's firm commitment to responsible finance and supporting Kuwait's national development goals.

NBK's participation in KOGS 2026 reflects its continued commitment to supporting Kuwait's efforts in building a more resilient and sustainable future, in addition to shedding light on the importance of incorporating responsible banking services in the work strategies, managing risk, and enhancing long-term value.

Furthermore, the Bank's participation in the conference underscores the deep and longstanding relationship it shares with the oil sector, one of the most vital sectors of the Kuwaiti economy. For decades, NBK played a key role in financing energy projects and supporting national companies in this sector, which reflects its continued commitment to supporting the economic pillars of the state and promoting its sustainable growth.

# Boursa Kuwait ends in negative territory

Premier and main markets slide

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait ended Thursday's trading session in negative territory, with the general market index falling 39.88 points, or 0.46 percent, to close at 8,691.77 points.

Trading activity included 205.7 million shares exchanged through 14,463 cash transactions, with a total value of KD 64.2 million (approximately USD 195.8 million).

The main market index recorded a decline of 24.36 points,

or 0.30 percent, ending the day at 8,109.70 points. Turnover reached 87.2 million shares across 6,198 transactions, valued at KD 16 million (about USD 48.8 million).

Meanwhile, the premier market index slipped 45.65 points, or 0.49 percent, to 9,266.07 points, with 118.4 million shares traded through 8,265 deals amounting to KD 48.2 million (around USD 147 million).

The Main 50 Index also retreated, losing 26.89 points, or 0.31 percent, to settle at 8,620.06 points. Trading volume for this segment reached 72.4 million shares from 4,515 transactions, worth KD 13 million (approximately USD 39.6 million).

### Highlighting international investment opportunities

## Cityscape expands to Kuwait in landmark 25th anniversary year

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5: Cityscape, the world's largest real estate exhibition series, will launch Cityscape Kuwait from 2-4 April 2026 at the Kuwait International Fairground, marking a significant milestone in the brand's 25th anniversary year.

The launch introduces a new platform designed to connect Kuwaiti investors, advisors, and developers with international real estate opportunities, reinforcing Kuwait's position as a key player in global property investment.

Kuwaiti investors continue to demonstrate strong appetite for overseas real estate, with an estimated USD 2.4 billion spent annually on international property acquisitions. Cityscape Kuwait responds directly to this demand, bringing trusted global developers to market and enabling direct engagement with decision-makers actively seeking diversified, long-term investments.

"Cityscape Kuwait 2026 creates a focused environment for meaningful engagement between Kuwaiti investors and international developers," said Alex Heuff, Group Director "Investors are increasingly looking for quality projects that support diversification and long-term value, and this platform brings those opportunities together in a market they trust."

For investors, the exhibition offers access to regulated international property markets, clear ownership structures, and investment-grade developments presented directly by credible global developers.

The platform provides a beyond local setting for evaluating opportunities beyond local borders, aligned with global best practice.

Cityscape Kuwait also serves brokers, advisors, and wealth professionals seeking to expand international portfolios for their clients. Through direct access to developers across multiple global markets, the event supports deal sourcing, relationship building, and the development of long-term international pipelines through face-to-face engagement.



Kuwait to host global property showcase at Cityscape 2026.

For exhibitors, Cityscape Kuwait represents a direct route to active capital. Kuwaiti developers will have the opportunity to present their vision within a global real estate context, while international exhibitors gain exposure to one of the region's most active outbound investor markets, engaging with Kuwaiti buyers actively acquiring overseas property.

The launch takes place against a backdrop of continued momentum in Kuwait's real estate and infrastructure landscape, aligned with Vision 2035. Major national developments across housing, transport, and logistics signal Kuwait's long-term commitment to growth, diversification, and international collaboration.

Cityscape Kuwait is delivered by Informa PLC, a FTSE 100 company and the world's largest exhibition organiser, in partnership with Blueprint, combining global reach with strong local market insight.

By bringing together local capital and international opportunity in a single, market-led platform, Cityscape Kuwait establishes a new meeting point for global real estate engagement in the region.

For exhibition and participation details, visit:cityscape-events.com/kuwait

### Two decades of youth advocacy

## Alghanim Industries, INJAZ enhance partnership to empower Arab youth

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5: Alghanim Industries (Kutayba Alghanim Group), one of the largest privately owned companies in the region, marked its long-standing collaboration with INJAZ through a leadership engagement between Chairman Kutayba Y. Alghanim and Sheikh Hanadi Al Thani, Chairperson of INJAZ Al-Arab. The meeting highlighted their enduring partnership and shared commitment to expanding youth opportunities in education, employability, and entrepreneurship across the Arab world.

The meeting also shed a light on Alghanim Industries' foundational role in supporting youth development initiatives, as the founder of INJAZ Kuwait and an active member of INJAZ Al-Arab, reflecting decades of sustained engagement in programs that prepare young people for the future of work.

During the meeting, Sheikh Hanadi Al Thani, Chairperson of INJAZ Al-Arab, presented Kutayba Y. Alghanim, Chairman of Alghanim Industries, with the INJAZ Lifetime Leadership & Legacy Award, in recognition of his exceptional vision in advancing youth empowerment over more than two decades. The award underscores Chairman Alghanim's enduring commitment to supporting youth development initiatives and his long-standing role in strengthening partnerships between the private sector and youth-focused programs.

INJAZ Al-Arab, a member of Junior Achievement Worldwide, is one of the region's largest and most impactful youth empowerment organizations, delivering programs focused on work readiness, financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and digital skills. Operating across multiple Arab countries, INJAZ equips students with practical, real-world skills that help bridge the gap between education and employment.

Since its inception, INJAZ has reached over 10 million students, and mobilized over 140,000 corporate volunteers across the region, enabling youth to build confidence, develop critical skills, and navigate an increasingly fast-changing global econ-



Group photo

omy.

In Kuwait, INJAZ Kuwait has played a pivotal role in preparing generations of students with the tools needed to succeed in the workforce, supported by strong and sustained private-sector partnerships. Collaborations with organizations such as Alghanim Industries help bring learning beyond the classroom, offering students hands-on exposure, mentorship, and real-world insights that enhance employability, build entrepreneurial mindsets, and strengthen work-readiness skills.

"Our partnership with INJAZ reflects our long-standing belief that investing in young people is one of the most meaningful ways to give forward to society," said Kutayba Y. Alghanim, Chairman at Alghanim Industries. "By supporting programs that build work readiness, financial literacy, and entrepreneurial skills, we are helping equip the next generation with the confidence and capabilities needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving world. We are proud of our employees who volunteer their time and expertise, and we encourage the wider private sector to play an active role in empowering youth."

Alghanim Industries' support for INJAZ aligns closely with the company's sustainability and social impact strategy, rooted in its pillars of Giving Forward, education, empowerment, and entrepreneurship & employability. By investing in initiatives that build human capital, Alghanim Industries aims to create long-term

value for individuals, communities, and the wider economy.

A key pillar of this partnership is employee volunteerism, with Alghanim Industries team members actively contributing their time, expertise, and mentorship to INJAZ programs. This engagement reflects the company's belief in giving back to the communities that have supported its growth, while fostering a culture of purpose and social responsibility within the organization.

"Our collaboration with Alghanim Industries stands as a powerful example of how private-sector leadership can drive lasting social impact," added Sheikh Hanadi Al Thani, Chairperson at INJAZ Al-Arab. "As a founding partner of INJAZ Kuwait and a committed member of INJAZ Al-Arab, Alghanim Industries has played an instrumental role in advancing youth empowerment across the region. Together, we continue to provide young people with the skills, exposure, and opportunities they need to succeed in today's competitive and fast-changing economy."

Alghanim Industries encourages other private-sector organizations and community stakeholders to engage in similar initiatives, underscoring the collective role businesses can play in empowering youth and strengthening future workforces across the region. Through its continued collaboration with INJAZ, Alghanim Industries reaffirms its long-term commitment to giving forward to the communities it serves, helping equip young people with the skills, confidence, and perspective needed to succeed in a rapidly evolving world.



# Bessent, lawmakers trade barbs over fiscal policy and Trump ties

WASHINGTON, Feb 5, (AP): A hearing about oversight of the U.S. financial system devolved into insults several times Wednesday as Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent clashed with Democratic lawmakers over fiscal policy, the business dealings of the Trump family and other issues.

Appearances by treasury secretaries on Capitol Hill are more typically known for staid exchanges over economic policy than for political theater, but Wednesday's hearing of the House Financial Services Committee hearing featured several fiery exchanges between the Republican Cabinet member and Democrats, with Bessent even lobbing insults back to the lawmakers.

Bessent called Rep. Sylvia Garcia "confused" when she questioned how undocumented immigrants could affect housing affordability across the country, prompting the Texas Democrat to snap back, "Don't be demeaning to me, alright?"

Bessent later mocked a question from Rep. Stephen Lynch, D-Mass., about shuttered investigations into cryptocurrency firms. Lynch expressed frustration with Bessent's interruptions, saying, "Mister Chairman, the answers have to be responsive if we are going to have a serious hearing."

Bessent replied, "Well, the questions have to be serious."

After a back-and-forth over whether tariffs cause inflation or one-time price increases for consumers, California Democratic Rep. Maxine Waters asked committee leaders to intervene with Bessent: "Can someone shut him up?"

And in a fiery exchange with Rep. Gregory Meeks over the Abu Dhabi royal family's investment into the Trump family's World Liberty Financial cryptocurrency firm last year, the New York Democrat dropped an F-bomb as he shouted at Bessent: "Stop covering for the president! Stop being a flunky!"

The Treasury Department did not immediately respond to a request for



Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bessent listens to questions from members of the House Financial Services Committee during a hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington, Wednesday, Feb. 4, 2026. (AP)

comment on the fireworks.

Bessent's performance was "not a role you typically see a treasury secretary play," said Graham Steele, a former assistant secretary for financial institutions under Biden-era Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen. The department has traditionally "been removed from some of the day-to-day, hand-to-hand political combat," Steele said in an interview.

He recalled his former boss having tense exchanges over climate change and policy issues with Republican lawmakers during committee hearings, but the exchanges were not personal, he said, noting treasury secretaries have to strike a "delicate balance" of working with the White House while safeguarding the "economic stature" of the country internationally.

In recent months, Bessent has ratcheted up his insults when it comes to Democratic leaders.

He has called California Gov. Gavin Newsom "economically illiterate," compared him to the fictional serial killer Patrick Bateman, and called him "a brontosaurus with a brain the size of a walnut." He has on several occasions called Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren an "American Peronist" after she told American financial institutions not to finance the Trump administration's massive support package for Argentina. Bessent's combative-ness is, in part, a sign of the times, said David Lublin, chair of the Department of Government at American University's School of Public Affairs.

"President Trump has shown he likes belligerence and he likes nominees and others who defend him vociferously," Lublin told The Associated Press.

"It's hard to say that this is unusual for this political environment. What used to be the normal modicum of respect for Congress has frayed to the point of vanishing," Lublin said.

What was unusual, in Lublin's view, was for Bessent to reveal his thoughts on monetary policy - normally the purview of the Federal Reserve - and his insistence that Trump has the right to interfere with the decision-making of the central bank. "You have a cabinet secretary defending the president's efforts to erode institutions," Lublin said.

On Thursday, Bessent will get another opportunity to spar with lawmakers. He is scheduled to appear before the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee on the same topic: the annual report by the Financial Stability Oversight Council, which Bessent leads.

## China warns Panama as CK Hutchison starts arbitration

HONG KONG, Feb 5, (AP): Hong Kong's CK Hutchison Holdings said Wednesday its subsidiary has started arbitration proceedings against Panama, after that country's Supreme Court ruled a concession for the subsidiary to operate Panama Canal ports was unconstitutional.

The company said it strongly disagreed with last week's ruling, and China warned Panama would pay "a heavy price" if it persisted. Panama has said the two ports at each end of the canal - a critical passage for global trade that links the Atlantic and Pacific oceans - would operate without interruption after the ruling, which was seen by some as a win for the U.S. President Donald Trump administration's goal of blocking Chinese influence over the canal.

Panama Ports Company, the subsidiary under CK Hutchison that operates the ports, began arbitration proceedings Tuesday under the rules of the International Chamber of Commerce. It's unclear what the impact of the proceedings would be and how long they could take.

The two Panama ports are part of a \$23 billion sale of CK Hutchison's 43 global ports to a consortium of buyers including U.S. investment firm BlackRock. The deal, which was first announced last March, has been delayed by complications surrounding the Panama court case as well as elevated geopolitical tensions between Washington and Beijing.

Analysts believe the Hong Kong conglomerate is likely to buy time with legal proceedings, such as the latest arbitration move, while looking for alternatives for the broader port deal.

Yueming Yan, a Chinese University of Hong Kong law professor, said if an arbitral tribunal is constituted, future hearings may be held outside Paris or New York, although the agreement specified the arbitration board should be in New York. The timing is difficult to predict, but arbitration involving investment-related concession contracts may extend over several years.

While not overturning domestic court decisions, the tribunal's ruling would be binding and address whether the Panamanian government breached its obligations and owes compensation. But a result favoring CK Hutchison could raise questions over its recognition or enforcement, she said.

"The approach that domestic courts in Panama may take in any recognition or enforcement proceedings cannot be assessed with certainty at this stage," she said.

Albert So, chairman of Hong Kong Mediation and Arbitration Center, said if CK Hutchison wins, this may result in compensation - since the concession was just renewed in 2021 for 25 years - or it could possibly restore parts of the firm's rights in operating the ports.

If Panama wins and the concession is confirmed unconstitutional, it could raise further questions over the company's past operations over almost three decades, he said. Robbert van Trooijen, founder of Panama-based consultancy Inception Partners, said there is little CK Hutchison can do to directly override Panama's Supreme Court ruling as it is the country's highest court.

Panama's court ruling has been drawing strong backlash from China.

The \$23 billion port deal was first announced in March last year, not long after Trump alleged China of "running the Panama Canal" and vowed to "take back" the canal. With the U.S. compa-

ny BlackRock listed as part of the consortium of buyers of CK Hutchison's ports - including the pair of ports in Panama - some interpreted the deal as a victory for the Trump administration.

The planned sale, however, had drawn China's ire early on, with Beijing saying last year its antitrust regulator would initiate a review of the deal. The parties involved in the deal have since been looking for ways to move forward the sale, including plans of adding a Chinese investor into the consortium.

Panama's court decision last week added further uncertainties. On Tuesday, Beijing's office overseeing Hong Kong affairs criticized the ruling, saying it showed that Panamanian authorities were bowing down to "hegemonic powers." It did not specify but pointed to politicians from some countries who had said they were "encouraged" by the ruling, in an apparent reference to U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

"Panama's authorities should recognize the situation and correct their course," it said. "If they persist in their own way and refuse to see reason, they will pay a heavy price both politically and economically!"

China Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian doubled down Wednesday, saying China will "firmly protect the legitimate and lawful rights and interests" of Chinese companies.

