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Kuwait Amir, Crown Prince receive visiting Qatari PM



HH the Amir receives Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs.



HH the Crown Prince receives Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mosh Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Sunday at Bayan Palace His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

His Highness the Amir also received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

His Highness the Amir received First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Mosh Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, received on Sunday at Bayan Palace His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani, along with his accompanying delegation, on the occasion of their official visit to the country.

During the meeting, Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman conveyed to His Highness the Amir the warm greetings and appreciation of the Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani,

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Opinion

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

O government, the creditor, rather than the debtor, should be blamed

EVERY year when the holy month of Ramadan approaches, donation campaigns begin in order to pay the debts of those in financial distress and those burdened by debt. These campaigns have become an annual habit that portrays the State as incapable of resolving this easily manageable crisis, only if there is a strong will.

First of all, we must put things on the right path. The debtors languishing in prison for their inability to pay their debts are victims of the greed and avarice of some merchants.

Second, the State granted numerous loans to countries struggling to pay these loans. The government restructured most of these loans and even converted some of them into non-refundable grants.

Therefore, we ask: Is it the policy of Kuwait to help foreigners, while depriving its own people?

Third, the total debt of individuals does not exceed KD2 billion. This figure may seem large, but it looks very tiny when compared to the debts of other nations.

Fourth, more than 120,000 citizens are subject to court rulings due to financial cases. This fact must set the alarm bell, as it means that 10 percent of the population is facing legal action. So, this matter must be resolved, because the negative social consequences are serious and threaten the society, if left unaddressed.

Fifth, State institutions should not become debt collectors for creditors who provided their money as loans without taking the required guarantee.

The legal rule, which we have mentioned previously and reiterate here, stipulates that "he who squanders his money is more entitled to the loss." In other words, a person who neglects to safeguard his money bears the consequences of his negligence and he has no right to demand for compensation from others. This rule is derived from the Islamic legal principle, "He who squanders his money is more entitled to the loss."

Nevertheless, the State must close this file. Solutions exist, such as the government purchasing the debts of indebted individuals and allow them to pay the debts in installments divided into 30 years, just as it does with housing loans and other loans offered by the government.

With this solution, the State encourages consumer spending on one hand, and eases the burden of citizens on the other one hand.

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Kuwait and EU join forces on sustainable energy transition

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Dr. Subaib Al-Mukhaizeem stressed that energy transition is a national priority, and policies are now connected to economic stability, environmental responsibility and national security.

Al-Mukhaizeem made the statement at the opening of the 'European Union-Kuwait Green Transition Forum', which was organized by Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) in coordination with the EU-GCC Cooperation Project on the Green Transition and under the sponsorship of the Supreme Energy Committee.

Continued on Page 4



KUNA photo
Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Dr. Subaib Al-Mukhaizeem

23 economic laws still under review

By Mohammad Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: The first quarter report on the current annual plan of the State confirmed the approval of 30 out of 63 draft laws, while 33 are pending — 23 of which are on the economy or 69.7 percent of the total.

These 23 draft laws are still under discussion and review by the concerned authorities. The report included a call for the concerned authorities to expedite the completion of the legislative requirements for the plan, as the development

Continued on Page 5

BEIRUT: At least three people were rescued from the rubble of a multi-story apartment building that collapsed Sunday in the city of Tripoli in northern Lebanon, state media reported.

Rescue teams were continuing to dig through the rubble. It was not immediately clear how many people were killed or injured. (AP)

CAIRO: A limited number of Palestinians traveled between Gaza and Egypt on Sunday as the Rafah crossing reopened after a two-day closure, Egyptian state media reported.

The vital border point opened last week for the first time since mid-2024, one of the main requirements for the U.S.-backed ceasefire between Israel and Hama.

Ramadan crescent to appear 17th Feb

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: The Al-Ujairi Scientific Center announced that approved astronomical calculations indicate the conjunction of the crescent moon marking the start of Ramadan will occur before sunset on February 17, with the moon setting after sunset in Kuwait, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

According to the center, a map illustrating the moon's visibility across various countries shows that the lower part of the lunar disk over Kuwait will set simultaneously with sunset at 5:38 p.m., while the entire disk will set at 5:39 p.m., with an elongation of about one degree.

Astronomical observations further suggest that in Makkah, the moon will set roughly three minutes after sunset, while visibility is expected to be limited in other Arab and Islamic countries.

Continued on Page 5



Ministry of Social Affairs photo
Kuwait's Social Affairs Minister with British Ambassador to Kuwait.

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8, (KUNA): Social Affairs and Family and Childhood Affairs Minister Dr. Amith Al-Huwailah on Sunday met with British Ambassador to Kuwait Qusdi Rasheed to discuss enhancing cooperation and coordinating efforts in social and humanitarian work.

In a press statement after the meeting, Minister Al-Huwailah said the talks reviewed key achievements of the Ministry and existing cooperation mechanisms with State institutions to ensure integrated social services for citizens. She said the meeting also addressed Kuwait's efforts in several areas, including women's affairs, elderly care and juvenile care, affirming the Ministry's keenness to exchange expertise with the British side to raise the level of social welfare services.

The minister noted the two sides proposed organizing field visits for the UK ambassador to review work mechanisms in social care sectors, shelters and elderly care homes to learn about the nature of services provided.



Al-Jarallah hosts Reconnaissance Center and Dr. Michael Herb



9 KFH holds earnings webcast for FY-2025

8 Gulf Bank participates in 'Joy Land' initiative

Prayer Timings

Fajr 05:12 Asr 15:09
 Sunrise .. 06:33 Maghrib .. 17:32
 Zohr 12:02 Isha 18:50

Local

Kuwaiti embassies in Belgium, Mongolia, Czech, Jakarta mark National Days



Kuwaiti embassy staff in Belgium mark National Day and Liberation Day.



Kuwait Embassy staff in Mongolia.



Cake-cutting ceremony in Czech



KUWAIT photos

mats and media figures.

Kuwait Ambassador to Mongolia Mutlaq Al-Thuwaimer congratulated 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 government and people of Kuwait on the country's national celebrations.

He pointed out firm relations between Kuwait and Mongolia, which have been developing across various fields, noting willingness to further promote and develop them.

For his part, the Mongolian Minister of Food, Agriculture and Light Industries congratulated the State of Kuwait on its national celebrations, affirming close bilateral relations between both friendly countries.

In Prague, the Kuwaiti Embassy's Charge d'Affaires Falah Al-Hajraf conveyed 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 government and people of Kuwait on the country's national celebrations.

The Embassy of the State of Kuwait in Prague held a reception on the occasion of the country's celebrations, which was attended by a number of Czech ministers, mainly Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, Maj. Gen. Jaromir Zuna, as well as deputy ministers and senior officials of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The ceremony was also attended by several accredited diplomats from the Czech Republic, as well as a number of businesspeople and members of the Arab community.

In Jakarta, Kuwaiti Ambassador in Indonesia Khaled Al-Yassin extended his sincere greetings to His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince, His Highness the Prime Minister, the Kuwaiti government and people on the National Day and Liberation Day.

Addressing a ceremony held on this occasion, the ambassador underlined Kuwait's commitment to sustainable development and transition into an international financial and trade hub.

He also boasted of his country's leading humanitarian and relief role at the international level, along with the vital and praiseworthy role of Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) by offering loans and technical aid to developing countries.

For his part, Indonesian Minister of Manpower Yassierli voiced his country's commitment to strengthening long-term cooperation with the State of Kuwait, particularly in the energy, trade, investment and labor sectors.

He noted that both sides are seeking to explore new ways of cooperation between the two countries that serve their common interests.

Mol unveils new policy on expat parents visas

Status of widows, divorcees of Kuwaitis overhauled

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: The Residency Affairs General Directorate at the Ministry of Interior has initiated new procedures regarding residency permits for parents of expatriates, as well as for the foreign widows and divorcees who got married to Kuwaiti citizens, reports Al-Anba daily quoting a security source.

