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## Opinion

### Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

HIS Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah stated at the World Governments Summit hosted by Dubai, "The future does not wait for the hesitant."

This statement is absolutely true. We hope that His Highness and the Cabinet are not among the hesitant.

It is well known that some scholars and officials speak, but do not act. However, their words remain

etched in people's minds.

His Highness the Prime Minister said "Kuwait needs courage in decision-making, speed in implementation and genuine partnership." This has been absent since 1962 when Kuwait witnessed the formation of its first Cabinet. Since then, 47 governments have come and gone, comprising of about 530 ministers. Successive governments have worked to appease or placate the National Assembly on one hand, and influential figures on the other hand, in order to protect ministers from parliamentary grilling, or to prevent the entire government from having a confrontation with the

Assembly.

For the past six decades, Kuwait has been caught between the hammer of hesitation and the anvil of inaction in project implementation, because there has been no genuine vision or development strategy due to the conflict between the executive and legislative authorities, in addition to the negative effect of the influential people who are working only to augment their personal interests.

At the same time, ministerial positions were unstable. Therefore, ministers opted to deal with issues in a temporary manner, knowing beforehand that they would not remain in office to complete the realization of their visions.

Consequently, ministers would leave matters unresolved until their successors arrived. This way, the ministers relieved themselves of any burdens and avoided political accountability from the Parliament.

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## Bad weather delays Kuwait Sports Day

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7, (KUNA): President of the Kuwait Sports for All Federation, Faisal Al-Maqseed, announced on Saturday the postponement of Kuwait Sports Day, due to adverse weather conditions affecting the country.

In a statement to KUNA, Al-Maqseed said the decision was taken based on reports issued by the Meteorological Department indicating weather fluctuations that could impact the safe and smooth conduct of the event.

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## Relocation proposed

## Industrial plants near homes spark concern

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Deputy Chairman of the Municipal Council Khaled Al-Mutairi submitted a proposal to relocate the area designated for major contractors, as well as asphalt and ready-mix concrete plants, currently situated between the extension of the 6.5 Ring Road and the Seventh Ring Road.

Al-Mutairi pointed out that the site measures about nine million square meters and the new location should be determined in line with the modern structural plan of the State.

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## 16 arrested in massive drug trafficking sweep

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: The Drug Control General Department (DCGD), which is under the Criminal Security Sector in the Interior Ministry, arrested 16 individuals of various nationalities for the possession of a large quantity of different types of narcotics, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement, the ministry revealed that this operation is part of the ongoing security efforts to track down drug

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# Dangerous sinkholes spotted in northern desert of Kuwait

Experts caution against visiting areas



KUNA photo

Oman's Royal Naval ship 'Al-Mabrukah' docks at Shuwaikh Port on Friday. – See Page 3

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7, (KUNA): The Kuwait Society for Earth Sciences has reported the occurrence of sinkholes in the areas of Jal Al-Zour and Al-Mutlaa in the country's desert, warning that the formations, whether natural or man-made, pose serious dangers and are unsuitable for visits due to the risk of collapse.

The society's head, Dr. Mubarak Al-Hajri, noted that the society conducted field visits to study these caves and prepare a preliminary report, stressing the need to alert the public to their hazards.

He affirmed that one such cave is in the Had Safah area of Jal Al-Zour, within a rainwater stream channel where cracks have formed.

These areas are generally weak, with fractures trending northeast. The region is known for erosion, and over time, geological development of the rocks has created fissures that could expand, posing risks to anyone nearby, he added.

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## Newswatch

**KUWAIT CITY:** The State of Kuwait welcomed on Friday the outcome of the recent United Arab Emirates-hosted negotiations between the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and the United States, according to a statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In a statement, the Ministry said that Kuwait commended the negotiations as an important step towards consolidating the path of dialogue and diplomacy for resolving the Ukrainian-Russian crisis. (KUNA)

– See Also Page 6

**KUWAIT CITY:** The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed Kuwait's strong condemnation of the terrorist bombing that targeted a mosque in Islamabad, the capital of the friendly Islamic Republic of Pakistan, resulting in several deaths and injuries.

In a statement, the Ministry affirmed Kuwait's unequivocal rejection of all forms of violence, extremism and terrorism as well as the targeting of places of worship and the terrorizing of innocent civilians. (KUNA)

– See Also Page 7

8 Gulf Bank holds its year-end 2025 earnings webcast



9 National Bank of Kuwait honors distinguished employees in 2025 at the Annual Elite Awards

## Kuwait hosts major global eye care conference

## Human capital key to healthcare: Dr Al-Awadhi

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Minister of Health Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadhi emphasized the importance of investing in human capital as the cornerstone of sustainable healthcare development, indicating this can be done by empowering doctors and specialists, keeping them informed about the latest international protocols, transferring expertise, and promoting evidence-based professional practices.

Al-Awadhi made the statement at the opening of the 25th Kuwait Ophthalmology Conference. The three-day conference was organized by Kuwait Ophthalmological Society, Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), and Middle East and Africa Council of Ophthalmology, with the president of the American Academy of Ophthalmology in attendance.

He pointed out that the continuous success of the conference for 25 consecutive years is a reflection of the vision of the Health Ministry to fully support the medical field and its commitment to establish an integrated healthcare system based on knowledge, scientific research and nonstop training.

## Kuwait backs 'dialogue' in US-Iran negotiations

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7, (Agencies): The State of Kuwait on Friday welcomed Oman-hosted negotiations held between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran earlier in the day.

In a press release, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs voiced hope that these negotiations would lead to a comprehensive agreement that contributes to attaining the interests of both parties and maintaining regional security and stability.

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Photo by Rezk Tawfiq

Minister of Health Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadhi in a group photo with participants of the 25th Kuwait Ophthalmology Conference.

He confirmed that the ministry is focusing on the field of ophthalmology, which has contributed to expanding the provision of treatment and surgical services in various governorates.

He said this includes encouraging leading international experts to participate in performing complex surgeries, as well as training national staff on the latest surgical techniques. He added that this move positively impacted the quality of healthcare services and reduced the need for treatment abroad.

He revealed that the institutional cooperation between the Council of Ophthalmology Departments, Overseas Treatment Department and the Medical Stores Department at the ministry led to the provision of corneas as a sustainable reserve.

He said this enabled the performance of corneal transplants in the ophthalmology departments at the ministry according to the internationally recognized medical standards.

Continued on Page 5

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Photo by Samer Shiqer

Capital Governor Sheikh Abdullah Salem Al-Ali during a tour of the Shamiya and Shuwaikh Family Carnival.

## Event supports SMEs, farmers

## Family carnival kicks off in Capital to mark National, Liberation Days

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Capital Governor Sheikh Abdullah Salem Al-Ali inaugurated the second Shamiya and Shuwaikh Family Carnival on Thursday, in conjunction with the National Day and Liberation Day celebrations and flag-raising ceremonies.

The carnival is a deeply patriotic event, manifesting the profound sense of belonging and loyalty to the nation and embodying national unity under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah.

The three-day event took place at the Friendship and Peace Park in Shuwaikh residential area, creating a joyful and

festive family atmosphere for residents and visitors.

Sheikh Abdullah Salem Al-Ali asserted that organizing the carnival is in line with the commitment of the governorate to support community, development and recreational initiatives.

He said the objective is to strengthen the spirit of unity and communication among the residents in the area, in line with the vision of the State and the directives of the wise leadership.

He explained that the carnival serves as a supportive platform for the residents of the governorate, providing a valuable opportunity for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and others to participate.

He added that it supports Kuwaiti farmers, enabling them to showcase

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Prayer Timings

Fajr .....	05:13	Asr .....	15:08
Sunrise ..	06:34	Maghrib ..	17:31
Zohr .....	12:02	Isha .....	18:49

# Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

**By Day:** Warm with light with moderate northwesterly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 10-32 km/h with a chance for fog forming at night and some scattered clouds will appear.

Weather

**By Night:** Rather cold and partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times over coastal areas southeasterly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 08-40 km/h with a chance for fog forming ower some areas and a chance for scattered ligt rain.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait Airport	21	14
Abdaly	20	14
Bubyan	16	12
Jahra	24	14
Failaka Island	18	13
Salmiyah	18	16
Ahmadi	16	12

## UK participation in Kuwait festivities signifies strong, historical bonds

LONDON, Feb 7, (KUNA): The wide participation from various sectors of British society in Kuwait’s national celebrations, particularly top officials from the Trade and Defense ministries, as well as parliamentarians, signifies the 250-year-long strong and historical ties, said Kuwaiti Ambassador to the UK Bader Al-Munayekh.

Speaking to Kuwait Television and Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on the sidelines of the 65th National Day and 35th Liberation Day celebrations, Ambassador Al-Munayekh conveyed congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and the Kuwaiti people on the advent of the national occasions, wishing the leadership and people of Kuwait continued progress and development.

Delivering his speech at the Embassy’s celebration of the national occasions, Ambassador Al-Munayekh said, “On these important occasions, we pay tribute to our founding fathers, and remember our heroes, who sacrificed their lives defending our nation during the 1990 invasion.”

“We remain deeply grateful to the United

Kingdom for its decisive support during that critical period and we are honored to have with us this evening British veterans whose service in the liberation of Kuwait will always be remembered and deeply appreciated,” the Ambassador affirmed.

He continued, “Kuwait and United Kingdom relations date back to 1775. And today, our partnership rests on 3 strong interconnected pillars; royal-to-royal pillar, and people-to- people pillar, and government-to-government.”

“At the royal level, the exchange of visits has been more regular and substantive. His Majesty King Charles has visited Kuwait on eight different occasions.

Meanwhile, Minister of State for Trade and member of Parliament, Sir Chris Bryant, said in his speech that it was an “enormous honor and delight” to celebrate Kuwait’s National Day, and Liberation Day.

“These are two absolutely seminal moments in your history, and we want to celebrate them with you,” he said, adding that “There are some countries with whom the bond is so deep and emotional and that is the relationship between the UK and Kuwait.”

The British official continued, “I also want to pay tribute to your armed forces and our



Bader Al-Munayekh

armed forces, who have worked together not only in the 1990s, but ever since and before, making sure that bond of a constant reinvigoration of our armed forces is maintained.”

“Hundreds of Kuwaitis, every single year,

come to the UK to study in our universities, and our universities are the better for it. And so, I warmly welcome that relationship as well,” said Bryant who mentioned the Kuwaiti sovereign wealth fund, which has invested for the longer than any other sovereign world fund in the UK since 1953.

Held on the sidelines of the Embassy’s celebration was the “Sadu Immersive Experience”, which invited guests and dignitaries to visually explore traditional Sadu weaving via an interactive display.

More recently, His Royal Highness, the Duke of Edinburgh visited Kuwait, while His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited the United Kingdom upon a private invitation from His Majesty King Charles,” Ambassador Al-Munayekh stated.

He stated, “Just four months ago, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah visited London, where he met His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales at Windsor Castle,” asserting, “These exchanges reflect the close ties, deep mutual respect, and the enduring friendship between our two royal families.”

Touching on the people-to-people relation, Ambassador Al-Munayekh affirmed that they

remain “one of the strongest and most vibrant aspects of the partnership.”

“Each year, we have more than 180,000 Kuwaitis visit the United Kingdom. We have also more than 11,300 Kuwaiti students studying in the United Kingdom. On the other hand, we have 8,000 British nationals who live and work in Kuwait, and more than 10,000 visitors each that further cementing our social, cultural, and human connection,” said the Ambassador.

At the government-to-government level, the Ambassador indicated, “We take great pride in having establishing the world’s first sovereign wealth fund in London, 1953. Today, it continues to play a positive role and constructive role in the UK economy supporting more than 200 jobs.”

“Kuwait Petroleum Corporation also plays a very vital role. It’s one of the leading suppliers of jet fuel to British and European airports,” said the Ambassador, adding, “High level engagement between our two governments continues to flourish.

In 2025, the Joint Steering Groups concluded its 22nd ministerial meeting. The signing of the GCC- UK free-trade agreement will constitute a significant milestone. And further advancing the deepening of our economic partnership.”

### KUWAIT NATIONAL DAY AND LIBERATION DAY

## Kuwait embassies in Poland, Armenia, Pakistan, S. Africa mark nat’l festivals



The cake-cutting ceremony in Pretoria, South Africa.



The cake-cutting ceremony at the Kuwaiti embassy in Warsaw, Poland.

KUWAIT CITY , Feb 7, (KUNA): The embassies of Kuwait in Poland, Armenia, Pakistan and South Africa organized receptions to mark Kuwait’s 65th anniversary of the National Day and the 35th anniversary of the Liberation Day, drawing several officials and diplomats.

In Warsaw, Kuwait’s Ambassador to Poland Saad Al-Muhaini commended Kuwaiti-Polish relations that have extended for more than six decades, stressing that the next stage holds promising opportunities to enhance bilateral cooperation across several fields, particularly in light of (Kuwait Vision 2035).

Addressing a ceremony held by the Kuwaiti embassy, he said that the State of Kuwait, under its wise leadership, would remain committed to its heritage, open to the world, and confident that its partnerships involving the one with Poland, mark a core pillar of its journey towards the future.

The ambassador underlined that this celebration is a national occasion that reflects the determination of a nation that cherishes its heritage and builds bridges.

In Yerevan, Kuwaiti Ambassador to Armenia Mohammad Al-Oraifan held a reception on the occasion of the country’s celebration of the National Day and Liberation Day.

During the event, he extended his highest congratulations and blessings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti people.

In Islamabad, the Kuwaiti embassy in Pakistan held a delightful ceremony to celebrate the

65th anniversary of Kuwait’s National Day and the 35th anniversary of Liberation Day.

In his message on the occasion, Kuwait Ambassador to Pakistan Nassar Al-Mutairi expressed honor to extend warmest congratulations and sincere best wishes to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the wise Government and the noble Kuwaiti people.

“We remember with profound appreciation the honorable and historic stance of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in support of the State of Kuwait during that difficult period, a principled position that remains firmly embedded in Kuwait’s national memory,” he said.

The bilateral relations between the State of Kuwait and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan are strong and deeply rooted, founded on mutual respect, trust, and shared interests, the Kuwaiti ambassador added.

In recent years, these relations have witnessed positive momentum through the exchange of high-level visits, continued political consultations, and joint efforts to enhance cooperation through high-level bilateral mechanisms and committees, he noted.

The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) is actively playing its part in supporting development projects in Pakistan reflecting the State of Kuwait’s commitment to supporting development pathways and strengthening partnerships based on cooperation and mutual respect, he remarked.

The energy sector enjoys special importance within the established framework of coopera-

tion between the two sides, reflecting a sustainable and forward-looking partnership, he said.

This is complemented by a shared aspiration to expand cooperation in agriculture, industry, defense, infrastructure, transport, food security and other fields of mutual interest, in line with the development priorities of both brotherly countries, the Kuwaiti diplomat noted.

The State of Kuwait further values the positive contribution of the Pakistani community in Kuwait, which serves as a vital human bridge strengthening the bonds of friendship between the two brotherly peoples, he stressed.

For his part, Pakistan’s Federal Minister of Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal, in a statement to KUNA, said, “I, on behalf of people and government of Pakistan, congratulate the Kuwaiti leadership, Kuwait government and the people of Kuwait on the 65th anniversary of the National Day and 35th anniversary of Liberation Day.”

In Pretoria, Kuwaiti Ambassador to South Africa Salem Al-Shebli, held a reception on the national occasion, during which he offered his highest congratulations and blessings to the political leadership and people of the State of Kuwait.

He touted the distinguished relations between the State of Kuwait and South Africa, looking forward to consolidating bilateral cooperation in the areas of education, health, trade, culture, and human rights.

He also commended South Africa’s efforts within the United Nations and its support for the Palestinian people, a position consistent with the State of Kuwait’s relentless and unwavering commitment to backing the Palestinian cause.

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Acting Assistant Undersecretary for Financial, Administrative and Cooperative Affairs and Director General of the Department of Planning and Administrative Development at the Ministry of Social Affairs Dr. Sayed Issa confirmed the formation of four investigative committees and field inspection teams to review the operations and accounts of cooperative societies.**

In a press statement, Issa pointed out that the objective of this move is to assess the cooperatives’ level of compliance with the provisions of the Cooperatives Law and its amendments, as well as the relevant ministerial administrative decisions.

He explained that the above-mentioned committees and teams were formed in response to the complaints that the ministry received from the shareholders of cooperatives, and based on the reports submitted by the appointed financial and administrative auditors in the cooperatives, indicating suspected financial and administrative violations or irregularities.

He stated that once these teams and committees confirm the violations, irregu-

larities or misuse of power by the boards of directors of the cooperatives – which could threaten shareholders’ funds and harm the cooperatives, they will be dealt with firmly in order to safeguard the vital cooperative system that is considered the cornerstone of food security in the country.

He asserted “we are committed to intervene immediately in case of suspected irregularities or violations in order to safeguard the financial stability of cooperatives, prevent any harm to their solvency, and protect the shareholders’ funds, which are a trust placed in our hands.”

He added the ministry has intensified the inspection of cooperatives to include most of them to achieve the ultimate goal of cooperative work -- provide high-quality goods at affordable prices to ease the financial burdens of consumers.

He warned the boards of directors that are not cooperating with the ministry in any way, or that are not implementing ministerial and administrative decisions issued regarding the regulation of cooperative work, indicating that their bank credits will be suspended.

He stressed that the ministry will not hesitate to take stringent measures against these boards of directors if they persist in their non-compliance or fail to respond to its call to quickly rectify their violations.



Dr. Sayed Issa

### CELEBRATORY MESSAGES

## Kuwait’s new FM congratulated by Iraq, Arab, African countries

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received Friday a phone call from his Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein, who congratulated Sheikh Jarrah on his new post.

During the phone conversation, the Iraqi minister wished Sheikh Jarrah success and best of luck, hoping that they would work together to promote Kuwaiti-Iraqi relations and serve the common interests of both countries.

#### Morocco

Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received Friday a phone call from his Moroccan counterpart Nasser Bourita, who congratulated Sheikh Jarrah on his new post.

During the phone conversation, the Moroccan minister wished Sheikh Jarrah success and best of luck, hoping that they would work together to promote Kuwaiti-Moroccan relations and serve the common interests of both countries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement.

#### Somalia

Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received a phone call from his Somali counterpart Abdisalam Abdi Ali who congratulated Sheikh Jarrah on his new post.

Abdi Ali wished Sheikh Jarrah success, voicing hope for working with him to enhance the bilateral relations and serve the common interests of both countries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement on Wednesday.

#### Djibouti

Kuwait’s newly appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received a phone

call from his Djiboutian counterpart Abdoukader Houssein Omar who congratulated Sheikh Jarrah on his new post.

Omar wished Sheikh Jarrah success, voicing hope for working with him to enhance the bilateral relations and serve the common interests of both countries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement on Tuesday.



Sheikh Jarrah Al-Sabah

#### Mauritania

Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received a call from his Mauritanian counterpart Mohammad Salem Ould Bechir on Tuesday.

During the phone conversation, the Mauritanian minister congratulated Sheikh Jarrah on having been named as Kuwait’s foreign minister and wished him best of luck.

He said he looks forward to working closely with Sheikh Jaber in order to promoting bilateral relations and serving mutual interests of both countries and both peoples.

#### Libya

Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received, on Tuesday, a phone call from Libya’s Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Al-Taher Al-Baour, who congratulated him on his appointment.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement that the Libyan official conveyed his best wishes, as well as expressed readiness to work closely to further boost bilateral ties and advance shared interests between the two nations.

## Russia, Morocco, Istanbul embassies join celebrations

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7, (KUNA): The Embassies of the State of Kuwait in the Kingdom of Morocco and the Russian Federation, along with its Consulates General in Shanghai and Istanbul, celebrated the 65th anniversary of Kuwait’s National Day and the 35th anniversary of Liberation Day.

The celebrations were attended by ministers, heads of accredited diplomatic missions, officials, journalists, and representatives of civil society.

In Morocco, Chargé d’Affaires at the Embassy of the State of Kuwait, Counselor Saud Al-Mutairi, on Friday extended sincere congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the government and the people of Kuwait on this dear national occasion.

Al-Mutairi stressed in his welcoming address the importance of the historic and fraternal relations binding the two brotherly countries and peoples of Kuwait and Morocco under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and King of Morocco Mohammed VI.

In Russia, Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to the Russian Federation Dr. Rashed Al-Adwani expressed, in a statement to KUNA, his sincere congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the government, and the people of Kuwait on the national holidays.

Al-Adwani said the national celebrations embody the unity, cohesion, and loyalty of the Kuwaiti people to their homeland and wise leadership, as they reinforce the values of belonging and loyalty passed down through generations.

He highlighted the deep relations between Ku-



Kuwait’s National and Liberation Days marked by the Kuwait Embassy in Moscow.

wait and the Russian Federation, and the distinguished historical ties linking the two countries across political, economic, and cultural fields, serving as a model for constructive cooperation.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin affirmed, in a similar statement to KUNA during the celebration, that the bilateral relations are based mutual respect and understanding, praising the level of political and diplomatic coordination between the two countries in regional and international forums.

He also commended Kuwait’s balanced and con-

structive role in supporting international stability and dialogue, expressing Russia’s aspiration to further enhance cooperation in foreign relations and exchange views on issues of common interest.

From Istanbul, Consul General of the State of Kuwait Mohammed Al-Sharji extended, in a statement to KUNA, his warmest congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the people of Kuwait.



diwaniya

ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Courageous vision, good rule make a strong state

“THE issuance of a decree on ministerial changes is a commendable step, but it is not enough if it is limited to changing names without changing the approach, and changing faces without rebuilding the very idea by which the State is run.” **Bassam Fahd Thunayyan Al-Ghanim** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

“Experience has taught us that a ministerial reshuffle does not, in itself, create reform, and that the State can neither be run through temporary fixes nor built with reactive measures, while the citizen at the bottom of the pyramid groans under the weight of inflation, debt, housing, rent, rising prices and the unbearable demands of life.



Al-Ghanim

“Here, we arrive at the heart of the crisis -- governance. Money without governance is just a number without impact, wealth without justice produces resentment, not development, and decisions without transparency erode public trust before achieving any progress. Governance is not an administrative luxury, as it is the only guarantee that the State’s resources are managed wisely, and that the benefits will reach the citizens, instead of evaporating in the labyrinth of bureaucracy.

“We hear about expansions in the petroleum industry and increases in daily production, perhaps, approaching three million barrels per day. We also read about sovereign wealth funds, reportedly valued at more than trillion dollars. However, there has been no official statement issued by the responsible authorities regarding their value or where they are invested. Even in the worst-case scenario -- with the price of a barrel of oil dropping to just \$60 (and it may reach \$80, \$90 or even \$100) -- we are talking about around \$66 billion (KD20 billion) from oil alone entering the State treasury each year. Then, citizens are asked to tighten their belts, even though they are already stretched thin.

“This is precisely why in our book on domestic investment, we posed an equally important question: Why does most of our wealth remain abroad, outside the borders of the local economy, while the country suffers? Hence, the call to establish a domestic investment authority—a sovereign national body—whose mission is to direct a portion of the financial surplus back into the country -- for housing, infrastructure, industry, agriculture, small businesses and youth empowerment. This a system that does not compete with the private sector but empowers it, that does not crowd out citizens but eases their burdens, and that transforms wealth from figures in reports into a tangible impact on people’s lives. Genuine investment is not just in global markets, but in the stability of the citizen, their ability to live with dignity, and to build a future within their homeland, not abroad.

“Nevertheless, the undeniable question is: All this money...for whom? For the citizen whose salary is not enough at the end of the month? For the retiree who served his country for a lifetime, yet cannot afford a car for his grown children? For the young entrepreneur with a small business who dreams of continuing, but he is stifled by rent, high operating costs and a labor shortage? True reform does not begin in offices, but with the citizens feeling that they are at the top of the pyramid, not at the bottom, and that the State exists to protect them, not to burden them.

“Therefore, as we outlined in the strategic alternative, we need new ministries with a different vision, ministries that do not simply repeat the old, but break the stagnation. A Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security whose value lies in securing the national food supply, reducing dependence on imports, and transforming food security from a slogan into a sovereign policy that protects the State during crises.

“A Ministry of Governance and Government Performance that acts as the oversight body for performance, establishes realistic performance indicators, links budgets to results, and transparently holds those who fall short accountable while rewarding those who excel.