"Who is seeking to monopolize the (Panama) canal? And who is undermining international laws in the name of the rule of law? That's quite clear in the international community," Lin said at a daily news conference in Beijing.

Panama President José Raúl Mulino responded Wednesday, saying that he "energetically rejected" Beijing's statement.

"Panama is country of laws and respects the decisions of the judiciary, which is independent of the central government," he wrote on X.

Panama Ports Company, the CK Hutchison subsidiary operating the two Panama ports, said in a separate statement Wednesday that the arbitration followed its efforts to consult and avoid disputes, while alleging that the Panamanian state had "routinely disregarded" communications and clarification requests. The company said it seeks damages based on data and necessary relief and reiterated its invitation to Panama for clarity and consultations.

The company said that while the court ruling has yet to become effective, the state conducted unexpected site visits and instructed it to provide unrestricted access to physical, commercial and intellectual property, information and employees.

Apart from its two ports in Panama, CK Hutchison's planned sale of its 41 other global ports also include those in Europe, Asia, Australia, the Americas, the Middle East and Africa.

The latest Panama situation has not - and is not likely to - impede discussions relative to the other ports, said a person with knowledge of the deal, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter with the media.

While BlackRock is part of the consortium of buyers, under initial deal terms, Switzerland-based port operator Terminal Investment Limited - chaired by Italian shipping scion Diego Aponte and controlled by the Mediterranean Shipping Company - is set to be the majority owner of all ports outside Panama.

# BoE holds interest rate at 3.75%

Inflation to hit 2% by spring

LONDON, Feb 5, (AP): The Bank of England kept its main interest rate unchanged at 3.75% on Thursday with U.K. inflation remaining above target and economic growth is showing signs of picking up.

The decision was widely anticipated in financial markets but the split on the nine-member rate-setting panel was much closer than expected. Five members of the Monetary Policy Committee opted to keep rates unchanged while four voted for a quarter-point cut.

The central bank, which sets interest rates for the whole of the U.K., has been steadily reducing interest rates over the past 18 months, more often than not every three months. It last cut its key rate in December and indicated that further reductions are likely this year.

Economic forecasts accompanying the decision reinforced the view that further rate cuts are in the offing, as the bank is predicting that inflation will fall back to its 2% target in the coming months from 3.4% currently.

That's around a year earlier than previously thought. It said a series of



Governor of the Bank of England, Andrew Bailey, talks during a Bank of England Monetary Policy Report press conference in London, Thursday, Feb. 5, 2026. (AP)

measures to reduce the cost of living, particularly with regard to energy bills, that were announced in November's annual budget by Treasury chief Rachel Reeves were largely behind the faster drop.

"We now think that inflation will fall back to around 2% by the

which has lost significant support since it won the general election in 2024 partly because of the economy, is counting on inflation falling sharply this year, which would allow the central bank to further reduce borrowing costs.

While painting a rosier inflation picture, the central bank downgraded its growth forecasts for the British economy this year, from 1.2% to 0.9%, and for 2027, from 1.6% to 1.5%. It is also expecting the unemployment rate to rise to 5.3% this year, having said in November that it would peak at 5.1%.

Lower interest rates help spur economic growth by reducing borrowing costs, which can lead to increased spending by consumers and boost investment by businesses. But that can also fuel higher prices.

Following Thursday's decision and the tight vote split, economists said there are likely to be at least two more quarter-point rate cuts this year.

"A cut at the next meeting in March is most certainly on the table," said Luke Bartholomew, deputy chief economist at asset management firm Aberdeen. "And even if it takes a bit longer for the next cut to come through, we still think there is a strong case for rates to eventually fall to 3% later this year."

Citing strong labor market and spending

# ECB keeps interest rates steady at 2%

FRANKFURT, Feb 5, (AP): The European Central Bank left interest rates unchanged Thursday as the economy in the 21 countries that use the euro chugs past the disruption from U.S. President Donald Trump's tariffs with modest yet resilient growth.

The bank left its benchmark deposit rate at 2%, where it has been since June, after a series of cuts from the peak of 4% starting in mid-2024.

"The economy remains resilient in a challenging global environment," the ECB said in a statement. It said growth was being supported by low unemployment, increased government spending on defense and infrastructure and the past series of rate cuts.

The reduced rate has been low enough to re-start mortgage lending for home sales and new construction due to reduced credit costs, boosting growth. Low unemployment is also contributing to demand for goods by consumers and helping keep the economy resilient without the stimulus of further rate cuts.

As a result, the chief monetary authority for the eurozone may leave its rates unchanged into 2027,



The Euro sculpture stands in front of the former headquarters of the European Central Bank (ECB) in Frankfurt, Germany, Tuesday, May 23, 2023. (AP)

analysts say. The eurozone grew a stronger than expected 0.3% in the last three months of 2025, and may reach growth of 1.3% for all of this year, according to forecasts by Berenberg bank.

Growth prospects have brightened due to anticipation of higher

ment without a vote -- lifted a dark shadow from the No. 2 eurozone economy.

Meanwhile energy costs have abated since a painful spike in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Europe weathered months of uncertainty as Trump threatened to raise tariffs to levels that could have choked off much of Europe's trade with the US. In the end, a deal with the EU's executive commission capped the tariff rate at 15%, a sharp increase from 4.8% previously but not as bad as feared.

The deal removed uncertainty and let businesses plan. That's despite Trump's brief threat to add more tariffs on some EU countries that opposed his demands for a US takeover of Greenland.

Inflation has fallen to below bank's target of 2%, coming in at 1.7% in January.

Economists at Berenberg said they expect the bank to leave rates unchanged until strengthening growth calls for a rate hike in mid-2027. Rate hikes combat inflation by raising credit costs and dampening demand for good bought on credit, from houses to new factories.

# Asia faces growing labor abuses amid authoritarian shift, HRW says

BANGKOK, Feb 5, (AP): Widespread backsliding on protections of basic rights is taking a toll on Asian economies as growing inequality leaves the poor vulnerable to labor abuses and scams, a report by Human Rights Watch says.

The report released Thursday says many governments in the region have grown more hostile to efforts to protect basic human rights as an authoritarian wave has swept across the world in the past year.

It urges "rights respecting democracies" to form alliances with civil society groups to counter that trend and help to fill a vacuum left by the U.S. withdrawal of foreign aid and participation in international organizations, such as the World Health Organization, under President Donald Trump.

Here is what to know.

Weakened basic human rights are intertwined with hardships for many in the region. In Afghanistan, forced returns of displaced people plus sharp cuts to foreign aid have left more than 22 million people without enough food, shelter or medical care, the report noted.

Authoritarian governments have outlawed dissent, enabling officials to evade public accountability and undermining the rule of law.

In Indonesia, Indigenous activists and government critics, particularly those op-

posing mining companies and oil plantations, faced threats and arrests, it said, giving them no recourse against powerful vested interests.

Predatory microfinance lending is another practice that has trapped the poor in indebtedness in places like Cambodia, where Indigenous communities, in particular, have fallen prey to forced land sales and a lack of access to their traditional livelihoods, it said. Nepal and Bangladesh are among several countries in Asia that rely heavily on remittances from migrant workers who are vulnerable to abuses despite decades of work aimed at protecting them.

The workers often must take out loans at high interest rates to pay recruitment fees and once they arrive overseas face abuses by foreign employers and domestic recruitment agents, including a wage theft, unsafe working conditions and sexual violence, among other violations.

In the wealthy city-state of Singapore, migrant workers are excluded from the country's Employment Act and limits on working hours, among other protections, and are restricted from participating in union activities, the report said.

In Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, a failure to consistently enforce laws against human trafficking, labor abuses and criminal activities have allowed cyber-scam centers to flourish despite occasional crackdowns, the report noted.

In Cambodia, the government has detained journalists working to expose such activities, accusing them of threatening national security and the "dignity of national leaders," it said.

In Myanmar, a 2021 military takeover deposed the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, leading to civil war that has displaced 3.6 million people in the country, while millions more have fled to neighboring Thailand and Bangladesh.

Illicit activities have flourished, and after years of progress toward its eradication, Myanmar has become the world's top opium producer and a major source of synthetic drugs, the report said.

Despite increasingly authoritarian governments in many parts of Asia and the rest of the world, there are some encouraging signs.

The report pointed to the success of South Korean lawmakers in pushing back against former President Yoon Suk Yeol's failed declaration of martial law and his subsequent impeachment. Yoon was sentenced to five years in prison.

Demonstrations by young citizens in Nepal, Indonesia and Bangladesh, dubbed Gen-Z protests, have helped draw attention to corruption, inadequate public services, inequality and poor governance, it said, although they did not always succeed in effecting democratic and peaceful change.



# What's On

## SPOTLIGHT



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Winning schools honored after collecting over 5.5 tons of e-waste

## 'Together for E-Waste-Free Schools' successfully concluded in partnership with Zain



Zain officials honor one of the winning boys' schools.



Honoring one of the winning girls' schools.

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5: Zain Kuwait announced the successful conclusion of its partnership with the "Together for E-Waste Free Schools" initiative, in collaboration with the ECO Business Incubator, the Ministry of Education, and the Environment Public Authority (EPA). This partnership comes as part of Zain's ongoing efforts to advance environmental sustainability and support the shift toward more responsible practices in managing electronic waste, helping embed a circular economy mindset among younger generations.

Over five months, students from 12 schools across Kuwait's six governorates collected more than 5.5 tons of e-waste, equivalent to the weight of three cars. This achievement reflects students' growing environmental awareness and their ability to create tangible impact when awareness efforts are reinforced through hands-on implementation.

The closing ceremony was held at the Ministry of Education headquarters, attended by ministry leadership and Zain officials. The company took part in honoring the winning schools in recognition of their



Ministry of Education officials honor Zain for the partnership.

excellence and commitment, in line with the initiative's conclusion, which included evaluation, issuing final outputs, and recognizing outstanding entities and schools.

Launched in September 2025 as part of an institutional collaboration that brought together national public and private entities, the initiative implemented an awareness and practical program within schools. It aimed to encourage students to adopt responsible environmental behaviors and to activate a practical model for managing e-waste through school collection points, monitoring collected volumes, and preparing periodic and final reports.

This partnership reflects Zain's ongoing approach to supporting national initiatives with sustainable impact, particularly those that promote the proper management of e-waste and mitigate its risks, while linking technological progress to long-term environmental and social responsibility by investing in school-based awareness as a first line of defense for building sustainable daily habits across homes and communities.



Photos during the event.



## IWG members visit the Minor Basilica of Our Lady of Arabia

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5: IWG members visited the Minor Basilica of Our Lady of Arabia, the Catholic church located in the Ahmadi area of the State of Kuwait, as part of an organized excursion. IWG became the first group to visit the Basilica following the recent visit of His Eminence, Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin.

During the visit, the parish priest, Rev. Fr. Darel Priwon Fernandes, shared the history and significance of the church with the group and presented a symbolic gift.

Ms. Marika Kochlamazashvili, President of IWG and wife of the Ambassador of Georgia, expressed her sincere gratitude for the warm hospitality and for organizing such an informative and meaningful visit.

## For Baiti customers and in collaboration with Hzaya

## Kuwait Finance House launches an innovative educational program to boost children's skills

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5: As part of its ongoing commitment to child development and early education, Kuwait Finance House (KFH), in collaboration with "Hzaya", organized an innovative training program for "Baiti" account holders. Titled "Al-Razzaq", the initiative taught children the deep meaning and significance of the name of Allah.

The program aims to offer a developmental journey through stories and creative play, helping children discover the meaning of sustenance through the lens of gratitude, generosity, and optimism. The program also incorporates workshops that stimulate critical thinking and creativity, engaging children in practical, hands-on experiences tailored to their developmental stages and abilities.

KFH remains committed to supporting such initiatives, reflecting the bank's dedication to social development across all segments and to fostering positive values in future generations.

This initiative is an extension of various activities organized by KFH under its Baiti program. These initiatives include a cybersecurity workshop, held in collaboration with the Bank's strategic partner, CODED Academy, which educates children on the risks of unsafe electronic device usage and promotes secure digital practices.

KFH's "Baiti" program, for children up to 14, instills saving habits through a Sharia-compliant investment savings account. It offers educational and recreational activities to boost children's financial and social awareness, while providing parents with an ATM card and e-services for easy account management.

Hzaya Bookstore specializes in books for children and young adults, with a mission to promote a love of reading. The bookstore aims to enrich young minds with meaningful concepts through carefully selected stories that meet high educational standards for parents.



Photos during the workshop.



## FAIPS-DPS celebrates talent and togetherness at annual event

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5: The auditorium at FAIPS-DPS was filled with excitement as Grade 1 students presented their Annual Day, themed "A Spectrum of Celebration," on Thursday, 29th January 2026. It was a joyful showcase of talent and cultural variety, leaving parents and guests thoroughly delighted.

The programme began with Kuwait's National Anthem, followed by the recital of the Holy Quran and lighting of the lamp, creating a perfect ambience to the celebrations.

The Principal, Mr. Ravi Ayanoli, welcomed the Chief Guest, H.E. Mr. Brahma Diakity Kaba, Ambassador of Liberia to Kuwait, along with distinguished guests from the Ministry of Education, Ms. Maha Al-Ali, Senior Supervisor of Student Affairs, and Ms. Amna Al-Moamen, Student Affairs Supervisor.

The programme commenced on harmonious notes, with students presenting a medley of songs in English and Indian languages. It was spellbinding to hear young kids transcend language barriers and render each note perfectly

on stage. It was followed by an upbeat retro Hindi song that resonated deeply with the audience and set the stage for the day.

What followed was a lively mix of dance performances celebrating friendship and diversity. Along with graceful French and contemporary Arabic presentations, the students brought great energy to the stage with lively Zumba steps. Contemporary Indian styles also added to the vibrance, with South Indian and Punjabi dances receiving loud applause. The event concluded with a dazzling contemporary finale that reflected unity and celebration.

From melodious singing, energetic group performancesto confident anchoring, the children managed it all with remarkable confidence. Their vibrant costumes, coordinated movements, and cheery expressions truly reflected the spirit of the theme.

In his address, Principal, Mr. Ravi Ayanoli, spoke about the importance of parents and teachers working together for the well-being of every child.

Through anecdotes, he also spoke of the sincerity with which teachers han-

dle even the smallest concerns of parents, despite the challenges they face at times.

The principal appreciated the dedication of the staff, noting that organising a programme of this scale with 550 young participants was no trivial task.