The source told the daily that residency

permits for the children and spouses of expatriates will be issued under Article 22 (family reunification), in accordance with the regulations and conditions set by the ministry.

He added that the residency permits for the foreign spouses of Kuwaiti citizens will be issued under Article 26, also subject to the regulations and conditions set by the ministry. He indicated that a residency permit for this category will cost KD15 per case annually.

He stated that the residency permits for foreign widows and divorcees who got married to Kuwaiti citizens will be issued under Article 28 at an annual fee of KD15, while Article 27 will be

extended to include residency permits for the maternal uncles and aunts of Kuwaiti citizens, clarifying that these categories are exempt from fees.

He went on to say that Article 29 residency permits are for the parents of expatriates. He pointed out that if their residency permits expire, they must visit the concerned department in their place of residence for the first renewal for a fee of KD300. They will later be able to renew online for the same fee.

He said foreign property owners and investors will be under a separate article and fees are currently being determined as per the Residency Law, and in accordance with the regulations and conditions set by the ministry.



of cultural and artistic segments that embodied the spirit of national belonging and highlighted Kuwait's heritage through a contemporary approach combining tradition and modernity.

These events enhance the role of culture in strengthening national identity, as well as the Centre's commitment to presenting high-quality programs fit for national occasions and suitable for all segments of society.

JACC celebrates nat'l holidays under Capital Gov. patronage

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre (JACC) held a celebration, Saturday, under the patronage of Al-Asimah Governor, Sheikh Abdullah Sallem Al-Sabah, on occasion of the national holidays.

Taking part in the event were Kuwait Finance House (KFH), the Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company, and Bait Al-Sadu.

The program featured a variety



ALGIERS, Feb 8, (KUNA): Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune affirmed that his country's relations with Kuwait are distinguished, stressing deep affection and respect for Kuwait's political leadership and noting its special place across Algerian society.

He praised, during a media interview aired by Algerian state television Saturday evening, Kuwait's commitment to ensuring the success of the Arab Summit hosted by Algeria in 2022, recalling the Kuwaiti leadership's pledge to arrive first and depart last.

Tebboune said Algeria maintains strong fraternal relations with Arab states including Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Qatar, emphasizing that Algeria defends all Arab countries and causes, viewing the Arab nation as one unified body and destiny.

He added that Algeria shares a common history with many Arab countries, stressing that any matter affecting them directly concerns Algeria and reflects its principled

stance toward Arab solidarity and collective responsibility and mutual support.

On economic prospects, Tebboune expressed optimism that Algeria's gross domestic product will exceed 400 billion dollars by 2027, while affirming continued national reforms and major projects to advance development and democratic governance nationwide objectives sustainably.

NIRC to hold 31 courses on cybersecurity and AI in '26

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Director of NATO Regional Centre and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (NIRC), Advisor Emad Al-Kanderi, affirmed the centre's commitment to capacity building, promoting experience exchange, bridging perspectives among partner countries, and developing national competencies across relevant fields.



Al-Kanderi told KUNA on Sunday that the centre hosted its second training session this year, titled "Public Affairs Fundamentals," organized with NATO's Regional Public Affairs Centre, with participation from Istanbul Cooperation Initiative members, GCC countries, and the GCC Secretariat.

He stated the course aims to equip participants with basic communication skills, introduce public affairs principles, teach media engagement techniques, enhance professional media interaction, and improve institutional communication, with

Workers Vision List to constitute KOC board

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Following the recount of votes in the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) Workers Union elections, the Petroleum and Petrochemical Workers Union announced the victory of the Workers' Vision List, thereby, forming the KOC Workers Union Board of Directors for the 2026-2028 term.

The board consists of Dhari Ahmad Ishaq Al-Kandari as Chairman, Mohammad Mansour Al-Muhaysin Al-Shammary as Vice Chairman for Technical Affairs, Abdullah Rakan Fallah Al-Taibai as Vice Chairman for Administrative Affairs and Services, Fallah Faisal Hamad Al-Hajri as Secretary, Bandar Nasser Suleiman Al-Shuaiel as Assistant Secretary for Headquarters Affairs, Ali Mohammad Mubarak Al-Ajmi as Treasurer, and Mohammad Abdulwahab Muhamma Al-Muhamma as Assistant Treasurer and Head of the Fellowship Fund Committee.

Saad Bajad Al-Dosari was appointed Secretary for Trade Union Affairs and Internal Relations and will serve as the representative of the Union to the Kuwait Workers General Union, Abdulaziz Abdullah Ahmed was appointed Secretary for Public Relations, Media and External Relations, and Saud Mohammad Saud Al-Mutairi and Adel Hamoud Rajan Al-Azmi were appointed as the representatives of the Union to the Petroleum and Petrochemical Workers Union.

The board members include Mohammad Hamad Shafi Al-Hajri, Jad'an Abdullah Al-Mutairi, Mohammad Suleiman Al-Muzaini, Ali Mohammad Al-Ajmi, Faisal Nayef Al-Enezi, Amer Mubarak Al-Hajri, Nasser Nawaf Al-Fadhi and Jaber Meshael Al-Mutairi.

'Utilize digital solutions, mitigate process risks'

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammary

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: The Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) played a vital role in the 27th Gulf Engineering Forum, with the theme, "Investment Challenges and the Sustainability of Smart Infrastructure Projects."

KISR was involved in managing and contributing to the panel discussion titled, "Smart Technologies in the Sustainability of Infrastructure Projects."

During the session, the representatives of KISR affirmed the need to utilize digital solutions and advanced technologies to improve

completion qualifying participants for the advanced course in late October.

Al-Kanderi added that the centre will hold 31 courses and events this year on cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, maritime security, medical services, lessons learned, and other subjects, including, for the first time, a practical simulation-based course on field response and crisis management.

He explained that annual programs are selected based on participant evaluations, proposals from the National Liaison Points Committee chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, inputs from Ministries of Defense, Interior, National Guard, Fire Service, and suggestions from Istanbul Cooperation Initiative members represented by Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, and Qatar.

Al-Kanderi concluded that this approach ensures continuous program development, maintains relevance to partner countries' needs, and strengthens regional cooperation, particularly with NATO, while fostering knowledge exchange, professional development, and readiness for security and crisis challenges across the region.

asset efficiency, mitigate operational risks, and maximize the return on investment, particularly in important sectors like transportation, energy and airports.

Dr. Sheikha Al-Sanad, Director of the Building and Infrastructure Program at KISR, moderated the discussion, whose depth underscored the vital function of the Institute in bridging scientific research with practical application, thereby, fostering digital transformation and sustainability within the infrastructure sector.

Dr. Osama Al-Sayegh, a researcher at KISR, highlighted the energy sector's crucial position as a foundation for the sustainability of smart infrastructure projects. He stressed that integrating energy systems with infrastructure

enhances operational efficiency, guarantees service continuity, and promotes the use of sustainable alternatives.

He also advocated for the adoption of smart energy technologies, improved resource efficiency, and their connection to digital systems to boost project resilience and adaptability to future shifts.

He confirmed the role of KISR in supporting decision-makers through scientific and applied research, indicating that studies are essential for developing energy policies and strengthening the integration among the transportation, infrastructure and related sub-sectors to achieve the sustainable goals and increase the economic value of national projects.

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Weather

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Jahra	29	14
Failaka Island	25	14
Salmiyah	25	17
Ahmadi	24	13
Kuwait Airport	28	13
Abdaly	28	14
Bubyani	23	12
Salmy	28	15

By Inaaq Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Municipal Council member Farah Al-Roumi proposed amending the resolution on the terms, procedures and regulations for issuing and renewing temporary storage permits.

The proposal includes replacing Clause One of Article Four with text stating that the validity period of a temporary storage permit for projects carried out under commercial, civil or administrative contracts must be equal to the duration of the original project contract, as evidenced by official documents approved by the project owner or supervisor.

The proposal allows the renewal of a storage permit more than once, as long as each renewal does not exceed one year, in accordance with the conditions specified in the resolution, and at the request of the implementing entity and with the approval of the

relevant authorities.