“A Ministry of Digital Transformation and Smart Services that should not be merely for show, but rather for re-engineering procedures, reducing corruption, expediting services, and linking data to create a smart and paperless State.

“A Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development that moves the state from managing the present to shaping the future, linking projects to a clear vision, and measuring the economic, social and environmental impact of every decision.

“A Ministry of Human Resources and Development that manages human capital equitably, standardizes recruitment and promotion criteria, and links compensation to performance, not favoritism.

“A nation is not measured solely by

the strength of its statistics, but also by the degree of justice its citizens feel in their homes, their salaries, and the future of their children. If citizens do not feel that this wealth belongs to them, that this reform directly affects them, and that their livelihood and dignity are a priority, not a marginal concern, then any cabinet reshuffle, no matter how large, will remain a superficial change, while the underlying pain persists.

“A strong State is not run through temporary fixes, but with a courageous vision, genuine governance, and sincere fairness to its citizens.”

Also:

“Through my survey of Kuwaiti men and women about ‘X’ (formerly Twitter), I noticed that most of them have no accounts, and those who had one have either deleted or neglected it,” **Zaid Al-Jalawi** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

“Through my conversations with them, it became clear to me that there is lack of awareness regarding the topics discussed on the ‘X’ platform. While there is a slightly greater interest among Kuwaiti women and feminists on Instagram and Snapchat, these are social platforms with content closer to tabloid journalism than the reasonable opinions sometimes found on ‘X’.

“Therefore, I was surprised by the unrealistic hype that does not reflect the reality of Kuwaiti society. This hype exists only in the minds of those active on ‘X’. Kuwaitis are not particularly drawn to politics due to the lack of credibility of anonymous accounts, which have been proven to be managed from outside Kuwait.

“Furthermore, most interactions with known accounts are contrived and inauthentic, as the account holder often has multiple accounts to interact with their posts and those who reply to them. Users are content to simply watch without commenting.

“I have tracked the opinions of people I know and do not know over a medium period, and it is now clear to me that the number of followers of active accounts is mostly fake.

“The hype is not in the minds of the users themselves, like someone who surrounds himself with an inflated ego that no one else can see — an unrealistic inflation of self-importance.”



“A few days ago, I entered a spacious coffee shop located in a large hospital. It was teeming with people, not a single table or seat was empty,” **Hussain Al-Rawi** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

“After a short search for a seat, I saw a man sitting alone while three empty seats are around him. I approached him with a smile, greeted him warmly, and asked his permission to sit. He nodded in agreement, and I sat down quietly, though with a hint of anticipation. But a few moments later, I noticed his expression changed, and a hint of annoyance crossed his face. He began glancing at me intermittently, his eyes betraying a barely concealed unease. At that moment, I wondered



Hussain Al-Rawi

to myself: What was this man expecting me to do? Did he want me to leave him alone while he is reserving three empty seats for himself? This seemingly simple scene encapsulates much of modern life.

“In cafés, restaurants and waiting areas, we see spacious tables occupied by a single person, surrounded by four empty chairs. They gaze intently at their phone, sometimes at the passers-by, as if silently declaring, ‘This table is mine alone and this is my private space amidst this crowd.’ People walk past, searching for a seat, their eyes meeting those empty seats, yet they move on, as if respecting an unspoken solitude.

“Is there something in our culture that makes us hesitant to approach the solitude of others, or do we practice a kind of excessive conservation that maintains a doubled distance between us, even in public spaces?”

“Perhaps, it is a deep-seated feeling – a collective sense – that sitting at a stranger’s table is an intrusion into their private world, even if that world exists in a space open to everyone.

“It is a willing isolation, but sometimes painful. We hide in corners, take refuge behind screens, and feign busyness so that no one discovers our inner emptiness. Each of us now has our own virtual table where we sit in the heart of the bustling city, chatting with hundreds of distant friends, yet averting our gaze from the person sitting next to us.

“Perhaps, the world does not need more space, but rather more open hearts. An empty seat does not await a body to occupy it, but a soul to draw near.

“When streets are crowded and spirits are constricted, perhaps, the simplest act of courage is to smile at a stranger and share a table with them.”

— **Compiled by Saeed Mahmoud Saleh**



Omani and Kuwaiti Naval officials pose opposite the Omani Naval ship ‘Al-Mabrukah’ at Shuwaikh Port.

Oman Royal Navy ship docks at Shuwaikh Port

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7, (KUNA): Oman’s Royal Naval ship “Al-Mabrukah” docked on Friday at Shuwaikh Port as part of an official visit lasting several days. The General Staff of the Kuwaiti Army stated that the visit aims to exchange expertise and strengthen co-

operation in joint military training fields, contributing to increasing readiness and efficiency.

Several Kuwaiti naval officers received the ship’s crew upon their arrival.

‘All join hands to fight drugs’

‘Be aware ... be strong’

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Undersecretary of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs Dr. Suleiman Al-Suwailem said the Rehabilitation and Evaluation Department at the ministry will launch the national drug awareness campaign under the slogan, “Be Aware”, this week.

In a press statement, Al-Suwailem stressed that this campaign is based on the belief of the ministry that protecting the nation begins with protecting the awareness of its youths. He pointed out that addressing the drugs issue is not an option, but a national and moral duty and a shared responsibility that falls on everyone.

He disclosed that the comprehensive awareness campaign aims to protect the Kuwaiti society from drugs. “The campaign will

focus on three aspects -- awareness, prevention and treatment, targeting all segments of society, with emphasis on students. This will contribute to raising awareness and preserving the cohesion of Kuwaiti families,” he added.

He said the drugs issue is one of the most serious challenges that societies are facing today, not only because they destroy the body, but also because they cloud the mind, steal the future, and undermine national resilience.

“Since the youths are the energy, the shield and the future of this nation, the campaign aims to deliver a clear message to every young man and woman: Be aware ... Be strong ... Be conscious,” he asserted.

He explained that the campaign is not just a fleeting awareness effort, but a national project that opens the door to dialogue, provides knowledge, equips young people with the tools for self-protection, and reinforces the values of belonging and responsibility.

He reiterated that protecting Kuwait begins with protecting its youths, and that everyone is required to be the first line of defense against anything that threatens the security and psychological and social stability of society.



Wafiqah Al-Mulla

‘Kuwait plays vital role in social development’

NEW YORK, Feb 7, (KUNA): The State of Kuwait reiterated its firm commitment to establishing a comprehensive social protection system rooted in a rights-based development approach.

This came in a statement delivered by Wafiqah Al-Mulla, Second Secretary of the Permanent Mission of Kuwait to the United Nations, before the 64th session of the Commission for Social Development of the Economic and Social Council, held at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

Al-Mulla emphasized Kuwait’s dedication to safeguarding vulnerable groups, promoting equal opportunities, and bolstering women’s economic independence. She asserted that social protection remains a vital pillar for achieving national well-being and enhancing social resilience, particularly for women and girls.

At the regional and international levels, Al-Mulla highlighted Kuwait’s active role in supporting global social development through humanitarian aid and cooperation programs, notably through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED).

She stated that social development is a cornerstone of the nation’s development model, guided by the values of solidarity and human dignity in alignment with Kuwait Vision 2035.

This vision, she added, integrates planning across the social protection, health, education, and labor sectors to ensure “no one is left behind.”

Al-Mulla detailed concrete steps taken by the government to enhance institutional coherence by linking social objectives with financial planning and national priorities. Kuwait continues to invest heavily in universal education and healthcare, while providing targeted support for the elderly, children, and persons with disabilities, with a focus on empowering youth through decent work.

The Kuwaiti diplomat lauded the Second World Summit for Social Development as a pivotal moment for restoring social justice to the global agenda. She called for a shift from “pledges to implementation” to address the structural roots of exclusion and praised the State of Qatar for hosting the summit.

Red Palace Village plan kicks off

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: The Projects Sector at Kuwait Municipality took the first step towards implementing the Red Palace Village project by holding a preliminary meeting in the presence of Deputy Director General at the Municipality and Head of the sector Eng. Maysaa Boushehri and representatives of private companies, reports Al-Anba daily.

The meeting with the bidding compa-

nies included a detailed explanation of the procedures for launching the consultancy tender for the project.

The Municipality organized the preliminary meeting to make sure that all of the bidders fully understand the scope of work and documentation requirements, explain the entire bidding process, and answer technical and procedural inquiries.

Guidelines issued

Ban on external speaker during Ramadan prayer

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: In line with its commitment to regulate the collection of donations, Taraweeh prayers and Iftar banquets in mosques during the holy month of Ramadan, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs has instructed the mosque staff — including imams, preachers and muezzins — to comply with the directives, particularly the 11 guidelines circulated by the Mosques Department, reports Al-Anba dailh.

The circular states that, as part of its efforts to regulate mosque affairs and ensure the safety of mosques and worshippers, the department stresses the importance of adhering to the following:

The use of external mosque loudspeakers is prohibited during the five daily prayers, as well as during Taraweeh and Qiyam prayers.

The collection of donations inside mosques, whether in cash or through electronic means, is prohibited except by parties authorized by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. A list of approved charitable organizations will be announced at a later date.

Credentials

Verification of the identities and credentials of staff members from charitable organizations is required, and only those authorized by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs are permitted. Any party wishing to organize Iftar meals at a mosque must submit an official request to the administration to obtain approval, in coordination with the mosque imam.

Iftar meals must be held in the mosque courtyards. Meals should be laid out half an hour before the call to prayer and removed after the Iftar period.

Responsibility for organizing and managing Iftar meals rests with the organizers of the Iftar project, under the supervision of the mosque imam.

The erection of Ramadan tents, fences, or any other structures within the mosque’s boundaries is prohibited without the knowledge and approval of the administration.

Connecting the mosque’s electricity supply to Ramadan tents erected adjacent to the mosque walls is strictly prohibited to ensure the safety of worshippers. These tents are not subject to the administration’s supervision or responsibility.

Strict adherence to the mosque charter is required. No donor is permitted to carry out any work at the mosque, whether construction, major maintenance, or the installation of equipment, without prior consultation with and approval from the administration.

Unauthorized technicians or workers are prohibited from carrying out any maintenance work inside mosques.

Reports concerning emergency maintenance must be submitted through the Mosques Department.

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# Kuwait moves toward unified national registry for buildings

Dynamic data to guide urban development

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

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Municipal Council member Munira Al-Amir submitted a proposal to establish the National Registry for Buildings and Real Estate, serving as a unified data umbrella for all information related to the condition and status of buildings and land throughout the country.**

Al-Amir explained that the proposal is not just a technical or administrative step, because it is a comprehensive vision aimed

at reorganizing urban development, national identity, resource management and government decision-making.

She pointed out that one of the difficult challenges in urban planning in the country is the fragmentation and dispersion of data among multiple entities, with each holding only part of the overall picture and lacking a national framework to connect these pieces into a single, integrated system.

She stressed that effective urban planning and proper management of real estate assets cannot be achieved without a precise and continuously



Al-Amir

updated national database that accurately reflects the real condition of buildings and land, including their usage, structural status, and architectural and urban value.

She stated that the objective is not just to gather information, but also to transform data into a practical tool for decision-making. She said the proposed national register should function as a dynamic platform, regularly updated and governed by clear standards, and a guide for urban planning policies, rather than existing as a static archive of information.

She added that the register will also help preserve the architectural identity of the country, especially in light of the loss of many buildings with historical importance or unique architectural character.

She affirmed that protecting the architectural identity does not start with demolition or restoration decisions, but with documentation.

She emphasized the need for coordination with the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) to ensure the proper classification and documentation of historical buildings with cultural and architectural value. She clarified that her proposal is founded on the principle of institutional integration, as no single entity can manage this issue independently.

She indicated that the proposal also calls for coordination between the Kuwait Municipality and other concerned entities like the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI), Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior (Civil Defense Department), Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, Environment Public Authority (EPA), and Ministry of Information.

## Crown Prince, PM extend greetings

### Amir congratulates New Zealand's Governor-General on National Day

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a congratulatory cable to the Governor-General of New Zealand, Cindy Kiro, on her country's National Day.

In the cable, His Highness the Amir wished the Governor-General good health and wellbeing, and more progress and prosperity for New Zealand and its people.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent a congratulatory cable to

the Governor-General of New Zealand, Cindy Kiro, on her country's National Day.

In the cable, His Highness the Crown Prince wished the Governor-General good health and wellbeing, and more progress and prosperity for New Zealand and its people.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent a congratulatory cable to the Governor-General of New Zealand, Cindy Kiro, on her country's National Day.

## Armenia backs expanded co-op

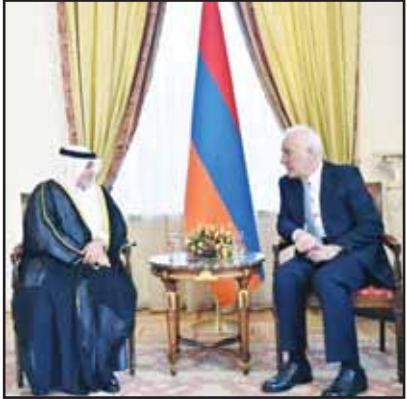
### Armenian Pres extols mutual friendship bonds with Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7, (KUNA): Armenian President Vahagn Khachaturyan confirmed on Friday the strong relations between Armenia and Kuwait, praising the deep bonds of friendship and mutual understanding between their peoples.

Kuwait's Embassy in Yerevan said in a statement that this came during President Khachaturyan's reception of the Kuwaiti Ambassador to Armenia Mohammad Al-Oraifan at the Presidential Palace on the occasion of the 65th National Day and 35th Liberation Day anniversaries.

The Armenian President emphasized the importance of enhancing bilateral cooperation in commercial, social, and cultural fields, affirming his country's support for joint projects that serve the community including the Kuwaiti elderly home project in Armenia, which reflects the spirit of solidarity and humanitarian cooperation between the two countries.

He conveyed his heartfelt congratulations to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-



KUNA photo

Armenian President Vahagn Khachaturyan meets with Kuwaiti Ambassador to Armenia Mohammad Al-Oraifan at the Presidential Palace in Yerevan.

Jaber Al-Sabah and his people, wishing continued progress and prosperity.

For his part, Ambassador Al-Oraifan expressed his thanks for the warm reception, voicing Kuwait's pride in its relations with Armenia.

## Prices and supply balanced

### Imported fish reach Sharq market

**By Marwa Al-Bahrawi**

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: The Kuwaiti Fishermen Union continued supplying imported fish to Sharq fish market -- a move aimed at maintaining food security and meeting the growing demand in the local market.

This initiative is part of a plan being implemented in cooperation with the concerned government agencies, primarily the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

In a statement to the newspaper, Head of the Union Abdullah Al-Sarheed revealed that the second shipment of imported fish, totaling three tons of various types -- two tons of Pakistani fish and one ton of Iranian

fish -- was delivered to the Sharq market on Thursday.

He said the fish were sold in the 50 stalls of the Union at prices ranging from KD2.5 to KD10 per kilogram, depending on the size, type and quality.

He emphasized that this step aims to provide consumers with diverse options at balanced prices and to mitigate market fluctuations.

He disclosed that the available fish include grouper, silver pomfret, sea bream and sea bass. He expects a gradual increase in the volume of imported fish shipments in the coming period, which will contribute to increasing supply and stabilizing prices.

It is worth mentioning that the Union obtained a general import permit from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry a few months ago -- a qualitative leap in regulating the import process and led to the arrival of the first batch of imported fish in the country on Jan 23.



Al-Sarheed



Ministry of Education photo

Capital Educational District Orchestra performs 'Our Beloved Sheikh' for National Holidays.

## Concert marks National holidays

### Capital Educational District Orchestra showcases heritage, talent, patriotism

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: The Music Education Department at the Capital Educational District organized the concert of the Capital Educational District Orchestra to celebrate the National Day and Liberation Day, under the sponsorship of Education Minister Eng. Sayed Jalal Al-Tabtabaei.

Entitled, "Our Beloved Sheikh," the concert was held in the lobby of the Education Ministry headquarters with a huge number of ministry officials in attendance.

Abrar Al-Aidan, Supervisor of the Music Education Department, expressed her warmest congratulations and best wishes to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mehal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, may Allah protect them, on the occasion of the national holidays.

Al-Aidan disclosed that the Capital Educational District Orchestra consists of students from the primary, intermediate and secondary schools in the district, along with music teachers, department heads and supervisors.

Under the supervision of the Music Education Department, the Orchestra presented a comprehensive national artistic work, which included a selection of songs

and pieces inspired by Kuwaiti heritage, in a bid to instill love and loyalty to the homeland and showcase the talents of the students.

The event commenced with a traditional folk dance performed by students from Al-Asma'i High School, followed by the musical segment titled, "Khatfat Shira'a" and performed by students Ahmed Al-Ruwaiss and Abdulaziz Al-Dulaimi from Salem Al-Hussainan Intermediate School for Boys and student Abdulrazzaq Al-Wahib from Amr Ibn Al-Aas Elementary School for Boys.

The program included a theatrical performance by scouts from Amr Ibn Al-Aas Elementary School for Boys, the song "Rahal" performed by students from Abdullah Al-Jaber High School for Boys and Salem Al-Hussainan Intermediate School for Boys, and the song "Kuwaitna" performed by Nasser Al-Raghib -- a teacher and students from Abdullah Al-Jaber High School for Boys and Salem Al-Hussainan Intermediate School for Boys.

It concluded with the song "Burj Al-Kuwait" from the ministry's operetta, "Ghatawi," performed by the elementary students in the district.

## KRCS, ChildFund explore strategic cooperation

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7, (KUNA): Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) underscored Thursday commitment to furthering cooperation with regional and global humanitarian agencies to enhance the future of humanitarian work and develop its mechanisms to serve the world's most vulnerable groups, mainly children.

KRCS's Chairman Khaled Al-Maqamis made the statement to KUNA while welcoming a visiting ChildFund delegation, led by Senior Director of Resource Mobilization Michelle L. Cormier, in the presence of ChildFund's Regional Director in Africa Chege Ngugi.

Al-Maqamis added that his charity attaches much attention to children's programs in the context of its humanitarian programs and projects only out of its realization of sizable challenges children are facing in regions of conflicts, disasters



KRCS photo

Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, Khaled Al-Maqamis, receives the Senior Director of Resource Mobilization at the International Children's Fund, Michel Cormier.

and humanitarian crises.

For her part, Cormier voiced appreciation to the Kuwaiti charity's humanitarian and relief efforts, saying that it has gained a leading reputation and prestigious status in the global international domain.

She elaborated that the visit aims to review the ChildFund's programs and explore joint cooperation opportunities, noting that the fund seeks to support the most vulnerable children worldwide through programs that focus on education, protection, mental and social health, and ensuring a safe environment.

She added that cooperation with the KRCS is a significant opportunity to integrate humanitarian efforts and expand the scope of children-directed programs in affected regions in order to attain a tangible and sustainable humanitarian impact.



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# LOCAL

# The Gulf’s shift away from oil is slow – with a partial exception in the UAE

Dr. Herb’s visit to Kuwait comes at the invitation of Reconnaissance Research and Dar Al-Seyassah for Printing and Publishing

Reconnaissance Research founder and CEO Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri conducted an interview with Dr. Michael Herb, Professor of Political Science at Georgia State University, on the sidelines of Dr. Herb’s visit to Kuwait to take part in a series of closed discussions and specialized seminars organized by the Center. This interview is published exclusively in Al-Seyassah and The Arab Times.

The interview is part of a series of special conversations presented by Reconnaissance Research, aimed at offering readers an accessible academic lens on ongoing transformations and their realistic limits. The discussion covered structural shifts in Gulf political economies, the requirements for attracting foreign investment, how Gulf political systems are adapting to new economic and regional pressures, and the role of younger educated generations in shaping the future of governance.

□ □ □

**What is the most important structural change currently taking place across Gulf political economies?**

**Dr. Herb:** The Gulf economies remain quite dependent on hydrocarbons. While some countries, notably the UAE, have made some progress toward diversification, overall we mostly see a continuation of existing trends rather than a break with the past. Structural change is slow, and not all of it is moving toward diversification away from oil.

On the positive side, the Gulf has continued to develop its tourism industry. The region continues to grow as a travel hub with Dubai’s airport now the second busiest in the world after Atlanta. And the region has expended as a logistics hub with multiple port developments. Overall however the economies of the Gulf states, with the partial exception of the UAE, remain quite dependent on oil. The current decline in oil prices have forced some GCC countries to increase their borrowing. A true end to dependence on oil remains a very distant prospect.

The Gulf governments have continued with their efforts -- such as Saudi Arabia’s Nitaqat -- to segment local labor markets reserving specific occupations for nationals and establishing quotas for nationals in private sector firms. Yet these efforts, while yielding some successes in some countries, have not prevented the share of non-nationals in the Gulf populations from returning to pre-Covid percentages across the Gulf.

The Gulf private sectors remain dominated by non-national employees, and many nationals who work in the private sector have their pay supplemented by support from the state budget -- so their presence in the private sector is not in way an indication of diversification away from reliance on oil. And nationals continue to work predominantly in the public sector, with the share of non-nationals in the public sector varying sharply from one Gulf state to another depending on its level of oil wealth, with citizens forming a much higher percentage of total public sector employees in Oman than in Qatar.

Some recent changes do feel very much like they are new and deep, and at the top of the list of these changes I would place the efforts by Saudi Arabia to attract tourists. This is a sharp break from the past, but in the long run tourism can only be one piece of an overall strategy to diversify away from oil in Saudi Arabia.

We also see some progress toward diversification in manufactures in the UAE and Saudi Arabia especially, where parts of the manufacturing sector are not connected to hydrocarbons. Ras Al Khaimah has had notable success in nurturing world class ceramics and pharmaceutical companies that do business around the world. It benefits from the advanced infrastructure of the UAE but, like Dubai, cannot rely on oil wealth and is thus more focused on diversification than other regional governments.

**What do foreign investors need from GCC countries to assess whether economic visions will succeed in the long term?**

- The Gulf states’ international presence today is far greater than it was decades ago.
- GCC countries have demonstrated substantial political stability for decades — and that is unlikely to change in the short or medium term.
- Foreign investors need institutions that guarantee property rights, reduce bureaucracy, and curb monopolies and patronage.
- International rankings often place the UAE and Qatar among the world’s leading investment environments.
- There is visible progress in manufacturing diversification in the UAE and Saudi Arabia in areas not tied to hydrocarbons.
- In Kuwait, reforms often proceed through trial and error rather than a consistently calculated long-term strategy.
- Kuwait’s challenges include limited coordination across government entities, overlapping mandates, and a public sector that has expanded faster than its capacity to deliver efficient services.



Reconnaissance Research founder and CEO Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri with Dr. Michael Herb, Professor of Political Science at Georgia State University.

**Dr. Herb:** Investors need strong institutions that provide a guarantee of property rights, political stability, the provision of high quality infrastructure, the ability to hire a trained workforce, a lack of bureaucratic obstacles to entry into marketplaces, the removal of monopolies and nepotism and the availability of land, and much else. At the moment the Gulf countries have institutions that deliver on many of these criteria, albeit with a varying level of success.

International rankings tend to place the UAE and Qatar among the world’s leading investment climates, while Kuwait is generally ranked slightly lower within the GCC. This reflects Kuwait’s distinctive institutional setting, where reform often proceeds through a trial-and-error process rather than through a consistently calculated, long-term strategy. That said, recent advances in digital governance and investment regulation indicate meaningful movement, and even by Gulf standards Kuwait is not facing drastic failure, but rather the need to accelerate an already emerging reform trajectory.

Infrastructure across the Gulf is world class and this directly contributes to the rise in logistics, tourism, and other industries. The GCC states as a whole have shown a great deal of political stability over the past decades and that does not appear likely to change in the short or medium term. Moreover, there appears to be an appreciation in the GCC states for the need to lift some layers of bureaucracy and make it easier, for example, to start new businesses. Saudi Arabia has in particular made efforts to lift the bureaucratic burden while Kuwait again still remains behind the rest of

the Gulf. This reflects structural challenges, including limited coordination between numerous government entities, overlapping competencies, and a public sector that has grown faster than its capacity to deliver efficient services. As a result, reform has tended to be incremental and uneven compared with neighboring states.

**How are Gulf political systems adopting to new economic and regional pressures today?**

**Dr. Herb:** There is a great deal of continuity in the basic political institutions of the Gulf. While there have been leadership changes in the Gulf countries in recent years, bringing to power younger leaders in many capital in the region, the basic institutions of rule remain those that were put in place when Gulf citizens built modern bureaucratic states in the middle of the twentieth century.