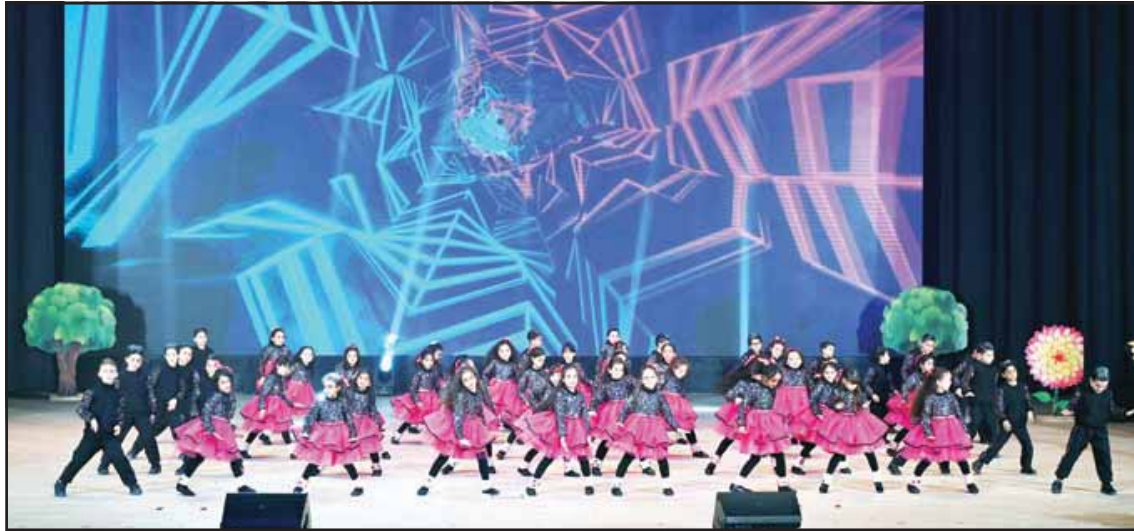
The Chief Guest, H.E. Mr. Kaba, shared that he was mesmerised by the performances and felt it was as engaging as a Bollywood production. He expressed his happiness at seeing young children perform with such promise and added that they would surely grow into the stars of tomorrow.

In her closing remarks, Primary School Headmistress, Mrs. Seema Bhatnagar, thanked the teachers, support staff, and parents for their constant support in making the event a memorable success.

The Annual Day was a proud reflection of the school's commitment to nurturing talent and providing students with opportunities to shine and learn beyond the classroom.



Photos during the event.





## Guthrie family ready to talk, wants proof mother is alive

## No reply yet to Guthrie's message to her mother's kidnapper

TUCSON, Ariz., Feb 5, (AP): There was no public sign early Thursday of a response to NBC "Today" show host Savannah Guthrie's message to her 84-year-old mother's kidnapper.

In a recorded video posted on social media Wednesday, Guthrie said her family is ready to talk but wants proof that Nancy Guthrie, who authorities believe was taken from her home in Arizona against her will, is still alive. Guthrie said her family has heard media reports about a ransom letter.

"We are ready to talk. However, we live in a world where voices and images are easily manipulated," Savannah Guthrie said while reading from a prepared statement. "We need to know without a doubt that she is alive and that you have her. We want to hear from you and we are ready to listen. Please reach out to us."

She was last seen around 9:45 p.m. Saturday, when she was dropped off at home by family after having dinner with them, the sheriff's department said. She was reported missing midday Sunday after she didn't appear at a church.

The family posted the message after police conducted a search in and around Nancy Guthrie's home for several hours Wednesday.

Kevin Adger, a spokesperson for the Pima County Sheriff's Department, said investigators had been at the home earlier in the week for a couple of days and then turned it back over to the family with the understanding they could go back if they needed to.

"This is a follow-up investigation," he said in reference to officials returning Wednesday.

Adger said the sheriff's department was not commenting on the video released by the family.

Multiple media organizations reported receiving pur-

ported ransom notes Tuesday that they handed over to investigators. The sheriff's department had said it was taking the notes and other tips seriously but declined to comment further.

Savannah Guthrie was at times emotional during the recording, with her voice cracking. She smiled and looked into the camera when addressing her mother directly, saying that the family was praying for her and that people were looking for her.

"Mommy, if you are hearing this, you are a strong woman. You are God's precious daughter," she said.

Savannah Guthrie described her mother as a "kind, faithful, loyal, fiercely loving woman of goodness and light" and said she was funny, spunky and clever.

"Talk to her and you'll see," she said.

Guthrie was flanked by her sister Annie and her brother Camron who both also spoke. Annie called their mother their beacon and said they need her.

"Mamma, if you're listening, we need you to come home. We miss you," Annie Guthrie said.

Authorities on Wednesday offered no detailed update on their search and their next news conference was scheduled for Thursday. Pima County Sheriff Chris Nanos' office said detectives still were speaking with anyone who had contact with Nancy Guthrie last weekend but that no suspect or person of interest had been identified.

Nanos suggested there was video from some cameras, though he didn't elaborate, adding: "That's all been submitted and we're doing our best with the companies that own those cameras or built those cameras."

There were signs of forced entry at the home in the Catalina Foothills neighborhood. Guthrie has limited mobility,



This image provided by the Pima County Sheriff's Department, on Monday, Feb. 2, 2026, shows a missing person alert for Nancy Guthrie. (AP)

and officials do not believe she left on her own. A sheriff's dispatcher talking to deputies during a search Sunday indicated that she has high blood pressure, a pacemaker and heart issues, according to audio from broadcastify.com.

Jim Mason, longtime commander of a search-and-rescue posse in Maricopa County, isn't involved in the search for

Guthrie but said desert terrain can make looking for missing people difficult. He said it can be hard to peer into areas that are dense with mesquite trees, cholla cactus and other desert brush.

"Some of it is so thick you can't drive through it," Mason said.

A couple hundred people attended an evening vigil for Nancy Guthrie at a Tucson church where they heard prayers and placed lit candles on an altar. A priest prayed for God to comfort Guthrie and to bring her home to those she loves.

Afterward, Jeremy Thacker had tears in his eyes as he described the heartbreak and helplessness he was experiencing over Guthrie's disappearance. He worked with Savannah Guthrie at a local news station and they shared losing their fathers at a young age. His own sister was kidnapped when he was young.

Thacker said he knew Nancy Guthrie to be sharp, grounded and earnest.

"We're all holding our breath," Thacker said.

For a fourth day Thursday, "Today" opened with Guthrie's disappearance, playing the family's video message in its entirety, but Savannah Guthrie was not at the anchor's desk. NBC Sports said Tuesday that she will not be covering the 2026 Milan Cortina Winter Olympics "as she focuses on being with her family during this difficult time."

The "Today" host grew up in Tucson, graduated from the University of Arizona and previously worked as a reporter and anchor at Tucson television station KVOA. Her parents settled in Tucson in the 1970s when she was a young child. The youngest of three siblings, she credits her mom with holding their family together after her father died of a heart attack at 49, when Savannah was just 16.

## Fans race to learn Spanish

## All eyes on Bad Bunny's historic Super Bowl act

SAN FRANCISCO, Feb 5, (AP): What can viewers expect from Bad Bunny's highly anticipated Super Bowl halftime performance? So far, all we know is that he's expected to perform solely in Spanish, bringing Latin identity at the center of America's most-watched television event.

But Bad Bunny could reveal more details Thursday in San Francisco when the Grammy winner speaks ahead of Sunday's game.

Apple Music's Zane Lowe and Ebro Darden will interview Bad Bunny and pregame performers beginning at 10 a.m. Pacific time on Thursday. The Puerto Rican superstar has become one of the world's most streamed artists with albums such as "Un Verano Sin Ti" and "Debí Tirar Más Fotos," which won album of year at Grammys Sunday night. It's the first time an all Spanish-language album has taken home the top prize.

Last year, Bad Bunny's historic Puerto Rico residency drew more than half a million fans.

Apple Music will broadcast the interview on its platform and social media sites like YouTube and Facebook.

The pregame media session might reveal some details about the performance, but headliners often keep a few secrets. Rihanna sure did, waiting until her Super Bowl performance in 2023 to reveal she was pregnant with her second child.

The Super Bowl will be held Sunday at the Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, with the Seattle Seahawks facing off against the New England Patriots.

## Anthem

The Super Bowl pregame show will open with several standout performers in Northern California: Charlie Puth will hit the stage to sing the national anthem, Brandi Carlile will take on "America the Beautiful" and Coco Jones will sing "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

The national anthem and "Lift Every Voice and Sing" will be performed by deaf performing artist Fred Beam in American Sign Language. Julian Ortiz will sign "America the Beautiful."

Before the game, Green Day will play a set to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Super Bowl. The band, which has its roots in the Bay Area, plans to "Get loud!" according to lead singer Billie Joe Armstrong.

In a historic first, the halftime show will include a multilingual signing program featuring Puerto Rican Sign Language, led by interpreter Celimar Rivera Cosme. All signed performances for the pregame and halftime shows will be presented in collaboration with Alexis Kashar of LOVE SIGN and Howard Rosenblum of Deaf Equality.

In October, the Puerto Rican singer - born Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio - kicked off the 51st season of "Saturday Night Live" expressing pride over the achievement in Spanish, after which he said in English, "If you didn't understand what I just said, you have four months to learn!"

That declaration further stoked the anger of some conservatives who have vilified Bad Bunny for speaking out against President Donald Trump's anti-immigrant policies. The singer canceled the US portion of his tour last year out of fear that Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents would target his fans.

There's been a frenzy online of people posting about Bad Bunny lyrics, including Puerto Ricans explaining slang used by the singer and non-Spanish speakers documenting their journey to learn Spanish.

Anticipation for his halftime performance has only intensified since last weekend, when his album, "Debí Tirar Más Fotos," became the first Spanish-language album to win the Grammy for album of the year. He did not shy away from addressing targeted federal immigration operations at the awards.

Niklaus Miller, 29, has been buckling down on learning Bad Bunny lyrics since the singer's SNL appearance months ago.

"I am delusional enough to be like 'this would be easy. I could pick it up pretty quickly,'" Miller said.

The fervor to learn a new language within a short time span highlights the powerful impact of Latino culture in the US despite the president's anti-immigrant rhetoric and actions.



Bad Bunny performs during the iHeartRadio Music Awards in Los Angeles on March 17, 2025. (AP)

## Film



This image released by Vertical Entertainment shows Caleb Landry Jones in a scene from 'Dracula.' (AP)

## Timeless vampire tale with stylish, romantic twist

## Jones is a lovesick vampire in Besson's 'Dracula'

LOS ANGELES, Feb 5, (AP): "I haven't eaten in centuries," says the stooped, wrinkled man knocking at a convent door, seeking food and shelter.

LOL! It's a funny line, given that this is a disguised Count Dracula - who indeed has not eaten in centuries, unless you count human blood. And it's especially funny given that "Dracula" is not now, nor has ever been, a comedy.

But the humor's a nice touch, as are the splashes of color, the lovely 19th-century gowns, the rendering of Parisian salons and vivid street celebrations that are part of Luc Besson's reimagining of the oft-told tale (more like the told-all-the-time tale), starring Caleb Landry Jones. And yes, the story of Dracula is not usually set in Paris. There's a lot that's familiar in this version, but enough variety, panache and bravado to raise it up a notch and give it, well, a raison d'être.

Writer-director Besson's calling card is romance - the original title was "Dracula: A Love Tale" - and, maybe more to the point, intimacy. Unlike Robert Eggers' 2024 "Nosferatu," which was beautiful but bleak to look at and featured an ugly, fearsome vampire, Besson imbues his main character with a swashbuckling sexiness that suits his star's craggy appeal.

Which is why, even when he's aged four whole centuries, a pack of nuns at the convent can't resist climbing all over Dracula, presenting their necks for the taking. He may be wrinkled, but he's wearing a homemade scent they can't resist - no women can, even nuns.

But we begin back in the year 1480, in a remote castle, where a handsome prince - Vlad's his name, for now - is

frollicking in the bedroom with beautiful bride Elisabeta (Zoë Bleu). Their playtime is stopped suddenly by Vlad's men: War is at hand, and it's the divine power time to fight.

Vlad's main concern is its wife. He asks the Orthodox priest to swear that the divine power will protect the life of Elisabeta - after all, they're fighting in its name. Alas, escaping through the forest in the snow, Elisabeta is killed in an ambush. A grief-stricken Vlad returns to kill the priest with his cross, and is thus cursed with immortal life. A life he will spend trying to find his wife, reincarnated.

Four hundred years later, Vlad, now Count Dracula, resides - shriveled but stylish, with an incredible flowing, white wig that looks like something Elvis might have worn if he were a 400-year-old vampire - in the Carpathian Mountains. But the action shifts to Paris, mainly just because Besson loves Paris, where citizens are joyously celebrating the centenary of the French Revolution.

Paris is also where we meet a prominent vampire-hunter from Bavaria - and unnamed priest - played by Christoph Waltz, who you might imagine is perfect for this role. Like Javert hunting Valjean in "Les Misérables," this priest is determined to find his prey, wherever that takes him.

And Dracula's on his own mission. In his gloomy castle, where he lives with a gaggle of CGI gargoyles, he prepares to kill a young solicitor (Ewens Abidi) who came to see him about his property, hanging him upside down until the blood pools in his head.

But then he sees a picture of the frightened young man's intended, Mina, and becomes obsessed with finding her, cer-

tain she's his reincarnated bride. He spares the man's life and heads to Paris.

The scenes in the French capital are full of welcome color and life - everything from receptions in salons or at Versailles to a street carnival to a mermaid swimming in an aquarium - all chances to display sumptuous costumes by Corinne Bruand.

When, aided by one of his vampire followers, Maria (Matilda De Angelis), Dracula finds Mina - also played by Bleu (the real-life daughter of Rosanna Arquette) - he immediately knows she's his eternal love. Now, all he needs to do is win her heart, and get back to Transylvania to escape the vampire hunters. Luckily for him, he's looking good - those nuns at the convent gave him all the fresh blood he needed to look young and handsome again.

There are plenty of Bessonian flourishes along the way - those gargoyles sure are weird, and they don't remain gargoyles - but in the end, it's too bad there weren't even more, to further distinguish this "Dracula" telling from many before it. In any case it all leads to a fairly satisfying confrontation between Dracula and the priest, saved until the very end, a la Pacino and De Niro in "Heat."

Here, it's fun to watch Jones and Waltz sink their teeth - well for Jones, his fangs - into a story that's old as time, but can always use another fairly watchable remake.

"Dracula," a Vertical Entertainment release, has been rated R by the Motion Picture Association "for violence, some gore and sexuality." Running time: 129 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four.

## Variety

**NEW YORK:** With the search for "Today" show host Savannah Guthrie's missing mother continuing, NBC says that veteran Olympics broadcaster **Mary Carillo** will replace Guthrie as co-host on Friday's telecast of the opening ceremonies for the Winter Games.

The mystery of Nancy Guthrie's disappearance - investigators believe she was taken from her Arizona home against her will - has cast a pall over what was anticipated to be a giant week for the television network.

The Olympics is among the few events to still draw consistent, big audiences to broadcast television. Other notable draws include the Super



Carillo

Bowl, which NBC is due to televise this weekend.

Savannah Guthrie had been scheduled to co-host the opening ceremony with Terry Gannon, but NBC said she was no longer traveling to Italy because of her mother's disappearance.

Carillo is a familiar face to people who watch the Olympics - these will be her 17th Olympic Games - and she will co-host with Gannon.