Al-Roumi pointed out that public and private entities implementing infrastructure and construction projects face recurring challenges related to the duration of temporary storage permits.

She stated that observations from regulatory bodies, contracting companies, and concerned ministries revealed a regulatory gap or inconsistency in the mechanism used to determine the duration of these permits.

She revealed that engineering work is disrupted when the permit expires while the contract is still in effect, in addition to the increased administrative burdens due to repeated renewal requests.

She stressed the need for storage permits to allow contractors to meet their contractual obligations, as well as clear regulations that tie the permit duration to the original contract period while allowing renewal as per the regulations.

Work disruption cited

Comply with dress code, officers told

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Ministry of Interior Undersecretary Major General Abdul Wahab Al-Wahib issued a circular to female police officers, stressing the need to maintain proper military dress and discipline during official working hours, while performing duties or when assigned tasks.

The circular prohibits any appearance

that could tarnish the dignity of the police service.

A security source told the newspaper that the directive underscored the need for compliance with all the relevant instructions and orders.

He explained that the circular stipulated accountability for any violation of its provisions, stating that disciplinary action will be taken according to the established procedures.

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diwaniya

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Kuwait safe and stable in robust policies of State

"IN A national scene brimming with pride, the State of Kuwait celebrates its 65th National Day and the 35th anniversary of its Liberation Day. These two occasions encapsulate the journey of a nation that has successfully established the concept of a modern state, founded on political legitimacy, social cohesion, and a strategic vision that combines the resilience of history with the flexibility of the present and a forward-looking perspective," Saudi media advisor **Abdullah bin Mohammad Al-Sheikh** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.



Abdullah Al-Sheikh

"Kuwait's National Day represents more than just a commemoration of independence. It marks a historical milestone that established a balanced political approach. Since its modern inception, Kuwait has chosen the path of a constitutional state, emphasizing the values of political participation and strengthening the role of national institutions. This has resulted in unique Gulf model of governance based on consensus, moderation and cultural openness."

"This approach enabled Kuwait to solidify its position as an influential regional and international player, particularly in the diplomatic and humanitarian spheres. Its foreign policy is a model for supporting stability and promoting dialogue among nations."

"The anniversary of the liberation represents one of the most pivotal moments in modern Gulf history, embodying the resilience of the State of Kuwait and the unity of its people and their support for their legitimate leadership."

"The anniversary of the liberation affirmed that the Gulf security system is based on the principle of shared destiny and strategic integration."

"The liberation of Kuwait marked a shining page in the annals of Arab and Gulf solidarity, and solidified a firm political conviction that the security of the Gulf states is a single, indivisible entity."

"The relationship between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the State of Kuwait is a leading example of bilateral Gulf relations. This relationship is based on deep historical roots and strong fraternal ties, reinforced by shared positions at various historical junctures."

"The Kingdom has demonstrated its historical presence as a cornerstone in supporting the security and stability of Kuwait, while the two countries have continued to develop their strategic partnership through political and economic coordination that reflects the awareness of both leaderships of the importance of integration in confronting rapidly evolving regional and international challenges."

"The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) remains one of the most prominent and successful models of integration in the Arab world. Since its inception, the GCC has contributed to establishing an integrated security and development system, working hard to unify political visions and enhance defense and economic coordination. This has enabled the member states to solidify their position as an active regional power striving to achieve stability and sustainable development."

"Kuwait's relations with its GCC brothers reflect the success of this Gulf project, which is based on shared interests and respect for the sovereignty and privacy of states."

"Kuwait's celebrations of these national occasions represent a renewal of its commitment to continue the path of construction and development. They reflect the State of Kuwait's ability to transform challenges into opportunities for growth and progress, and affirm its continuous vital role in supporting joint Gulf action and strengthening the security and stability system in the region under the wise leadership that rests on the trust of its people and its deep-rooted Gulf and Arab ties."

"On this cherished national occasion, feelings of appreciation and pride in the State of Kuwait, its leadership, and its people are renewed."

"I extend my sincere congratulations and best wishes to His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of the State of Kuwait, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and to the brotherly Kuwaiti people. I pray to Allah to perpetuate Kuwait's security, stability and prosperity. I congratulate the Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad, and the members of his country's embassy, in appreciation of their efforts in strengthening the bonds of brotherhood and cooperation between the two sisterly countries, and in consolidating the model of Gulf relations based on a shared destiny and integrated vision towards a more prosperous and stable future."

Also:

"In one of the long corridors, files lined up like untold stories, containing women's names, old dates, postponed dreams, and wishes waiting for the right moment to come true," **Fahad Al-Rifai** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Those papers were not mere transactions, but windows overlooking homes yet to be opened, and mothers who learned patience beyond what their hearts could bear. This continued until the voice of humanity and reassurance began to flow, little by little, with Sheikha Bibi Al-Yousef Al-Sabah assuming the chairmanship of the Women's Committee at the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW)."

"Sheikha Bibi entered the place not only with the eye of an official, but with a heart that knows that behind every file lay a woman's suffering, and behind every housing application is a long story of waiting. She read the names carefully and slowly, as one reads lines from a novel about society, realizing that shelter represents the beginning of a stable life. The names were neither just numbers on a list, nor a situation summarized in a sentence, but behind every file is a human being the size of a society, a woman worn down by responsibilities, and perhaps by waiting. The decision then came as simpler and more just, restoring rights to their rightful place, without fanfare or empty promises."

"Little by little, homes began to open, not just with doors, but with a tranquility that transformed into a light illuminating every dark corner. The features of waiting changed in the eyes of many, and home acquired a meaning that transcended walls, encompassing psychological stability, inner security, spiritual harmony, family cohesion, and a new beginning of serenity upon which to build a complete life."

"That is how Sheikha Bibi earned the title 'Mother of Goodness', a title not officially bestowed, but one etched in the hearts of those who endured the pain of waiting. Sheikha Bibi did not receive it by her own request, nor did she adorn herself with it; rather, it came as a right, as destiny bestows upon names that silently leave their mark. Goodness, when practiced in silence, reaches people faster than any speech."

"This experience conveys a clear message: social justice begins when the human being is considered before any action is taken. The human being comes before the action, and good intentions precede the action, and good intentions precede the action."

"When women are treated justly, they do not just find stability, their families find stability with them, and society finds peace."

"This is how stories are written—not with a period, but with a lasting impact."

"When justice is achieved, some names remain immortal, not because they had prominent positions, but because they made a difference."

"In the name of society and in the name of every woman who has found security in housing, we invoke the social message imbued with human value and a moral experience led by Sheikha Bibi Al-Yousef Al-Sabah, with a sincere belief in justice and equity."

"A salute of respect to Sheikha Bibi Al-Sabah, who has made her position a gateway to hope, a legacy that will endure, and a life shaped by wisdom and boundless generosity."

□ □ □

"It is said that a worker was employed in a fish freezing and preservation factory. One day, before the end of his shift, he went into the fish freezer to finish his work, but the door closed behind him. The man tried to open the door but he could not. He began shouting and calling for help from the other workers, but the shift ended, and no one remained in the factory. After five hours, when the man was on the verge of death from the intense cold, the factory guard opened the freezer and rescued him," **Ahmad Al-Dawas** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"When the factory manager asked the guard: How did you know that the worker was still inside the factory and had not left with the others? The guard replied: I have been working in this factory for 30 years. Hundreds of employees enter and leave the building daily, but none of them greeted me or asked about my well-being, except that one worker."

At the end of the day, I did not hear his greeting. I noticed his absence when the other workers left. I knew he was still in the factory, so I searched for him until I found him.

"Allah Almighty says, 'And speak kindly to people.' A kind word saved him. A kind word, even one you might not think much of, can have a positive impact on others and might even save you. So, never underestimate the power of kindness."