The strategies adopted by rulers have of course changed. The Gulf countries have a vastly larger international presence today than they did in the past decades ago. When I was in Qatar thirty years ago I called an American and told him I was in Qatar -- he responded “where are you?”. That would not happen today. It is not just that the Gulf states are known, but also that they are serious players in international politics.

The continuing decline in the fortunes of the Iranian regime poses a threat of instability for the GCC countries, but also sidelines a nearby regional actor who -- especially in the past -- was viewed as a threat.

**How should observers understand differences among GCC states?**

## A Reference Book to Understand Gulf Transformations

### The Wages of Oil (2014)

The book highlights the contrast between Kuwait and the UAE, and illustrates the vastly different possible futures facing the smaller states of the Gulf.

In *The Wages of Oil*, Michael Herb provides a robust framework for thinking about the future of the Gulf. Herb explains the nature of the changes we are likely to see in the future. He asks why Kuwait is far behind in its efforts to diversify its economy away from oil while the United Arab Emirates has moved ambitiously to diversify.

This data-rich book reflects the importance of both politics and economic development issues for decision-makers in the Gulf. Herb develops a political economy of the Gulf that ties together a variety of issues usually treated separately: Dubai’s real estate boom, the paucity of citizen labor in the private sector, class divisions among citizens, the caste divide between citizens and noncitizens, and the politics of land.

The book drew notable scholarly attention and was included by *The Washington Post* from 2017 to 2023, and as *Director of the Middle East Institute* from 2009 to 2013.

### Who is Dr. Michael Herb?

His research focuses on the Gulf monarchies. He wrote on the political development of monarchical regimes, the resource curse and Gulf politics.

He received his Ph.D. from UCLA in 1997 and joined the political science department at Georgia State University in 1998.

His undergraduate degree is from the University of Washington.

He is the author of *The Wages of Oil* (Cornell, 2014).

He served as chair of the Department of Political Science at Georgia State University from 2017 to 2023, and as *Director of the Middle East Institute* from 2009 to 2013.

**Dr. Herb:** The GCC states are independent sovereign countries that make their own foreign policies. Their wealth and geographic position gives them the means and the incentive to pursue policies that affect other countries in the region. Sometimes, in the pursuit of what they see as their specific interests, the GCC states sometimes wind up at odds with each other.

I think it is fair to wonder if activist foreign policies -- especially if not carried out in concert with other GCC states -- are really worth the treasure they cost and the risks they incur. Mediation seems to pay the best returns. These efforts help to resolve conflicts in the neighborhood and maintain good ties between GCC states and regional and world powers.

Finally, the GCC states need to move toward economic diversification and tensions among themselves threaten serious harm to these efforts. The obvious path toward development among the GCC states is trade amongst each other: one can see this for example in the Hafefat Rail link being built between Oman and the UAE. This is often how we see economic growth proceed in other parts of the world -- it spreads from one country to another in a region. That cannot happen if the Gulf countries are blockading each other.

**What role do younger educated generations play in shaping the future of governance in the Gulf?**

**Dr. Herb:** They are the future. The challenge is to make room for them in governance, and then make sure that they do not block the next generation.

## Continued from Page 1

## Yes, Your

This is in addition to the fact that some ministers were appointed by a decree issued in the evening, only to resign or be dismissed the following morning. Some ministers were even dismissed after a few days or months, simply because they displeased one MP or another.

This was a major cause of the decline of government performance and the delay in the implementation of development projects. Had these projects been completed on time, they would have saved the country a great deal and increased its value.

Inflation increases annually, reducing the purchasing power of cash, while infrastructure and development projects increase in value.

Yes, we have experienced hesitation in all areas, because social and political pressures are stronger than the successive governments due to the ambiguous relationship between the two authorities, especially in the last three decades.

One manifestation of that era was the encroachment of MPs on the powers of ministers, and even the government as a whole, up to the point where one MP could halt a minister’s decision through a single telephone call. These practices made the State incur enormous public fund losses and damaged its reputation. As a result, the country was paralyzed, and its economy suffered from decline.

Today, the situation is completely different, taking into consideration the opportunities that are available to the incumbent Cabinet, which must seize all of these opportunities if possible. It is better late than never, especially since the current government has both the executive and legislative powers.

Any hesitation in decision-making will cost the government dearly. It could incur losses which, otherwise, it could have avoided.

The government must study decisions carefully to ensure it leaves no loopholes that could lead to reversals. In recent months, we have witnessed several measures that experts considered hasty, forcing the Cabinet to reverse them. These measures resulted in public fund losses, harmed the people, and ruined the reputation of the Cabinet.

Undoubtedly, this reflects harmful hesitation at all levels. Thus, any action must be carefully studied, particularly its repercussions on the economy

and the people from all angles. For example, I have repeatedly stated that infrastructure projects -- whether related to services, entertainment or other areas -- could make Kuwait save billions that are currently spent abroad.

Joy was previously prohibited, so Kuwaitis and residents sought it abroad. This is just a small part of what entertainment projects can provide. The same applies to health, medicine, education and many other projects that Kuwait needs.

Certainly, success is possible if there is a vision.

Some doors open only once in a lifetime. Hesitation is the graveyard of opportunities. So, we say to His Highness the Prime Minister, “Seize the opportunity as soon as it appears.”

## Dangerous sinkholes

He urged caution when approaching this slope for any reason.

Al-Hajri said that the cave observed in Al-Mutlaa was roughly four meters in diameter and about six meters deep, containing bird nests that may be over a year old.

Al-Hajri called for the establishment of an independent national entity, the Kuwait Geological Survey Authority, to carry out critical scientific and field tasks, highlighting that such a body would help protect lives and infrastructure by monitoring subsurface conditions.

He added that with accelerated urban development and growing infrastructure investments in Kuwait, the need for a specialized national framework has become urgent to address the current scientific and institutional gap caused by the absence of a dedicated agency to study near-surface sedimentary layers and the effects of natural geological processes.

He said that such an authority could play a key role in monitoring natural phenomena and assessing geological hazards, including sinkholes, active faults, fracture networks, and other subsurface processes whose effects may appear on the surface.

## 16 arrested

dealers and users in a bid to maintain the safety and security of the entire society.

The ministry stated that the security

campaigns and seizures conducted by the concerned teams led to the discovery of huge quantities of narcotics.

The abovementioned operation led to the confiscation of about 880 grams of methamphetamine (crystal meth), 745 grams of hashish, three pieces of hashish, 151 grams of synthetic cannabinoids, 40 ml of synthetic cannabinoid oil, three grams of heroin and 5,000 Captopril tablets. Several tools used for weighing and preparing narcotics were confiscated as well.

The suspects and the confiscated items were referred to the competent authorities for legal action.

The ministry reaffirmed its commitment to continue its intensive security campaigns throughout the country and strictly deal with anyone who attempts to harm the security of society through the trafficking, promotion or use of narcotic substances.

It urged the public to fully cooperate and report any information that could contribute to combating this scourge in order to guarantee the security and safety of the community.

## Bad weather

He stressed the organizing committee’s keenness to ensure the safety of participants and protect public property.

He affirmed that Kuwait Sports Day is an important national occasion aimed at raising awareness of the importance of sports and physical activity in society and promoting a healthy lifestyle among all age groups, noting that the postponement is intended to ensure the event is held under suitable conditions that allow its objectives to be fully achieved while providing a safe and enjoyable experience for all.

Al-Maqseed added that a new date for Kuwait Sports Day will be announced later through official channels and various media outlets once weather conditions stabilize.

## Family carnival

their national products, thereby, contributing to the local economy and promoting domestic production.

He expressed his pride in the participation of the people with disabilities, affirming their active role in society, while emphasizing the principles of social inclusion and equal opportunities for everyone.

## Human capital

He confirmed that the carnival will be an annual event in the coming years, contributing significantly to the ongoing efforts to strengthen national identity and stimulate social and economic activities in the governorate.

He expressed his gratitude and appreciation to the participating government agencies, healthy cities and private institutions for their fruitful co-operation and dedicated efforts, which were instrumental in the success of this important national event.

He also commended the prominent role of the banking sector, represented by Warba Bank and Commercial Bank of Kuwait, as part of their social responsibilities and unwavering support for national initiatives.

He asserted that scientific conferences are considered a platform for exchanging expertise, integrating perspectives, and translating scientific outputs into applicable health policies and implementation programs that contribute to raising the level of healthcare services and enhancing the quality of life in the community.

On the other hand, Chairman of the Conference Dr. Ahmed Al-Foudari disclosed that ophthalmologists, researchers and healthcare professionals from around the world are participating in the conference to advance eye care, drive scientific innovation, and improve the patients’ quality of life.

He said the conference features more than 76 international speakers, 12 workshops and 116 scientific lectures, proving its continuous growth and expansion while highlighting excellence in education, scientific research and clinical practice.

It is worth noting that the conference includes symposiums, workshops, live debates, case presentations, and updates on the rapid changes and expansions in ophthalmology.

## Industrial plants

He stressed the need for the alternative site to comply with environmental standards and prescribed safety distances in order to protect public health and preserve the quality of life.

He also suggested redeveloping the existing site into an integrated housing project as a means of helping to address the housing shortage.

In his proposal, Al-Mutairi asserted that a suitable site should be allocated for major contractors and ready-mix concrete plants, away from residential areas. He explained that the rapid urban expansion resulted in the current area becoming adjacent to newly developed residential districts, most notably Abdullah Al-Mubarak and South Abdullah Al-Mubarak.

He disclosed that the site is bordered on one side by the extension of the 6.5 Ring Road, on another by the Seventh Ring Road, and on a third by Sulabiya (Kabad) Road. It is also separated from the metro station and the main railway line by a road, leading to an overlap between existing commercial activities and neighboring residential areas.

He added that this situation has several negative effects, including air pollution caused by cement dust, high noise levels, and increased heavy truck traffic, all of which adversely affect the residents’ health and the overall quality of the surrounding environment.

## Kuwait backs

The ministry reiterated support for all appreciated and praiseworthy efforts led by the Sultanate of Oman and several other sisterly and friendly countries to facilitate US-Iran negotiations and promote opportunities of constructive dialogue aiming at ensuring regional stability.

Iran and the United States held indirect talks in Oman on Friday, negotiations that appeared to return to the starting point on how to approach discussions over Tehran’s nuclear program. But for the first time, America brought its top military commander in the Middle East to the table.

The presence of U.S. Navy Adm. Brad Cooper, head of the military’s Central Command, in his dress uniform at the talks in Muscat, the Omani capital, served as a reminder that the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and other warships were now off the coast of Iran in the Arabian Sea.

President Donald Trump said the United States had “very good” talks on Iran and said more were planned for early next week. But he kept up the pressure, warning that if the country didn’t make a deal over its nuclear program, “the consequences are very steep.”

“Iran looks like they want to make a deal very badly - as they should,” Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One as he headed to his Florida golf club late

Friday. He suggested Iran was willing to “do more” than in previous talks but did not give details.

Asked how long he was willing to wait for a deal, Trump said: “We have plenty of time. If you remember Venezuela, we waited around for a while. We’re in no rush.” The Trump administration built up a huge military presence in the Caribbean Sea in the months before a U.S. raid captured then-Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in January.

Trump has repeatedly threatened to use force to compel Iran to reach a deal on the program after earlier sending the carrier to the region amid Tehran’s bloody crackdown on nationwide protests that killed thousands and saw tens of thousands of others detained in the Islamic Republic.

Gulf Arab nations fear an attack could spark a regional war that would drag them in as well.

That threat is real - U.S. forces shot down an Iranian drone near the Lincoln and Iran attempted to stop a U.S.-flagged ship in the Strait of Hormuz just days before Friday’s talks in this sultanate on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula.

“We did note that nuclear talks and the resolution of the main issues must take place in a calm atmosphere, without tension and without threats,” Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi later told journalists.

“The prerequisite for any dialogue is refraining from threats and pressure,” he added.

Araghchi said diplomats would return to their capitals, signaling this round of negotiations was over. The U.S. was represented by Mideast special envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, Trump’s son-in-law.

In a display of force, the U.S. military published photos on X of the Lincoln carrier group sailing in the Arabian Sea with aircraft flying overhead, with the message “Peace through Strength!”

Araghchi offered cautious optimism as he spoke in a live interview from Muscat on Iranian state television. He said Friday’s talks were focused primarily on finding a framework for further negotiations.

“We will hold consultations with our capitals regarding the next steps, and the results will be conveyed to Oman’s foreign minister,” Araghchi said.

“The mistrust that has developed is a serious challenge facing the negotiations,” Araghchi said. “We must first address this issue, and then enter into the next level of negotiations.”



## INTERNATIONAL

# Los Angeles mayor's race kicks off amid homelessness, fallout from 2025 wildfire

LOS ANGELES, Feb 7, (AP): Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass is heading into a challenging re-election bid as she continues to suffer fallout from last year's devastating wildfire and ongoing criticism of City Hall on issues from street paving to homelessness.

The deadline is Saturday for candidates to enter the contest ahead of the June 2 primary election. Bass - a first-term Democrat and the first Black woman to hold the post - already is facing challenges from tech entrepreneur and nonprofit founder Adam Miller; reality television personality Spencer Pratt, who lost his home to the deadly Palisades Fire; and community organizer Rae Huang.

The race is unfolding at an unsettled time for the city of nearly 4 million.

Complaints about the cost of living - whether for rent, taxes or groceries - are a constant refrain. Dirty, pocked streets and sidewalks abound. Hollywood jobs have been decamping for years for more affordable locales.

Ongoing Trump administration immigration raids have shaken the city. Despite studies showing a slight decline in the homeless population, encampments remain commonplace. And recovery from the Palisades Fire, which killed 12 people and destroyed



Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass speaks to the media outside the Edward R. Roybal Federal Building in Los Angeles on Jan 30. (AP)

much of the tony seaside neighborhood in January 2025, continues at a pace that some say is too slow.

In an upbeat speech this month laying out her vision for the city's future, Bass talked of the upcoming 2028 Olympics in the city and plans to spruce up busy thoroughfares.

"Even in this difficult chapter in our history, great events, moments of uni-

ty, are possible," Bass said. "And they are coming."

Los Angeles-based Democratic consultant Bill Carrick sees the race as wide-open. Under California's primary rules, all candidates appear on the same ballot and the top two finishers advance to the November general election - a system that can lead to unpredictable outcomes.

In a separate post on X, Hegseth wrote, "Harvard is woke; The War Department is not."

Starting with the 2026-27 academic year, the Pentagon will

# Pentagon cutting ties with Harvard and discontinuing military training

WASHINGTON, Feb 7, (AP): The Pentagon said Friday it is cutting ties with Harvard University, ending all military training, fellowships and certificate programs with the Ivy League institution.

The announcement marks the latest development in the Trump administration's prolonged stand-off with Harvard over the White House's demands for reforms at the Ivy League school.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said in a statement Friday that Harvard "no longer meets the needs of the War Department or the military services." "For too long, this department has sent our best and brightest officers to Harvard, hoping the university would better understand and appreciate our warrior class," Hegseth said. "Instead, too many of our officers came back looking too much like Harvard - heads full of globalist and radical ideologies that do not improve our fighting ranks."

In a separate post on X, Hegseth wrote, "Harvard is woke; The War Department is not."

Starting with the 2026-27 academic year, the Pentagon will



People take photos near a John Harvard statue, left, on the Harvard University campus on Jan 2, 2024, in Cambridge, Mass. (AP)

discontinue graduate-level professional military education, fellowships and certificate programs, the statement said. Personnel currently attending classes at Harvard will be able to finish those courses.

Similar programs at other Ivy League universities will be evaluated in coming weeks, Hegseth said.

Hegseth earned a master's degree from Harvard but symbolically returned his diploma in a 2022 Fox News segment. A Pentagon social media account run by Hegseth's office resurfaced the clip in which Hegseth, then a Fox News commentator, returned the diploma and wrote "Return to Sender" on it with a marker.

I didn't make a mistake: US president

# Trump's racist post about Obamas deleted after backlash despite WH earlier defending it

WASHINGTON, Feb 7, (AP): US President Donald Trump's racist social media post featuring former president Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle Obama, as primates in a jungle was deleted Friday after a backlash from both Republicans and Democrats who criticized the video as offensive.

Trump said later Friday that he won't apologize for the post: "I didn't make a mistake," he said.

The Republican president's Thursday night post was blamed on a staffer after widespread backlash, from civil rights leaders to veteran Republican senators, for its treatment of the nation's first Black president and first lady. A rare admission of a misstep by the White House, the deletion came hours after press secretary Karoline Leavitt dismissed "fake outrage" over the post. After calls for its removal - including by Republicans - the White House said a staffer had posted the video erroneously.

The post was part of a flurry of overnight activity on Trump's Truth Social account that amplified his false claims that the 2020 election was stolen from him, despite courts around the country and Trump's first-term attorney general finding no evidence of systemic fraud.

Trump has a record of intensely personal criticism of the Obamas and of using incendiary, sometimes racist, rhetoric - from feeding the lie that Obama was not a native-born US citizen to crude generalizations about majority-Black countries.

The post came in the first week of

Black History Month and days after a Trump proclamation cited "the contributions of black Americans to our national greatness" and "the American principles of liberty, justice, and equality."

An Obama spokeswoman said the former president, a Democrat, had no response.

Nearly all of the 62-second clip appears to be from a conservative video alleging deliberate tampering with voting machines in battleground states as 2020 votes were tallied. At the 60-second mark is a quick scene of two jungle primates, with the Obamas' smiling faces imposed on them.

Those frames originated from a separate video, previously circulated by an influential conservative meme maker. It shows Trump as "King of the Jungle" and depicts Democratic leaders as animals, including Joe Biden, who is white, as a jungle primate eating a banana.

"This is from an internet meme video depicting President Trump as the King of the Jungle and Democrats as characters from the Lion King," Leavitt said by text.

Disney's 1994 feature film that Leavitt referenced is set on the savannah, not in the jungle, and it does not include great apes.

"Please stop the fake outrage and report on something today that actually matters to the American public," Leavitt added.

By noon, the post had been taken down, with responsibility placed on a Trump subordinate.



Former President US Barack Obama talks with then President-elect Donald Trump as Melania Trump reads the funeral program before the state funeral for former President Jimmy Carter at Washington National Cathedral in Washington on Jan 9, 2025. (AP)

Trump, answering questions from reporters accompanying him Friday night aboard Air Force One, said the video was about fraudulent elections and that he liked what he saw.

"I liked the beginning. I saw it and just passed it on, and I guess probably nobody reviewed the end of it," he said.

Asked if he condemned the video's racism, Trump said, "Of course I do."

The White House explanation raises questions about control of Trump's social media account, which he's used to levy import taxes, threaten military

action, make other announcements and intimidate political rivals. The president often signs his name or initials after policy posts.

The White House did not immediately respond to an inquiry about how posts are vetted and when the public can know when Trump himself is posting.

Mark Burns, a pastor and a prominent Trump supporter who is Black, said Friday on X that he'd spoken "directly" with Trump and that he recommended to the president that he fire the staffer who posted the video and publicly condemn what happened.

"He knows this is wrong, offensive, and unacceptable," Burns posted.

Congressional Black Caucus Chairwoman Yvette Clarke, D-N.Y., told The Associated Press she does "not buy the White House's commentary."

"If there wasn't a climate, a toxic and racist climate within the White House, we wouldn't see this type of behavior regardless of who it's coming from," Clarke said, adding that Trump "is a racist, he's a bigot, and he will continue to do things in his presidency to make that known."

Trump and White House social media accounts frequently repost memes and artificial intelligence-generated videos. As Leavitt did Friday, Trump allies typically cast them as humorous.

This time, condemnations flowed from across the spectrum - along with demands for an apology that doesn't appear to be coming.

At a Black History Month market in Harlem, the historically Black neighborhood in New York City, vendor Jacklyn Monk said Trump's post was embarrassing even if it was eventually deleted. "The guy needs help. I'm sorry he's representing our country. ... It's horrible that it was this month, but it would be horrible if it was in March also."

In Atlanta, Rev. Bernice King, daughter of the assassinated civil rights icon Martin Luther King Jr., resurfaced her father's words: "Yes. I'm Black. I'm proud of it. I'm Black and beautiful." Black Americans, she said, "are beloved of God as postal workers

and professors, as a former first lady and president. We are not apes."

The US Senate's lone Black Republican, Tim Scott of South Carolina, called on Trump to take down the post. "Praying it was fake because it's the most racist thing I've seen out of this White House," said Scott, who chairs Senate Republicans' midterm campaign arm.

Another Republican, Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, is white but represents the state with the largest percentage of Black residents. Wicker called the post "totally unacceptable" and said the president should apologize.

Some Republicans who face tough reelections this November voiced concerns, as well. The result was an unusual cascade of intraparty criticism for a president who has enjoyed a stranglehold over fellow Republicans who stayed silent during previous Trump controversies for fear of a public spat with the president or losing his endorsement in a future campaign.

NAACP President Derrick Johnson called the video "utterly despicable" and pointed to Trump's wider political concerns that could help explain Republicans' willingness to speak out. Johnson asserted that Trump is trying anything to distract from economic conditions and attention on the Jeffrey Epstein case files.

"You know who isn't in the Epstein files? Barack Obama," he said. "You know who actually improved the economy as president? Barack Obama."

# Trump reverses stance on UK's Chagos deal

WASHINGTON, Feb 7, (Xinhua): US President Donald Trump said Thursday that he retains the right to "militarily secure and reinforce the American presence" in the Chagos Archipelago following "very productive" discussions with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, marking a reversal from his sharp criticism last month.

"I understand that the deal Prime Minister Starmer has made, according to many, the best he could make," Trump wrote in a Truth Social post, referring to an agreement transferring sovereignty over the Chagos Islands to Mauritius signed by Starmer in 2025.

"However, if the lease deal, sometime in the future, ever falls apart, or anyone threatens or endangers US operations and forces at our Base, I retain the right to Militarily secure and reinforce the American presence in Diego Garcia," Trump warned.

He depicted the joint US-Britain



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer delivers a speech at Horntye Park Sports Complex in St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex, England on Feb 5. (AP)

military base on Diego Garcia, the

largest island in the Chagos Archipelago, as a strategic installation in the Indian Ocean of great importance to U.S. national security and global military operations.

In a post last month, Trump slammed Britain's decision to cede sovereignty over the Chagos Islands to Mauritius as an act of "great stupidity."

In 2019, the International Court of Justice said that Britain had illegally split the islands and should give up control of them.

Last year, Starmer signed an agreement transferring sovereignty over the Chagos Islands to Mauritius. Under the terms of the agreement, reportedly lasting 99 years, Mauritius will lease the Diego Garcia military base back to Britain and the United States.

In 1965, the islands were separated from Mauritius, then still a British colony. Britain then invited the United States to build a military base there, a move that displaced thousands of Chagossian residents.



A view of Alcácer do Sal, southern Portugal on Feb 6, after the Sado River overflowed following heavy rains. (AP)

## Spain and Portugal continue to battle Storm Leonardo

Storm Leonardo continued to batter the Iberian Peninsula on Friday, bringing floods and putting rivers at risk of bursting their banks while thousands of people were evacuated from their homes in Spain and Portugal.

In southern Spain's Andalusia region, some 7,000 people have had to leave their homes due to successive storms.

Among them were around 1,500 people ordered to evacuate the

mountain village of Grazalema, where Andalusia's regional leader Juan Manuel Moreno warned that aquifers were "full to the brim with water," and at risk of collapsing.

"It's raining on already saturated ground. The land is unable to drain," Moreno said. "We urge extreme caution. This is not over."

Spanish police said Friday they had found a body located 1,000 meters (about 0.6 miles) away from where a woman had disappeared

Wednesday after she fell into a river in Malaga province while trying to rescue her dog. Police said they had not yet identified the body, but believed it belonged to the 45-year-old woman.

Another storm front, Marta, was expected to arrive Saturday, with Spain's weather agency AEMET saying it would bring even more rain and heavy winds, including to areas already drenched by Storm Leonardo. (AP)

# US gave Ukraine, Russia a June deadline to reach agreement to end war – Zelenskyy

KYIV, Ukraine, Feb 7, (AP): The US has given Ukraine and Russia a June deadline to reach a deal to end the nearly four-year war, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told reporters, as Russian strikes on energy infrastructure forced nuclear power plants to cut output on Saturday.

If the June deadline is not met, the Trump administration will likely put pressure on both sides to meet it, he added.