Carillo lived in Milan for two years as a child, NBC said. She has hosted closing ceremonies at three Olympic games - in Salt Lake City in 2002, Beijing in 2008 and Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

Guthrie's "Today" show co-host, Craig Melvin, is also not going to Italy, NBC said. He was due to host late-night Olympics broadcasts early next week, and he'll be replaced in that role by Ahmed Fareed.

NBC News has aggressively covered the story of Nancy Guthrie's disappearance, but it hasn't been alone. It was the lead story of ABC's "World News Tonight" on Tuesday, too. (AP)



**WASHINGTON:** The Washington Post laid off one-third of its staff Wednesday, eliminating its sports section, several foreign bureaus and its books coverage in a widespread purge that represented a brutal blow to journalism and one of its most legendary brands.

The Post's executive editor, Matt Murray, called the move painful but necessary to put the outlet on stronger footing and weather changes in technology and user habits. "We can't be everything to everyone," Murray said in a note to staff members.

He outlined the changes in a company-wide online meeting, and staff members then began getting emails with one of two subject lines - telling them their role was or was not eliminated.

Rumors of layoffs had circulated for weeks, ever since word leaked that sports reporters who had expected to travel to Italy for the Winter Olympics would not be going. But when official word came down, the size and scale of the cuts were shocking, affecting virtually every department in the newsroom. (AP)



Complexly aims to fight ‘brain rot’ online

# Greens’ studio goes nonprofit to deliver ‘trustworthy content’

NEW YORK, Feb 5, (AP): Author-vloggers Hank and John Green often end their popular “Crash Course” videos with a donation appeal to keep the YouTube show “free for everyone forever.” The multihyphenate brothers now hope they’ve figured out a way to do just that - by changing their production studio’s tax status.

Their educational media company Complexly, which has garnered billions of views through web series that explain just about every classroom subject from animal biology to Latin American literature, will now operate as a nonprofit.

The change is intended to ensure viewers have access to engaging, fact-based content that can compete free of advertisers’ interests in the attention economy. It comes as artificial intelligence gives rise to absurdist “brain rot” and distorted deepfake images while public media struggles to make ends meet amid sudden cuts in federal funding.

“Part of what Complexly’s trying to do is create good information on the internet,” Hank told the Associated Press. “Let’s actually just say that this is our goal. Like, our goal isn’t to build a big company and sell it someday.”

“There’s never been more information and yet there’s never been less information that you feel you can trust,” John added. “Our goal at Complexly has always been to make trustworthy content. And making Complexly a public good, for me, is the next step in that process.”

Nonprofit status has been a consideration for several years, according to Complexly CEO Julie Walsh Smith.

The studio already receives sizable philanthropic funding - including \$4.8 million last year. The nonprofit’s initial supporters are led by existing partners such as YouTube, PBS, and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. Other funders such as Arizona State University and the Howard Hughes Medical



This combination of photos show brothers John Green, left, and Hank Green. (AP)

Institute underwrite a number of “Crash Course” projects.

While about one-third of their revenue comes from a YouTube program that gives creators a share of advertising earnings, strong audience support made them confident in their ability to reach individual donors.

John estimates that another third of their revenue comes from Patreon, a platform where fans can contribute to their favorite online creators often in exchange for bonus content. Monthly Patreon subscribers tend to give \$5 or \$10 to help them make shows such as “Crash Course.”

They also sell minted silver “Crash Course” coins every year that can cost thousands of dollars. Hank said they have relationships with the individuals who buy the most expensive versions

of the coin - and that most of those high-dollar supporters have said they want to increase their support but maybe “felt a little weird” giving money to a for-profit entity.

The small donors provide general funds that Hank said give them flexibility to “invest in the ideas that we think are most likely to deliver impact through reach.”

It is “hard to do the thing that we have to do where we compete with MrBeast and cat videos and all of the very attention-grabbing dashcam fights that YouTube has to offer,” he said. “But we really take that responsibility very seriously. We are not just here to make educational video. We are here to make educational video that people choose to watch. And so that’s the fight that we are fighting.”

The nonprofit transition requires Hank and John, best known for his young adult novels “The Fault in Our Stars” and “Looking for Alaska,” give up any equity they held in Complexly. While the Montana-headquartered nonprofit expects to maintain its staff of roughly 80 employees, Smith says its growth means they no longer require the founders’ “day-to-day leadership.”

John will move forward as “founder emeritus” - he doesn’t know exactly what that means but says he is “looking forward to finding out” - while Hank will join the nonprofit’s board of directors and continue hosting some shows.

“The way I like to think about it is they’re going from leaders of the organization to cheerleaders,” said Smith.

John promised that the viewing experience won’t change much. If anything, he said, there are potential new shows “that have long been great ideas that weren’t possible because they didn’t make sense from a business perspective.”

Complexly is committing \$8.5 million to a new educational series that neither its founders nor CEO would discuss yet. But Smith did say they are seeking additional funding

for an upcoming series that will follow Hank as he goes behind the scenes at zoos and museums to spotlight the specimens they don’t display.

As far as new mediums such as TikTok go, Smith said they’re focused on YouTube while staying committed to being in the spaces “where audiences are spending their time.”

The duo has long tried to crack the economics of the internet.

They founded the crowdfunding platform Subbable in 2013 to help creators raise money for specific projects. There was even a point where Hank tried to form a union for creators, whose livelihoods are subject to the unpredictability of social media platforms’ algorithmic priorities and advertising share models.

This shift wasn’t motivated by any doubts about their business’ health, they insisted, but rather other concerns.

“We’ve always worried about being overly reliant on advertising,” John said. “I think that an advertising-funded internet is a complicated place to live, as I’ve observed from the last 25 years of my life.”

By leaning into philanthropic funding, John says the desire is for Complexly to exist “for the good of the people who benefit from it” and not “for anyone else’s benefit.”

“That’s not the same path a lot of digital media companies take,” Smith said. “Often, they’ll put premium content behind paywalls or behind a subscription service. And we’re just never gonna do that.”

It’s hardly their first foray into philanthropy.

The brothers say they have granted more than \$17 million to dozens of charities through their Foundation to Decrease World Suck. They fund those donations with the profits from everyday purchases made on the Good Store, their online retailer.

## Film



Alison Oliver poses for photographers at the photo call for the film ‘Wuthering Heights’ in London, Wednesday, Feb. 4. (AP)

## Obituary

Founding member of The 5th Dimension

# Singer LaMonte McLemore dies at 90

LOS ANGELES, Feb 5, (AP): Singer LaMonte McLemore, a founding member of vocal group The 5th Dimension, whose smooth pop and soul sounds with a touch of psychedelia brought them big hits in the 1960s and ’70s, has died. He was 90.

McLemore died Tuesday at his home in Las Vegas surrounded by family, his representative Jeremy Westby said in a statement. He died of natural causes after having a stroke.

The 5th Dimension had broad crossover success and won six Grammy Awards including record of the year twice, for 1967’s “Up, Up and Away” and 1969’s “Aquarius/Let the Sunshine In.” Both were also top 10 pop hits, with the latter, a mashup of songs from the musical “Hair,” spending six weeks at No. 1.

McLemore had a parallel career as a sports and celebrity photographer whose pictures appeared in magazines including Jet.

Born in St. Louis, McLemore served in the Navy, where he worked as an aerial photographer. He played baseball in the Los Angeles Dodgers’ farm system and settled in Southern California, where he began making use of his warm bass voice and skill with a camera.

He sang in a jazz ensemble, the



Members of the Fifth Dimension, (from left), LaMonte McLemore, Florence LaRue, Ron Townson, Marilyn McCoo, and Billy Davis, Jr., pose with their Grammy Award in Los Angeles on Feb. 29, 1968. (AP)

Hi-Fi’s, with future 5th Dimension bandmate Marilyn McCoo. The group opened for Ray Charles in 1963 but broke up the following year.

McLemore, McCoo and two of his childhood friends from St. Louis, Billy Davis Jr. and Ronald Towson, later formed a singing group called the Ver-

satiles. They also recruited Florence LaRue, a schoolteacher McLemore met through his photography, to join them. In 1965 they signed to singer Johnny Rivers’ new label, Soul City Records, and changed their name to The 5th Dimension to better represent the cultural moment.

## Education

Rouble Nagi accepts the award at WGS in UAE

# Indian educator who created hundreds of learning centers wins \$1M Global Teacher Prize

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates, Feb 5, (AP): An Indian teacher and activist known for creating hundreds of learning centers and painting educational murals across the walls of slums won the \$1 million Global Teacher Prize on Thursday.

Rouble Nagi accepted the award at the World Governments Summit (WGS) in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, an annual event that draws leaders from across the globe.

Her Rouble Nagi Art Foundation has established more than 800 learning centers across India. They aim to have children who never attended school begin to have structured learning. They also teach children already in school.

Nagi also paints murals that teach literacy, science, math and history, among other topics.

The prize is awarded by the Varkey Foundation, whose founder, Sunny Varkey, established the for-profit GEMS Education company that runs dozens of schools in Egypt, Qatar and the UAE.

“Rouble Nagi represents the very best of what teaching can be - courage, creativity, compassion, and an unwavering belief in every child’s potential,” Varkey said in a statement posted to the Global Teacher Prize website. “By bringing education to the most marginalised communities, she has not only changed individual lives, but strengthened families and communities.”

Nagi plans to use the \$1 million



Indian teacher Rouble Nagi, left, receives the Global Teacher Prize trophy from Dubai Crown Prince Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed Al Maktoum at a ceremony in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Thursday, Feb. 5. (AP)

to build an institute that offers free vocational training.

Stefania Giannini, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education, said Nagi’s prize “reminds us of a simple truth: teachers matter.”

In comments carried on the prize website, Giannini said UNESCO was “honoured to join the Global Teacher Prize in celebrating teachers like you, who, through patience, determination, and belief in every learner, help children into school - an act that can change the course of a life.”

Nagi is the 10th teacher to win the award, which the foundation began handing out in 2015.

Past winners of the Global Teacher Prize have included a Kenyan teacher

from a remote village who gave away most of his earnings to the poor, a Palestinian primary school teacher who teaches her students about non-violence and a Canadian educator who taught a remote Arctic village of Inuit students. Last year’s winner was Saudi educator Mansour al-Mansour, who was known for his work with the poor in the kingdom.

GEMS Education, or Global Education Management Systems, is one of the world’s largest private school operators and is believed to be worth billions. Its success has followed that of Dubai, where only private schools offer classes for the children of the foreigners who power its economy.

How experts measure kindergarten readiness

# Is your child ready for school?

NEW YORK, Feb 5, (AP): New federal data shows about two-thirds of the nation’s 3- to 5-year-olds are on track to enter kindergarten. But being ready for school involves a lot more than a child’s ability to count or recite their ABCs.

The effort to get a snapshot of kindergarten readiness is part of the National Survey of Children’s Health, and that metric has been reported each year since 2022. Thousands of parents and guardians submitted answers about their child in five categories - early learning, motor skills, social-emotional development, self-regulation and health - with the goal of answering the big question: Is your child ready for school?

While there’s growing interest in assessing school readiness, education experts differ on what to measure and how. And some dispute whether children should be ready for school or if schools should be ready for their students.

Despite the complexities, it’s indisputable that what a young child learns before they enter classrooms can set the course for the rest of their academic career.

Kindergarten readiness encompasses the foundational skills necessary to engage in a more formal learning environment, said Ohio State University educational psychology professor Laura Justice. In some ways, it’s very similar to the expectations for a college graduate to be successful in their first job, she said.

There isn’t a universal definition of kindergarten readiness, but many experts and educators rely on guidance from the bipartisan National Education Goals Panel’s five developmental domains critical to a child’s success upon entering grade school. The criteria emphasize a child’s health and motor skills, social-emotional development, cognition, language development and general attitude toward learning - a very similar framework as the federal survey.

But school readiness is a relatively new concept, as the panel’s guidelines came in the 1990s. Historically, there weren’t many expectations for children entering kindergarten, although some



Pre-K 4 SA students arrive by school bus, Oct. 9, 2025, in San Antonio. (AP)

students - typically from wealthier families - would come in with more advanced skills than others, said Robert Crosnoe, a sociology professor at the University of Texas at Austin. That meant providing enriching learning opportunities before children set foot in a kindergarten classroom - so they could learn not only their ABCs, but also skills such as carrying on a conversation and problem-solving during playtime.

“If we just focus on those strictly academic things, it’s only going to get us so far,” Crosnoe said.

There are a few ways to measure readiness, but each method has its drawbacks, said Jill Cannon, a senior policy researcher at global policy think tank RAND.

Parents can answer questions about their child - such as in the NSCH survey - but can be biased or misinterpret questions, especially if English isn’t their first language. Teachers can assess children instead, but interpretations of a child’s behavior can depend on which teacher is doing the assessment.

Alternatively, a young child can be directly assessed on certain skills. But that approach can be “hit or miss,” according to Cannon, because a child

that young may perform differently on any given day.

When to measure readiness can also be a factor.

A child’s age when they enter kindergarten - typically at age 5 - can also factor into readiness, as children who are several months older are often in the same class as students who just turned 5, Cannon said.

“Six months now to me means nothing, but back then ... I had a lot of learning to do. I grew a lot,” Cannon said. “These kids, they grow a lot over the kindergarten year.”

If your child is scheduled for a kindergarten readiness assessment, don’t worry. Most experts agree that readiness tests are, overall, a crucial tool for educators - but only to identify what supports kids will need.

“We have an arsenal of interventions that can improve these skills in kids,” Justice said. “So the screening instrument can help us identify where the need is so that we can respond.”

Research suggests that attending a high-quality preschool program is one of the best ways to boost kindergarten readiness.



Researchers develop ultra-sensitive disease test strip

World-first fingerstick test to expand hepatitis B diagnosis access

SYDNEY, Feb 5, (Xinhua): A world-first Australian trial has found that a simple fingerstick test for hepatitis B DNA is as accurate as standard lab testing, paving the way for wider access in remote and resource-limited settings.

Published in the Journal of Clinical Microbiology, the study showed that the point-of-care test can deliver results within an hour and be performed in decentralized clinics, overcoming delays caused by laboratory-based testing, according to a statement from the Kirby Institute at Australia's University of New South Wales on Thursday.

"The results of our trial found that the fingerstick point-of-care test is highly accurate, closely matching the

accuracy of traditional tests," said Professor Gail Matthews who led the research at the Kirby Institute.

The finding has the potential to "expand access to testing and treatment globally," especially where access to testing is limited, Matthews said.

Hepatitis B, a viral infection that attacks the liver, affects an estimated 254 million people worldwide and causes over 1 million deaths annually, statistics showed.

Though preventable by vaccine, only about 8 percent of those living with chronic hepatitis B receive treatment, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

The new test could support global efforts to meet the WHO target of eliminating hepatitis B as a public health threat by 2030, the statement said.

In another related development, Australian researchers have developed a single-use test strip which could ultimately change how diseases like cancer are diagnosed.

The team from Australia's La Trobe University reported in the journal Small that the new biosensor used enzymes to boost an electrical signal to detect disease-indicative molecules, also known as microRNAs, a university statement said Wednesday.