"Another story is about someone who mocked a sanitation worker, but Allah opened the doors of opportunity for the latter. The story began when someone photographed a Bangladeshi sanitation worker standing silently and thoughtfully in front of a gold shop window in Riyadh. This worker was gazing at the gold pieces behind the glass with the simple eyes of a human being, but the photographer mocked him, posting the picture with hurtful words like, 'This is all he is good at, looking at garbage,' as if poverty is a sin or honest work is something to be ashamed of."

"When Allah wants to elevate someone, He makes hearts and circumstances work in his favor. Within a few hours, that mockery turned into a wave of outrage among followers, and voices rose in defense of the man's dignity. A widespread solidarity campaign, led by the 'Humanities' online account, was launched to find the worker and honor him, not out of pity, but in recognition of his humanity, which was insulted. So, the insult transformed into a moral test, in which society triumphed and the mockery was defeated. As soon as the worker was found, a flood of kindness poured in from all directions. Gifts poured in—gold sets and jewelry, cash, modern phones, food, and even plane tickets to visit his family."

— Compiled by **Saeed Mahmoud Saleh**

Joint bid for Kuwait growth

EPA, AOU sign MoU

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8, (KUNA): Environment Public Authority and Kuwait-based Arab Open University signed a memorandum of understanding on Sunday to strengthen cooperation in environmental protection and sustainable development, and to support national efforts to raise environmental awareness and achieve sustainability.

Acting Director General of the EPA, Nouf Behbehani said the MoU aims to enhance scientific and technical cooperation, support research, build capacity and exchange expertise in environmental fields of mutual interest, contributing to the development of national competencies and environmental protection efforts.

Behbehani noted that the agreement reflects strong institutional partnership between national entities and highlights the importance of collaboration between academic institutions and government bodies to meet sustainable development requirements and promote science-based environmental initiatives.

President of AOU Salah Al-Hamadi said the agreement aligns with the university's mission to promote scientific research, community service, and social responsibility.

He affirmed the university's commitment to sustainability initiatives and integrating environmental concepts into academic and student activities.

Al-Hamadi added that the two-year MoU, renewable upon agreement, aims to establish effective strategic partnerships that support community development and sustainable development efforts in Kuwait.



KUNA photo

Other Voices

Iran is not Venezuela ... Ayatollah is not Maduro

By Ahmad alsarraf

After the bloody and tumultuous demonstrations that claimed tens of thousands of lives in various Iranian cities, as confirmed by the most credible sources, local observers predicted the fall of the hardline religious regime, especially after the pledge of Trump to support the protesters and urge them to continue their demonstrations.



alsarraf

However, it later became clear that the promises of Trump are not better than the promises made by successive American presidents to the Iraqi people to revolt.

Therefore, at the height of the recent Iranian uprising, I tweeted, rejecting all predictions of the regime's imminent collapse, as many had hoped. Iran is neither Venezuela nor Iraq, and its ruler is neither Maduro nor Saddam, and certainly not the Shah.

President Trump mobilized his fleets and threatened an unprecedented war against Iran, coinciding with similar Israeli threats and unlimited military support for the battle that Tel Aviv has been anticipating for decades.

This contradicts the pronouncements of all the analysts whose claims about a secret alliance between Iran on one side, and Israel, with America behind it, on the other side, have long troubled us. This alliance supposedly prevents any conflict between them.

The American threat of using force against Iran is not different from the one that preceded the attack which ousted Maduro.

However, the difference between the leaderships and circumstances of the two countries is clear, and their geographical locations, importance and conditions are entirely different.

Venezuela has never possessed either the desire or the capability to strike Israel, Trump's favored darling.

Venezuela has neither the power nor the intention to strike the American bases near its borders, nor the resolve to destabilize the security of Middle Eastern countries allied with America.

For these reasons and others, the American decision was delayed.

The consequences of striking Iran are incalculable because Iran is a far more formidable adversary than Venezuela, Iraq and the dozens of other countries that have previously been subjected to American aggression.

Hence, even as this article is being written, America is still weighing its options, aware that eliminating the entire Iranian leadership cannot be achieved without a full-scale war. This is what Israel wants, alone, without the support of the rest of the world.

Despite all the apparent weaknesses of Iranian military power, this very weakness is one of the reasons for its leadership's ferocity in clinging to power and responding violently, because it is a struggle for survival.

Iran will resist, even if it means setting the entire region ablaze, to pre-

serve its position, because they are fully aware that their fate will be annihilation in either case. But this desperate resistance might give them a greater chance of survival.

In my humble opinion, Iran holds three powerful cards:

First is the capability of Iran's ballistic missiles to inflict significant damage on Israel, other Middle Eastern countries, and American bases in the region.

This is what America is trying to avoid at all cost.

Second is Iran's disregard of the scale of human losses it might suffer, based on ideological principles, as has been demonstrated repeatedly whenever it violently suppresses any protest movement. According to this ideology, anyone killed fighting against the 'Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist' regime is destined for hell.

Whoever is 'martyred' fighting in defense of the 'Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist' regime is destined for paradise. Therefore, the huge number of victims does not mean much.

Third is that the fall of the regime does not just mean the fall of its leaders, but also the fall of the 'idea of the Twelve Shiite theocratic state', which is governed by the theory of the 'Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist', and perhaps, even the postponement of Mahdi's reappearance.

This is something the Iranian authorities will not allow to happen easily or without enormous bloodshed.

□ □ □

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KNPC set to upgrade firefighting systems

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8, (KUNA): Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) Deputy Chief Executive Officer for Support Services, Kholoud Al-Mutairi, affirmed the company's keenness to strengthen its firefighting system, in recognition of the vital role it plays.

Al-Mutairi made the remarks in a statement to KUNA following a ceremony held by KNPC on Sunday to mark the graduation of a new batch of newly appointed firefighters working at the company and at Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) Wadha Al-Khateeb.

The ceremony was attended by Al-Ahmadi Governor Sheikh Homoud Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, KNPC Chief Executive Officer, and Acting Chief Executive Officer of KIPIC Wadha Al-Khateeb.

Al-Mutairi praised the support provided by the Ahmadi Governor in facilitating the company's work and enabling it to carry out its role, highlighting in particular his recent support in helping the company's Fire Training Center obtain official accreditation from the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC).

She noted that enhancing the efficiency of firefighters is among the company's top priorities, through advanced training and qualification programs that enable them to perform their duties to the highest standards, using modern methods and tools that keep pace with the latest developments in the field.

Al-Mutairi added that since its establishment, the Fire Training Center has graduated five batches of firefighters, totaling nearly 250 personnel.

She congratulated the graduates, stressing that the course represents a fundamental step in their professional journey, and urged them to continue developing their skills and to seize every opportunity to enhance their capabilities and potential.

The ceremony was held at the company's Main Support and Emergency Operations Center. The number of graduates reached 65 firefighters, who completed a training course accredited by the US National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

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Other Voices

From diwaniyas to boardrooms how public opinion is shaping policy

By Nasser Al-Hajeri

Public opinion has always played a role in shaping decisions, even when it is not formally acknowledged. In Kuwait, much of this opinion is formed in diwaniyas, family gatherings, workplaces, and casual conversations. These spaces remain important because they reflect what people are thinking in real time.

In diwaniyas, discussions often move naturally from daily life to wider issues. People talk about prices, jobs, services, regional events, and economic concerns. These conversations are not organized or planned, but they offer a clear picture of public mood. Over time, repeated concerns tend to surface, showing what matters most to society at a given moment.

Beyond social spaces, the business world is also influenced by public sentiment. Companies today are more aware of how public



Al-Hajeri

opinion can affect success or failure. Decisions related to investment, partnerships, customer relations, and expansion are often shaped by how people respond. Ignoring public feeling can create problems, while understanding it can build confidence and loyalty.

Social media has added another layer to this process. Opinions now travel faster and reach wider audiences. While not every comment represents a shared view, trends become visible. This has made organizations more careful and more attentive to how their actions are perceived.

Public opinion does not always push for change. Often, it reflects concern, uncertainty, or the need for reassurance. People want to

feel that decisions are thoughtful and that their daily realities are understood. When communication is clear, misunderstandings are reduced and trust is easier to maintain.