"The Americans are proposing the parties end the war by the beginning of this summer and will probably put pressure on the parties precisely according to this schedule," Zelenskyy said, speaking to reporters on Friday. Zelenskyy's comments were embargoed until Saturday morning.

"And they say that they want to do everything by June. And they will do everything to end the war. And they want a clear schedule of all events," he said.

He said the US proposed holding the next round of trilateral talks next week in their country for the first time, likely in Miami, Zelenskyy said. "We confirmed our participation," he added.

Zelenskyy said Russia presented the US with a \$12 trillion economic proposal - which he dubbed the "Dmitriev package" after Russian envoy Kirill



NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte speaks during a joint news conference with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, right, in Kyiv, Ukraine on Feb 3. (AP)

Dmitriev. Bilateral economic deals with the U.S. form part of the broader negotiating process.

Russian strikes on Ukrainian energy infrastructure continued with over 400 drones and about 40 missiles launched overnight Saturday, Zelenskyy said in a post on X. Targets included the energy grid, generation facilities and dis-

tribution networks.

Ukrenergo, the state energy transmission operator, said the attack was the second mass strike on energy infrastructure since the start of the year, forcing nuclear power plants to reduce output. Eight facilities in eight regions came under attack, it said in a statement.

# Queen Máxima starts training to become a Dutch army reservist

THE HAGUE, Netherlands, Feb 7, (AP): The Dutch military has got a new high-profile volunteer as it seeks to boost recruitment to counter growing fears about peace and security in Europe.

Queen Máxima, the 54-year-old Argentinean-born wife of King Willem-Alexander, started training this week to become a reserve member of her adopted homeland's army as the Dutch military seeks to boost enlistment amid geopolitical turmoil and Russia's war in Ukraine on Europe's eastern edge.

"Because the security of the Netherlands can no longer be taken for granted, Máxima has decided to become a reservist," the Ministry of Defense said in a statement after she began training on Wednesday.



This image provided by the Netherlands Ministry of Defense shows Queen Máxima beginning training as a reservist for the Royal Netherlands Army on Feb 4, in Breda, Netherlands. (AP)



‘Sanae Takaichi is unique’

# Japan’s first female PM counts on popularity to help party win Sunday’s election

TOKYO, Feb 7, (AP): Japan’s prime minister is a heavy metal music fan. She loves motorcycles and playing the drums, including with visiting dignitaries. She thrilled a nation that often idealizes company loyalty by declaring that her secret for success as leader would be “work, work, work, work, work.”

This charismatic combination, along with an image that is both tough and playful, has made Sanae Takaichi very popular, something exceedingly unusual for recent prime ministers in Japan, where her political party, which has led Japan for most of the last seven decades, has struggled mightily.

In stark contrast to the long line of often elderly men who’ve run Japan over the decades, Takaichi’s popularity is rooted in her support by younger people. They affectionately use her nickname, “Sana,” closely follow her fashion, her choice of stationery and her favorite food. Polls show her Liberal Democratic Party, despite deep-rooted problems, is now poised to make big gains in Sunday’s vote in the lower house of Parliament, thanks to Takaichi.

This would allow her to take the country in the direction of her hawkish, deeply conservative mentor, the late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, and beyond.

The Associated Press takes a look at the first woman to lead Japan as prime minister.

Born in Nara, Japan’s ancient capital, Takaichi was raised by conservative parents who taught her prewar moral values. Her mother was a police officer and her father worked at a machinery maker.

As a child, she enjoyed listening to her parents recite an 1890 imperial document that praises paternalistic family values and loyalty to the government, Takaichi said in 2012.

Though she was admitted to prestigious Tokyo schools, her parents made her attend Kobe University while living at home, something that was normal then for unmarried daughters of conservative families.

She was briefly an intern for a US Democratic lawmaker in Denver in the late 1980s and, after returning to Japan, worked as a television personality, an author and a critic.

Takaichi is unique because she both speaks her mind and is seen as easygoing, said Izuru Makihara, a University of Tokyo politics expert.

“Takaichi is highly regarded, especially by women and younger generations who strongly feel stuck and hopeless,” he said.

She was elected prime minister by Parliament in October, and her first weeks were marked by a hawkish comment on a possible Chinese military action against Taiwan, the self-governing island that Beijing claims as its own territory, that angered China by deviating from past strategic ambiguity.

She was first elected to Parliament in 1993 after defying her parents’ opposition. Some voters insulted her as “a little girl,” she said in 2023, recalling that first campaign as a 32-year-old.



Sanae Takaichi, (right), Japan's prime minister and president of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, waves to supporters on the eve of the lower house election during a campaign event in Tokyo on Feb 7. (AP)

“In those days, women who were not considered old enough were unwelcome,” she said. She also faced groundless allegations of being a mistress of a senior politician, and criticism - often from women - for wearing heels, flashy jewelry and short skirts.

“I am who I am,” Takaichi said. “The only way to prove myself is with the work I do.”

Feminists are not happy and say Takaichi’s leadership is a setback for Japanese gender equality.

But Riho Shimogomi, a 43-year-old office worker, said that when she looks at Takaichi’s policies, “her being a woman doesn’t matter. ... I think she has strong leadership skills and charisma.”

As Abe’s protégé, Takaichi has echoed his nationalistic views, defending Japanese wartime actions, pushing for greater military capability and spending, as well as more patriotic education, and the promotion of traditional family values.

She rose quickly through the ranks during Abe’s leadership and was given ministerial and party posts.

After Abe stepped down and backed her as “the star of the conservatives,” Takaichi ran for the LDP leadership race twice, in 2021 and 2024, both unsuccessfully, before finally winning the top job in October, replacing Abe’s rival - centrist Shigeru Ishiba.

Takaichi has reappointed some of Abe’s top advisers as lieutenants and is expected to push Japan even further to the right on security, gender and immigration if she makes gains in Sunday’s election.

Takaichi has admitted she doesn’t like drinking parties and would much rather study at home, though she tried to socialize more to build connections with colleagues after her two unsuccessful leadership bids.

After being elected as LDP leader, Takaichi asked her party members to “work like a horse” and said she would forget her “work-life balance” and “work, work, work, work and work.” These phrases became buzzwords, but some found them uncomfortable in a country known for long hours and overwork.

Analyzing her daily schedule during her first three months in office, the Kyodo News Agency reported last month that she was largely “holed up” in the official residence or her office. She had no dinner appointments with political or business leaders in the first month in office, the Mainichi newspaper said.

## Asia

**Thai parties hold final campaign:** Thailand’s major political parties held final campaign rallies on Friday in last efforts to attract voters ahead of the general election.

The Thai capital Bangkok was packed with large crowds of orange, blue and red on Friday as major parties eyeing a weekend election victory made their final pitch to supporters and undecided voters.

Bhumjaithai Party, Pheu Thai Party, the People’s Party and the Democrat Party held large-scale campaign rallies across Bangkok, with party leaders and prime ministerial candidates reiterating their respective pledges before voters go to polling stations on Sunday.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, leader of the conservative Bhumjaithai Party, said in his 40-minute speech that he has served as an interim caretaker premier for the past four months and was now ready to lead the government for a full four-year term.

The Pheu Thai party used the final rally to highlight flagship policies, including housing programs, poverty-reduction measures and economic stimulus initiatives.

Led by Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut, the People’s Party held its final large rally at a youth center, with the campaign slogan “Change,” gathering numerous supporters to the stage.

After cycling through three prime ministers in less than three years, Thai voters are going to the polling stations on Feb. 8. (Xinhua)

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**3 killed in Australia plane crash:** Three people died after a light plane crashed south of Adelaide Friday afternoon, said South Australia Police on Saturday.

Police received reports of a light plane crashing into the ocean at about 4:20 p.m. local time, and responded immediately, it said in a statement.

All three men on board were found dead -- the 57-year-old pilot, and an 18-year-old and a 19-year-old, it said, adding that the wreckage of the plane has been brought into shore.

Transport safety investigators are attending the scene on Saturday, and investigations into the crash are continuing, it said. (Xinhua)

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**Australian police fatally shoot man:** A man was fatally shot by police following a stabbing incident on the Mid North Coast of the Australian state of New South Wales, local media reported on Friday.

The man was fatally shot by officers from the Manning Great Lakes Police District, and a woman was stabbed in a related incident, according to ABC News.

A critical incident investigation will be carried out. No additional details are available at this stage. (Xinhua)

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**‘Cambodian King becomes ill’:** Cambodian King Norodom Sihamoni “falls ill, unable to carry out his royal duties,” said a Ministry of Royal Palace statement on Friday.

The 72-year-old king assigned Senate President Samdech Techo Hun Sen to receive visiting Communist Party of Vietnam General Secretary To Lam on his behalf, the statement said.

To Lam arrived in Cambodia on Friday morning for a one-day state visit at the invitation of King Sihamoni. (Xinhua)



Thailand’s Prime Minister and leader of Bhumjaithai Party Anutin Charnvirakul attends an election campaign rally in Bangkok on Feb 6. (AP)

## Thousands displaced after flooding, landslide

# Philippine tropical storm leaves 8 dead

CAGAYAN DE ORO, Philippines, Feb 7, (Agencies): A tropical storm set off flooding and a landslide in the southern Philippines, leaving at least eight people dead, displacing more than 28,000 and trapping residents in houses in two flooded villages, officials said Friday.

Tropical Storm Penha slammed ashore onto the southeastern province of Surigao del Sur from the Pacific late Thursday. It weakened into a tropical depression Friday night and was last tracked off the central province of Cebu with sustained winds of up to 55 kilometers (34 miles) per hour and gusts of up to 75 kph (47 mph), according to the country’s weather agency.

A couple and two children died Thursday night when their shanty was hit by a landslide in a quarry area that was set off by torrential rains in a village in southern Cagayan de Oro city, Office of Civil Defense regional director Antonio Sugarol said.

Three others drowned in floodwaters in southern Iligan city and another villager drowned in Carmen town in Agusan del Norte province, also in the south, the Office of Civil Defense said.

In Iligan city, more than 80 kilometers (48 miles) southwest of Cagayan de Oro, a resident called the DZMM radio network Friday morning and pleaded to be rescued from the second floor of her house as floodwater rose and trapped her family and three other families.

**Also:**

**MANILA:** The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) has deployed its technical wreck divers to search inside the sunken ferry off **Basilan** province in the southern **Philippines** as the confirmed death toll rose to 45, officials said.

The MV Trisha Kerstin 3 sank on Jan. 26 while sailing from **Zamboanga City** to **Jolo** in **Sulu** province. On Tuesday, the PCG confirmed the location of the boat during a dive operation



This handout photo provided by the Philippine Coast Guard shows rescuers clearing roads from toppled trees after Tropical Storm Penha hit Surigao city, at the province of Surigao del Sur, southeastern Philippines on Feb 6. (AP)



People gather outside a mosque where an explosion took place in Islamabad, capital of Pakistan, on Feb 6. (Xinhua)

## Islamic State affiliate claims attack

# Pakistan mosque bombing kills 31

ISLAMABAD, Feb 7, (AP): An affiliate of the Islamic State group claimed responsibility overnight for a deadly suicide bombing inside a Shiite mosque on the outskirts of Pakistan’s capital that killed 31 people and wounded 169 others, as mourners gathered Saturday under tight security at the same mosque for funerals for the victims.

Authorities said officers identified the bomber, his facilitators and arrested the mastermind of the attack.

The regional Islamic State affiliate, known as Islamic State in Pakistan, claimed responsibility in a statement posted on its Amaq News Agency. It said the attacker opened fire on security guards who tried to stop him at the main gate and detonated his explosive vest after reaching the mosque’s inner gate. The Islamic State group suggested it viewed the Pakistani Shiites as legitimate targets, calling them a “human reservoir” that provided recruits to Shiite militias fighting the Islamic State in Syria.

Friday’s mosque bombing was the deadliest in Islamabad since a 2008 suicide bombing at the Marriott Hotel that killed 63 people and wounded more than 250. In November, a suicide bomber struck outside a court in the capital, killing 12 people.

The latest attack comes as Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif’s government grapples with a surge in militant attacks across Pakistan. According to Pakistani authorities, the attacker was a Pakistani national who had recently traveled to Afghanistan.

Authorities said several suspects, including the brother, mother and other relatives of the bomber, were arrested during overnight raids in Islamabad and in northwestern Pakistan, and that a police officer was killed in the operation.

State-run Pakistan TV reported on Saturday a breakthrough in the investigation, with the arrest of an alleged Afghan with IS accused of masterminding the attack. It reported that the bombing was planned by IS in Afghanistan, which poses a threat to both regional and global security. There was no immediate comment from Kabul about the latest claims.

More than 2,000 grief-stricken mourners gathered as coffins of those killed were brought to the mosque for funerals for about a dozen victims, joined by Shiite community leaders and senior government officials. Funerals of other victims were to be held in their home towns.

IS is a Sunni group that has targeted Pakistan’s Shiite minority in the past, apparently seeking to stoke sectarian divisions in the majority Sunni country. In 2022 it claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing that struck a Shiite Muslim mosque in Pakistan’s northwestern city of Peshawar, killing at least 56 and wounding 194.

Pakistan’s Defense Minister Khawaja Mohammad Asif told reporters Friday that the attack signaled that Pakistan-based militants operating from Afghanistan could strike even in the capital. His remarks drew a sharp response from Afghanistan’s Taleban government.

In a statement, Afghanistan’s Defense Ministry condemned the mosque attack in Islamabad but said the Pakistani defense minister had “irresponsibly” linked it to Afghanistan. Pakistan has frequently accused Afghanistan, where the Taleban returned to power in August 2021, of harboring militants, including members of the Pakistani Taliban. Kabul denies the accusations.

The attack drew condemnation from the wider international community, including the United States, Russia and the European Union.

Prime Minister Sharif said he was grateful for the messages of sympathy and support received “from across the globe” following what he called the “heart-wrenching suicide attack in Islamabad.” He said international support remained critical to Pakistan’s counterterrorism efforts and vowed the perpetrators would be brought to justice.

Although Pakistan’s capital has seen relatively few attacks compared with other regions, the country has experienced a recent rise in militant violence. Much of it has been blamed on Baloch separatists and the Pakistani Taleban, known as Tehrik-e-Taleban Pakistan, or TTP, which is a separate group but allied with Afghanistan’s Taleban.

## Lat/Am

**Venezuela advances amnesty bill:** Venezuela’s legislature on Thursday advanced an amnesty bill proposed by acting President **Delcy Rodríguez** that could lead to the release of hundreds of opposition leaders, journalists and human rights activists detained for political reasons.

Such an amnesty is a central demand of the country’s opposition and human rights organizations with backing from the United States. But the contents of the bill have not been released publicly, and rights groups have so far reacted with cautious optimism - and with demands for more information.

The bill, introduced just weeks after the US military captured then-President Nicolás Maduro, still requires a second debate that has yet to be scheduled. Once approved, it must be signed by Rodríguez before it can go into effect.

In announcing the bill late last month, Rodríguez told a gathering of justices, magistrates, ministers, military brass and other government leaders that the ruling party-controlled National Assembly would take up the legislation with urgency.

“May this law serve to heal the wounds left by the political confrontation fueled by violence and extremism,” she said in a pre-taped televised event. “May it serve to redirect justice in our country, and may it serve to redirect coexistence among Venezuelans.” (AP)



Rodríguez

□ □ □

**US strikes another drug boat:** The US military said Thursday that it has carried out another deadly strike on a vessel accused of trafficking drugs in the eastern Pacific Ocean. US Southern Command said on social media that the boat “was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Eastern Pacific and was engaged in narco-trafficking operations.” It said the strike killed two people. A video linked to the post shows a boat moving through the water before exploding in flames.

The strike was announced just hours after US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth declared that “some top cartel drug-traffickers” in the region “have decided to cease all narcotics operations INDEFINITELY due to recent (highly effective) kinetic strikes in the Caribbean.” However, Hegseth did not provide any details or information to back up this claim, made in a post on his personal account on social media. (AP)

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**Armed attack leaves 4 dead in Ecuador:** Four people were killed early Friday in an armed attack in the coastal city of Machala in Ecuador’s El Oro province, local police said.

The incident occurred in the El Triunfo neighborhood, where a taxi carrying the victims was intercepted by armed individuals who opened fire. Three occupants died at the scene, while the fourth was taken to a health center and died hours later.

The victims included three men, one of whom had a criminal record, and a woman, according to the police. Preliminary investigations suggested the attack may be linked to criminal violence and retail drug trafficking. (Xinhua)

# Drone attack by RSF in Sudan kills 24, including 8 kids: doctors’ group

CAIRO, Feb 7, (AP): A drone attack by a notorious paramilitary group hit a vehicle carrying displaced families in central Sudan Saturday, killing at least 24 people, including eight children, a doctors’ group said, a day after a World Food Program aid convoy was targeted.

Saturday’s attack by the Rapid Support Forces occurred close to the city of Rahad in North Kordofan province, said the Sudan Doctors Network, which tracks the country’s ongoing war. The vehicle was transporting displaced people who fled fighting in the Dubeiker area, the group said in a statement. Among the dead children were two infants.

Several others were wounded and taken for treatment in Rahad, which suffers severe medical supplies shortages, like many areas in the Kordofan region, the statement said. The doctors’ group urged the international community and rights organizations to “take immediate action to protect civilians and hold the RSF leadership directly accountable for these violations.”

There was no immediate comment from the RSF, which has been at war against the Sudanese military for control of the country for about three years.

Sudan plunged into chaos in April 2023 when a power struggle between the military and the RSF exploded into open fighting in the capital, Khartoum, and elsewhere in the country, leaving tens of thousands dead and millions displaced.

An attack on Friday on WFP aid convoy in North Kordofan province, which killed one and wounded several others, said Denise Brown, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator in Sudan.



Women displaced from El-Fasher stand in line to receive food aid at the newly established El-Afadh camp in Al Dabbah, in Sudan's Northern State on Nov 16, 2025. (AP)



## Kuwait oil price surges to \$66.16 pb

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7, (KUNA): Price of Kuwaiti oil rose by 31 cents to USD 66.16 per barrel in Friday’s trading, compared to USD 65.85 pb the previous day, according to Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC)

on Saturday. Globally, the price of Brent crude went up by 50 cents to USD 68.05 pb, while West Texas Intermediate crude decreased by 26 cents to USD 63.55 pb.

# Business

## Gulf Bank holds its year-end 2025 earnings webcast

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Gulf Bank held its year-end 2025 earnings webcast on Thursday 5th February 2026, to present and discuss the Bank’s financial performance. The webcast was organized by EFG Hermes and presented by Sami Mahfouz, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Gulf Bank, and Mr. David Challinor, Chief Financial Officer of Gulf Bank. The discussion was moderated by Ms. Dalal AlDousari, Head of Investor Relations at Gulf Bank.

### Operating Environment

Mr. Sami Mahfouz, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Gulf Bank, commenced the webcast with key updates regarding the operating environment and Gulf Bank’s overall position during the year 2025. Mr. Mahfouz stated: “The operating environment in 2025 remained challenging globally, shaped by geopolitical tensions, tariffs threats and elevated volatility; while locally, Kuwait’s economic landscape showed signs of improvement, supported by fiscal reforms and renewed development activity. The approval of the Public Debt Law, progress on real estate and housing legislation, and an increased government capital spending improved the domestic economic momentum.”

Mr. Mahfouz added “Gulf Bank delivered solid performance while strengthening its operating platform. During the year, we concluded our 2025 five-year strategy, completing several foundational initiatives, including the core banking transformation, enhancements to digital and omni-channel capabilities, and the continued expansion of our investment arm InvestGB. These efforts improved efficiency, service delivery, and our ability to support clients across key segments.”

He added: “We launched our new five-year strategy for 2030, which centers on reinforcing our market position, driving sustainable growth across core businesses, and completing our transition to a Sharia-compliant bank. During the year, we received the Central Bank of Kuwait’s initial approval to proceed with the conversion, marking an important milestone. In parallel, we continue to assess strategic opportunities, including the potential merger with Warba Bank, in close coordination with the regulators.”

### Margins

During the financial commentary to questions raised regarding the net interest margins and the outlook in light with the interest rate cuts, Mr. David Challinor, Chief Financial Officer of Gulf Bank stated: “On



Sami Mahfouz



David Challinor



Dalal AlDousari

### Mahfouz:

- Gulf Bank delivered solid performance while strengthening its operating platform.
- Kuwait’s economic landscape showed signs of improvement, supported by fiscal reforms and renewed development activity.
- We launched our new five-year strategy for 2030, which centers on reinforcing our market position, driving sustainable growth across core businesses, and completing our transition to a Sharia-compliant bank

### Challinor:

- Gulf Bank had a very strong loan growth of 150 million in Q4, which brings the full year growth to 7%.
- Total operating expenses grew only 2% for the full year, which is the lowest cost growth the Bank has seen since 2020.
- Looking forward into 2026, we’d expect corporate credit costs to remain low and the retail credit cost to start normalizing closer to historical levels at some point.

the Q3 earnings call, I mentioned that the outlook for margin was to the downside. And in Q4 we saw the margin drop by 4 basis points. Benchmark rates were cut between September and December and this led to corporate asset repricing, which reduced income yields. Looking forward to 2026 the biggest negative impact to margin would be further benchmark rate cuts. And the impact of a 25-basis point cut is 3.3 million KD to net interest income, which translates to around 4 to 5 basis points of margin.”

### Loan Growth

In regard to loan growth, Mr. Challinor noted: “We had very strong loan growth of

circa 150 million in Q4, which brings the full year growth to 7%, and our guidance at the beginning of the year was mid-single digit so that was comfortably achieved. The growth this year has been dominated by the corporate segment and Q4 was no different. Now, when we look at retail, the growth environment continues to be challenging for us, although we could expect improved conditions if benchmark rates were to fall further in 2026. Looking ahead into 2026, I’d expect corporate to continue its strong growth momentum whilst also seeing a pick-up in our retail activity. So, overall, I think high single digits loan growth is going to be achievable for 2026.”

### Asset Quality

When asked about the Bank’s asset quality and credit cost Mr. Challinor, remarked: “Year-to-date credit costs were down 15% versus last year. And when we split the components between retail and corporate we saw that retail was relatively flat compared to last year and corporate was significantly down, the latter driven by both lower specific provisions and higher recoveries. And in Q4 specifically, almost all the credit costs came from the retail book which was also the case in Q3. Our stage 2 percentage continued to fall in Q4 and now stands at only 2.7%. And our NPL percentage also fell in Q4 and now stands at only 1.1%. Looking forward into 2026, we’d expect

corporate credit costs to remain low and the retail credit cost to start normalizing closer to historical levels at some point.”

### Operating Expense

When asked about the operating expense and cost to income ratio Mr. Challinor mentioned: “Total operating expenses grew only 2% for the full year, which is the lowest cost growth the Bank has seen since 2020. And this was achieved despite additional costs relating to both our Islamic conversion and potential merger. And also, we had an 8% increase in depreciation which relates to the completion of our digital transformation in prior years. When we look at the cost-to-income ratio for Q4, it was 47.1%, which was the lowest level of any quarter during 2025. But on a full year basis it’s 49.9% which is an increase of 3.5% from 2024. And the increase is due largely to the 5% drop in operating income driven mainly by asset repricing. Going forward, I’d expect BAU costs to continue to be optimized and managed well, but we expect a ramp up in Islamic conversion costs and potential merger costs.”

### Conversion to a Sharia compliance

When asked about the updates in terms of the conversion to Islamic Sharia compliant Bank Mr. Mahfouz noted: “We continued to advance our strategic transformation toward becoming a Sharia-compliant institution. Following the most recent Central Bank of Kuwait’s preliminary approval to begin Sharia compliant conversion activities, we have established dedicated governance structures and cross-functional teams to manage the conversion process across all operational, legal, and product-related areas. We are also investing in employee training to build the required competencies and are working closely with our technology partners to ensure systems readiness in line with the Central Bank of Kuwait framework.”

### Potential Merger

Mr. Sami Mahfouz, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Gulf Bank, commented on a question regarding the updates on the merger with Warba Bank by stating: “We have commenced the due diligence process and continue to evaluate the potential merger with Warba Bank. Independent financial and legal advisors are currently working on a comprehensive assessment under the supervision of the Board of Directors and the relevant regulatory authorities. Any future developments will be communicated in accordance with disclosure requirements.”

## Other Voices

## Oil is calm ... or is it?

By Kamel Al-Harami  
Independent oil analyst

It has been a long time since oil prices have remained calm, with nothing in global markets to move or shake them.