The biosensor works in a similar way to glucose test strips, but is much more sensitive, detecting microRNAs in blood plasma at ultra-low concentrations that are up to a trillion times lower than glucose, it said.

"MicroRNAs provide early clues about health and diseases like cancer, but they can be difficult to detect even

using standard laboratory methods like PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) tests because they are often present in tiny amounts in blood, plasma, and saliva," said La Trobe University senior researcher Saimon Moraes Silva.

The study's lead researcher and La Trobe University PhD candidate Vatsala Pithaih said the team's key breakthrough came from a specialized enzyme that amplified the biosensor test strip's response.

The enzyme amplifies the change in the test strip's electrical signal, allowing the detection of microRNAs at concentrations 1,000 times lower than usual, Pithaih said.

The innovation could underpin portable diagnostic devices for use outside traditional labs, making disease testing more affordable and accessible, the researchers said.



The Franklin Fire sends a plume of smoke into the sky, Dec. 10, 2024, in Malibu, Calif. (AP)

Chronic exposure deadly

Wildfire smoke linked to 24,100 US deaths per year

NEW YORK, Feb 5, (AP): Chronic exposure to pollution from wildfires has been linked to tens of thousands of deaths annually in the United States, according to a new study.

The paper, published Wednesday in the journal Science Advances, found that from 2006 to 2020, long-term exposure to tiny particulates from wildfire smoke contributed to an average of 24,100 deaths a year in the lower 48 states.

"Our message is: Wildfire smoke is very dangerous. It is an increasing threat to human health," said Yaguang Wei, a study author and assistant professor in the department of environmental medicine at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.

Other scientists who have studied the death toll from wildfire smoke were not surprised by the findings.

"The estimates they're coming up with are reasonable," said Michael Jerrett, professor of environmental health science at the University of California, Los Angeles who was not involved in the study. "We need more of them. It's only if we're doing multiple studies with many different designs that we gain scientific confidence of our outcomes."

The paper's researchers focused on deaths linked to chronic exposure to fine particulate matter, or PM2.5 - the main concern from wildfire smoke.

These particles can lodge deep into lungs and enter the bloodstream. Short-term exposure can trigger coughing and itchy eyes, but longer term, they can make existing health problems worse and lead to a range of chronic and deadly health issues, including respiratory illness, cardiovascular and neurological diseases, and premature death.

"Wildfire smoke PM2.5 has emerged as significant environmental hazard in the U.S., and it's driven by increasing frequency and intensity of wildfires due to climate change," said Min Zhang, a postdoctoral student at the Icahn School and a study author.

Along with decades of forest mismanagement, growing development in fire-prone areas has expanded the "urban wildland interface," increasing wildfire risk with real consequences for human health, said Jerrett.

Exposure

"Nobody's going to have 'wildfire death' on their death certificate unless the fire actually burned them or a tree fell on them or something like that," said Jerrett. "But many of the people that are dying from this exposure are ones that are already more vulnerable. These are real lives that are being lost. This is not some arbitrary abstract statistical concept."

The study's authors analyzed the link between annual average exposure to PM2.5 from wildfire smoke and deaths by county in the lower 48. They used federal mortality data across 3,068 counties of all causes of death and several specific ones - circulatory, neurological and respiratory diseases, as well as mental and behavioral disorders, tumors and endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases.

They also included deaths related to falls and transport accidents - which are unlikely to be linked to wildfire smoke - to ensure their other observations weren't biased.

"We found no association for car accidents and falls, while for other diseases we found statistically significant effects," said Wei. Deaths from neurological diseases saw the biggest increase with exposure to these particulates.

How pronounced the link was between particulate exposure and death varied by season and demographics. A stronger association appeared during cooler periods, and people in rural areas and younger communities appeared to be more vulnerable.

Researchers also found that with every 0.1 microgram per cubic meter increase of PM2.5 across all these places, about 5,594 more people died each year.

Jerrett said the study had the benefit of a large study population and that it includes most causes of deaths in the U.S. But he said the county-level data could have led to over or underestimates because wildfire smoke is very dynamic. "It doesn't just blanket a large county all at once. There are going to be parts of the county that gets it a lot worse."

The study also did not account for other important factors, such as whether a person smokes, he said.

Kai Chen, an associate professor of environmental sciences at the Yale School of Public Health who has also studied the topic, said: "I really like that they examined both the smoke and nonsmoke PM2.5." Various research has found that PM2.5 from wildfire smoke has bigger health impacts than pollution from other sources, such as car emissions, said Chen in an email, who was not involved in the study.

The Trump administration's rollbacks in climate change policy, even as the more destructive wildfires become more frequent in large part due to global warming, poses critical risks, the study's authors said. Quantifying the deadly threat that PM2.5 from wildfires poses to human health shows the need for effective, urgent mitigation strategies, backed by Environmental Protection Agency monitoring and regulation, they said.

Aid cuts

Cholera shots resume: WHO

CAPE TOWN, South Africa, Feb 5, (Agencies): Preventive cholera vaccination programs will restart globally after they were halted for nearly four years due to a vaccine shortage, the World Health Organization said Wednesday.

In a joint statement, WHO, vaccine alliance GAVI and the United Nations Children's Fund said stocks of oral cholera vaccines in the global stockpile they manage had improved to nearly 70 million doses last year.

The vaccines are distributed free to countries that need them, but they had to be used only in reaction to outbreaks rather than preventative campaigns after a shortage was announced in 2022 because of a surge in demand. The stockpile dropped to 35 million doses and countries grappling with outbreaks requested many more than were available.

WHO, GAVI and UNICEF said a first allocation of 20 million doses was now being deployed, with 3.6 million doses going to Mozambique, 6.1 million to Congo and 10.3 million planned for delivery to Bangladesh.

"Global vaccine shortages forced us into a cycle of reacting to cholera outbreaks instead of preventing them. We are now in a stronger position to break that cycle," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a statement.

Cholera is a diarrheal disease caused by waterborne bacteria. Outbreaks often occur as a result of poverty, conflict or climate crises as health facilities are destroyed, access to clean water is disrupted, or floods spread the bacteria.

Mozambique is one of the priority countries after devastating flooding in the southern African nation last month affected around 700,000 people and raised the threat of cholera outbreaks.

WHO has previously said that while poverty and conflict remain enduring drivers for cholera around the world, climate change aggravated a global upsurge of the disease that began in 2021 because it contributed to more and wetter storms.

Also:

**MOGADISHU:** Reductions in donor funding could force the closure of 618 health facilities in **Somalia** in 2026, the World Health Organization (WHO) said Wednesday.

The UN health agency said 95 percent of Somalia's health budget depends on external financing, noting that 51 district hospitals, 413 health centers and 154 primary health units will likely close their doors in 2026 due to funding cuts.

"These facilities are lifelines, especially in regions that are hard to reach, prone to climate shocks and reporting the highest rates of malnutrition," the WHO said in its emergency appeal report.

Funding cuts have forced humanitarian agencies across Somalia to scale back or even close critical interventions, thereby drastically reducing life-saving programs and putting millions of lives at risk, according to the UN.

The WHO said that without renewed partner investment, Somalia risks reversing critical public health gains, increasing the likelihood of large-scale disease outbreaks and preventable deaths across the country.



A health worker administers a cholera vaccine in Blantyre, southern Malawi, Thursday, Jan. 22, 2026. (AP)

New pill cuts LDL up to 60% in high-risk patients

Experimental 'cholesterol-lowering' pill may offer new option for millions

WASHINGTON, Feb 5, (AP): A new kind of pill sharply reduced artery-clogging cholesterol in people who remain at high risk of heart attacks despite taking statins, researchers reported Wednesday.

It's still experimental but the pill helps rid the body of cholesterol in a way that today can be done only with injected medicines. If approved by the Food and Drug Administration, the pill, named enlicitide, could offer an easier-to-use option for millions of people.

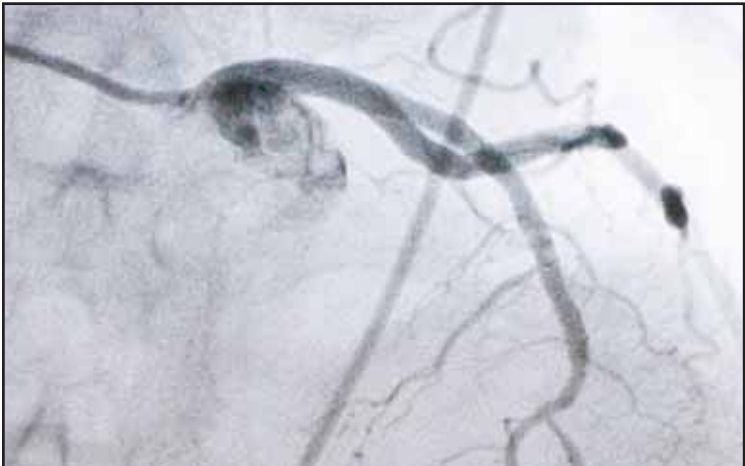
Statins block some of the liver's production of cholesterol and are the cornerstone of treatment. But even taking the highest doses, many people need additional help lowering their LDL, or "bad," cholesterol enough to meet medical guidelines.

In a major study, more than 2,900 high-risk patients were randomly assigned to add a daily enlicitide pill or a dummy drug to their standard treatment. The enlicitide users saw their LDL cholesterol drop by as much as 60% over six months, researchers reported in the New England Journal of Medicine.

There are other pills that patients can add to their statins "but none come close to the degree of LDL cholesterol lowering that we see with enlicitide," said study lead author Dr. Ann Marie Navar, a cardiologist at UT Southwestern Medical Center.

That benefit dropped only slightly over a year, and there was no safety difference between those taking the pill or placebo, researchers found. One caveat: The pill must be taken on an empty stomach.

Heart disease is the nation's leading



A monitor shows an artery during a catheterization lab heart procedure in Burlington, Vt., Tuesday, Sept. 23, 2008. (AP)

cause of death and high LDL cholesterol, which causes plaque to build up in arteries, is a top risk factor for heart attacks and strokes. While an LDL level of 100 is considered fine for healthy people, doctors recommend lowering it to at least 70 once people develop high cholesterol or heart disease - and even lower for those at very high risk.

Statin pills like Lipitor and Crestor, or their cheap generic equivalents, are highly effective at lowering LDL. For additional help, some powerful injected drugs work differently, blocking a liver protein named PCSK9 that limits the body's ability to clear cholesterol from blood. Yet only a small fraction of people who could benefit from PCSK9 inhibitors use them. While prices for the costly shots have dropped recently, patients still may dislike administer-

ing shots and Navar said they're more complex for doctors to prescribe.

Merck funded Wednesday's study, which provides some of the final data needed to seek FDA approval of enlicitide. The FDA has added the drug to a program promising ultra-fast reviews.

The research offers "compelling evidence" that the new pill lowers cholesterol about as much as those PCSK9 shots, Dr. William Boden of Boston University and the VA New England Healthcare System, who wasn't involved with the study, wrote in the journal.

Boden cautioned there's no data yet showing the pill's cholesterol-reduction translates into fewer heart attacks, strokes and death. That takes much longer than a year to prove. Merck has a study of more than 14,000 patients underway to tell.

Gardening boosts nutrition, reduces stress

Backyard vegetable gardens healthy for people and planet, experts say

NEW YORK, Feb 5, (AP): If you want healthy food, experts say to eat what's local, organic and in-season. Those foods benefit the planet too, because they are less taxing on the soil and they don't travel as far.

It doesn't get more local, organic and in-season than a backyard vegetable garden.

At this time of year, many backyards across the country are still covered in snow. But it's the perfect time to start planning for a garden because you'll want to have supplies ready to start planting just after the last frost date in your area.

Below are some tips on how to plan a backyard garden and reasons why you should do it.

Vegetable gardens benefit the surrounding ecosystem by adding diverse plant life, especially where they replace grass or cover a deck or patio. They also can provide flowering plants for pollinators.

The plants capture and store carbon in the soil, promote healthy soil by preventing compaction and can make the air cooler on rooftops and patios, according to Ellen Comeau, who chairs the advisory council for the Cuyahoga County Master Gardener Volunteers with the Ohio State University Extension program.

Homegrown vegetables and fruits are responsible for fewer emissions than their store-bought counterparts because grocery store produce typically travels long distances on trucks.

"There's this whole idea of a zero-kilometer meal, that I don't have to



A lettuce seedling is displayed in Boston on Dec. 8, 2015. (AP)

travel anywhere, except my backyard, to make food. That certainly helps the climate," said Carol Connare, editor of The Old Farmer's Almanac.

The health benefits from gardening are multifaceted, "social, emotional, nutritional, physical," said Katherine Alaimo, an associate professor of food science and human nutrition at Michigan State University.

Gardening promotes physical health because it requires a lot of movement. The food is typically picked at the height of ripeness and eaten fresh so it tends to have more nutrients than grocery store produce.

Alaimo said most gardeners don't use pesticides and grow their food organically. And of course, when you grow more produce, you eat more produce.

"That's going to reinforce people eating more fruits and vegetables even

in the off season when they're not growing food. So they try new foods, they potentially increase creativity and their cooking skills," she said.

Alaimo said gardening also connects people with nature, provides a sense of responsibility and accomplishment and encourages sharing harvests with friends. All of that can contribute to reduced stress, lower blood pressure and higher energy, she said.

Sunlight is the biggest factor in choosing where to put your garden. Most produce wants at least six hours of sunlight per day. If sunny spots are few, save them for fruiting plants because leafy greens can tolerate more shade.

It also helps to have a nearby water source because you'll get more food for less effort if you're not lugging buckets of water a long way.

If you're growing in the ground, Comeau said to start with a soil test to determine its acidity and nutrient makeup. Soil samples, once bagged or boxed, can typically be sent to a cooperative extension office at a university. The Old Farmer's Almanac offers a list of extension offices by state. The results will give you an idea of what to grow and whether you need fertilizer or other amendments.

If you have barren soil or a concrete patio, you can buy or build raised beds with purchased soil. Connare said raised beds have advantages such as controlling the soil, but the disadvantages include the cost and the likelihood of compacting soil and eventually needing to replace it.

Leukemia patients battle illness, costs in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's only public blood disease center offers hope

KABUL, Feb 4, (Xinhua): The narrow hallway outside the leukemia ward of a public blood disease treatment center in Afghanistan is quiet, save for the soft shuffle of feet. Inside, the faint smell of antiseptic lingers, and patients lie quietly on their beds, some sleeping, others staring at the ceiling, waiting for their next round of treatment. Here, pain and struggle are constant, but so is hope.

Gul Ahmad, 40, from Herat province, brought his brother here after two months of unsuccessful treatment at home. "Despite trying many treatments back home, nothing worked. He was in severe pain. Since coming here, his condition has gradually improved day by day," he said. This hospital is Afghanistan's only public center dedicated to treating blood disorders and leukemia. For thousands of families with limited resources, it has become a fragile lifeline.