It is also worth noting that public opinion is not fixed. It evolves with circumstances, information, and experience. What matters today may change tomorrow. This makes listening an ongoing process rather than a one time exercise.

In Kuwait, open discussion has long been part of social life. The exchange of views, even when they differ, has helped shape attitudes across generations. From diwaniyas to boardrooms, these shared conversations continue to influence how choices are made and how society moves forward.

Public opinion, when observed carefully and responsibly, remains one of the clearest reflections of a society's priorities.

CAPT reschedules bids for data center power project

Opening moved to May 10 to allow technical review

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: The Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) rescheduled the opening of bids for the supply and installation of three 11/132 kV main substations — essential infrastructure for the cloud data center project in various locations — to May 10, instead of March 10.

This will give the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy enough time

to review the bids and formulate a technical recommendation, which is a prerequisite for awarding the contract to the most qualified bidder that satisfies all specifications and conditions.

Following the potential awarding of the tender and pending approval from CAPT, the ministry is obligated to forward the contract documents to the State Audit Bureau (SAB) for the mandatory audit, review and final contract approval, that is, if all the requirements are met.

The ministry views the prompt finalization of this tender as a priority due to its importance in terms of establishing the necessary infrastructure for the agreement

overseen by the Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority. In December, the Authority entered a land lease agreement with Google for the establishment of data centers for cloud computing services.

The objective of this agreement is to strengthen the nation's digital infrastructure and propel digital transformation in the public and private sectors by delivering advanced and secure cloud solutions.

The cloud centers are slated for construction in Sulaibiya, North Saad Al-Abdullah City and Mutlaa, while the total budget for the three main substations is KD22 million.



A group photo of the Kuwaiti artists participating in the exhibition.

4th Gulf Symposium features Kuwaiti artists' creative work

MANAMA, Feb 8, (KUNA): Kuwaiti artists showcased on Saturday a collection of paintings and artworks in Manama as part of the 4th Gulf Symposium exhibition, reflecting their diverse artistic styles.

Kuwaiti artists participating in the exhibition, which brings together about 250 artists worldwide, emphasized to KUNA the role of these displays in promoting cultural exchange among artists from different countries.

Artist Awatif Kakoli said to KUNA that her current participation marks her 4th consecutive appearance in the Contemporary Art Society Symposium, noting that these participations contribute to artists exchanging experiences in arts.

Dr. Anbar Waleed explained that Gulf Symposium's goal is to strengthen relationships between artists and build cultural and artistic bridges that allow for diverse experiences to be exchanged.

For her part, Dr. Farida Abdeen described the art forum as an importance creative celebration that brings artists together from different countries and art

KUNA photos
Artist Dr. Walid Al-Sarab during his participation in the exhibition.

schools under one roof to create live artworks.

PACI expands digital services with new certificate launches on Sahel

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: The Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) launched a new set of certificate-related services on the government application, Sahel, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

PACI disclosed that these certificates include the previous nationality certificate, previous name certificate, previous address certificate, and the 'To Whom It May Concern' certificate in English.

Continued from Page 1

Kuwait and

According to the minister, Kuwait is pushing for energy transition with a clear vision and a strategic approach aligned with national interests and a long-term development outlook, stressing that it is an integral part of Kuwait Vision 2035 -- the roadmap for sustainable development and economic diversification in the country.

He affirmed that Kuwait is following a unified approach under the Supreme Energy Committee, which coordinates energy security, sustainable growth and international commitments, ensuring coordination and integration in the energy, water and climate sectors to support national goals.

He pointed out that Kuwait is fully aware of the global shift toward cleaner and more efficient energy systems, while ensuring the transition is "realistic and gradual" and consistent with the responsibilities of the country as major energy producer. He said the objectives are to enhance resilience, increase efficiency and secure long-term value for the State and its people.

He considers the forum a valuable opportunity to strengthen cooperation with the EU and benefit from its expertise in transition planning, regulatory reforms and innovation to support the national agenda of Kuwait, while latter contributes its regional experience and clear sustainable development vision.

He underscored the need for international cooperation to address the complexities of the current global energy landscape through constructive partnerships that identify practical areas of mutual benefit in policy, technology, capacity building and investment.

He is hoping the forum will yield the desired results that lay the foundations for a sustainable energy future.

On the other hand, Director General of KISR Dr. Faisal Al-Humaidan stated that hosting the forum marks an important milestone in strengthening the link between scientific research and policy formulation, thereby, supporting the effective implementation of the country's energy transition.

He confirmed that the energy system

of Kuwait is entering a phase requiring ambitions and policies to be grounded in sound technical foundations, data-driven decisions, systems analysis, and a thorough understanding of local operational realities.

He argued this scientific and applied approach is vital due to the increasing electricity demand, the growing complexity of the energy system, and the long-term transformation goals, all of which necessitate mitigating implementation risks and enhancing planning efficiency.

He also pointed out the role of KISR as the national scientific body supporting decision-makers through independent applied research. He explained that this research contributes to shaping energy policies and system planning in critical areas, including energy efficiency, integrating renewable energy sources, energy storage, carbon capture, sustainable buildings, and emerging technologies.

He reaffirmed the full commitment of KISR to support the nation's energy transformation journey by working closely with national and international partners to translate ambitions into practical and technically sound steps.

Moreover, EU Ambassador to Kuwait Anne Koistinen asserted that the forum reflects the depth of the longstanding partnership, which this year celebrates 40 years of diplomatic relations. She emphasized that cooperation in clean energy and sustainability is the key pillar of this relationship.

She said the European experience in the green transition has proven that expanding renewable energy, improving energy efficiency, and innovating in green technologies can simultaneously enhance economic growth and energy security.

She affirmed that Kuwait has promising opportunities to adapt these experiences to its national priorities, especially in solar energy, energy storage and green hydrogen.

She added that the EU remains committed to support Kuwait through knowledge exchange, technical partnerships and policy dialogue, expressing the desire to raise bilateral relations to a deeper strategic partnership that accelerates the transition to a more sustainable and resilient energy system.

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US scholar praises analytical depth of Al-Seyassah and Arab Times

Al-Jarallah hosts Reconnaissance Center and Dr. Michael Herb

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Dean of Kuwaiti Journalism and Editor-in-Chief of Al-Seyassah and Arab Times newspapers Ahmed Al-Jarallah met with a delegation from the Reconnaissance Center for Research and Studies at his office on Sunday.

The delegation included Professor of Political Science at Georgia State University Dr. Michael Herb, who specializes in the study of Gulf political systems and their development.

Founder and President of the Center Abdulaziz Al-Anjari headed the delegation that also included Yousef Ahmed Al-Ghossain, Saqer Al-Ganim, Sheikh Mubarak Azzam Al-Mubarak and Sheikh Sabah Abdullah Salem Al-Hamoud.

At the beginning of the meeting, Dr. Herb, who is currently visiting Kuwait, expressed his gratitude to Al-Jarallah for the interviews and analyses published in Al-Seyassah and Arab Times newspapers.

He praised the professional level of the articles, which addressed Gulf issues from a sound political and economic perspective.

He also emphasized the important role of the media in conveying specialized analysis to the public in an easy to understand language without compromising the academic depth.



Editor-in-Chief of Al-Seyassah and Arab Times, Ahmed Al-Jarallah, receives Dr. Michael Herb, Professor of Political Science at Georgia State University, at the Al-Seyassah office.



Left: Dr. Michael Herb and Reconnaissance Center delegation visit Al-Jarallah to exchange insights on Gulf issues. Right: Al-Jarallah poses for group photo with Dr. Herb and Reconnaissance Center delegation.



Photos by Rezk Tawfiq

SDGs 2030 on agenda

Kuwait to host 104th Arab Media Committee session



KUNA photo

Ambassador Ahmad Khattabi, Assistant Secretary-General of the League for Media and Communication

CAIRO, Feb 8, (KUNA): The Arab League announced on Sunday that Kuwait will host, next Tuesday, the 104th session of the Permanent Committee for Arab Media and the 22nd ordinary session of the Executive Bureau of the Council of Arab Information Ministers.