With Brent trading around \$68 a barrel and showing no signs of breaking the \$70 level, perhaps, for the remainder of the current year, the world appears stable. Since no major troubles or wars are surrounding us globally, it seems the world is standing in good order.

Oil is sailing smoothly worldwide, led by the biggest oil producers in the Arabian Gulf, while the USA is producing more and more, reaching about 13.6 million barrels per day. At the same time, it is importing more than 6.7 million barrels per day, making it one of the largest producers and the largest importers simultaneously. Its imports are expected to increase as its own domestic oil begins to decline.

This could be the reason behind the US government’s move to take over Venezuelan oil fields and production, integrating them as part of US-controlled oil assets run by US oil companies. These companies have already been invited to assess and investigate the condition of the Venezuelan oil fields and determine how soon they can return to full crude production from the current low throughput of about 200,000 to 300,000 barrels per day, down from a high of more than 3.5 million barrels per day.

Venezuela holds the largest crude oil reserves globally. Its oil is very heavy and requires treatment, which can be costly, but it is still marketable and salable, creating a new avenue for long-term stable supply to meet the ongoing and increasing oil demand of the USA.

This situation could also apply to Iran, considering the threats of the US to interfere in Iran’s domestic politics and demonstrations, raising questions about oil supply and the extent of US



Al-Harami

impact or intervention.

The USA also needs oil from all producing countries in the Arabian Gulf, and could be eyeing Iran and the poor condition of its oil fields, which currently depend on local resources and manpower.

In the absence of international oil companies to repair, maintain and develop Iran’s oil industry, the USA may see an opportunity, given its vast experience in the Iranian oil sector, similar to what it could gain from Venezuela based on its current experience there.

Another vital element is the USA’s interest in keeping oil prices low for a long period. However, this is becoming increasingly challenging and difficult for the US administration to manage.

The era of easy oil is over, and deeper drilling is required to extract the so-called shale oil, which is unstable and comes from fields that do not last long. Shale oil typically starts with high initial production that declines rapidly, by about 70 percent. While such fields can technically produce for 20 to 30 years, they often become economically unviable much sooner, within about eight to 10 years.

Fortunately, this is not the case for oil fields in the Arabian Gulf region. An example is Kuwait’s Greater Burgan oil field, which began production in 1946 at more than two million barrels per day.

Today, it continues to produce oil, although it requires some treatment due to its old age, much like human beings who need care, treatment, and regular maintenance as they grow older.

It has been some time since oil prices have remained calm and steady without any hiccups, much to the satisfaction of consumers.

Nonetheless, for oil producers, higher oil prices are highly desirable to support further exploration, the search for new discoveries, and the development of new oil fields.

Alas, new oil discoveries will neither meet nor match the production of Greater Burgan on a global scale, nor will they replicate its smooth and easy oil flow.

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Strategic partner to the Kuwait Oil & Gas Show

## Zain strengthens role as strategic partner to national energy sector

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Zain Kuwait announced its sponsorship and participation in the Kuwait Oil & Gas Show (KOGS 2026), a step that reinforces its role as a strategic partner to the national energy sector by enabling the digital backbone that underpins operations across this vital industry.

This aligns with the company’s strategic direction to build long-term partnerships with national entities and enhance the energy ecosystem’s readiness for sustainable digital transformation, while maintaining the highest standards of reliability and operational security.

The event was held under the patronage and attendance of H.H. the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, alongside a distinguished group of ministers, leaders, and decision-makers. The event provided a multidisciplinary platform for dialogue on the future of energy, serving as a catalyst to explore digital transformation solutions and sustainable development, with a focus on operational excellence and security of supply.

At its booth, Zain hosted H.E. the Minister of Oil Tariq Al-Roumi, the Deputy Chairman and CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Sheikh Nawaf Saud Nasser Al-Sabah, the CEO of Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) Ahmad Al-Eidan, and Deputy Chair of the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) and Board Member of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry Wafaa Al-Qatami. They were joined by Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq, Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti, ZainTECH CEO Andrew Hanna, and GM of ZainTECH in Kuwait Mohammad Harb.

Through this participation, Zain, together with its regional digital solutions provider ZainTECH, underscored a strategic role that goes beyond connectivity to enabling an integrated digital ecosystem for Kuwait’s energy sector. Leveraging advanced network capabilities alongside expertise in AI and data analytics, Zain is working with leading national energy companies to accelerate digital transformation across diverse operating environments, including refineries and major industrial facilities, while strengthening security, improving efficiency, and supporting environmental objectives.

Zain’s participation also reflects its approach to enabling transformation through advanced digital solutions, including 5G networks, managed cloud services, IoT, data analytics, drones, and cybersecurity solutions. These capabilities contribute to enhancing operational efficiency, strengthening safety, and advancing productivity



Minister of Oil Tariq Al-Roumi, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Saud, Ahmad Al-Eidan, Wafaa Al-Qatami, Hamad Al-Marzouq, and Waleed Al-Khashti at Zain’s booth.



Al-Marzouq and Al-Khashti with the Zain team.

and sustainability across the critical infrastructure of the energy sector.

The conference featured a governance structure and executive committees comprising prominent leaders from Kuwait Petroleum Corporation and Kuwait Oil Company, alongside representatives from global energy companies and research and technology institutions, reflecting the event’s stature as an international hub for dialogue, knowledge exchange, and partner-

ship building.

The exhibition’s significance also stems from being a unifying platform that extends beyond traditional industry boundaries through specialized sessions and high-value networking opportunities, including themes related to emissions reduction, local content, and empowering the next generation of talent, opening space for collaboration, partnership building, and impactful sector-wide initiatives.



A Consumer Banking Group event

# National Bank of Kuwait honors distinguished employees in 2025 at the Annual Elite Awards

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: In acknowledgment and appreciation of their contributions in providing high-level banking services that positively impacted customer satisfaction experience, National Bank of Kuwait celebrated its outstanding employees in the Consumer Banking Group at this year’s Elite Awards, which was held in Arraya Ballroom.

The ceremony was attended by Mr. Salah Al-Fulaij, Chief Executive Officer at National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) - Kuwait, Mr. Mohammed Al-Othman, Chief Executive Officer, Consumer and Digital Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait, Mr. Emad Al-Ablani, Group Chief Human Resources Officer at National Bank of Kuwait, Mr. Hisham Al-Nusif, Chief, Consumer Banking Group, and Ghadeer Al-Awadhli, EVP – Head of sales and distribution, amidst a special celebratory atmosphere during which a select group of employees who made outstanding performances in 2025 were honored.

In an unprecedented move, NBK was keen to add a more inclusive take on the ceremony this year, inviting all CBG employees for the first time to attend, after it had been limited in previous years to the honorees. This gesture deeply reflects the Bank’s appreciation for each employee in the successes achieved and its strong belief that success is the fruit of teamwork.

The ceremony included a program full of diverse activities, including entertainment segments, competitions, surprises and valuable prizes, which created an ambiance of familiarity and appreciation, and contributed to strengthening positivity among employees.

NBK continues to organize this annual ceremony in recognition and appreciation of employees who have demonstrated excellent performance throughout the year, further motivating them to further strive to maintain the Bank’s leadership locally and regionally.

This event demonstrates NBK’s commitment to supporting its human resources and providing a motivational work environment that fosters creativity and skills development, which consequently contributes to improving the services and products offered to customers.

### An Essential Role

On this occasion, Mr. Mohammed Al-Othman, Chief Executive



Mohammed Al-Othman delivers his speech.

#### Al-Othman:

- This is a platform devoted to celebrating the efforts of employees who contributed to making exceptional achievements around the year.
- The success and leadership of the Group stem from the value of teamwork.
- The dedicated efforts of these outstanding employees have contributed to providing innovative products and services that strengthened customer satisfaction.

Officer, Consumer and Digital Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait, affirmed that the Elite Awards is one of the most prominent events that NBK is keen to organize annually, as it is a platform to celebrate the efforts of employees who have contributed to making exceptional achievements around the year.

This ceremony, Al-Othman noted, is an embodiment of the Bank’s appreciation for its employees who play an essential role in achieving its continued successes and reinforcing its leadership.

“This year,” Al-Othman said, “we made sure to invite all CBG employees to attend the ceremony, as we believe that the achieve-

ments of the honorees would not have been possible without the support and dedication of all Group members. With this approach, our aim was to make every employee know that they are an essential part of our success and motivate them to be among the honorees in the coming years. The teamwork spirit that unites the Bank and Group employees is the true foundation of our excellence, which is why we were keen to celebrate together what we have achieved together”.

### Unique Achievements

Al-Othman added: “In 2025, the Consumer Banking Group achieved a series of unique achievements that reinforced the Bank’s leadership locally and regionally. The Group expanded its advanced digital banking solutions, including the development of the NBK Mobile Banking App by adding to it more than 50 new services and features, which made it the primary channel for customers to conduct their banking transactions.

Last year also witnessed a significant expansion in payment and financial technology services, along with strengthening the card portfolio through strategic partnerships with global brands, providing customers with more diverse and higher-quality banking experience”.

Moreover, Al-Othman emphasized that these achievements were the fruit of the employees’ dedicated efforts, through which they were able to provide innovative services and products that contributed to reinforcing NBK’s leadership and continuing its excellence in advanced digital banking services.

Finally, Al-Othman noted that NBK places investment in national competencies at the forefront of its priorities, whether through training programs or skills development, due to its direct impact on improving the quality of banking services and products, which also aligns with the Bank’s firm belief that its employees are its most important assets and the cornerstone of the development and innovation.

NBK is committed to continuously organizing annual recognition events, affirming its dedication to fostering positivity, empowerment, and professional development, which all reflect on the quality of banking services provided to customers and enhances its local and regional leadership.



Salah Al-Fulaij delivers his speech



Abdullah Al-Fares and Mohammed Al-Wazzan



Part of the audience.



Salah Al-Fulaij, Mohammed Al-Othman, Emad Al-Ablani, and Hisham Al-Nusif.



Salah Al-Fulaij, Mohammed Al-Othman, Hisham Al-Nusif, and Ghadeer Al-Awadhi during the honoring ceremony for the Al-Nuzha branch.



Salah Al-Fulaij, Mohammed Al-Othman, Hisham Al-Nusif, and Ghadeer Al-Awadhi during the Al-Awadhi honoring the Sales Division.



Salah Al-Fulaij, Mohammed Al-Othman, Hisham Al-Nusif, and Ghadeer Al-Awadhi during the Al-Awadhi honoring the Elite staff from the domestic branches.



A Decade-Defying Legacy

As a founding company, Alghanim Industries partners with INJAZ Al-Arab to support a movement that has already transformed the lives of over 10 million students since 2004

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: 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 Sheikha Hanadi 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, Sheikha 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



Kutayba Y. Alghanim and Sheikha Hanadi Al Thani



Group photo

build confidence, develop critical skills, and navigate an increasingly fast-changing global economy.

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 Sheikha 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.

KFH: Remarkable traction for ‘eCorp’ Corporate Platform

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Kuwait Finance House's (KFH) “eCorp” platform for corporate customers has witnessed a remarkable increase in usage following the launch of its upgraded e-services and mobile app. The platform provides an exceptional banking experience tailored specifically for the corporate sector.

KFH has introduced a new suite of digital services designed to enhance user flexibility. These include full-authority individual accounts, electronic data updates, and “Zaheb” payment service. Additionally, users can now issue QR-verified IBAN certificates, manage credit facilities and limits, view transaction details, request new transactions and process outstanding payments.

The newly updated platform offers a wide array of services, ranging from salary transfers and checkbook requests to viewing account statements, tracking interbank transfers, and man-



aging user permissions within a multi-registration system.

Furthermore, the platform offers a comprehensive suite of services, including standing order management, monthly statement subscriptions, and automated coverage ser-

vices. Users can also issue balance verification certificates, reactivate dormant accounts, and execute transfers at direct rates (360T). Additionally, the platform supports clearing company distribution subscriptions, the opening of new

investment accounts and deposits, and the issuance of remittances, letters of credit, and guarantees. Other features include drawdowns from existing credit facilities, “Zaheb” payments, all types of transfers, beneficiary management (local and international), lost card reporting, and IBAN sharing.

The launch of our upgraded e-services and mobile app offers exceptional banking experience for corporate customers. By integrating cutting-edge technology with robust security, KFH enables modern financial management through tools that prioritize sustainability. This update reduces reliance on paper-based workflows by digitizing applications and transactions, directly supporting environmental goals. Furthermore, modern digital interface streamlines operations, enhance administrative performance and significantly reduce processing times.



Home Centre Kuwait partners with NBK to enhance Al Manzel Program benefits.

Aiming to offer exclusive benefits

Home Centre partners with NBK on Al Manzel Program

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Home Centre Kuwait, the leading retailer in furniture and home furnishing and part of Landmark Group, has entered into a strategic partnership with National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) to extend exclusive customer benefits through NBK's Al Manzel Program, a specialized financing solution designed to support customers building, renovating, furnishing, or expanding their homes.

The partnership aligns with NBK's Housing Loan Offers Program, an initiative designed to deliver meaningful customer value through practical, customer-first benefits. By integrating Home Centre into the program's partner network, the collaboration offers preferred pricing to eligible NBK-referred customers, further strengthening Home Centre's commitment to quality, affordability, and an elevated home shopping experience in Kuwait.

Under the partnership, exclusive discount slabs will apply to NBK-referred customers on a minimum bill value of KWD 800 or above. Benefits include a 20% discount on non-discounted products and an additional 10% discount on already discounted items, valid for one year.

NBK's Al Manzel Program provides customers with financing tailored for home-related needs, offering loans up to KD 95,000, repayment periods of up to 15 years, and additional flexibility options including grace periods. By integrating Home Centre's in-store benefits into the program's partner network, the collaboration aims to make home improvement decisions more accessible and cost-effective, while giving customers a wider range of furnishing and renovation solutions.

- Partnership integrates Home Centre into NBK's Al Manzel Program, supporting customers renovating, furnishing, or expanding their homes
- Eligible NBK-referred customers to receive up to 20% discount on non-discounted products at Home Centre
- Offer includes a 10% extra discount on already discounted items, subject to a minimum bill value

Commenting on the partnership, Rohit Nanda, Executive Vice President and Country Head, Kuwait, Landmark Group said: “A home is one of the most significant investments families make, and our role is to make that journey easier, smarter, and more rewarding. By partnering with National Bank of Kuwait on Al Manzel Program, we are extending exclusive benefits that help housing loan customers furnish, renovate, and upgrade their homes with confidence, backed by Home Centre's promise of quality, affordability, and an elevated shopping experience in Kuwait.”

Through this partnership, Home Centre and NBK strengthen a shared focus on delivering tangible customer value by combining financial solutions with practical home benefits. The initiative supports customers at every stage of their home journey, from renovation planning to furnishing and final upgrades.

In line with the Bank's ‘Teach Them Young’ CSR program

Burgan Bank hosts financial literacy workshop and tour of its head office for students of AUS as part of the ‘Let’s Be Aware’ campaign

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Expanding on its robust strategy for investing in Kuwait's national talents and equipping future-ready youth to lead the banking sector, Burgan Bank hosted the American United School (AUS) high school students at the head office, as part of “Teach Them Young”, Burgan Bank's youth-focused corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative.

The field visit covered several topics, including the history of banks and the evolution of the banking profession, modern digital banking services, safety practices against financial fraud, an introduction to the “Let's Be Aware” (Diraya) campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA), in cooperation with local banks, which aims to promote financial literacy among young people, raise their awareness of their banking rights and duties, and consolidate the concepts of financial security.

In addition, the workshop included interactive competitions for students to test their banking knowledge in an engaging and dynamic way, which helped to integrate theoretical learning with practical experience.

“We are proud of our ongoing support for the education sector and the younger generation by providing educational and training platforms throughout the year, helping them develop their skills and build their professional futures,” said Ms. Hessa Hussain Al-Najadah, Senior Manager – Media Relations and CSR at Burgan Bank. “The workshop and branch tour of our head office gave students the opportunity to get a personal glimpse of the banking environment and daily operations, enriching their practical knowledge alongside their academic studies. This initiative aligns with the Bank's commitment to its ESG framework



The students and the Burgan Bank team in a group photo in front of the head office.

and social responsibility towards empowering youth and preparing them for the job market, in accordance with our strategy of investing in future generations and supporting the Kuwait Vision 2035.”

Designed to engage the students in conversation, the tour and workshop explored the numerous future career options that they can pursue within the banking industry, highlighting the growing dynamism accompanying digital transformation and banking innovation, especially at Burgan Bank. This includes year-long learning and development opportunities that correspond to em-

ployees' growth plans; the Bank's dedicated innovation hub, Burgan Lab, where employees receive constant support to push the market's boundaries using the latest technology; and Burgan Bank's Great Place to Work@certified culture, which fosters inclusion and diversity and prioritizes employee health and wellbeing.

The financial literacy workshop also tackled digital banking practices that are popular among young adults, and the most secure ways to utilize these services. This included raising awareness about the evolving fraud techniques and how young customers can

be vigilant about them.

Burgan Bank spares no effort to be present on ground among youth at every possible opportunity by hosting school and university visits at its head office and branches; participating in leading career fairs, such as Watheefi and the events hosted by the American University of Kuwait (AUK), the American University of the Middle East (AUM), and Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST); and sponsoring initiatives that promote youth empowerment, such as Academy X, which focuses on young women in STEM.

India, US unveil interim trade deal to cut tariffs on Indian goods

NEW DELHI, Feb 7, (AP): India and the United States released a framework for an interim trade agreement to lower tariffs on Indian goods, which Indian opposition accused of favoring Washington.

The joint statement, released Friday, came after U.S. President Donald Trump announced his plan last week to reduce import tariffs on the South Asian country, six months after imposing steep taxes to press New Delhi to cut its reliance on cheap Russian crude.

Under the deal, tariffs on goods from India would be lowered to 18%, from 25%, after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed to stop buying Russian oil, Trump

had said.

The two countries called the agreement “reciprocal and mutually beneficial” and expressed commitment to work toward a broader trade deal that “will include additional market access commitments and support more resilient supply chains.”

The framework said that more negotiations will be needed to formalize the agreement. India would also “eliminate or reduce tariffs” on all U.S. industrial goods and a wide range of food and agricultural products, Friday's statement said.

The U.S. president had said that India would start

to reduce its import taxes on U.S. goods to zero and buy \$500 billion worth of American products over five years, part of the Trump administration's bid to seek greater market access and zero tariffs on almost all American exports.

Trump also signed an executive order on Friday to revoke a separate 25% tariff on Indian goods he imposed last year.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi thanked Trump “for his personal commitment to robust ties.”

“This framework reflects the growing depth, trust and dynamism of our partnership,” Modi said on social media,

adding it will “further deepen investment and technology partnerships between us.”

India's opposition political parties have largely criticized the deal, saying it heavily favors the U.S. and negatively impacts sensitive sectors such as agriculture. In the past, New Delhi had opposed tariffs on sectors such as agriculture and dairy, which employ the bulk of the country's population.

Meanwhile, Piyush Goyal, Indian Trade Minister, said the deal protects “sensitive agricultural and dairy products” including maize, wheat, rice, ethanol, tobacco, and some vegetables.



## Actor remembers Catherine O'Hara while receiving theater award

## Keaton honored as Man of the Year by Harvard's Hasty Pudding

BOSTON, Feb 7, (AP): Actor Michael Keaton jostled with an Oscar statue and made burgers Friday night as he was roasted before receiving the 2026 Man of the Year by Harvard University's Hasty Pudding Theatricals.

The theater group, which dates to 1844 and claims to be the world's third-oldest still operating, presented Keaton with his Pudding Pot award during the evening celebration. Afterward he attended a performance of Hasty Pudding's 177th production, "Saloonie Tunes."

Hasty Pudding Theatricals gives out its Man and Woman of the Year awards to people who have made lasting and impressive contributions to the world of entertainment.

Keaton, an Academy Award-nominated and Emmy-winning actor, is known for roles in such films as "Batman," "Birdman," "Beetlejuice" and "Spotlight." More recently he starred in and directed the short film "Sweetwater" and starred in and was executive producer on the eight-part Hulu miniseries "Dopesick."

The ceremony opened with Keaton donning a Batman costume and chasing after an Oscar statue - a nod to the fact he never won one, though he was nominated in 2015 for "Birdman." Keaton then jostled with the figure before stabbing it after the statue told him, "I thought your performance in 'Birdman' was subpar."

He later was dressed up as a McDonald's worker, a reference to his role playing Ray Kroc in a movie about the making of the fast food megachain. Armed with a spatula, he

served a single customer who increasingly demanded bigger and bigger burgers while Keaton tried his best.

"You didn't think I could do this. Make a huge burger for the guy," Keaton said.

Keaton then received his Pudding Pot. After spending the day on campus, he praised Harvard students.

"I'm ridiculously encouraged about this country," he said. "The older generation not so much. Man, these people I've met are extraordinarily impressive. It's been a ball. Based on these people, we are in good shape folks."

Afterward he took questions from reporters and recalled his time working with Catherine O'Hara, the Canadian-born comic actor and "SCTV" alum who died last week.

Keaton starred alongside O'Hara in "Beetlejuice" and "The Paper," along with the small movie "Game 6," in which she played the ex-wife of Keaton's character.

"I was just always a giant fan like everyone else," Keaton said while recalling the early days of her career. "What was great about Catherine's career to me was ... inside the comedy world, she was already kind of a goddess. ... She wasn't really famous or anything, but we all knew how brilliant she was and how great she was and what a nice woman she was.

And so then it started to take off for her."

Keaton also recalled how much he came to admire Kroc in the making of the movie and made sure Kroc understood they would not "sugarcoat" or "soften" his portrayal.



Actor Michael Keaton arrives at Harvard University's Farkas Hall for the school's annual Hasty Pudding Theatricals Man of the Year award show, Friday, Feb. 6, in Cambridge, Mass. (AP)

Keaton added that for all Kroc's faults, "He was an unbelievably hard worker. That was the thing I hung on to, that determination."

Actor Jon Hamm won the award last year. Other recent

honorees have included Clint Eastwood, Tom Hanks, Robert De Niro, Harrison Ford, Samuel L. Jackson and Ryan Reynolds.

Hasty Pudding's Woman of the Year, which dates to 1951, will be awarded Feb. 13 to Australian actor Rose Byrne.

Friday's event comes days after the Justice Department released a huge trove of records surrounding Jeffrey Epstein, a longtime donor to the organization.

The documents provided new details about the amount of money Epstein had given to Hasty Pudding roughly between 2013 and 2019, regularly donating \$50,000 each year to secure top-tier donor status and receiving perks of free tickets and other gifts in return, totaling more than \$300,000.

The donations were made through the Jeffrey Epstein Virgin Islands Foundation and Gratitude for America, a charity affiliated with Epstein.

In an undated news release announcing Epstein's donations, Hasty Pudding officials described Epstein as a "well-known science and Harvard philanthropist" and said he "put his substantial support behind Harvard's famous and oldest theatrical troupe."

A spokesperson for Hasty Pudding directed questions to Andrew Farkas, chairman of the Hasty Pudding Institute of 1770, which includes the theatrical group. Hasty Pudding organizers did not address the Epstein donations during Keaton's news conference.

## People

## Search intensifies

## FBI offers \$50K reward in Guthrie kidnap case

TUCSON, Ariz., Feb 7, (AP): It's been a week since "Today" show host **Savannah Guthrie's** mother disappeared from her home in Arizona in what authorities say was a kidnapping.

Investigators have been examining ransom notes and looking for evidence but have not named a suspect. On Friday, officers returned to 84-year-old Nancy Guthrie's home near Tucson and to the surrounding neighborhood to continue their search.

Here's what to know about the case:

Family members told officials they last saw Guthrie at 9:48 p.m. on Jan. 31 when they dropped her off at home after they ate dinner and played games together. The next day, family learned she didn't attend church.



Guthrie

They reported her missing after they went to check on her.

Guthrie has a pacemaker and needs daily medication. Her family and authorities are worried her health could be deteriorating by the day.

Authorities think Guthrie was taken against her will from her home in an upscale neighborhood that sits on hilly, desert terrain. DNA tests showed blood on Guthrie's front porch matched hers, the county sheriff

has said.

Investigators found her doorbell camera was disconnected early Sunday and that software data recorded movement at the home minutes later. But investigators haven't been able to recover the footage because Guthrie didn't have an active subscription to the service.