Zakiya, 55, had spent months visiting doctors without understanding her condition. At the center, she was diagnosed with severe anemia and a chronic

blood disorder. "I was suffering from severe headaches, trembling in my hands and feet, weakness, numbness, and sudden attacks of fatigue," she said.

Yet, thanks to the attentive care she receives, her strength is slowly returning.

Masooda Alizadeh, head nurse of the leukemia ward for seven years, said the hospital faces daily challenges. Many patients from poor families cannot afford expensive medicines. "Some families sell their land, animals, and belongings to continue treatment," she said. Patients with dangerously low platelets often arrive bleeding from the nose or gums, requiring urgent transfusions to stabilize their condition.

Abdul Ahmad, a farmer from Bamyan province, recalled arriving at the hospital barely able to walk or breathe. After three months of treatment, his physical condition has improved, but the financial burden remains heavy. "I am a farmer. The medicine is very costly. Sometimes we borrow money just to continue treatment," he said. Shortages of nurses and essential

medicines make care even more difficult. In the 14-bed ICU and main ward, one nurse may be responsible for multiple patients.

Mohammad Hanif Mohammadi, a blood disease specialist at the center, said the facility treats 40 to 45 outpatients daily. "It is the only public facility of its kind in Afghanistan, serving patients from Herat, Bamyan, and other provinces. In winter, some patients are trapped by snow and miss vital treatment. One center cannot meet nationwide demand, and many patients must wait for beds before being admitted," he said.

"The lack of trained doctors is another major challenge. If trained specialists and treatment centers existed in every province, patients would not need to travel such long distances," Mohammadi added.

"As medical technology and treatments advance rapidly, doctors and nurses require routine training to apply new medicines and techniques to patient care properly," Alizadeh said, highlighting the importance of continued international support.



A woman receives medical treatment for blood disorders at a public blood disease treatment center in Kabul, Afghanistan, Jan. 28, 2026. (Xinhua)



# Cavaliers rout Clippers after Garland-Harden trade

Johnson, Wembanyama lead Spurs to 4th win over injury-depleted Thunder

INGLEWOOD, Calif., Feb 5, (AP): Donovan Mitchell scored 29 points and had nine assists, Jaylon Tyson added 17 points and the Cleveland Cavaliers routed the Los Angeles Clippers 124-89 , hours after the teams completed a trade of All-Stars.

The Cavaliers sent guard Darius Garland to the Clippers in exchange for James Harden. Neither took the court for their new teams.

Jarrett Allen scored 10 points and grabbed 11 rebounds, Dennis Schroder added 11 points in his Cavaliers debut and Keon Ellis had 6 points in his first game with the Cavaliers, who won for the seventh time in eight games. Schroder and Ellis were acquired from Sacramento in a three-team trade Sunday.

Kawhi Leonard scored 25 points and John Collins added 19 for the Clippers, who lost consecutive games for the first time since a five-game losing streak in December.

Rookie Yanic Konan Niederhauser scored 10 points and had eight rebounds for Los Angeles, which is 17-5 since Dec. 20, although most of that success was with Harden.

**Spurs 116, Thunder 106**

In San Antonio, Keldon Johnson scored 25 points, Victor Wembanyama had 22 points and 14 rebounds and the San Antonio Spurs never trailed in a victory over injury-depleted Oklahoma City, beating the reigning NBA champion Thunder for a fourth time this season.

De'Aaron Fox had 15 points and 10 assists, rookie forward Carter Bryant matched a season high with 11 points as San Antonio won its second straight.

The Spurs (34-16) closed to within five games of the Western Confer-



Cleveland Cavaliers guard Tyrese Proctor, right, shoots as Los Angeles Clippers center Yanic Konan Niederhauser defends during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Inglewood, Calif. (AP)

ence-leading Thunder (40-12).

Kenrich Williams scored 25 points and Jaylin Williams added 24 points and 12 rebounds for Oklahoma City, which had only eight active players.

Reigning MVP and All-Star Shai Gilgeous-Alexander missed the game with an abdominal strain. The Thunder were without their entire regular starting lineup on the second night of a back-to-back.

**Knicks 134, Nuggets 127 2nd OT**

In New York, Jalen Brunson had 42 points, nine assists and eight rebounds, and the New York Knicks outlasted the Denver Nuggets in two overtimes for their eighth straight victory.

Karl-Anthony Towns added 24 points and 12 rebounds while playing with a bandage over his right eye after he was bloodied in a head-to-head collision in the first quarter. He fouled out in the first overtime, but

Brunson took over with 10 points in the second extra period.

**Celtics 114, Rockets 93**

In Houston, Derrick White made six 3-pointers and scored 28 points and the Boston Celtics used a big third quarter to build the lead and cruise to a win over the Houston Rockets .

White's performance helped the Celtics win a fourth straight game despite missing star Jaylen Brown, who sat out with left hamstring tight-

ness in the second game of a back-to-back.

Houston coach Ime Udoka was ejected at the end of the third quarter after receiving a double technical for arguing with officials, and Alperen Sengun was tossed midway through the fourth after receiving two technical fouls for yelling at an official following a no-call.

**Grizzlies 129, Kings 125**

In Sacramento, Cam Spencer hit

three key baskets late in the fourth quarter and finished with 20 points, and Ty Jerome added 28 as the Memphis Grizzlies beat Sacramento , sending the Kings to their season-worst 10th straight loss.

Spencer hit a 3-pointer with 2:08 remaining in the fourth to give Memphis a 122-118 lead. After GG Jackson hit a jumper, Spencer added a 16-foot jumper with 43 seconds left to keep the margin at four points. After the Kings pulled within a point on DeMar DeRozan's 3, Spencer hit a 3-pointer with 18 seconds left to restore the four-point lead and help seal the win.

**Bucks 141, Pelicans 137 OT**

In Milwaukee, Ryan Rollins scored 27 points and the Milwaukee Bucks withstood a brilliant performance from Trey Murphy III to beat the New Orleans Pelicans in overtime .

Murphy scored a career-high 44 points and shot 12 of 19 from 3-point range. His 12 3-pointers matched the fifth-highest, single-game total in NBA history. The single-game record belongs to Klay Thompson, who had 14 for Golden State against Chicago on Oct. 29, 2018.

The teams shot a combined 45 of 93 from 3-point range, with New Orleans 24 of 46 and Milwaukee 21 of 47. The Bucks shot a season-best 60.9% overall.

**Timberwolves 128, Raptors 126**

In Toronto, Anthony Edwards scored 13 of his 30 points in the fourth quarter, Bones Hyland had 20 points and the Minnesota Timberwolves overcame an 18-point deficit to beat the Toronto Raptors .

Minnesota won in Toronto for the first time since Jan. 21, 2004. The Timberwolves' previous road win in the series came Feb. 14, 2021, when the Raptors were playing in Tampa because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jaden McDaniels scored 19 points, Naz Reid and Julius Randle each had 17 and Donte DiVincenzo added 15 as the Timberwolves won for the fifth time in six games.

‘The quality and the numbers are going up’

## Italy’s ‘rising’ cricket team takes T20 World Cup stage, soccer slips

MILAN, Feb 5, (AP): Italy is finally heading to the World Cup - just not in the sport most people might expect.

Amid dark times for the country's storied but ailing soccer team, some salvation comes in the form of the Azzurri's unheralded cricketers after their first-ever qualification for a global tournament.

Add Italy to cricketing superpowers like India, Australia, England and South Africa competing at the T20 World Cup starting Saturday.

"Just to be there and playing," Luca Bruno Malaspina, CEO of the Italian Cricket Federation, said "is the end of 45 years of hard work."

That's a reference to the formation of the sport's national federation in 1980, but cricket in Italy dates back much further than that - to the late 19th century when it was played by expatriate British textile workers.

Genoa, Italy's oldest soccer club founded in 1893, was - and still is - called Genoa Cricket and Football Club. The original name of AC Milan, the seven-time European champion, when it was founded in 1899 by an Englishman, Herbert Kilpin, was Milan Football & Cricket Club.

More than a century later, there might not be any grass cricket pitches in Italy but there are around 4,000 registered men's players, around 80 clubs in a two-tier league system, and a burgeoning national team filled with players who have Italian heritage or who are first- or second-generation immigrants from Asia.

Take for example captain Wayne Madsen, a South African who qualifies because of his Italian grandmother.

Or bowler Crishan Kalugamage, a Sri Lankan who moved to Italy when he was 15.

Or wicketkeeper Marcus Campopiano, who was born in England and has an Italian father.

The 15-man World Cup squad con-



Wicketkeeper Marcus Campopiano

tains two sets of Australian brothers with Italian family connections: Harry and Benjamin Manenti, and Anthony and Justin Mosca.

"The quality and the numbers are going up," said Bruno Malaspina, who also praised the largely overseas-born coaching and backroom staff for changing mindsets and raising expectations. The head coach is former Canada cricketer John Davison, who was raised in Australia and played first-class cricket there before becoming a star for Canada's national team. Former Ireland batter Kevin O'Brien is an assistant coach.

Italy qualified for the expanded 20-team World Cup via European regional qualifying, finishing second to the Netherlands, and last week beat Ireland for its first ever win over a full member of the International Cricket Council, the sport's world governing body.

Contrast the national team's progress in cricket to the regression of its soccer team.

A four-time World Cup winner, Italy missed out on qualification for soccer's biggest tournament in both 2018

and 2022 after losing unexpectedly in the playoffs. The Italians are back in the playoffs again in their bid to reach the upcoming World Cup held in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Bruno Malaspina believes it's a chance for cricket to "capitalize" on Italy's shortcomings in soccer.

The World Cup "is a good way to open up cricket to Italians," he said in a video call. "We are not talking only about money ... but visibility in the Italian sport organization because they are learning now that cricket is an important sport. There are big numbers all around the world."

Italy was recognized by the ICC as an Associate member in 1995 and then by the Italian National Olympic Committee, which was a significant step because it enables cricket to receive government funding.

Getting into a World Cup marks the end of a long journey for Italian cricket but the start of another.

The lack of cricket infrastructure in the country is a major obstacle for progress - Italy currently "hosts" its international games in other European nations, such as the Netherlands and England - and he said the federation is working hard to improve the "very, very poor" cricket grounds and fund at least one turf pitch that can be the spiritual home of Italian cricket. The domestic game needs to be more professional and structured better, Bruno Malaspina added.

"The problem is money and the bureaucratic things you have to do in Italy," he said.

The federation, according to Bruno Malaspina, is in talks with the proposed European T20 Premier League to have an Italian franchise, potentially in 2027. It also wants to inspire the next generation by entering Italian schools, teaching children the rules and culture of cricket, getting them into local clubs.

and November of 2022, alongside facilitating wagering," the agency said in a statement. It added that Tedesco, who reached a career-high ITF world singles ranking of 423 in January 2023, had chosen not to appeal the ruling.

The sentence was backdated to January 24 this year, when the provisional suspension began, meaning he will be eligible to return on April 23, 2028.

Former player Gylunara Nazarova was also suspended for four years and fined 10,000 dollars after a separate investigation revealed evidence of "historic" anti-corruption code breaches in 2019, ITIA said. (Xinhua)

### Best of the Rest

**Tedesco handed match-fixing ban:** Brazil's Gustavo Tedesco has been banned for two years and three months due to match fixing, the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) said. The 21-year-old was also fined 15,000 U.S. dollars, of which 10,500 dollars is suspended, after admitting to six breaches of the sport's anti-corruption code.

"Tedesco... was found to have contrived the outcome of three ITF World Tennis Tour matches between September

‘Pressure feels normal’

## Odermatt unshaken by ski-mad Switzerland

BORMIO, Italy, Feb 5, (AP): Marco Odermatt hears the comparison all the time, that he is the Roger Federer of ski racing.

It's flattering to be linked with the tennis great and dominate as his fellow Swiss countryman once did. It's pressure, too, as the expectations for Odermatt are immense heading into the Milan Cortina Games, where he will be a favorite in the giant slalom - he's the defending champion - downhill and super-G.

The 28-year-old doesn't mind the added weight of competing for a ski-crazed nation. Or the spotlight. Or the demands. Or even the loss of privacy (well, maybe a little bit on that one).

"It all kind of feels normal," Odermatt recently said in an interview. "I've grown up with this (pressure) during the last couple of years. It's not something that comes overnight, so you learn to deal with it and it doesn't feel like pressure."

Odermatt's the ski racer everyone studies because his form is so solid, his line through a course always so fast and his turns so crisp. He's won four straight overall World Cup titles - cruising toward a fifth - and holds the season-long globe titles in the giant slalom, super-G and downhill.

"Winning," he said, "is still fun, so that's my biggest motivation to try and stay on top."

He's the most dominant men's ski racer since Austria's Marcel Hirscher, who won eight straight overall World Cup titles. Hirscher did things on skis that left his rivals in awe.

Odermatt has a different sort of wizardry. His talent comes from his timing, which two-time Olympic champion Ted Ligety described as Odermatt's "superpower."

"Timing sounds so simple in ski racing, but it is so hard to do at varying speeds, to know exactly when to start your turn into a whole bunch of varying tempos," Ligety explained. "To do that as consistently as he does is pretty amazing to watch."

Ligety used to go head-to-head against Hirscher. Now he just observes Odermatt's mastery.

"We've seen more magical skiing out there before," Ligety said, "but we've never seen such magical timing before."

From Buochs, a small town in central Switzerland, Odermatt was on the slopes at an early age. His father was a skier while his mother was there "for everything else besides skiing," he explained on an episode of the International Ski and Snowboard Federation's podcast. "This gave me exactly the



Switzerland's Marco Odermatt speeds down the course during the alpine ski, men's downhill second official training, at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Bormio, Italy. (AP)

good balance. Skiing was important but they always told me there were more important things in life."

His idol was Swiss great Didier Cuche, a 21-time World Cup winner and an Olympic silver medalist in the super-G at the 1998 Nagano Games. As a kid, Odermatt won a race where the prize was to meet and spend a day skiing with Cuche.

Winning simply became a familiar theme. Like at the 2018 junior world championships in Switzerland, when Odermatt captured four individual gold medals.

He's become the gold standard on the circuit, with 53 World Cup victories and three world championship crowns. Odermatt won the Olympic giant slalom at the 2022 Beijing Games when he held off Zan Kranjec of Slovenia by 0.19 seconds.

"Generational talent," American ski racer Bryce Bennett said. "Just totally dialed in. He's consistent, too. It's amazing."

That goes ditto for many on the World Cup tour:

- "He's always bringing intensity, he's pushing limits and showing that the athleticism is very important in this sport," said Norwegian skier Aleksander Aamodt Kilde, who recently withdrew from the Olympics as he works his way back from injuries. "You can say much about his skiing but what you can see is that he's on point with his timing, he's willing to ski fast, he's motivated and he's pushing. That's why he keeps winning."

- "It's pretty much the same like Marcel," said Austrian skier Vincent Kriechmayr, who's in second place behind Odermatt in the World Cup super-G standings. "They, of course, are the best skiers but they're even stronger in the head. That's the most important part."