In a statement, Assistant Secretary General for Media and Communication Ambassador Ahmad Khattabi said the meetings will address continued media support for the Palestinian cause due to current developments, along with a range of initiatives aimed at advancing joint Arab media action.

He explained that the agenda includes activating mechanisms of the Arab media outreach plan abroad, strengthening the phased plan of the media strategy to combat terrorism, reviewing recommendations of a team of experts on media and information literacy.

In addition, the Arab officials would be discussing a media plan to address environmental issues and climate change in the Arab world.

Ambassador Khattabi pointed out that meeting will cover the executive program of the Arab Media Map for Sustainable Development Goals 2030, recommendations of the Arab Committee for Electronic Media, preparation of a law to regulate digital media and a practical plan for negotiations with international media

KFAED, Sida ink MoU to enhance global development cooperation

Deal aligns on infrastructure and food security

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8, (KUNA): The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) on Sunday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Sweden, represented by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), aimed at establishing a framework for international cooperation between the two sides.

In a press statement, the KFAED said the MoU seeks to enhance cooperation in areas of mutual interest, particularly in countries where both parties are implementing ongoing projects and programs.

The statement noted that the MoU provides a framework for cooperation in social, economic and sustainable development, infrastructure projects, and the exchange of technical expertise, while taking into account the policies and priorities of each party.

Cooperation under the MoU is expected to focus on several specific activities consistent with the mandates and operational policies of both institutions, especially in countries where both have active programs, it added.

Among the key areas of cooperation outlined in the MoU is the early identification of projects eligible for support from both institutions, either through financing or the provision of technical assistance, in accordance with each institution's



Acting Director General of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, Waleed Al-Bahar, and Director General of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Dr. Jakob Granit, after signing the Memorandum of Understanding.

policies and operational procedures.

The statement also noted that the MoU includes conducting consultations from time to time to coordinate operations and activities in areas where such coordination is possible in shared partner countries, particularly, but not limited to, Ukraine and Syria.

It further highlighted that priority sectors for cooperation include, but are not limited to, agricul-

ture and food security, water supply and sanitation, education, and health, in addition to exchanging information and enhancing knowledge sharing to benefit from the expertise, resources, and capacities of both sides.

The MoU was signed by Acting Director General of the Kuwait Fund Waleed Al-Bahar and Director General of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency Dr. Jakob Granit.

Continued from Page 1

0 government,

For example, if the loan amount is KD30,000, the borrower will pay KD1,000 annually. This is an affordable installment plan that does not burden the debtors or force them to borrow again.

We should consider the fact that bank loans are not included in this calculation, as they are secured by collateral, which is a form of guarantee. This differs from bounced checks signed by the beneficiary due to their need for money for the treatment of a family member or pay for educational expenses.

The lender exploits the borrower's difficult circumstances, granting the loan at high interest rates, relying on State institutions to ensure he receives his due in one way or another. In this manner, the relevant government agencies seem to be protecting the user.

I have mentioned several times that issuing bounced checks is no longer a crime in advanced countries, or even in developing countries. This is what Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Tunisia have done.

For decades, most European countries, as well as the United Kingdom, France and Ireland, have abolished penalties for issuing bounced checks.

Disputes arising from bounced checks are now resolved through civil channels, unlike in Kuwait, where official agencies act as debt collectors for creditors who have misappropriated funds.

Moreover, donations are ineffective because they are insufficient. The collected donations are not enough to solve the problem, they rather exacerbate it and even the social problems.

Consequently, the government must take a decisive action. It must address the suffering of 10 percent of the Kuwaiti people.

Minister of

cooperation across several sectors, reflecting the longstanding ties between the two countries.

Sheikh Hamad also expressed his wishes for Lebanon's continued security and stability, as well as progress and prosperity.

He also received the Ambassador of the Republic of El Salvador to Kuwait, Juan Carlos Staben Boillat.

The meeting discussed ways to bolster bilateral relations and praised joint cooperation across several fields, affirming commitment to strengthening cooperation and exploring new avenues of collaboration to serve the interests of both countries.

Ramadan crescent

The center explained that the new moon occurring before sunset and setting afterward fulfills the astronomical conditions for marking the beginning of the new Hijri month under its calculation criteria. However, it emphasized that the official announcement of Ramadan's start remains the responsibility of the Sharia sighting

committee and other competent authorities.

The Al-Ujairi Scientific Center also confirmed its participation in the crescent observation efforts on February 17, in response to an invitation from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Kuwait Amir,

wishing him good health and continuous progress for the people of Kuwait.

In return, His Highness the Amir conveyed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the Qatari Amir wishing him and his people continued development, prosperity, and stability.

The meeting was attended by Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Al-Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Chief of His Highness the Crown Prince Office retired General Jamal Al-Thebay, Undersecretary of the Amiri Diwan Sheikh Abdulaziz Mishal Mubarak Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs at the Amiri Diwan Mazen Al-Issa.

Similarly, His Highness the Crown Prince Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received on Sunday at Bayan Palace the Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani, along his accompanying delegation, on the occasion of their official visit to the country.

During the meeting, Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman conveyed to His Highness the Crown Prince the

greetings and regards of the Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani and his Deputy Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al-Thani.

In return, His Highness the Crown Prince sent his greetings to Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani and Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al-Thani, wishing them good health and wellness.

The meeting was attended by Head of the Crown Prince's Diwan Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and senior officials.

The Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani and his accompanying delegation arrived in Kuwait on Sunday on an official visit.

He was received at Kuwait's International Airport by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdulrahman Al-Sabah.

The Qatari premier was also welcomed by Head of the Amiri Diwan Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman Al-Dakhil, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Acting Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Aziz Al-Dihani, Assistant Foreign Minister for GCC Affairs Ambassador Najib Al-Bader, Qatar's Ambassador to Kuwait Ali Al-Mahmoud, and senior state officials.

23 economic

programs require legislative reform to advance and regulate development

efforts.

It emphasized in its introduction that based on the Kuwait 2035 vision, the 2025/2026 annual plan adopted nine programs, formulated to be integrated in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and create human capital that meets development challenges according to international indicators.

It affirmed that several programs have been launched, particularly the establishment of a special international economic zone, with its own laws and regulations to attract investment, along with an independent institutional structure that ensures the attraction of high-value-added global investments.

This is in addition to the immediate implementation of the public privatization program in order to privatize more government assets and services by updating the legislative framework and introducing privatization initiatives in operational sectors. This move will contribute to the public finance reform and support the diversification of government revenue sources.

Moreover, the program for strengthening a dynamic private sector must be implemented quickly to empower the sector, diversify the production base, and encourage and market knowledge-based industries with advanced technology.

Following are the economy-related draft laws:

- Establishment of the Northern Economic Zone
- Establishment of the Postal Company
- Establishment of the Fixed-Line
- Telephone and International Communications Company
- Establishment of the Public Electricity and Water Corporation
- Amendment of Law No. 37/2010 on the Regulation of Privatization Programs and Operations
- Amendment of Public-Private Partnerships Law No. 116/2014
- Establishment of the Kuwait Technical Entrepreneurship Complex Free Zone
- Amendment of the Industry Law
- Amendment of Kuwaiti Import Law No. 43/1964
- Amendment of the law on the inclusion of the 01/07/2005 increase in the salary subject to supplementary insurance for the private sector
- Amendment of the Public Funds Protection Law
- Amendment of Supervision and Control of Precious Metals and Gemstones Law No. 23/1980
- Fees for Using Public Utilities and Services
- Amendment of Law No. 31/1978 (Rules for Preparing Public Budgets, Monitoring their Implementation, and the Final Accounts)
- Pricing Energy Services
- Public Debt
- Regulated Withdrawals from the Future Generations Fund
- Unified Tax Procedures
- Approval of the GCC Agreement on Value Added Tax
- Approval of the Northern Economic Zone
- Real Estate Finance for Kuwait Credit Bank
- Civil Aviation Law
- Tourism



From left to right: Ambassador Dhari Al-Ajran, Minister Sheikh Jarrah Al-Jaber, Ali Al Mahmoud, Salah Al-Maliki, and Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafeeri.