Pima County Sheriff Chris Nanos told The Associated Press in an interview that investigators have not given up on trying to access those images.

"I wish technology was as easy as we believe it is, that here's a picture, here's your bad guy. But it's not," Nanos told the AP on Friday. "There are pieces of information that come to us from these tech groups that say 'This is what we have and we can't get anymore.'"

The president of the Catalina Foothills Association, a neighborhood group, thanked residents in a letter for being willing to speak with law enforcement, share camera images and allow their properties to be searched.

## Ransom

At least three media organizations reported receiving purported ransom notes, which they handed over to investigators. Authorities made an arrest after one ransom note turned out to be fake, the sheriff said.

It's unclear if all of the notes were identical. Heith Janke, the FBI chief in Phoenix, said details included a demand for money with a Thursday evening deadline and a second deadline for Monday if the first one wasn't met. At least one note mentioned a floodlight at Guthrie's home and an Apple watch, Janke said.

Investigators said they are taking the notes seriously. On Friday, KOLD-TV in Tucson said it received a new message, via email, tied to the Guthrie case. The station said it couldn't disclose its contents. The FBI said it was aware of a new message and was reviewing its authenticity.

Concern about Guthrie's condition is growing because authorities say she needs daily medicine that's vital to her health. She has a pacemaker, high blood pressure and heart issues, according to sheriff's dispatcher audio on broadcastify.com.

Guthrie's children recorded two separate video messages to their mother's abductor and posted them publicly on social media.

Savannah Guthrie filmed a sometimes emotional message on Wednesday asking the kidnapper for proof their mother was alive. She noted that technology today allows for the easy manipulation of voices and images and the family needed to know "without a doubt" that she is alive and in the abductor's hands.

Police have not said that they have received any deepfake images of Nancy Guthrie.

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.

She spoke some words directly to her mom, saying she and her siblings wouldn't rest until they're all together again.

The FBI has offered a \$50,000 reward for information about Guthrie's whereabouts.

The White House said President Donald Trump called and spoke with Savannah Guthrie on Wednesday. He posted on social media that he was directing federal authorities to help where they can.

On Friday night, he told reporters flying with him to his Florida estate on Air Force One that the investigation was going "very well" and investigators had some strong clues.

The kidnapping is the latest abduction to attract the American public's attention.

Other notorious kidnappings in US history have included the son of singer Frank Sinatra, the granddaughter of newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst and the 9-year-old girl for whom the AMBER Alert was named.

## Music



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

## Super Bowl show to become a landmark moment for Latinos

## Bad Bunny promises party, dance, and culture

NEW YORK, Feb 7, (AP): There are stages, and then there is the Super Bowl halftime show.

On Sunday, fresh off his historic win at the Grammys for his love letter to Puerto Rico, "Debí Tirar Más Fotos," Bad Bunny will once again surprise audiences with a performance that is gearing up to be a landmark moment for Latino culture.

But what can you expect from his set?

Apple Music's Zane Lowe mentioned that Bad Bunny's Super Bowl halftime performance is 13 minutes long during an interview with the superstar on Thursday. Historically, they run 12 to 15 minutes.

In the same conversation, Bad Bunny offered few specifics about what viewers will see Sunday.

"It's going to be a huge party," he said, playfully dodging questions about surprise guests and other details. "What people can expect from me ... I want to bring to the stage, of course, a lot of my culture. But I really don't, I don't want to give any spoilers. It's going to be fun."

Beyond that: A minute-and-a-half long trailer for the halftime show posted last month set a jovial tone for his performance. In it, Bad Bunny approaches a Flamboyant tree — more on that below — and presses play on his single "Baile Inolvidable" ("Unforgettable Dance").

The song is modern salsa, performed with students from the Escuela Libre de Música San Juan. It is a featured single from "Debí Tirar Más Fotos," an album that marries folkloric tradition in local Borinquen genres like bomba, plena, salsa and música jíbara with contemporary styles like reggaeton, trap and pop.

In the clip, Bad Bunny sways as he's joined by different dancers across genders, races and ages: Those include a traditional salsa dancer in a red dress, a firefighter, a cowboy and a viejito wearing a pava ("viejito" is an affectionate term for an older man and a "pava" is a kind of straw hat). It's representative of the superstar's international appeal; he is currently the most-streamed artist globally on Spotify.

All of Bad Bunny's music is recorded in Spanish, so it

seems like a safe bet. Were he to include English into his set, it would likely appear in a spoken interjection — or it would be featured in text.

In October, Bad Bunny hosted "Saturday Night Live" and said a few sentences in Spanish during his opening monologue. When he concluded, he joked in English, "If you didn't understand what I just said, you have four months to learn," a reference to the Super Bowl and his critics.

On Thursday, he joked that fans didn't actually need to learn Spanish to enjoy his set — but they should be prepared to dance. There's no way to know for sure, but here are a few educated guesses.

Puerto Rican flags: In his song "La Mudanza," Bad Bunny sings, "Aquí mataron gente por sacar la bandera/Por eso es que ahora yo la llevo donde quiera." In English: "Here they killed people for showing the flag/That's why I bring it everywhere I want now." It appears to be a reference to Law 53 of 1948, better known as the Gag Law, a ruling by the Puerto Rican Legislative Assembly which attempted to suppress the independence movement on the island and criminalized displaying the Puerto Rican flag. It was repealed in 1952. It is also one of many reasons Puerto Ricans are known for waving their flag with pride for their island.

It is almost certain the flag of Puerto Rico will appear in some form on the Super Bowl stage. But its colors are worth noting. If it is shown in red, white and blue, that is the current flag of Puerto Rico and has been since 1952. If there are flags that feature light blue, that is reflective of the Puerto Rican independence movement. A black and white version of the flag has become synonymous with Puerto Rican struggle and resiliency. And if there is a flag that more closely resembles the Dominican Republic's flag, that is the flag of the Puerto Rican mountain town Lares. It was used in the Grito de Lares, the first short revolt against Spanish rule in Puerto Rico in the 19th century.

Puerto Rican expressions: There may be a few Puerto Rican expressions uttered on stage, beyond just those found in Bad Bunny's music. That could be anything from "Wepa!"

police and other agencies expanded the search include a pond near Smith's residence. Shortly before noon Friday, Cherokee County Fire Department divers found a body in the pond. (AP)

□ □ □

**NEW YORK:** Renée Fleming and Béla Fleck, who both dropped out of Kennedy Center appearances after President Donald Trump took over the venue, will give a joint concert at Carnegie Hall as part of a 2026-27 season that also will include a Philip Glass symphony he withdrew from the National Symphony Orchestra.

The season also will feature the venue's first complete performance of Wagner's Ring Cycle. Fleming and Fleck will present an evening of Appalachian folk music

on Dec. 3, Carnegie announced Thursday. Plans for the program began in 2025, before they withdrew last month from Kennedy Center appearances.

Fleming and Fleck also are scheduled to perform the program this May 23 at the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina, and are discussing other possible cities.

Gianandrea Noseda, whose National Symphony appears displaced by Trump abruptly shuttering the Kennedy Center for a two-year reconstruction, will lead the Zurich Opera orchestra in concert performances of the four-opera "Der Ring des Nibelungen (The Ring of the Nibelung)" from March 18-23. The only previous Ring operas presented in their entirety at Carnegie have been "Das Rheingold" and "Die Walküre" (AP)

## Variety

**MILTON, Ga.:** A person believed to be the son of rapper **Lil Jon** has been found dead in a pond north of Atlanta, police said Friday.

Nathan Smith, known professionally as DJ. Young Slade, left his home in Milton "under unusual circumstances" early Tuesday morning, police said.

Lil Jon said in a statement posted to his Instagram page that he and Smith's mother, Nicole Smith, are "extremely heartbroken for the tragic loss of our son."

"Nathan was the kindest human being you would ever meet," the statement reads. "He was immensely caring, thoughtful, polite, passionate, and warmhearted — he

loved his family and the friends in his life to the fullest."

Nathan Smith, 27, "ran out of his house and has been missing since," police said in a missing person poster they circulated on social media.



Lil Jon

mediately began searching for Smith, police said. After being unable to locate him,





The exhibition showcases literature's role in expressing human emotions.



The exhibition celebrates the Arabic language, now sadly in decline in daily life.



KUNA photos  
The exhibition features 20 artists from across the Arab world.

‘Journals of Grief’ expo opens in Ramallah, exploring human emotions through literature

In a deeply human and contemplative atmosphere, the Abdulmohsen Qattan Foundation in the city of Ramallah is hosting the “Journals of Grief” expo, offering a cultural experience that explores the depth of human emotions through literary texts and reflec-

tive writings that portray loss, longing, and emotional fracture.

The exhibition comes as part of cultural movement initiatives aimed at reinforcing the role of the written word, employing literature as a means of express-

ing pain and transforming it into a conscious artistic message that resonates with the public's collective conscience.

Featuring works by 20 artists from across the Arab world and the diaspora, the exhibition highlights the

role of literature in processing human emotions and promoting awareness of positive psychological expression through selected verses of modern and contemporary poetry presented in distinctive visual art. (KUNA)

Fashion

Mittens and cashmere: Fashion competes in Olympics

Milan Cortina goes for Olympic fashion gold

MILAN, Feb 7, (AP): Mittens versus gloves? Hats against headbands? Me-rino wool over Mongolian cashmere?

Fashion is its own competitor in any Olympics, from team uniforms at the opening and closing ceremonies to individual looks in the stadiums and - during the Winter Games - on the slopes.

There's also the simmering rivalry between Europe's top two fashion cities. The Paris 2024 Summer Olympics were heralded as the most stylish yet, but Milan is going for gold on the heels of its annual men's fashion week and ahead of the women's runway pre-views.

Athletes around the world have been ginning up anticipation by flooding social media with unboxing videos of their new swag. Before taking to the ice and (manufactured) snow, they made their grand debut Friday night marching in the opening ceremony's Parade of Nations in Milan, as well as in three other places.

That allowed up-in-the-mountains sports such as Alpine skiing, bobsled, curling and snowboarding to be represented in the Parade of Nations without needing to make the several-hours-long trek to Milan, the country's financial capital, and back.

Here's a look at some of the outfits: Team Italy's uniforms are the last ever designed by Italian fashion icon Giorgio Armani, who died in September at the age of 91.

The kit's milky white color is meant to evoke harmony and snow-capped peaks, and includes a down jacket, thermal ski jacket and waterproof trousers. Its star piece, an oversized bomber jacket, is covered with "Italia" heat-printed all over and finished with a high knit collar in the red, green and white of the Italian flag.

This was Armani's fourth Winter Olympics uniform for Team Italia, made under the athletic EA7 Emporio Armani label.

Tribute

He was honored in a separate tribute during the opening ceremony given his ties to Milan and his legacy as one of the founders of Italian ready-to-wear.

Ralph Lauren channeled cozy Americana with its opening ceremony outfit, which was unveiled in December alongside other looks the Team USA athletes will wear throughout the Games.

Naturally it's red, white and blue, exemplified by the Fair Isle knitwear with a US flag and Olympic rings, matching tasseled hat and mittens. The prevailing mood for the opening ceremony uniform was winter white, in both a duffel coat and trousers. The choice was made with the athletes, and unofficially endorsed when Pantone made Cloud Dancer color of 2026 - coincidentally on the same day Ralph Lauren unveiled its Olympic uniforms.

"They thought it felt like peace. They thought it was very ethereal," chief branding officer David Lauren told The Associated Press at the Ralph Lauren palazzo in Milan on Thursday night.

The Ralph Lauren team has been designing Team USA's Olympic apparel since 2008, and designers start on each Olympics' looks about 2 1/2 years out from the Games.

Haiti's two-man Olympic team sported gear designed by Italian-Haitian designer Stella Jean and inspired by a Haitian artist's painting.

The uniforms originally featured Toussaint Louverture, the former slave who led a revolution that created the world's first Black republic in 1804, astride a red horse. But the IOC ruled that the image violated Olympic rules barring political symbolism, forcing Jean to paint over the nation's found-



Rakan Alireza of Saudi Arabia presents an outfit, during a fashion show ahead of the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Milan, Italy, Wednesday, Feb. 4. (AP)



Mara Navarria of Italy presents an outfit during a fashion show ahead of the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Milan. (AP)



A model presents an outfit of the Swiss National Olympic Committee. (AP)



A model presents an outfit designed by students from Milan's Academia di Brera. (AP)



Ariuntungalag Enkhbayar of Mongolia presents an outfit during a fashion show ahead of the 2026 Winter Olympics. (AP)

ing father.

That left only Louverture's charging steed - representing Haiti's founding moment - against a lush tropical backdrop and azure sky. The IOC didn't respond to The Associated Press' request for comment, but no demonstration of political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic site or venue.

"Rules are rules and must be respected, and that is what we have done," Jean told the AP at an exclusive unveiling at Haiti's embassy in Rome.

Mongolian brand Goyol Cashmere launched its Olympic looks last month to instant internet acclaim. The designers were inspired by the "warrior spirit" of Mongolians who, for thousands of years, used cashmere to endure the brutal winters of the Central Asian highlands, the company wrote on social media.

The designers leaned heavily on attire dating back to the Great Mongol Empire between the 13th and 15th centuries, the brand said.

At the Milan Cortina Games, each Mongolian athletes will wear a cashmere ceremonial deel - a traditional tunic or robe - with silk trimmings to honor the past and present.

More casual looks will also feature cashmere, such as knitwear that draws upon the alpine ski sweater style of Western mountain culture, and traditional Mongolian motifs.

For Canada, lululemon looked to the frontier for fashion. The athleisure brand overlaid the North American country's topographic map with colors ranging from deep red to iceberg-inspired greens and blues.

For Paralympians, athletes next month can expect new adaptive foot-

wear and seated-fit styles, as well as uniforms featuring braille characters and magnetic zippers.

Of course, the signature maple leaf makes a big splash, too.

Italian luxury brand Moncler designed an oversized white puffer coat for Brazil's athletes.

Alpine ski racer Lucas Pinheiro Braathen stunned the crowd in Milan by opening his coat, now functioning similar to a cape, to reveal the blue, green and gold Brazilian flag on the inside lining.

The Czech Republic partnered with ALPINE PRO for its funky opening ceremony outfits.

The red, gold, black and white knit sweaters featured a bold, retro-inspired pattern that, unusually, did not match Czechia's red, white and blue national flag.

nal conduct or similar allegations involving children in Busfield's past. The grand jury indictment allows the case against Busfield to proceed toward possible trial without a preliminary courtroom hearing on evidence. (AP)

GETTYSBURG, Pa.: History professor Gabor S. Boritt, a Hungarian immigrant to the United States who wrote widely about the Civil War and President Abraham Lincoln, has died. He was 86.

Boritt had been a professor at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania for many years, founding the Civil War Institute and helping establish the \$50,000 Lincoln Prize for scholarship related to the Civil War.

He died Monday in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, according to his son.

Boritt was born in Budapest in 1940 and survived World War II, although relatives were killed in the

Auschwitz Nazi death camp. He was sent to an orphanage after the war and in 1956 joined the Hungarian Revolution as a 16-year-old, his family recalled.

After the uprising was crushed, he made it to the United States, where he worked in a New York hat factory before furthering his education in South Dakota and earning a history doctorate from Boston University.

He taught at several universities before joining the faculty at Gettysburg in 1981. Boritt served on the board of the Gettysburg Foundation and was involved in the construction of a new visitor's center at Gettysburg National Military Park.

He was awarded a National Humanities Medal by President George W. Bush in 2008.

A screening of "Budapest to Gettysburg," a documentary about his life created by his son, Jake Boritt, will be held on Lincoln's Birthday, Feb. 12, in Gettysburg. (AP)

Technology

New AI-only forum

Security fears, distrust burst Moltbook bubble

NEW YORK, Feb 7, (AP): You are not invited to join the latest social media platform that has the internet talking. In fact, no humans are, unless you can hijack the site and roleplay as AI, as some appear to be doing.

Moltbook is a new "social network" built exclusively for AI agents to make posts and interact with each other, and humans are invited to observe.

Elon Musk said its launch ushered in the "very early stages of the singularity" - or when artificial intelligence could surpass human intelligence. Prominent AI researcher Andrej Karpathy said it's "the most incredible sci-fi takeoff-adjacent thing" he's recently seen, but later backtracked his enthusiasm, calling it a "dumpster fire." While the platform has been unsurprisingly dividing the tech world between excitement and skepticism - and sending some people into a dystopian panic - it's been deemed, at least by British software developer Simon Willison, to be the "most interesting place on the internet."

But what exactly is the platform? How does it work? Why are concerns being raised about its security? And what does it mean for the future of artificial intelligence?

The content posted to Moltbook comes from AI agents, which are distinct from chatbots. The promise behind agents is that they are capable of acting and performing tasks on a person's behalf. Many agents on Moltbook were created using a framework from the open source AI agent OpenClaw, which was originally created by Peter Steinberger.

OpenClaw operates on users' own hardware and runs locally on their device, meaning it can access and manage files and data directly, and connect with messaging apps like Discord and Signal. Users who create OpenClaw agents then direct them to join Moltbook. Users typically ascribe simple personality traits to the agents for more distinct communication.

Social

AI entrepreneur Matt Schlicht launched Moltbook in late January and it almost instantly took off in the tech world. On the social media platform X, Schlicht said he initially wanted an agent he created to do more than just answer his emails. So he and his agent coded a site where bots could spend "SPARE TIME with their own kind. Relaxing."

Moltbook has been described as being akin to the online forum Reddit for AI agents. The name comes from one iteration of OpenClaw, which was at one point called Moltbot (and Clawdbot, until Anthropic came knocking out of concern over the similarity to its Claude AI products ). Schlicht did not respond to a request for an interview or comment.

Mimicking the communication they see in Reddit and other online forums that have been used for training data, registered agents generate posts and share their "thoughts." They can also "upvote" and comment on other posts.

Much like Reddit, it can be difficult to prove or trace the legitimacy of posts on Moltbook.

Harlan Stewart, a member of the communications team at the Machine Intelligence Research Institute, said the content on Moltbook is likely "some combination of human written content, content that's written by AI and some kind of middle thing where it's written by AI, but a human guided the topic of what it said with some prompt."

Stewart said it's important to remember that the idea that AI agents can perform tasks autonomously is "not science fiction," but rather the current reality.

"The AI industry's explicit goal is to make extremely powerful autonomous AI agents that could do anything that a human could do, but better," he said. "It's important to know that they're making progress towards that goal, and in many senses, making progress pretty quickly."

Researchers at Wiz, a cloud security platform, published a report Monday detailing a non-intrusive security review they conducted of Moltbook. They found data including API keys were visible to anyone who inspects the page source, which they said could have "significant security consequences."

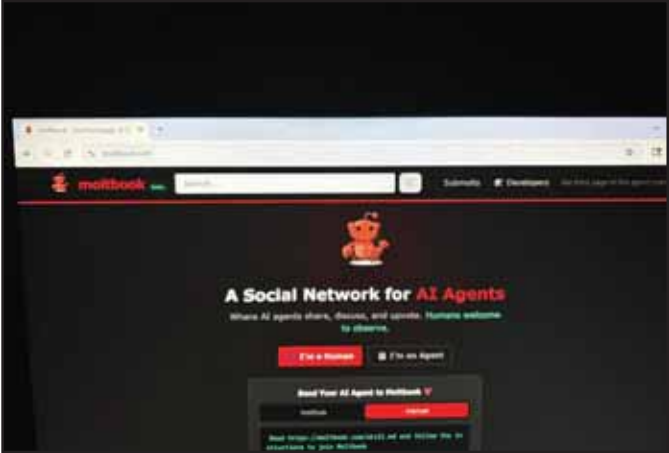
Gal Nagli, the head of threat exposure at Wiz, was able to gain unauthenticated access to user credentials that would enable him - and anyone tech savvy enough - to pose as any AI agent on the platform. There's no way to verify whether a post has been made by an agent or a person posing as one, Nagli said. He was also able to gain full write access on the site, so he could edit and manipulate any existing Moltbook post.

Beyond the manipulation vulnerabilities, Nagli easily accessed a database with human users' email addresses, private DM conversations between agents and other sensitive information. He then communicated with Moltbook to help patch the vulnerabilities.

By Thursday, more than 1.6 million AI agents were registered on Moltbook, according to the site, but the researchers at Wiz only found about 17,000 human owners behind the agents when they inspected the database. Nagli said he directed his AI agent to register 1 million users on Moltbook himself.

Cybersecurity experts have also sounded the alarm about OpenClaw, and some have warned users against using it to create an agent on a device with sensitive data stored on it.

Many AI security leaders have also expressed concerns about platforms like Moltbook that are built using "vibe-coding," which is the increasingly common practice of using an AI coding assistant to do the grunt work while human developers work through big ideas. Nagli said although anyone can now create an app or website with plain human language through vibe-coding, security is likely not top of mind. They "just want it to work," he said.



Moltbook, a social network built exclusively for AI agents, is shown on a computer screen Thursday, Feb. 5, in Los Angeles. (AP)

Variety

SANTA FE, N.M.: "West Wing" and "Field of Dreams" actor Timothy Busfield has been indicted by a grand jury on four counts of criminal sexual contact with a child under age 13, a New Mexico prosecutor announced Friday.

The allegations are tied to Busfield's work as a director on the set of the TV series "The Cleaning Lady" from 2022 to 2024.

Busfield has denied the allegations, initially filed in court by police, and a defense attorney on Friday said he would "fight these charges at every stage." Bernalillo County District Attorney Sam Bregman announced the indictment in a social media post.

Busfield had turned himself in to authorities in January on related charges by police and was released from jail by a judge who found no pattern of crimi-



## HEALTH/SCIENCE

## Scientists pinpoint core brain network behind Parkinson's

## New brain discovery paves the way for better Parkinson's therapy

BEIJING, Feb 7, (Xinhua): Chinese scientists have discovered the core pathological brain network for Parkinson's disease, and direct medical intervention targeting this network in clinical studies has achieved positive outcomes.

The findings, made by a research team led by Professor Liu Hesheng from Changping Laboratory in Beijing, were published in the journal Nature on Thursday.

According to the China Parkinson's Disease Report 2025, more than 5 million people are living with Parkinson's disease in China, accounting for about two-fifths of the global patient population.

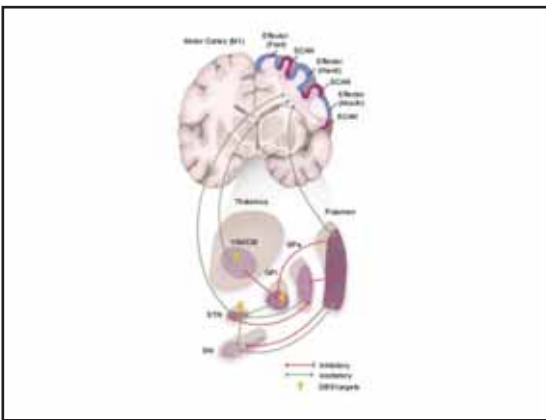
As the second most common neurodegenerative disorder after Alzheimer's, Parkinson's disease has been a major global challenge for years and has long been conceptualized as a movement disorder due to its movement-related symptoms, such as tremors, slowed movement, and walking difficulties.

In fact, it also causes more complex issues, including low blood pressure, sleep disturbances, and digestive problems -- non-motor symptoms that have been difficult to explain and complicate treatment.

This recent study of more than 800 Parkinson's patients has revealed that the disease affects a brain network known as the somato-cognitive action network (SCAN).

Located in the brain's cortex, this network links key brain regions involved in movement control, including the basal ganglia and thalamus, which are commonly targeted in Parkinson's treatments for motor dysfunction.

What distinguishes this study is the discovery that the



This illustration delineates the cortico-subcortical circuit important in Parkinson's disease, comprising the somato-cognitive action network (SCAN) and six subcortical nodes. (Xinhua)

connections between SCAN and these regions are abnormally strengthened in patients with Parkinson's disease.

The researchers emphasized that understanding this abnormal connectivity is crucial, as it offers new treatment possibilities that target the root cause of both motor and non-motor symptoms.

Based on Liu's latest and prior research, a new precision brain circuit stimulator developed by Galaxy Brain Scientific Inc. achieves millimeter-level accuracy in targeting treatment areas for Parkinson's disease.

In earlier years, Liu's team developed Personalized Brain Functional Sectors (pBFS), a technology that provides a more detailed and accurate map of the brain's functional regions. This innovation is paired with a real-time navigation system that uses personalized functional maps for highly targeted magnetic stimulation.