- "On my best day, I can compete with anybody," explained American racer River Radamus, who finished fourth in the GS four years ago in Beijing. "But a guy like Marco Odermatt, on his bad days, he's still competing with everybody."

Odermatt's quite familiar with the Olympic track in Bormio, winning a World Cup super-G twice at the venue and finishing runner-up a pair of times in the downhill.

"Marco combines technical precision, physical conditioning and an exceptional ability to read in-run conditions - that mix creates his consistency," said Markus Waldner, the men's World Cup race director. "Having a dominant athlete is healthy for the sport: it creates a reference point opponents aim at, builds narratives and draws new audiences."

Just like Federer, who won 20 Grand Slam singles titles.

Odermatt has taken up tennis, and hopes to one day play an official match with Federer. Odermatt also enjoys golf, escaping into the wilderness for a hike, biking and, of course, going fast on skis. "I just like skiing," he said with a laugh, "and I always try to give my best."

### Change of Name

I, Sandip Babu Pujari holder of Indian passport No Y6405948, do hereby change my daughter's name Seonah Janice as given name Crasta as surname for all purposes. My Daughter will henceforth be known in the name Seonah Janice Crasta and I will also undertake to carry out this name change in all her documents

### Change of Name

I, Sandip Babu Pujari holder of Indian passport No Y6405948, do hereby change my son's name Sehan Johan as given name Crasta as surname for all purposes. My son will henceforth be known in the name Sehan Johan Crasta and I will also undertake to carry out this name change in all his documents

## Pakistani PM cites Bangladesh solidarity for India game boycott

ISLAMABAD, Feb 5, (AP): Pakistan's decision to boycott its match against India at cricket's T20 World Cup was a way of showing solidarity with Bangladesh after it was ousted from the tournament, Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said.

Bangladesh was replaced by Scotland after refusing to play in India, which is co-hosting the tournament with Sri Lanka. Pakistan's government then said it would allow its national team to take part but that it would have to boycott its group game

against archrival India.

The government initially did not give a reason for its decision, but Sharif said during a meeting with his cabinet members that it was because of Bangladesh's exclusion.

"We have taken a very clear stand on the T20 World Cup that we won't play the match against India because there should be no politics on the sports field," Sharif. "We have taken a very considered stance, and we should completely stand by Bangladesh, and

I think this is a very appropriate decision."

Pakistan had been set to play India on Feb. 15 in Sri Lanka.

The ICC had reacted strongly to the Pakistan government's announcement of a boycott and warned the Pakistan Cricket Board of the consequences.

"The PCB will consider the significant and long-term implications for cricket in its own country as this is likely to impact the global cricket ecosystem, which it is itself a member and beneficiary of," the ICC said.

The ICC is set to lose millions of dollars from broadcasters and sponsors if Pakistan boycotts its Group A game against India.

PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi had criticized the ICC for its "double standards" when Bangladesh was removed and replaced by Scotland last month. The Bangladesh government didn't give its cricket board permission to play matches in India due to security concerns, but the ICC said it was not possible to shift its games so close to the tournament.



# Man City and Arsenal set for epic English League Cup final



Newcastle’s Jacob Ramsey, left, and Manchester City’s Tijjani Reijnders run for the ball during the English League Cup semifinal soccer match between Manchester City and Newcastle in Manchester, England. (AP)

## Marmoush stars with brace

**MANCHESTER, England, Feb 5, (AP): It’s Manchester City vs. Arsenal in the English League Cup final.**

The current top two in the Premier League will go head-to-head at Wembley Stadium next month after City beat Newcastle 3-1to complete a 5-1 win on aggregate in the semifinals.

Both City and Arsenal are still in contention for a clean sweep of trophies this season. The League Cup is the chance to lift the first piece of major silverware this term and to potentially inflict a psychological blow in the race for the title.

“We’re here to win trophies and we give our best every day to reach these finals and win the silverware,” City forward Omar Marmoush - who scored two goals on the night - told Sky Sports.

Arsenal currently leads the standings by six points ahead of second-place City. Both teams are through to the round of 16 in the Champions League and and fourth round of the FA Cup.

The League Cup final is on March 22. “It’s a pleasure to play against Arsenal, the best team right now in Europe, maybe the world,” City manager Pep Guardiola said. “As much (as) we (can) play against them, it will make us a better, better team.”

Two first-half goals from Marmoush at the Etihad effectively finished off Newcastle in a semifinal where City led 2-0 from the first leg. Tijjani Reijnders added another before the break.

Newcastle scored a consolation through substitute Anthony Elanga and prevented what looked like being a rout after the first 45 minutes.

Arsenal booked its place in the final with a 1-0 win against Chelsea on Tuesday to seal a 4-2 aggregate victory.

The final will continue the recent rivalry between the clubs, which has seen City beat Arsenal to the title in 2023 and ‘24. On both occasions Arsenal had led the way before being overhauled.

Mikel Arteta’s team is ahead again this season and aiming to win the title for the first time since 2004.

The League Cup would be Arteta’s first major trophy since his debut season as Arsenal manager when he won the FA Cup in 2020.

He was formerly Guardiola’s assistant at City and victory in the final would see him finally beat his former boss to a major trophy.

Guardiola, meanwhile, will get the chance to win a 16th major trophy since taking over at City in 2016 and his fifth League Cup.

City is looking to win it for the ninth time and move within one of Liverpool’s record haul of 10 in the competition.

Arsenal has won the trophy twice - most recently in 1993.

This year’s final will be a repeat of 2018, when Arteta was part of Guardiola’s coaching team as City triumphed.

Marmoush bundled in City’s opener in the seventh minute when Dan Burn’s tackle rebounded off the Egyptian international and into the net.

His second came from another defensive error in the 29th when Kieran Trippier’s attempted clearance looped up for Marmoush to head in from close range.

Reijnders drove home the third from inside the box three minutes later. Elanga’s goal came in the 62nd and Newcastle had chances to score more.

## Barcelona eyes 17th win in 18 matches

# Madrid faces Valencia without star duo Vinícius & Bellingham

MADRID, Feb 5, (AP): Real Madrid will be without Vinícius Júnior and Jude Bellingham for its La Liga match at Valencia on Sunday.

Vinícius will miss the game because of an accumulation of yellow cards. He picked up his fifth yellow last Sunday in the 2-1 home win against Rayo Vallecano, a result that moved Madrid back within a point of leader Barcelona.

Vinícius’ superb goal helped Madrid earn the victory against Rayo but again he was booed by some Madrid fans at the Bernabeu. He was also criticized later after Spanish media said he was spotted in Paris ahead of his time off from playing.

The Brazil forward was expected to face a tough crowd in Valencia, where three years ago he was subjected to racist taunts that sparked anti-racism campaigns across Spain. Valencia at the time helped identify the fans who taunted Vinícius, but the club was not happy with the generalization made about all of its fans being racist. Valencia fans have jeered Vinícius every time he’s returned to Mestalla Stadium.

Bellingham recently also was criticized by Madrid fans but will not play on Sunday because of a left hamstring injury against Rayo. The team did not give a timetable on his recovery but he is expected to be sidelined for a few weeks.

Madrid has won six consecutive league games, with its last setback in December, 2-0 at home against Celta Vigo.

Valencia, sitting in 16th place, is coming off a tough 2-1 home loss to Athletic Bilbao in the quarterfinals of the Copa del Rey, where it conceded six minutes into stoppage time and failed to advance.

Leader Barcelona will try to earn its 17th victory in 18 matches across all tournaments when it hosts 14th-placed Mallorca on Saturday.

Barcelona, whose only setback in that streak was 2-1 at Real Sociedad in January, won at Albacete 2-1 midweek to reach the Copa del Rey semifinals.

On Sunday, third-placed Atletico Madrid hosts fifth-placed Real Betis, the same opponent it will face as a visitor in the quarterfinals of the Copa del Rey on Thursday.

Atletico boosted its squad in the winter transfer window by signing Nigeria forward Ademola Lookman from Atalanta and Mexico midfielder Obed Vargas from the Seattle Sounders in Major League Soccer.



Barcelona’s goalkeeper Joan Garcia jumps for the ball during a Copa del Rey quarterfinal soccer match between Albacete and Barcelona, in Albacete, Spain. (AP)

On Monday, fourth-placed Villarreal hosts sixth-placed Espanyol.

Atletico will likely showcase newcomers Lookman and Vargas, while Barcelona will continue to rely on Lamine Yamal, who has scored four times in his last four matches with Barcelona, and five times in his last six games with the club.

Madrid’s Kylian Mbappé will likely play at Mestalla and will look to add to an impressive scoring streak that includes eight goals in his last five matches.

Without Vinícius and Bellingham, Madrid coach Álvaro Arbeloa may see a few players return from long injury layoffs, including defenders Trent Alexander-Arnold, Antonio Rüdiger and Ferland Mendy.

Barcelona will remain without Gavi and Pedri because of injuries, and Raphinha remains doubtful after already missing the Copa del Rey match on Tuesday.

Barcelona president Joan Laporta said this week the club will hold elections in March and he will be a candidate again. He said he and his board members will resign on Monday so they can stand for re-election. Laporta is set to face opposition.

## Ligue 1 showdown with PSG looms

# Marseille’s title chances hang by a thread

PARIS, Feb 5, (AP): Marseille’s trip to play bitter rival Paris Saint-Germain could prove to be a turning point in Ligue 1.

Marseille is in third place and trails defending champion PSG by nine points and second-placed Lens by seven.

Victory for Marseille on Sunday would drag it back into the title race but a defeat would all but end hopes of winning a first league title since 2010, and open the door for Lyon to move into third spot in the race for a Champions League berth next season.

Marseille’s attack has scored freely and English forward Mason Greenwood is on 22 goals in all competitions.

But while Marseille has outscored even PSG in the league - 46 goals to 43 - the defense is poor and the team panics under pressure, too often giving away soft goals.

Despite all his talk about resolving these glaring issues, coach Roberto De Zerbi still has not done so.

For all of its deficiencies Marseille has competed well against PSG this season.

Marseille beat PSG 1-0 in September and was seconds away from another win in the Champions Trophy last month, until PSG equalized deep in stoppage time and won the penalty shootout.

Lens will move back to the top providing it beats Rennes at home on Saturday and PSG then loses on Sunday.

Resurgent Lyon is level on points with Marseille and trails on goal difference ahead of its trip to Nantes on Saturday. Lyon is on an 11-game winning streak overall, while changing coach has not stopped the rot for a Nantes side languishing in 16th place.

Nice hosts Monaco in the French Riviera derby on Sunday with both sides slowly showing signs of improvement.

Nice has more fight under hard-nosed coach Claude Puel, coming back from 2-0 down in the past two games to draw and win.

Coach Sébastien Pocognoli’s Monaco kept three straight clean sheets ahead of the French Cup game at Strasbourg later Thursday.

Endrick’s loan move from Real Madrid to Lyon is working out even better than expected. With a spectacular goal in the French Cup on Wednesday, the 19-year-old Brazil forward took his Lyon tally to five in five games.

Veteran Nantes goalkeeper Anthony Lopes has the task of stopping Endrick and faces the side for which he made nearly 500 appearances from 2012-24.

Paris FC hopes the signing of veteran striker Ciro Immobile will kickstart a flagging attack. He netted 169 league goals for Lazio during an eight-year spell. During the 2019-20 season he finished as the “Capocannoniere” (top scorer) with 36 goals, beating Cristiano Ronaldo (then with Juventus) to the award. Overall, the 35-year-old Immobile has 304 goals in 587 club appearances and scored 17 times for Italy.

# Reed continues torrid pace in the Middle East

DOHA, Qatar, Feb 5, (Agencies): Patrick Reed continued his torrid pace in the Middle East on Thursday when he made six birdies in the opening eight holes and finished with a 7-under 65 to share the lead with Daniel Hiller in the Qatar Masters.

Reed won the Dubai Desert Classic and then lost in a playoff last week in the Bahrain Championship, moving the American to No. 2 in the Race to Dubai.

Reed had intended to be about 350 miles away this week in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to start another season with LIV Golf. But when he couldn’t agree to a contract extension, he became the second major defection from the Saudi-funded league, along with Brooks Koepka.

Reed could earn a full PGA Tour card for 2027 if he were to be among the top 10 players on the Race to Dubai who are not already exempt. Each

round moves him closer to that, and Reed has yet to play in the four majors this year.

Padraig Harrington, meanwhile, opened with a 71 at Doha Golf Club, significant because it was the 500th career start on the European tour for the Irishman.

□ □ □

LIV golf Riyadh 2026 opened at Riyadh golf Club, with a tightly packed leaderboard taking shape after the opening round of the season-opening event on the global LIV golf calendar.

LIV golf newcomer **Thomas Detry** (4Aces GC) and **Peter Uihlein** (RangeGoats GC) share the early lead at seven-under-par, while Australian rookie **Elvis Smylie** (Ripper GC) sits one shot back on six-under-par following an impressive league debut.

“It was really fun, I definitely enjoyed it,” Detry said. “I think I was just happy out there. I was really happy.”

Co-leader Uihlein said: “I enjoy it. There’s nothing like this, so I have a great time.”

Making his LIV golf debut, Elvis Smylie of Ripper GC shot a confident opening round of 66 (-6). Speaking on what contributed to his low round at Riyadh golf Club, Smylie said, “I think there was a little bit of nerves and excitement, but I think I showed what I’m capable of tonight. It’s an environment where I feel like I’m really thriving, and I have some great teammates to learn off and achieve some great things together.”

The event runs from February 4 to 7. Now in its fourth season, the LIV golf League features 13 teams competing for both an Individual and Team title.

## Man United hosts Spurs with chance to continue resurgence

# New De Bruyne? Wirtz beginning to live up to the hype at Liverpool

MANCHESTER, England, Feb 5, (AP): Florian Wirtz took time to catch fire at Liverpool. Now he’s cooking.

A run of six goals in 10 games has blown away concerns that the Germany international couldn’t handle the hustle and bustle of the Premier League. It has also shone a light on the level of expectation on players in England’s top flight and the demand for immediate success.

The spotlight was on Wirtz from the moment he completed a move from Bayer Leverkusen last summer for a fee that could rise to \$156 million. One of the hottest prospects in Europe, Manchester City was reportedly another of his suitors.

But he chose Premier League champion Liverpool and was part of a spectacular \$500 million spending spree by the Merseyside club as it reshaped its title-winning attack with the additions of Wirtz, Alexander Isak and Hugo Ekitike.

Liverpool was installed as the title favorite but things haven’t gone to plan for coach Arne Slot.

Going into Sunday’s game against City, Liverpool is eighth in the standings and 14 points behind leader Arsenal. The title defense unraveled long before Christmas during a run of six losses in seven games.

Wirtz was not the primary cause of that ruinous run but his lack of impact was noted as he failed to score in his first 21 appearances for his new club.

In October, Sky Sports pundit and Liverpool icon Jamie Carragher raised his own concerns.