From left to right: Turkish Ambassador Tuba Sonmez, Sheikh Ali and his wife Khulood Aba Al-Khail, Indonesian Ambassador Lena Maryana, and Dr. Amira Al-Hassan.

Annual gathering marks National and Liberation Day celebrations, highlights Kuwait's hospitality

Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber hosts Diplomatic Day at Azayez farm



Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber with Sheikh Jarrah Al-Jaber.



Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber and Ambassador Abdulaziz Al-Sharekh.



Sheikh Ali welcomes the US Chargé d'Affaires, Steven Butler.



Moroccan Ambassador Ali Ibn Issa, and his wife.

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber hosted diplomats and members of diplomatic missions in the country, along with their families, at his farm – Azayez – on Friday, coinciding with the National Day and Liberation Day celebrations.

This is part of an annual tradition that Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber cherishes.

Speaking at the event, Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber pointed out that the annual gatherings have become a regular occasion to celebrate the national events. He revealed that His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and members of the Al-Sabah family attended the first gathering. He said the subsequent gatherings are for the diwaniyas (traditional Kuwaiti gathering places) and the members of the diplomatic corps.

While welcoming Foreign Affairs Minister Sheikh Jarrah Al-Jaber, several ambassadors, members of the diplomatic corps and their families, Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber expressed his hope that the annual gatherings will continue and wished everyone good health and well-being.

He also welcomed the newly appointed ambassadors, stressing that those leaving the country usually depart with positive impressions of the State of Kuwait.

Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan to Kuwait Zubaydullo Zubaydov said the Diplomatic Day at Azayez Farm embodies authentic Kuwaiti traditions and contributes to strengthening communication among diplomats.



Sheikh Ali with Fahad Abu Shaar and his wife Nadia.

Bahraini Ambassador Salah Al-Maliki stated that the event organized by Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber is a social occasion that brings together diplomats and their families in a friendly atmosphere, away from the routine of work. He expressed his appreciation for the initiative, which has continued for more than 32 years.

Al-Maliki wished the State of Kuwait perpetual security, safety, progress and prosperity under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled.

He asserted that the visit of HH the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa is part of the reciprocal fraternal visits, which

affirm the depth of the historical relations between the two ruling families and the two brotherly peoples.

Omani Ambassador to Kuwait Dr. Saleh Al-Kharousi indicated that the Diplomatic Day is a cherished annual tradition that reflects the spirit of rapprochement and communication. He praised the friendly atmosphere that brings together members of the diplomatic corps, away from formal settings.

Egyptian Ambassador Mohamed Abu El-Wafa asserted that the event is an annual tradition combining social and diplomatic dimensions. He added that it is held in a joyful atmosphere, which allows participants to connect, become acquainted, and engage in dialogue within a humanistic framework, far from formality.

Moroccan Ambassador to Kuwait Ali Ibn Issa expressed his pleasure at participating, describing the event as a wonderful occasion that brings together members of the diplomatic corps in a friendly atmosphere, manifesting the depth of relations and human connection.

He congratulated His Highness the Amir and the Kuwaiti people on their national celebrations, and wished them continuous good health, well-being, progress and innovation.

American Chargé d'Affaires Steven Butler praised Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad's initiative in organizing the event. He pointed out that opening the farm to diplomats and their families provides a unique opportunity to meet in a friendly and comfortable setting that reflects Kuwait's renowned hospitality.

Butler added that such gatherings help break the daily routine and foster closer relations by creating space for spontaneous interaction outside the work environment.



Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber with Egyptian Ambassador Mohamed Jaber Abu Al-Wafa and his family.



Ambassador Dr. Saleh Al-Kharousi during an interview.



Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber and his wife, Aba Al-Khail, with the Lebanese ambassador and his family.



Iranian Ambassador with Libyan and Syrian Ambassadors.



During the annual Diplomatic Day gathering at Azayez farm.



Indian Ambassador Paramita Tripathi and her family.

INTERNATIONAL

Trump's aggressive tactics force reckoning between local leaders and Washington

WASHINGTON, Feb 8, (AP): Denver Mayor Mike Johnston regularly games out responses to threats like destructive tornadoes or hazardous waste leaks. He's added a new potential menace: the federal government.

When President Donald Trump deployed National Guard troops to some US cities last year over the objection of local leaders, Johnston said his tabletop exercises expanded to consider what might happen if federal officials took aim at Denver, which the Trump administration has sued for limiting cooperation on deportations. The city now prepares for the impact of federal activity on everything from access to schools and hospitals to interference with elections.

"We used to prepare for natural disasters," Johnston, a Democrat, said in an interview. "Now we prepare for our own federal government."

A half-dozen state and local officials from both major political parties over the past week described an increasingly hostile relationship with Washington. While there's inherent tension between city, state and federal governments over power, politics and money, the current dynamic is unlike anything they've experienced, particularly after federal agents killed two US citizens in

Minneapolis last month. While partnerships are still in place, the officials said the Minneapolis killings have hardened opposition to excessive federal power.

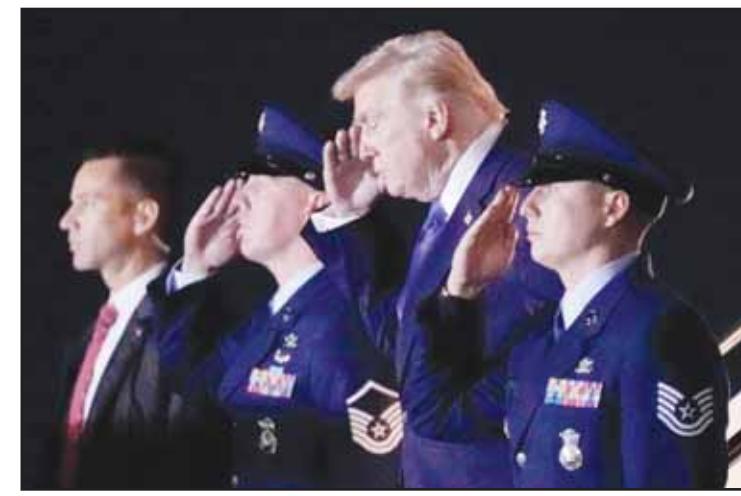
"This is unprecedented," said Jerry Dyer, the Republican mayor of Fresno, California, and a former police chief. "I've never seen federal law enforcement come to the cities, whether it's National Guard or ICE, and police cities without a level of cooperation from local police."

The tensions have upended long-time Republican arguments that the federal government should leave local governance to the states under the 10th Amendment to the US Constitution. Now a Republican president is articulating a muscular federal approach over the protest of Democrats.

"There's no question that the Trump administration has repeatedly violated the Constitution and how it deals with states," Kentucky Gov Andy Beshear, a Democrat, said in an interview.

"My hope," he added, "is that we are quickly approaching our McCarthyism moment where even Donald Trump's supporters are going to recognize this has gone too far."

Trump has expressed frustration at reflexive resistance from Democratic



US President Donald Trump arrives on Air Force One on Feb 6, at Palm Beach International Airport in West Palm Beach, Fla. (AP)

mayors and governors, insisting this week that he doesn't want to force federal law enforcement on communities.

He prefers to work with officials like Louisiana GOP Gov Jeff Landry, who requested National Guard troops to patrol New Orleans.

The president's willingness to use federal power is often issue-based, favoring states in areas like abortion or education

"That's not what the Constitution says about elections," Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., told MS NOW.

Beshear and the 23 other Democratic governors released a statement Thursday objecting to "interference from the federal government." In the interview, Beshear pointed to Paul's comments as an example of bipartisan agreement. "Rand and I don't agree on a lot," he said. Paul and some other Republicans, including Govs. Phil Scott of Vermont and Kevin Stitt of Oklahoma, have also expressed concern about the immigration operation in Minnesota.