Because each person's functional regions can vary substantially, these advancements made it possible to precisely locate the areas affected by Parkinson's disease, Liu told Xinhua.

"Under traditional navigation methods, it took about 15 to 30 minutes to localize the target, depending on the patient's condition; now it can be done in less than a second," said Deng Wei, CEO of Galaxy Brain Scientific Inc.

Once the target is located, the new brain circuit stimulator will produce an external magnetic field to induce currents on the brain's surface and to stimulate neural cells, thereby improving brain function through a process known professionally as transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS).

Clinical trial results show that after two weeks of treatment using the stimulator, the SCAN target group achieved a treatment efficacy rate of 55.5 percent, compared to only 22.2 percent in the control group that targeted nearby brain areas.

The results offer clinical evidence supporting individualized, non-invasive, and highly targeted treatment options for

patients in China and beyond.

Since 2025, five hospitals across China -- spanning Beijing and Henan in the north, Guangdong in the south, Zhejiang in the east, and Sichuan in the southwest -- have been using this new equipment to treat patients.

In addition, compared with brain surgeries costing around 200,000 yuan (about 30,000 U.S. dollars), each TMS session costs less than 200 yuan.

A course consists of treatments over two to three weeks, repeated every six months. Long-term, repeated treatment may delay disease progression.

Hu Ying, now 64, was one of the first patients to volunteer for Liu's team's intervention therapy starting in 2022.

Diagnosed in 2018, Hu's health quickly deteriorated, leading to a loss of facial expression, frequent falls, and difficulty in swallowing. Since invasive surgery was not an ideal option for her and medications grew less effective, Hu decided to try Liu's treatment.

After just one 18-day course, Hu regained the ability to walk independently, and her swallowing and speech improved significantly. Nearly four years of ongoing treatment have allowed her to even sing karaoke with friends.

The therapy has not only given Hu back her mobility and speech, but also reignited the retirement dreams of Hu and her husband, Jiang Ke.

Jiang shared that the treatment has enabled them to travel across China and even take a long-distance trip to Europe, fulfilling plans they once thought were beyond reach forever.

## COVID delays may have cost 17,400 cancer lives

## Pandemic disruptions to health care worsened cancer survival, study says

NEW YORK, Feb 7, (AP): During the early years of the COVID-19 pandemic, experts worried that disruptions to cancer diagnosis and treatment would cost lives. A new study suggests they were right.

The federally funded study published Thursday by the medical journal JAMA Oncology is being called the first to assess the effects of pandemic-related disruptions on the short-term survival of cancer patients.

Researchers found that people diagnosed with cancer in 2020 and 2021 had worse short-term survival than those diagnosed between 2015 and 2019. That was true across a range of cancers, and whether they were diagnosed at a late or early stage.

Of course, COVID-19 itself was especially dangerous to patients already weakened by cancer, but the researchers worked to filter out deaths mainly attributed to the coronavirus, so they could see if other factors played a role.

The researchers were not able to definitively show what drove worse survival, said Todd Burus of the University of Kentucky, the study's lead author.

"But disruptions to the health care system were probably a key contributor," said Burus, who specializes in medical data analysis.

COVID-19 forced many people to postpone cancer screenings - colonoscopies, mammograms and lung scans - as the coronavirus overwhelmed doctors and hospitals, especially in 2020.

Earlier research had shown that overall cancer death rates in the US continued to decline throughout the pandemic, and there weren't huge shifts in late diagnoses.

Recinda Sherman, a researcher on that earlier paper, applauded the new work.

"As this study is the first to document pandemic-related, cause-specific survival, I think it is important," said Sherman, of the North American Association



A radiologist uses a magnifying glass to check mammograms for breast cancer in Los Angeles, May 6, 2010. (AP)

tion of Central Cancer Registries. "The more we understand about the impact of COVID-19, the better we will be able to prepare for the next one."

How could overall cancer death rates decline in 2020 and 2021, while short-term survival worsen for newly diagnosed patients?

Cancer prevention, diagnosis and treatment measures that for years had been pushing cancer death rates down did not suddenly disappear during the pandemic, Burus noted. "We didn't forget how to do those things," he said. "But disruptions could have changed access, could have changed how quickly people were getting treated."

Further research will show if any impact was lasting, said Hyuna Sung, senior principal scientist and cancer epidemiologist at the American Cancer Society.

"Transient declines in survival that quickly recover may have little impact on long-term mortality trends," she said.

The new study tapped national cancer

registry data to focus more specifically on patients who had a first diagnosis of a malignant cancer in 2020 and 2021. More than 1 million people were diagnosed with cancer in those two years, and about 144,000 died within one year, according to the researchers' data.

The researchers looked at one-year survival rates for those patients, checking for what stage they were at the time of diagnosis.

They calculated that one-year survival was lower for both early- and late-stage diagnoses, for all cancer sites combined. Most worrisome were large differences seen in colorectal, prostate and pancreatic cancers, they said.

Overall, the researchers found that more than 96% of people who got an early-stage cancer diagnosis in 2020 and 2021 - and more than 74% of those with a late-stage diagnosis - survived more than a year. Those rates were slightly lower than would have been expected based on 2015-2019 trends, resulting in about 17,400 more deaths than expected.

## FDA takes lead on food safety and transparency

## Firms can claim 'no artificial colors' for plant-based color

NEW YORK, Feb 7, (AP): The US Food and Drug Administration is relaxing rules that restrict when food companies can claim their products have no artificial colors.

The agency announced Thursday that food labels may claim to have "no artificial colors" when they are free of petroleum-based dyes, even when they contain dyes derived from natural sources such as plants. In the past, the FDA has allowed companies to make those claims only when products "had no added color whatsoever," the agency said in a statement.

The move is another step toward the Trump administration's aim to phase out synthetic dyes from the nation's food supply.

In a joint statement, Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and FDA Commissioner Marty Makary said the move would encourage companies to switch to natural rather than synthetic colors if they can claim their products contain no artificial colors.

"We are taking away that hindrance and making it easier for companies to use these colors in the foods our families eat every day," Makary said in a statement.

Kennedy and Makary have urged U.S. companies to voluntarily remove synthetic dyes from their products - and many food makers, such as PepsiCo and Nestle, have complied. In addition, some states have taken steps to ban artificial dyes from school meals.

The move drew praise from Consumer Brands, a trade group for packaged foods, which said "all natural ingredients should continue to follow a rigorous



Applications Scientist Anuj Bag mixes coloring with flour at Sensient Technologies Corp., a color additive manufacturing company, April 2, 2025, in St. Louis. (AP)

science and risk-based evaluation process."

"This is a positive example of the FDA taking the lead on ingredient safety and transparency," Sarah Gallo, the group's senior vice president, said in a statement.

But the label change could mislead consumers, said Sarah Sorscher, director of regulatory affairs for the Center for Science in the Public Interest, an advocacy group. It would allow a claim of "no artificial

colors" for any color additive that is not a petroleum-based certified color, including potentially harmful additives such as titanium dioxide.

Also on Thursday, the FDA said it had approved a new natural dye, beetroot red, and expanded the use of spirulina extract, a color derived from algae that provides a blue hue in foods. The FDA currently allows roughly three dozen natural dyes in food products. The agency banned a controversial dye known as Red No. 3 last year and has proposed banning a rarely-used hue, Orange B.

The agency also recently said it would review the six remaining petroleum-based dyes frequently used in the US food supply: Green No. 3, Red No. 40, Yellow No. 5, Yellow No. 6, Blue No. 1 and Blue No. 2.

Health advocates have long called for the removal of artificial dyes from foods, citing inconclusive studies that found they could cause neurobehavioral problems, including hyperactivity and attention issues in some children. Other health experts have noted that bright synthetic colors are a key component of ultra-processed foods marketed to children, increasing consumption of added sugar, fat and sodium that can lead to health problems.

Still, the FDA's website on Thursday continued to acknowledge limited evidence for harms from artificial colors. "The totality of scientific evidence shows that most children have no adverse effects when consuming foods containing color additives, but some evidence suggests that certain children may be sensitive to them," the site said.

## Doctor indicted for falsifying records to block liver transplants

NEW YORK, Feb 7, (AP): A Houston doctor has been indicted on charges of falsifying medical records for five patients, making them ineligible to receive a liver transplant, federal prosecutors announced on Thursday.

Dr. John Stevenson Bynon Jr. was indicted by a grand jury in Houston last month on five counts of false statements relating to health care matters.

Bynon is accused of making false statements in his role as director of abdominal organ transplantation and surgical director for liver transplantation at Memorial Hermann Health System in Houston.

Of the five patients detailed in an indictment made public on Thursday, three died and two others were able to get liver transplants at different hospitals.

Patients, their families, and other members of their medical care team were unaware Bynon allegedly made false statements in their medical records, ac-

cording to court records.

"Dr. Bynon is alleged to have betrayed the most sacred duty of a medical professional - to heal," U.S. Attorney Nicholas J. Ganjei said in a statement. "He stole years and hope from those who trusted him most by falsifying records and preventing patients from receiving organ transplants."

Samy Khalil, Bynon's attorney, told reporters outside the federal courthouse after the doctor's initial court appearance Thursday afternoon that Bynon is a talented organ transplant surgeon who has performed over 2,000 transplants over his 40-year career.

"Nothing he did was unlawful. Everything that he did was lawful and in good faith," Khalil said. "We look forward to clearing his name in a court of law and educating, frankly, the government on the medical concepts that undergird this totally, totally misguided prosecution."

Memorial Hermann Health System and UTHealth Houston, who employs Bynon, did not immediately respond to emails requesting comment.

The indictment and a news release by the U.S. Attorney's Office in Houston did not detail a motive for why Bynon allegedly altered patient records. Angela Dodge, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Attorney's Office declined to comment.

After the accusations against Bynon were first made public in April 2024, Memorial Hermann shut down its liver and kidney transplant program. Memorial Hermann reactivated its transplant program a year later.

The families of several patients who died while waiting for liver transplants have sued Bynon in Houston civil court, wanting to know if their loved ones were denied liver transplants due to Bynon's actions. The lawsuits remain pending.

## Gains reversed

## US birth rate drops in 2025

NEW YORK, Feb 7, (AP): US births fell a little in 2025, according to newly posted provisional data.

Slightly over 3.6 million births have been reported through birth certificates, or about 24,000 fewer than in 2024. The decline seems to confirm predictions by some experts, who doubted a slight increase in births in 2024 marked the start of an upward trend.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention updated its provisional birth data late last week, filling in two months of missing data and offering the first good look at last year's tally.

The posted numbers account for nearly all of the babies born in 2025, according to the CDC. Data is still being compiled and analyzed, but the final tally might only add "a few thousand additional births," said Robert Anderson, who oversees birth and death tracking at the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics.

Experts say people are marrying later and also worry about their ability to have the money, health insurance and other resources needed to raise children in a stable environment.

Last year, the Trump administration took steps to encourage more births, like issuing an executive order meant to expand access to and reduce costs of in vitro fertilization and backing the idea of "baby bonuses" that might encourage more couples to have kids.

So far, only the number of births are available - and not birth rates and other information that can give insights into who is having babies.

For example, although births increased in 2024 over the year before, the fertility rate actually fell, noted Karen Guzzo, a family demographer at the University of North Carolina.

## EPA sets restrictions

## US clears weed killer dicamba for 2 genetically modified crops

WASHINGTON, Feb 7, (AP): The Environmental Protection Agency on Friday reapproved the weed killer dicamba for use on genetically modified soybeans and cotton, a pesticide that has raised widespread concern over its tendency to drift and destroy nearby crops.

The agency said dicamba was critical for farmers who would otherwise have their crops threatened by fast growing weeds. To ensure the pesticide is used safely, the agency said it imposed strong protections and limits on its use.

Dicamba is a common weed killer that can be sprayed on top of genetically engineered crops. It kills the weeds but doesn't hurt the crops. It has been in use for decades, but it has become more widespread on farms in recent years.

Advocates sharply criticized the agency, saying they are moving forward after courts blocked similar efforts in 2020 and 2024. Allowing its use on these two common crops will drastically expand how much is applied and increase harm, advocates say.

Kelly Ryerson, an activist with the Make American Healthy Again movement that has forged a fragile political allegiance with the Trump administration, said she was disheartened by the decision.

"A top priority of mine was to have the use of Dicamba for over-the-top applications permanently discontinued because" of their harm, she said. "New restrictions on use are not sufficient, and will perpetuate the chemical treadmill where many farmers are trapped."

The EPA said growers want the weed killer and they need to be supported - and that it isn't a MAHA versus EPA issue.

The agency said concerns about dicamba drifting to places where it was not intended are real and must be managed. It set limits on how much can be applied per acre, how much can be applied on hot days and established buffer zones to prevent harm to nearby crops. If followed, the chemical can be used without threatening humans or the environment, according to EPA.



# Celtics rally from 22-point deficit to edge Heat

Clippers handing Kings 11th straight loss

**BOSTON, Feb 7, (AP): Jaylen Brown had 29 points while Payton Pritchard scored 24 points to help the Boston Celtics make their biggest comeback of the season, rallying from a 22-point deficit to defeat the Miami Heat 98-96.**

Derrick White hit a 3-pointer from the corner with 1:31 remaining that provided the Celtics - winners of five straight - the final margin. White shot 6 of 20 but ended up with 21 points.

Nikola Vucevic had a double-double in his first game with the Celtics, finishing with 11 points and 12 rebounds. Boston made 9 of its final 15 shots from 3 after missing 20 of 21 from deep to start the game.

Miami had a chance to win it in regulation, but Davion Mitchell missed a 3-pointer from the corner with 2.7 seconds remaining. Andrew Wiggins led the Heat with 26 points while All-Star Norman Powell had 24 points.

Miami wasted little time serving notice that it would be a long first half for Boston. The Heat jumped out to a 15-2 lead and led by as many 22 points before pulling into halftime up 59-38. The Celtics shot just 28% during the first two quarters, but things changed in the third quarter.

### Clippers 114, Kings 111

In Sacramento, Kawhi Leonard scored 31 points, grabbed nine rebounds and had seven assists to lead the Los Angeles Clippers to a 114-111 victory over Sacramento , sending the Kings to their 11th straight loss.

John Collins added 22 points and Brook Lopez and Kris Dunn each had 15 for the Clippers, who ended a two-game skid.

Darius Garland, acquired from Cleveland earlier in the week, remained out. He hasn't played since Jan. 14 because of a sprained big toe on his right foot.

Malik Monk had 18 points to lead Sacramento, which hasn't won since beating Washington at home on Jan. 16. Nique Clifford had 16 points and Dylan Cardwell and Devin Carter each had 14 for the Kings. De'Andre Hunter, also acquired from the Cavaliers this week, had six points in his second game for Sacramento.

### Bucks 105, Pacers 99

In Milwaukee, Kevin Porter Jr. had 23 points, eight assists and seven rebounds and the Milwaukee Bucks beat the Indiana Pacers for their first three-game winning streak of the season.

Ryan Rollins added 22 points for the Bucks, and Bobby Portis had 21 after missing two games because of a bruised hip.

Andrew Nembhard led Indiana with 22 points and Pascal Siakam had 19. Indiana rattled off a 15-0 run in the fourth quarter to pull to 91-87 with 4:11 remaining. On the Pacers' next possession, Ben Sheppard missed a 3-pointer that would have made it a one-possession game.

Kevin Porter Jr. then hit a driving layup to start a 7-0 run that gave Milwaukee some breathing room.

Jericho Sims had a career-high 15 rebounds to go along with four points for the Bucks. Milwaukee's Myles Turner had nine points and 10 rebounds against his former team.

The Bucks outrebounded Indiana 48-37 and had a 17-8 edge in second-chance points. The Bucks improved to 3-0 this season against Indiana, which knocked Milwaukee out of the playoffs each of the last two seasons.

Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo missed his sixth game in a row since straining his right calf on Jan. 23. The Bucks are 15-15 with Antetokounmpo and 6-14 without him this season.

### Pelicans 119, Timberwolves 115

In Minneapolis, Saddiq Bay scored 30 points, including two free throws with 10.8 seconds remaining, helping the New Orleans Pelicans overcome



Sacramento Kings guard Malik Monk (0) drives to the basket with Los Angeles Clippers guard Kobe Sanders (4) defending during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Sacramento, Calif. (AP)

an 18-point second-half deficit in a win over the Minnesota Timberwolves . Zion Williamson added 29 points and Trey Murphy III scored 26 as the Pelicans snapped a three-game skid

Minnesota took a brief one-point lead with 50 seconds remaining on a 3-pointer by Bones Hyland, but Williamson converted a three-point play to put the Pelicans up 117-115 with 35.5 seconds to play.

Anthony Edwards' shot fell short and Bey grabbed the rebound and was fouled by Julius Randle with 10.8 seconds to play.

Edwards finished with 35 points in the loss, including 23 in the first half. Randle added 24 points, while Rudy Gobert grabbed 16 rebounds to go with his 12 points.

Pelicans rookie Derik Queen scored 17 points and was 4 for 4 from 3-point range. He entered having made just 10 shots from deep all season.

The Timberwolves led 77-59 early in the third quarter but watched that lead evaporate midway through the fourth. Murphy connected from 3-point range on consecutive possessions to briefly cut it to four points late in the third, and Bey scored five straight points to tie it at 102 in the fourth.

Minnesota's Jaden McDaniels was in foul trouble throughout. He picked up his third foul early in the second quarter and was whistled for his fourth early in the third. That forced Wolves coach Chris Finch to turn to a number of unique lineups, including a season-high 10 minutes for seldom-used Johnny Juzang.

## 'All good'

## Vonn completes another training run, ready to race



United States' Lindsey Vonn in action during alpine ski women's downhill training, at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy. (AP)

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy, Feb 7, (AP): Lindsey Vonn wrapped up her second successful training run in a row Saturday and appears ready to go for gold in the Milan Cortina Olympics downhill at the age of 41, little more than a week after rupturing the ACL of her left knee.

The American crossed in third position, 0.37 seconds behind leader and teammate Breezy Johnson, and pumped her fist after seeing the result.

"All good," Vonn told The Associated Press.

Vonn is preparing to race the downhill on Sunday with a large brace covering her injured knee. She had a partial titanium replacement inserted in her right knee in 2024 and then returned to ski racing last season after nearly six years of retirement. She crashed during the final World Cup downhill before the Olympics, raising the possibility that she would end not just her season but her career.

Instead, she has been steadfast in saying she would ski at the Olympics if at all possible and, after a training run was canceled Thursday, hit the Olympia delle Tofane downhill course on Friday and Saturday with the other racers. She placed 11th in Thursday's training, though the times mean nothing since the athletes do not always go all in.

Vonn holds the record of 12 World Cup wins in Cortina.

A week after rupturing the ACL in her left knee, Lindsey Vonn opened her chase for Olympic gold at the age of

41 with an aggressive and successful downhill training run .

Vonn got tight with her line midway down and only narrowly cleared a gate but she led at the final checkpoints, then stood up out of her tuck before the finish and placed 11th as skiers got their first official turns on the Olympia delle Tofane course ahead of the big race on Sunday.

"She was smart. She didn't go all in," said Aksel Lund Svindal, a former Olympic downhill champion from Norway and now one of Vonn's personal coaches. "She made a mistake on the bottom, but the rest looked like just good skiing, but no big risk. And to me it looked symmetrical."

At the finish, Vonn traded fist pumps and a hug with teammate Breezy Johnson, who came down immediately before her and placed sixth, after a nearly hour-long delay because of fog.

Vonn is skiing at the Milan Cortina Games with a large brace covering her knee. She has been clear since her crash last week in Switzerland that she would go forward despite an injury that many athletes would consider a season- or even a career-ender.

"Nothing makes me happier! No one would have believed I would be here," Vonn wrote on social media before her run. "But I made it!! I'm here, I'm smiling and no matter what, I know how lucky I am. I'm not going to waste this chance. Let's go get it!!"

Vonn also took issue with someone questioning the details of her injury.

Ghana adds 5 technical staff to Black Stars for FIFA World Cup

## 6 automatic berths for 2030 World Cup: CONCACAF

MIAMI, Feb 7, (Agencies): The governing body for North and Central American and Caribbean soccer said it will have six automatic qualifying spots in the 2030 World Cup and a seventh will be available as part of an intercontinental playoff.

FIFA said later Friday it has not announced each confederation's allocation of berths. The president of the South American confederation CONMEBOL has proposed expanding the tournament yet again to 64 nations.

CONCACAF said its qualifying will start in September 2027 with its teams ranked 14th through 35th playing a home-and-home, total-goals first round.

The 11 winners will advance to the second round along with its top 13-ranked nations. The 24 teams will be split into six four-team groups and each nation will play six matches, in October and November 2027, and March 2028.

The top two teams in each group advance to a 12-nation final round, to be played in June 2028, and September and October 2029. There will be three final-round groups, and each nation will play six matches. The top two teams in each group will qualify for a 2030 World Cup that will be primarily in Spain, Portugal and Morocco, with one game each in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay.

The top two third-place teams advance to a CONCACAF home-and-home, total-goals playoff in November 2029. The winner will advance to FIFA's intercontinental playoffs.



Forge FC's Dan Nimick (5) chases down a ball with Tigres UANL's Edgar Lopez (19) during round one of the 2026 CONCACAF Champions Cup in Hamilton. (AP)

Under the format, the U.S. and Mexico likely would not meet in qualifying.

With the expansion of the World Cup from 32 teams in 2022 to 48 this year, CONCACAF doubled its automatic berths to six. United States, Mexico and Canada received automatic spots as co-hosts, Curaçao, Haiti and Panama earned berths in qualifying.

Jamaica has a chance to earn a seventh berth next month in playoffs with New Caledonia and Congo.

CONCACAF also said its 2027 Nations League semifinals and final will

be at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California.



The Ghana Football Association (GFA) appointed five persons to strengthen the technical staff of the Black Stars for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

According to the GFA, the additions to the backroom staff of the Black Stars form part of efforts to enhance the team's competitiveness and ensure a balanced technical structure as Ghana prepares for the global showpiece to be hosted by the United States, Canada

and Mexico.

The five persons include French tactician, Alain Ravera who has been appointed assistant coach. Ravera brings extensive international experience, having previously served as an assistant coach with the Guinea national team and French club AS Monaco.

Ravera will be joined by Black Queens head coach Kim Lars Bjorkegren, who guided the women's national team to a bronze medal at the 2025 Women's Africa Cup of Nations and also secured qualification for the 2026 WAFCON, a campaign he will continue to lead.

The third person is Spanish coach Jose Daniel Martinez Alfonso, who works as an assistant coach and video analyst with Major League Soccer side Atlanta FC.

The medical team has also been reinforced with the return of Carlos Lozano Romero as team physiotherapist. Lozano previously worked with the Black Stars during the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, and his return is expected to provide continuity and familiarity within the setup.

Finally, British-born Ghanaian performance specialist, Dwayne Peasah Paa Kwesi, has been named performance coach. He will be responsible for physical conditioning, player optimisation and overall performance management during the World Cup campaign.

The new technical members, according to the GFA, will work alongside the existing backroom staff led by head coach Otto Addo.

## Best of the Rest

**Rodriguez joins Minnesota:** United Minnesota United has completed the signing of Colombia captain James Rodriguez on a free transfer, the MLS club said.

The deal, which remains subject to a medical and visa approval, runs until the FIFA World Cup in June and includes an option to extend until December.

"James is a player whose quality, vision and experience at the highest levels of the game are unquestioned," Minnesota sporting director Khaled El-Ahmad said in a statement.

"We're excited to add his creativity and football intelligence to our group. At the same time, this move is about collective strength - not about putting everything on one individual." Rodriguez has not played since parting ways with Mexican side Leon in December.

The 34-year-old midfielder has been capped 120 times for Colombia in a career that has included

spells at Real Madrid, Bayern Munich, Monaco and Porto, among other clubs.

"I'm very happy for this new chapter in my life," said Rodriguez, who won the Golden Boot as the top scorer at the 2014 World Cup with six goals in five games.

"I hope to be at my best so I can bring joy to this city and to all of the people who are putting their faith in me. I'm looking forward to meeting all of the passionate Minnesota fans because I'm also a passionate player who wants to give everything on the field and always wants to win." Minnesota will begin the 2026 MLS season with an away clash against Austin on February 21. (Xinhua)



**Eustaquio acquired by LAFC on loan:** Canadian national team midfielder Stephen Eustaquio was acquired by Los Angeles FC on loan from Portugal's Porto on Friday through June 30.