“We talk about how long do you give foreign players (time to settle) when they come to the league,” he said. “But if I’m being totally honest, in my experience of players who’ve come to the club when I was a player, if I think of the great



Liverpool’s Florian Wirtz scores his side’s second goal during the Champions League soccer match between Liverpool and Qarabag in Liverpool. (AP)

foreign signings ... I’ll think Sammy Hyypia, Mo Salah, Sadio Mane, Luis Suarez, Didi Hamman ... coming in, they all hit the ground running. History doesn’t tell me that foreign signings coming into England take a year.”

While Carragher was adamant he wasn’t writing off Wirtz three months into the season, his comments reflected the 22-year-old forward’s difficult start at Anfield and how overwhelming his performances had been in a Liverpool team desperate for inspiration.

A mitigating factor was the amount of changes made to Liverpool’s lineup with so many new players and the instability that caused. It’s also not known what the impact was on Wirtz to leave his home country at such a young age and start a new life overseas - a factor often underestimated when it comes to international transfers.

Carragher, however, appears to have been

vindicated in his assertion that foreign players shouldn’t need a year to find their feet.

Wirtz’s first Liverpool goal came at the end of December and he hasn’t looked back. As well as his six goals, he’s provided two assists in a period when he has dominated Liverpool’s attack.

His growing influence was shown in the 4-1 win against Newcastle last week when he twisted his way into the box before creating a goal for Ekitike and scored himself with a clinical finish.

“He is getting better all the time,” Carragher said this week, adding he saw parallels with City great Kevin De Bruyne. “The Premier League has lost Kevin De Bruyne. We’ve gained Florian Wirtz.”

“Forget the teams they play for. We’re talking about special players coming into our league.”

The next test for Wirtz comes against City at Anfield on Sunday. His form has likely come too late to salvage Liverpool’s title defense but it has provided a glimpse of what could come beyond this season.

Man City’s trip to Anfield could be crucial to Pep Guardiola’s hopes of overhauling leader Arsenal in the title race. Anfield has not been a happy hunting ground for City, or Guardiola, with just one win in the last 23 visits. Trailing Arsenal by six points, City needs to avoid the gap growing wider. Manchester United hosts Tottenham on Saturday with the chance to continue its resurgence under coach Michael Carrick with a fourth straight win.

Wirtz and Ekitike are showing signs of forming a lethal partnership. City’s Erling Haaland, meanwhile, is experiencing an unusual lean spell with just two goals in his last 12 games. He has never scored for City at Anfield.

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Britain's Jennifer Dodds in action during the mixed doubles round robin phase of the curling competition against Estonia, at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy. (AP)

# Sports

## Kuwait wins historic wheelchair basketball championship

Egypt and Palestine complete podium

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5, (KUNA):** Kuwait claimed the title of the first Arab Wheelchair Basketball Championship, defeating Egypt 72-68.

Palestine secured third place with a 53-39 victory over Syria. The final, held at the Kuwait Disabled Sports Club, was attended by Dr. Dalal Al-Othman, Director-General of the Public Authority for the Disabled; Shafi Al-Hajeri, Chairman of the Kuwait Wheelchair Basketball Federation; and Egypt's Ambassador to Kuwait, Mohammad Abul-Wafa.

Speaking to KUNA after the match, Dr. Al-Othman reaffirmed the Authority's support for the Kuwait Disabled Sports Club, praising its pivotal role in developing sports talent among people with disabilities. She also congratulated the Kuwaiti team on their historic win and expressed hope that the team would continue achieving success in future international competitions.

Al-Hajeri hailed the championship as a testament to the participants' determination and resilience, highlighting their ability to overcome challenges and defy disability.

Kuwait's hosting of the championship reflects the nation's commitment to strengthening fraternal ties among Arab countries and promoting regional sports, particularly in the field of disabled sports.

Ambassador Abul-Wafa also congratulated the Kuwaiti team on their performance and victory, thanking Kuwait for providing a platform that fosters sporting excellence and reinforces the sisterly bonds among Arab nations.



Kuwait wheelchair basketball team celebrates on the podium.

KUNA photo

## Kuwaiti female archers win bronze



The Kuwaiti team poses with an official.

KUNA photo

**SHARJAH, UAE, Feb 5, (KUNA):** Archers from the Kuwait Shooting Sport Club claimed the bronze medal in the team competition at the Eighth Arab Women Sports Tournament (AWST 2026). The tournament is being hosted by Sharjah Women's Sports in the UAE.

The Kuwaiti team, consisting of Nour

Al-Sharhan, Soad Al-Bahr, and Reem Al-Naqib, delivered an impressive performance that reflects the growing popularity of archery in Kuwait.

Opened on February 2, AWST 2026 runs until February 12 and features 65 teams from 16 Arab countries competing across nine individual and team events.

## Kuwait handball league returns after long break

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5:** The Kuwaiti Premier Handball League resumes today after a 90-day pause, following the national team's participation in the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh last November and hosting the 22nd Asian Men's Handball Championship, which served as a qualifier for the 2027 Handball World Cup in Germany. Kuwait secured third place in the Asian Championship, earning the bronze medal and qualifying for the 2027 World Cup for the tenth time in its history. Prior to these tournaments, the team held overseas training camps in Tunisia, Egypt, Slovenia, and Croatia.

Round 9 of the Premier League kicks off today with Salmiya facing Burgan at 5:00 PM, followed by Al-Arabi against Al-Nasr at 7:00 PM. Tomorrow, Kazma will meet Al-Sulaibikhat at 5:00 PM, while reigning champions Kuwait Club will take on Qadsia at 7:00 PM in the round's highlight clash.

Kuwait Club leads the league standings with a perfect 16 points, followed by Kazma with 11. Burgan and Qadsia each have eight points, Al-Sulaibikhat seven, Al-Arabi and Salmiya six each, and Al-Nasr two points.

Today's spotlight match between Salmiya and Burgan will feature a unique coaching duel: Hussein Habib,



Burgan player makes a goal attempt as rivals defend.

Burgan's former coach, now leads Salmiya, while Yaqoub Al-Mousawi, previously at Salmiya, now coaches Burgan. Both coaches are well-acquainted with each team's strengths and weaknesses, promising an open and competitive encounter.

Meanwhile, the First Division Handball League returned yesterday. Khaitan tops the standings with 10 points, followed by Al-Qurain with eight, Yarmouk seven, the Youth National Team five, Al-Fahaheel four, and Al-Sahel with zero points.

## Burgan looks to make a statement against Al-Ittihad in West Asia Volleyball Champ'ship

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5:** Burgan will make its debut today in the 4th West Asia Clubs Volleyball Championship, facing Saudi Arabia's Al-Ittihad at 6:00 PM. The tournament, hosted by Kuwait Club until February 14, features 11 teams and is being held at the Volleyball Federation Hall in Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Complex.

Earlier matches include Shabab Al-Batroun of Lebanon against Bahrain's Al-Ahli at 1:00 PM (Group B), and Iraq's Ghaz Al-Janoub facing Qatar's Al-Rayyan at 3:30 PM (Group A).

The championship kicked off the day before yesterday. Host Kuwait Club opened with a 3-0 victory over Shabab Al-Batroun, while Al-Ahli of Bahrain defeated Al-Wakrah of

Qatar by the same score. Qatar's Al-Rayyan secured a 3-2 win over Oman's Majees in a thrilling encounter.

Teams were divided into three groups, with the top two from each group and the two best third-placed teams advancing to the quarterfinals on February 10.

In other news, Qadsia Club has strengthened its roster by signing Bahraini player Mohammed Yaqoub for the remainder of the season. Yaqoub, a seasoned professional who has played for multiple Gulf and Asian clubs, is expected to make a significant impact as Qadsia prepares to resume the domestic league following the championship.

Additionally, Hussein Mahmoud has joined Qadsia on a one-season loan from Yarmouk Club to further bolster the team's lineup.



Kuwait Club and Shabab Al-Batroun players vie for the ball during the opening match.

Al-Arabi faces Kazma

## Kuwait Club seeks to avenge Cup loss

By Hassan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5:** The 13th round of the Zain Premier League continues today as Kuwait Club visits Qadsia at 6:00 PM. The round will conclude tomorrow with Salmiya hosting Al-Jahra at 4:40 PM and Al-Arabi facing Kazma at 7:05 PM.

The clash between league leader Kuwait Club (32 points) and third-placed Qadsia (21 points) carries extra significance. Kuwait Club is aiming to avenge last week's Super Cup final loss to Qadsia and add three more points on their path to a fifth consecutive league title.

Qadsia hopes to replicate its recent success over Kuwait Club. A win would provide a major morale boost and strengthen the team's title hopes, while also preparing it for its midweek Gulf Champions League clash against Iraq's Zakho. The team has reinforced its lineup with Algerian professional Tayeb Mzyani, who replaces compatriot Victor Lekhal, now with Saudi Arabia's Al-Shabab. Mzyani arrived yesterday and is ready for today's match under coach Nabil Maaloul.

Second-placed Al-Arabi (24 points) is looking to regain momentum after losing to Kuwait Club 0-1, drawing 1-1 with Al-Fahaheel, and losing 3-4



New recruit Tayeb Mzyani.

to Qadsia in the Super Cup semi-final. Any result other than a win could seriously impact their title hopes.

Fourth-placed Kazma (18 points) aims to secure points to move away from the relegation-threatened zone while pushing for a top-three finish.

Meanwhile, Salmiya (17 points) hopes to continue its resurgence with a second consecutive win, following their recent victory over Al-Jahra 2-0 in the first half of the season. Al-Jahra (7 points), however, aims to win to keep their Premier League survival hopes alive, a challenging task against in-form opponents.

Winter Olympics uncertain

## Canada's McMorris out of hospital after training crash

**LIVIGNO, Italy, Feb 5, (AP):** Canadian snowboarder Mark McMorris was out of the hospital Thursday after suffering a nasty crash during big air training for the Winter Olympics, with a team official saying it is too early to know if one of the country's biggest stars will compete at the Games.

Eric Myles, the sports director for Canada's Olympic team, said McMorris was "doing fine" back at the athletes village and that team doctors were assessing him hour by hour. The 32-year-old, three-time bronze medalist had to be taken off the course on a stretcher Wednesday night after apparently hitting his head and neck while landing.

Qualifying for big air was Thursday night, about 24 hours before the opening ceremony. McMorris is also entered in the men's slopestyle contest - the event he finished third in at the last three Games - set for Feb. 16.

"We're not going to take a chance on the health of an athlete," Myles said in Milan, where the first question of his news conference was for an update on McMorris. "It would be premature to take any decision right now."

In big air, riders do four, five or more spins after taking off from a ramp that, in Livigno, is more than 50 meters (165 feet) tall and built on scaffolding.

On his landing, McMorris lay motionless for about a minute while the medical team rushed out. He was conscious as he was being placed on the stretcher.

Though others - Max Parrot and Sebastien Toutant - have won Olympic gold medals and McMorris has not, he might be the best-known member on the successful Canadian snowboard team. He has a record 22 X Games medals, 12 of them gold. Eight of those have come in slopestyle and the other four in big air.

This is hardly McMorris' first brush with a bad crash.

He suffered life-threatening injuries after slamming into a tree during a back-country ride in 2017. He has had a rod placed in his leg, a plate in his arm and another in his jaw as the result of that and numerous other injuries over the years.

Last month, he told The Associated Press that he was in good health heading into the first Olympics in his 30s.

"I've been feeling pretty good, staying strong and putting quite a bit of effort in the gym to build a robust frame," he said, "because what we do can be a little tricky at times on the body."

A new era arrives

## After questions and concerns, Milan Cortina Winter Olympics ready to go

**CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy, Feb 5, (AP):** Will there be an Olympic spirit or will it seem like a bunch of individual world championships? Will a complicated transport network connecting far-flung venues run smoothly?

Will crowds fill the arenas, rinks and stadiums despite sluggish advance ticket sales? Will the controversial sliding venue and main hockey arena feel finished following construction delays? Will the locals remain more interested in soccer than snow and ice sports?

The answers to these and many other questions that shadowed the preparation of the Milan Cortina Olympics are about to be answered.

When the XXV Winter Games kick off with the opening ceremony at the San Siro soccer stadium on Friday, it won't just be the athletes who are going to be tested. It's a new era for the entire Olympic movement.

Spread out over a vast swath of northern Italy, these Olympics are the first to truly embrace the International Olympic Committee's reform plan of using existing venues no matter

how far apart they are.

Skating sports - including the return of NHL hockey players to the Olympics after more than a decade - will be held in Milan; women's Alpine skiing, sliding and curling in Cortina d'Ampezzo; Nordic sports in Val di Fiemme; men's Alpine skiing and ski mountaineering in Bormio; snowboarding and freestyle in Livigno; and biathlon in Anterselva.

In all, this Olympic footprint covers an area of more than 22,000 square kilometres (nearly 10,000 square miles). That's about the size of the state of Massachusetts.

"I do believe that we took the right decision in having a more dispersed games," new IOC President Kirsty Coventry said. "But it has - and I think we can all say very openly and honestly - it has added additional complexities."

Complexities that Olympic organizers are going to have to get used to because this is the first of several Winter Games arranged with the same model.

The 2030 French Alps Games don't even have a host city in its name. Same for Utah in 2034; and probably for a Swit-

zerland bid - the only candidate - for 2038, too.

"It's a much greater conversation," Coventry said of assessing pros and cons of the new model. "I think initially, we all thought, 'Oh, well, we'll just have it be a little bit more dispersed, because that's more sustainable.'"

Adapting to the new model extends beyond the competition. The opening ceremony will also be spread over multiple locations, with athlete parades held simultaneously in Milan, Cortina, Livigno and Val di Fiemme. There will be two cauldrons lit, one in Milan and another in Cortina.

Former Olympic champion skiers Alberto Tomba and Deborah Compagnoni are the favorites to light the cauldrons in Milan and Cortina, respectively.

American skiing standout Lindsey Vonn, competing in her fifth Olympics, has mixed feelings about the new formula.

"I mean, I'm in Cortina, so there's really nothing to complain about. I'm very happy being here. It's one of the most beautiful places in the world. But it is sad to not be closer to more of your teammates, not just in ski racing, but in any

sport," said Vonn, who plans to race despite a torn ACL in her left knee.

"Salt Lake City was my favorite Olympics because we were all so close to each other. Almost everyone was in the Olympic Village in Salt Lake and this is quite different," said Vonn, referring to the 2002 Games. "A lot of the girls (teammates) were talking about wanting to watch hockey, but it's difficult. ... Obviously you can't choose that geography and where the mountains are, but I think it would have been more fun if we were all closer."

The sliding center in Cortina was rebuilt against the wishes of the IOC, which preferred using an existing venue for bobsled, luge and skeleton in nearby Switzerland or Austria.

The sliding track itself is finished, tested and ready. But surrounding areas of the track are still under construction. Fortunately for organizers, it has snowed all week in Cortina.

"Obviously outside (the track) there are still some little things," Italian luger Dominik Fischnaller said. "But the snow will cover it, so we're good for the Games."