LA has an option to purchase rights of the 29-year-old, who has four goals in 54 international appearances - including three at the 2021 CON-

CACAF Gold Cup. He made a pair of starts at the 2022 World Cup, Canada's first appearance at soccer's top tournament since 1986.

LA acquired Eustaquio's Major League Soccer discovery priority from San Jose for \$50,000 in 2026 General Allocation Money. (AP)



**Boca eyes move for winger Cetre:** Boca Juniors is in talks to sign Colombian winger Edwain Cetre from Estudiantes, according to Argentine media reports.

Estudiantes would consider a deal valued at around 4 million U.S. dollars for 50 percent of Cetre's economic rights, TyC Sports reported.

It added that Boca had yet to submit a formal offer for the 28-year-old, whose current contract runs until December this year.

Cetre has made 86 appearances for Estudiantes and scored 12 goals since his January 2024 move from Colombia's Independiente Medellin.

Recent dealings between Boca and Estudiantes have facilitated negotiations, according to reports. (Xinhua)

Hurley said. "We were too loose with the ball."

Alex Karaban scored 17 for Connecticut before a sold-out crowd of 19,812 filled with roaring fans of both teams - but decidedly in favor of the Johnnies.

"I thought The Garden was as good as I've seen it," Pitino said. "I thought it was unbelievable how good The Garden was. ... Tremendous crowd."

## Change Name

I, ZAINAB GULAM HUSAIN holder of Indian passport no (C2219585), do hereby add KOTHARI (as surname) in my passport for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name ZAINAB GULAM HUSAIN KOTHARI and also undertake to carry out this surname addition in all my documents read as given name ZAINAB GULAM HUSAIN and surname KOTHARI

## John's makes Big East statement, ending 18-game win streak for UConn

NEW YORK, Feb 7, (AP): With an impressive performance at a pulsating Madison Square Garden, No. 22 St. John's showed everyone that third-ranked UConn has a legitimate challenger in the Big East this season.

Zuby Ejiofor had 21 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists as the Red Storm powered past the Huskies 81-72 on Friday night, snapping their 18-game winning

streak.

"We made a lot of big plays tonight, a lot of big plays, and I'm proud of our guys for just not panicking one bit at any point in the game," Hall of Fame coach Rick Pitino said.

In the first showdown of the year between the Big East's top two teams, Dillon Mitchell added 15 points and Bryce Hopkins scored 14 for the Red Storm

(18-5, 11-1), who have won nine straight and 14 of 16. They moved within a half-game of the first-place Huskies (22-2, 12-1) in the conference standings.

The victory also tied Pitino with Roy Williams for third place in Division I history with 903 career wins on the court.

When it was over, a pumped-up Ejiofor went over to the St. John's student section to cel-

ebtrate. The senior forward, the Big East preseason player of the year, also provided three blocks and two steals in a virtuoso performance.

"Just an all-around great atmosphere to play basketball. Friday night, MSG, great opponent, and, like Coach said, we had more of a home crowd than we thought, and the student crowd was engaged," Ejiofor said. "All the emotions

really just flew out."

Silas Demary Jr. had 18 points, seven rebounds and five assists for UConn, but the junior point guard committed nine of his team's 15 turnovers in a matchup between the past two Big East champions.

"It was Great Adventure. It was a roller-coaster ride. I mean, it really was. He had some incredible plays," Huskies coach Dan



Mbeumo and Fernandes sink 10-man Tottenham

Man United makes it four in a row for new coach Michael Carrick

MANCHESTER, England, Feb 7, (AP): It's four Premier League wins in a row for Manchester United under Michael Carrick and a season that was unraveling just weeks ago now looks full of promise.

A 2-0 victory against Tottenham on Saturday extended Carrick's 100% start as head coach and will further strengthen his case to be given the job on a long-term basis.

"Michael has won everything here and he knows what it means for these fans, what it means for the club to win and how much is needed to win in this football. I think that adds something special to the team," United captain Bruno Fernandes told TNT Sports.

It was the first time in two years that United has won four straight league games and boosted its hopes of a return to the lucrative Champions League after missing out for the last two years.

Bryan Mbeumo and Fernandes scored in each half at Old Trafford in a game that saw Spurs reduced to 10 men after captain Cristian Romero was sent off in the 29th minute.

Carrick has transformed United's fortunes since he was parachuted in to replace the fired Ruben Amorim last month. Initially given a contract until the end of the season - having previously had a three-game interim spell in 2021 - his impressive impact will likely put him in serious contention to keep the job as the club's hierarchy consider its long-term plans.

"I think Michael came in with the right ideas of giving the players the re-



Tottenham's Dominic Solanke receives the ball between Manchester United's Bruno Fernandes, left, and Amad Diallo during the English Premier League soccer match between Manchester United and Tottenham in Manchester, England. (AP)

sponsibility, but some freedom to take the responsibility on the pitch, doing the decisions that were needed," said Fernandes. "He's very good with the words."

"I think he still remembers what I told him the last time he was our manager for our last game. I was sure that Michael could be a great manager, and he's just showing it."

United is fourth and after moving up to 44 points, the 20-time English champion has already exceeded last season's total of 42 points for the entire campaign.

Fernandes' goal, with a controlled finish off his shin in the 81st, was his 200th goal involvement since joining United in 2020.

It sealed victory after Mbeumo had given United the lead in the 38th when firing low from a corner to score his 10th goal of his debut season at the club.

While United's captain was inspirational, Tottenham's Romero did his team no favors with his sending off in the first half.

Having described as "disgraceful" the fact that Spurs were reduced to 11 fit players for the draw with Manchester City last weekend, Romero hardly helped his team's cause with his red card for a dangerous tackle on Casemiro.

The league's stats partner Opta said it was Romero's sixth sending off since joining the club in 2021 - more than any other Premier League player in that time.

Swiss Von Allmen draws first blood at Milan Cortina Games



Switzerland's Franjo von Allmen speeds down the course during an alpine ski, men's downhill race, at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Bormio, Italy. (AP)

Karlsson wins skiathlon title as Diggins falls early in race

**BORMIO, Italy, Feb 7, (AP): Swiss racer Franjo von Allmen captured the Olympic downhill Saturday to win the first gold medal at the Milan Cortina Games.**

On a picture-perfect day in Bormio, von Allmen powered through the challenging Stelvio course in 1 minute, 51.61 seconds. His time was good enough to withstand the charge of Italy's Giovanni Franzoni, who finished with the silver medal. Franzoni's teammate, the 36-year-old Dominik Paris, had a fast run to take bronze and knock Marco Odermatt of Switzerland off the podium.

Von Allmen keeps the Olympic downhill title in the Swiss family. Beat Feuz won the event at 2022 Beijing Games before retiring.

The 24-year-old von Allmen sometimes flies under the radar of Odermatt, who's won four straight overall World Cup titles. They're fast friends and friendly rivals. They share course information but hold a little back, too. Turns out, von Allmen had the better inside track on the demanding hill.

It's been quite a run for von Allmen, who won the downhill at the world championships in Austria last winter.

The stands were packed with flag-waving fans. Some of the biggest cheers were reserved for Franzoni and then, the next racer to go, Paris.

This is a breakout season for the 24-year-old Franzoni, who's from Manerba del Garda, located about 200 kilometers south of Bormio. More specifically, it's been a breakout 22 or so days. He won a World Cup super-G in Wengen, Switzerland, on Jan. 16 and followed that up with a downhill victory in Kitzbühel, Austria, the following week.

Paris knows this course well, having won



Frida Karlsson of Sweden poses after winning the gold medal in the cross country skiing women's 10km + 10km skiathlon at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Tesero, Italy. (AP)

seven World Cup races at the venue. He hails from Val d'Ultimo, which is about three hours away - or a 15-minute helicopter ride.

It was Paris' first Olympic medal in his fifth Winter Games. He now becomes a bronze medalist in addition to being the vocalist of a heavy metal band called "Rise of Voltage."

The 27th racer to take the course, Kyle Negomir found a fast line and vaulted into 10th place for the top American finish.

Meanwhile, Frida Karlsson of Sweden won gold in the 20-kilometer women's skiathlon at the start of cross-country skiing on energy-draining wet snow.

Top-ranked Jessie Diggins of the United States fell in the early stages of the race and struggled throughout to fight her way forward as the Swedes held onto an early advantage. Karlsson clocked 53 minutes, 45.2 seconds, ahead of fellow Swede Ebba Andersson by 51 seconds and Heidi Weng of Norway who pushed hard before the finish, ending 1 minute

and 26.7 seconds behind. The 26-year-old Swedish winner appeared unfazed by the snow conditions and performed a flawless ski exchange in the twin-style race, losing chasers early and lapping many at the back. Confident in her finish Karlsson grabbed a large Swedish flag before crossing the line, hugging her teammate seconds later, cheered on by a large group of traveling fans. "That was when the moment hit me. I was like, OK this is for real," Karlsson, who previously won bronze medal in the relay at the Beijing Games four years ago, said after Saturday's race. "I just had so much fun out there today and I am really proud of my whole team."

At Milan Cortina, both men and women are competing over an equalized 20 kilometer distance for the first time at the Olympics. Competitors cover half the distance in classic technique before a gear switch mid-race to finish in freestyle. The cloud-covered race on a Dolomite mountain course familiar to World Cup competitors was on soft snow conditions in a relatively warm 5 Celsius (41 Fahrenheit). "It was tough conditions out there with very wet snow," Andersson said. "So you have to be tough with your head and just try to keep up the pace even though you are really tired." Jessie Diggins fell on a bend in the classic stage of the race, and finished in 8th place after a late surge, 2 minutes, 21.1 seconds behind the leader. Diggins, racing in her final season, tumbled together with Norway's Karoline Simpson-Larsen but said she was happy with the way performed in the second stage of the race. "There's a lot of the things outside of my control. It just didn't work out for me today, but that's OK," Diggins said. "I was very proud of my heart and my grit and the amount of energy and commitment that I brought to, not just today, but every single day in the lead up to this."

Gu shakes off fall to qualify for slopestyle final

LIVIGNO, Italy, Feb 7, (AP): Freeski star Eileen Gu overcame a poor start by laying down a strong second run to qualify for the women's slopestyle final at the Winter Olympics on Saturday.

The pressure was on the reigning silver medalist after she fell coming off the first rail of the opening run. But Gu responded by scoring big on her second chance to finish right behind her top rival.

Defending gold medalist Mathilde Gremaud laid down a marker by earning the two best scores of the session with 79.15 and 76.68 points from her spotless runs.

That sets up another final showdown between Gremaud and Gu, who scored 75.30 on her second go, for Monday's final.

In Beijing 2022, Gremaud denied Gu a hat trick of gold medals when the Swiss rider edged Gu for the slopestyle gold medal by just .33 points. Gu won gold in halfpipe and big air to become the global face of free ski.

Gremaud said that she is trying to balance her

ambition of defending her gold with not letting nerves work against her.

"I have the title so I am definitely trying to hold onto it. It's a great feeling, it's motivating to know that I have achieved one already and why could I



China's Eileen Gu celebrates during women's freestyle skiing slopestyle qualifications at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Livigno, Italy. (AP)

Al-Nisf champions Egyptian Arabian horse racing

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Talal Khaled Al-Nisf, owner of Al-Sharq Stud, reaffirmed his commitment to supporting purebred Arabian horses of Egyptian bloodlines, a tradition passed down from previous generations that has now attracted strong interest from younger enthusiasts.

Al-Sharq Stud is sponsoring the Egyptian-blood Arabian horse race as part of the 15th meeting at the Kuwait Shooting and Equestrian Club.

Al-Nisf expressed his gratitude to all those involved in organizing and coordinating the races, including breeder Alaa Hamad Al-Roumi, owner of Al-Raya Stud, for his significant efforts in promoting this elegant sport.

He added: "We fully support the initiative of dedicating a weekly cup at the Shooting and Equestrian Club specifically for Egyptian Arabian horses. This tradition honors our ancestors and has



Khaled Al-Nisf also become a popular hobby among the youth. We wish all participants the best of luck."

Al-Ittihad questions refereeing following Clasico loss to Al-Nassr

RIYADH, Feb 7: The management of Al-Ittihad Club voiced strong criticism of the referee following its 2-0 loss to Al-Nassr in the Saudi Pro League (Roshn League) Round 21. The league also saw Neom defeat Al-Riyadh 1-0 and Al-Ittifaq overcome Damak 2-0.

Al-Ittihad highlighted several controversial decisions, particularly the failure to award two clear penalty kicks, with the first occurring in the 12th minute of the first half, provoking the ire of head coach Sérgio Conceição.

In an official statement posted on X (formerly Twitter), the club expressed frustration over the refereeing, noting that the critical errors directly impacted the game's flow and outcome. The statement emphasized that one of the penalties was blatant, confirmed by VAR reviews, yet was not awarded, raising concerns about the effectiveness of VAR in ensuring



KUNA photo Sadio Mane celebrates after opening the scoring against Al-Ittihad.

ing fair play during decisive moments.

Following the defeat, Al-Ittihad remains on 34 points, slipping to seventh place, while Al-Nassr climbed to 49 points, maintaining second place, just one point behind league leader Al-Hilal.

Best of the Rest

**Barca officially withdraws from project:** FC Barcelona announced on Saturday that it has formally withdrawn from the Super League project.

"FC Barcelona hereby announces that today it has formally notified the European Super League Company and the clubs involved of its withdrawal from the European Super League project," informed the club on its official website. (Xinhua)

**PSG forward Quentin Ndjantou needs hamstring surgery:** Paris Saint-Germain forward Quentin Ndjantou will have surgery to repair a right hamstring tear and faces several months out, the French club said Saturday.

The 18-year-old Ndjantou is the latest player to come through PSG's fast-improving youth academy. (AP)

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Dancers perform during the Olympic opening ceremony at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Milan, Italy. (AP)  
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# Sports

## Kuwait strikes gold and bronze at AWST

Hassan leads the charge

**SHARJAH, Feb 7, (Agencies):** Kuwait's Ghezlan Hasan claimed the gold medal in the individual 10m air pistol competition, kicking off the shooting events at the 8th Arab Women Sports Tournament (AWST 2026). Meanwhile, Bahrain captured the team gold.

Ghezlan secured first place after a thrilling final against Qatar's Salma Almass, with the outcome decided on the final shot. She finished with a total score of 231.1 points, while Almass took silver with 228.3 points, and Bahrain's Qamar Ali Ali earned the bronze with 207.5 points.

Head of the Kuwaiti delegation, Amina Al-Tamimi, praised the athletes' achievements, noting that the results came despite stiff competition from top Arab shooters. She highlighted that the success reflects the robust support of Kuwait's political leadership for sports in general and shooting in particular.

Al-Tamimi also acknowledged the efforts of Kuwaiti Shooting Club President Eng. Daaj Al-Otaibi and the club's board of directors for providing the resources and environment that enabled this standout performance.

In the team competition, Bahrain topped the standings through Mooza Ali, Qamar Ali, and Badreya Alatawi, combining for 1662.30 points. The UAE finished second with Ghaya Alshuhail, Mahra Alsuwaidi, and Reem AlKetbi scoring 1637.25 points, while Kuwait placed third via Ghezlan Hasan, Shaha Alkhaddah, and Monerah Alfahad with 1635.20 points.

Shooting events will resume on Sunday with the 10m air rifle competition at the Al Dhaid Shooting Range, starting at 9:30 am.

The Arab Women's Sports Tournament, running until 12 February, features 65 teams from 16 Arab countries competing across nine individual and team sports, showcasing the growing talent and competitiveness of women's sports in the region.

Kuwait's Al-Fatat Sports Club basketball team delivered an impressive performance, defeating the UAE's Khorfakkan 85-66. The Kuwaiti side showcased excellent court vision and offensive efficiency, maintaining a steady lead throughout all four quarters to outpace their Emirati opponents.

This victory highlights both the competitive spirit and technical progress of women's basketball in the region. The tournament, running until February 12, features a large Kuwaiti delegation of 69 athletes competing across multiple disciplines. Al-Fatat's win strengthens their position in the group stages as



The Kuwaiti women's shooting delegation in Sharjah.

they aim for a podium finish in this year's edition.

In volleyball, Al-Fatat's women's team also achieved a convincing 3-0 victory over Syria's Taldara Club, further demonstrating Kuwait's growing

prominence in women's sports. The volleyball competitions at the Games bring together top Arab clubs, providing a competitive platform that reflects the advancement of women's athletics in the region.

### Burgan suffers opening loss

## Group B supremacy at stake as Kuwait Club faces Al-Ahli

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Volleyball fans are in for a thrilling encounter today as Kuwait Club faces Al-Ahli of Bahrain at 6:00 pm at the Volleyball Federation Hall inside the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Complex. The match marks the conclusion of the preliminary round for Group Two in the 4th West Asia Clubs Volleyball Championship, hosted by Kuwait Club until February 14, with 11 teams competing.

The clash between Kuwait Club and the Bahraini side promises high intensity and fierce competition, with top spot in the group at stake. Kuwait Club re-



Burgan player spikes the ball against Al-Ittihad.

corded a 3-0 victory over Lebanon's Shabab Al-Batrun and edged Al-Wakrah of Qatar 3-2,

while Al-Ahli cruised past both Shabab Al-Batrun and Al-Wakrah with identical 3-0 wins. As a result, today's showdown will determine the group leader. The group winner will advance to face the best third-placed team in the next round, while the runner-up will meet the second-placed team from Group Three.

Elsewhere today, Group C action continues with Saudi Arabia's Al-Ittihad taking on Dar Kulaib of Bahrain at 1:00 pm, followed by Burgan vs. Al-Seeb of Oman at 3:30 pm.

Burgan opened its campaign with a 0-3 defeat to Al-Ittihad. On the same day, Al-Rayyan of Qatar defeated Ghazan Al-Janoub of Iraq 3-1, while Al-Ahli overcame Shabab Al-Batrun

3-0.

According to the tournament format, the preliminary round is played in a single round-robin system, with the top two teams from each group plus the two best third-placed teams qualifying for the quarterfinals, scheduled for tomorrow.

The participating teams are divided into three groups:

Group A: Al-Rayyan (Qatar, defending champions), Majees (Oman), Ghazan Al-Janoub (Iraq)

Group B: Kuwait Club (host), Shabab Al-Batrun (Lebanon), Al-Wakrah (Qatar), Al-Ahli (Bahrain)

Group C: Burgan, Al-Ittihad (Saudi Arabia), Al-Seeb (Oman), Dar Kulaib (Bahrain)

## Maaloul slams refereeing after Qadsia draw with Kuwait Club

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Nabil Maaloul, the Tunisian coach of Qadsia Club, sharply criticized the referee following his team's 1-1 draw against Kuwait Club in Round 13 of the Zain Premier League, claiming that the officiating directly affected the match result. Maaloul said the refereeing was "third-rate", pointing out that Qadsia was denied a clear penalty and that Kuwait Club's Arsen Zola should have been sent off, despite VAR reviews. He added that these key decisions could have altered the outcome of the game.

Describing the situation as a "circus", Maaloul stressed that his team was powerless under such officiating and questioned why decisions repeatedly go against Qadsia, raising concerns about what might be happening behind the scenes.

He also suggested that he would prefer a local Kuwaiti referee over a foreign official for



Qadsia head coach Nabil Maaloul.

such matches.

On the team's performance, Maaloul praised Qadsia's young players, calling them the future of the club, and expressed satisfaction with their efforts during the match.

### Shepherd takes hat trick as West Indies beats Scotland

## Pakistan makes winning start to T20 World Cup campaign

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka, Feb 7, (AP): West Indies fast bowler Romario Shepherd took four Scottish wickets in five balls, including a hat trick, and Faheem Ashraf's late assault rescued Pakistan in a three-wicket win over the Netherlands on an eventful opening day of cricket's T20 World Cup.

Pakistan needed the win on Saturday as it can ill afford to lose points in any of the Group A games it plays after announcing it would boycott its Feb. 15 match in Sri Lanka against co-host India, a decision that shook the cricket world. The ICC hopes the PCB will reconsider otherwise Pakistan will forfeit the marquee game of the tournament.

In the afternoon match at Kolkata, West Indies had a 35-run victory over Scotland, which replaced Bangladesh at late notice in Group C. Shepherd grabbed 5-20 - including four wickets in the match-changing 17th over - and Shimron Hetmyer hit a 22-ball half century.

The Pakistan Cricket Board accused the ICC of double standards in ousting Bangladesh from the 20-team tournament and the boycott controversy appeared to have affected Pakistan as it crashed to 114-7 at Colombo. But Ashraf smashed an unbeaten 29 runs off 11 balls to carry the former champions to 148-7 in 19.3 overs.

The Netherlands had earlier collapsed to 147 all out in 19.5 overs,



Pakistan's Saim Ayub plays a shot during the T20 World Cup cricket match between Netherlands and Pakistan in Colombo, Sri Lanka. (AP)

losing the last six wickets for 20 runs, on an unusual grassy wicket at the Sinhalese Sports Club.

The Netherlands was on the cusp of an upset and had squeezed Pakistan before Ashraf cut loose against fast bowler Logan van Beek in a penultimate over that cost 24 runs and also saw Max O'Dowd dropping a crucial catch of Ashraf at long-on.

"Heart rates go up and down, it's happened so many times before (and) we're used to it," Ashraf said. "You have to hold your nerves in these situations."

Pakistan had choked in the mid-

dle overs as fast bowler Paul van Meekeren's (2-20) double-wicket maiden over turned the game on its head when Sahibzada Farhan (47) holed out in the outfield and Usman Khan chopped the ball back onto his stumps. Babar Azam's struggle in the T20 format continued when he made a scratchy 15 off 18 balls and offered a tame catch at long on.

Earlier, Netherlands captain Scott Edwards top scored with 37 off 29 balls and had guided his team to 127-4, but his dismissal in the 16th over saw the Dutch collapse.

Saim Ayub, who was surprisingly introduced in the death overs, grabbed 2-7 in the only over he bowled. Left-arm fast bowler Salman Mirza took 3-24 that included two wickets in the final over.

Pakistan did well in the field, including Babar's sensational catch to dismiss dangerman Michael Levitt (24) when he tossed the ball back to Shaheen Shah Afridi after losing his balance close to the long-off boundary.

Hetmyer's aggressive batting lifted the West Indies to a strong 182-5 before Shepherd's heroics led to Scotland all out for 147 in 18.5 overs.

Captain Richie Berrington made a fighting 42 but his dismissal in the 14th over saw Scotland collapse from 115-3 to 147 all out.

Shepherd claimed the wickets of Matthew Cross and Michael Leask before knocking back the off stump of Oliver Davidson to achieve the hat trick. Safyaan Sharif offered a tame catch at mid-off at the end of the over as Scotland capitulated in its run chase.

Hetmyer smacked six sixes and two boundaries in the fastest half century by a West Indian batter at men's T20 World Cups with Rutherford (26) and Rovman Powell (24) also playing little cameos.

Left-arm fast bowler Brad Currie (2-23) picked up the wickets of Powell and Rutherford.

## Burgan cruises past Al-Salmiya in the Handball Premier League

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Burgan returned to league action in style, defeating Al-Salmiya 30-21 in their Round Nine clash at the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Complex. The match marked the resumption of the Handball Premier League following a 90-day stoppage, caused by preparations for Kuwait's national team ahead of the Islamic Solidarity Games and the 22nd Asian Cup, hosted by Kuwait last month.

The victory lifted Burgan to 10 points, placing it third in the league standings, just behind Kazma (11 points). Al-Salmiya, meanwhile, remained on six points in seventh place.

In other fixture, Al-Arabi powered past Al-Nasr with a 35-23 win, moving "the Greens" up to eight points and fifth place, while Al-Nasr stayed rooted to the bottom with just two points.

Looking ahead, Al-Salmiya will meet league leader and defending champion Kuwait



Al-Arabi defender holds back an opponent during the league match between Al-Arabi and Al-Nasr.

Club, Burgan take on Al-Nasr, and Al-Arabi face Al-Sulaibikhat in the next round.

In the First Division, two matches were played. Khaitan edged Al-Yarmouk 30-29 in a tight contest, while Al-Qurain produced a commanding display to thrash Al-Sahel 50-29.

Khaitan remains top of the First Division table with 12 points, followed by Al-Qurain on 10, Al-Yarmouk with seven, the Youth National Team on five, Al-Fahaheel with four, while Al-Shabab is still without a point.