Trump has taken preliminary steps to ease tensions, replacing Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Department of Homeland Security leaders in Minneapolis with Tom Homan, the administration's border czar. Homan is withdrawing 700 of the roughly 3,000 federal officers deployed around Minneapolis, though Trump and Vice President JD Vance reject any suggestion of a federal drawdown.

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey said the continued presence in the Twin Cities of thousands of federal officers contradicts his demand that the administration end its operation there. In a sign of the frustration between local

and federal officials there, the rhetoric has taken on militaristic tones.

Trump has referred to federal law enforcement in Minneapolis as "soldiers." Homan has described agents as being "in theater," a military phrase typically used in reference to a conflict zone. During a quick trip to Washington last week to address fellow mayors, Frey spoke of an "invasion" and "occupation" in his city.

"We are on the front lines of a very important battle," he said.

At the same event, Elizabeth Kautz, the Republican mayor of suburban Burnsville, Minnesota, said she now carries her passport around the city she's led since 1995.

"With the introduction of ICE, our cities are no longer safe," she said.

That's also how it feels to leaders in places far from Minneapolis, even if they haven't been targeted by ICE.

"What I can't tolerate is the approach to immigration operations in a place like Minneapolis that are causing people to look over their shoulder in cities like Allentown," said Matt Tuerk, the Democratic mayor of Allentown, Pennsylvania, which has a large Latino population. "Even though you're not in Allentown, you're having an impact."

3 parties vying for power

Thailand counts votes in early election

BANGKOK, Feb 8, (AP): Vote counting was underway in Thailand's early general election on Sunday, seen as a three-way race among competing visions of progressive, populist and old-fashioned patronage politics.

The battle for support from 53 million registered voters came against a backdrop of slow economic growth and heightened nationalist sentiment. While more than 50 parties contested the polls, only three - the People's Party, Bhumjaithai, and Pheu Thai - have the nationwide organization and popularity to gain a winning mandate.

A simple majority of the 500 elected lawmakers selects the next prime minister.

Local polls consistently project that no single party will gain a majority, necessitating the formation of a coalition government.

Although the progressive People's Party is seen as favored to win a plurality, its reformist politics aren't shared by its leading rivals, which may freeze it out by joining forces to form a government.

The People's Party, led by Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut, is the successor to the Move Forward Party, which won the most seats in the House of Representatives in 2023, but was blocked from forming a government by conservative lawmakers and then forced to dissolve.

"I think we will get the mandate



Voters cast their ballot at a polling station during a general election in Bangkok on Feb 8. (AP)

from the people, and we promised the people that we will form the people's government to bring policies that benefit all, not a few in the country," Natthaphong told reporters after casting his ballot in Bangkok.

His party's platform continues to promise sweeping reforms of the military, police and judiciary, appealing to youth and urban voters. Legal constraints have led it to set aside demands for reform of a law that metes out harsh penalties for criticism of the monarchy, while putting new emphasis on economic issues.

Softening its politics risks weakening its core support, already at risk because the last election had positioned it squarely as the alternative to nine previous years of military-led government, a situation it can't fruitfully exploit this time.

At the same time, its positions critical of the military can be a political liability with the surge of patriotism that emerged during last year's border clashes with Cambodia, said Napon Jatusripitak, director of the Center for Politics and Geopolitics at Thailand Future, a Bangkok-based think tank.

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Business

Enterprises of all sizes to benefit from wider wallet acceptance across everyday payment use cases

Bede partners with Ottu to advance enterprise payment solutions and digital wallet adoption



Ahmad Al-Nafisi and Talal Al-Awadhi sign the partnership.

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Bede Kuwait, a subsidiary of Zain Group, has strategically partnered with Ottu, a payment orchestration platform operating across the Middle East and North Africa, to support enterprise businesses in Kuwait transition toward unified payment operations. This collaboration enhances the country's broader digital transformation and the increased adoption of digital wallets issued by Bede and other providers.

Through this partnership, the integration enables the distribution of Bede's wallet and payment gateway services across Ottu's enterprise merchant network in Kuwait, including businesses in retail, hospitality, education, and digital services. Merchants using Ottu can activate Bede Wallet and services through configuration without additional development, supporting wider wallet acceptance across everyday payment use cases.

Bede merchants also gain access to centralized orchestration capabilities designed to support enterprise-scale payment operations, while benefiting from improved resilience, visibility, and operational efficiency.

Ahmad Al-Nafisi, General Manager of Bede Kuwait, "This strategic partnership



Al-Nafisi and Al-Awadhi with the Bede and Ottu teams.

aligns with Kuwait's ongoing efforts to modernize financial infrastructure, encourage cashless transactions, and expand the use of regulated digital payment methods across the economy. Bede aims to continually partner with leading digital solutions providers such as Ottu to equip customers with practical tools to grow. Our mission is to enable merchants and entrepreneurs to manage their businesses with ease and security, empowering them to expand within Kuwait and beyond."

"The evolution of Kuwait's payment ecosystem requires infrastructure that supports scale, flexibility, and new digital payment behaviors," said Talal Al-Awadhi, Chief Executive Officer of Ottu. "By combining orchestration with wallet and digital payments enablement, this partnership supports enterprises while contributing to the broader shift toward digital payments across the Kuwaiti economy."

Bede entered the regional fintech space in 2024 as a platform delivering innovative digital financial services and end-to-end payment solutions across Kuwait, Bahrain, and Sudan. It currently offers secure, fast e-wallets for individuals and businesses, alongside advanced payment gateways that support multi-channel transactions, making everyday payments simpler and more efficient.

Bede operates under official central bank licenses in the markets where it provides its services, with a strong focus on security and full regulatory compliance. It aims to advance financial inclusion through simplified personal financing and technology-enabled tools, enabling merchants and consumers to benefit from a unified digital payments ecosystem that supports economic growth and e-commerce.

Ottu provides an independent orchestration layer that operates above payment gateways and wallets, allowing enterprises to connect multiple payment service providers through a single integration. This model enables businesses to manage routing logic, resilience, and operational oversight with access to multiple banks and payment providers.

Through Ottu's platform, merchants integrate once and gain access to multiple pre-connected payment providers. Transactions are routed based on configurable rules that consider performance, cost, and availability. The platform also supports automatic failover to maintain continuity in the event of provider disruptions, while offering consolidated dashboards for finance, technology, and reporting teams.

Output rise to lift refining

Kuwait should partner with foreign oil firms, says expert

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Oil analyst and expert Kamel Al-Harami stressed the need to involve international companies in onshore and offshore field operations in view of the announcement of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) that it intends to work with international companies in developing the three offshore oil and gas fields that the country discovered in 2025.

Al-Harami pointed out that extracting oil from some onshore fields is more challenging than from offshore fields. He believes that the involvement of international oil companies will increase the production capacity of the country, ensuring an increase to four million barrels of oil per day in the shortest possible time, rather than after 10 years. He argued that optimal planning for increasing domestic oil production should be done every three years, not over decades, especially since increasing oil production capacity must be a gradual process.

He indicated that major international companies have vast experience and expertise in exploration, advanced technologies and the ability to navigate digital transformations, which guarantee the extraction of oil from challenging reservoirs in the shortest possible time.

He stated that one of the important reasons for involving foreign companies is to address the declining production in some existing oil fields due to age. He cited the declining production in the Burgan field as an example, indicating this field alone used to produce about 70 percent of the output of Ku-

wait Oil Company (KOC), but has now dropped to less than 60 percent. "Therefore, the involvement of international companies is essential to address the difficulties hindering the smooth operation of the Burgan field, taking into account that traditional private contracting companies find it difficult to resolve this issue. Most other countries readily engage international oil companies to increase production," he asserted.

He said there are no obstacles preventing the Kuwaiti oil sector from dealing with international companies, similar to other oil-producing nations, in order to attract such companies.

He added that increasing Kuwaiti crude oil production not only benefits the State budget, but will also contribute to increasing the refining capacity of local refineries—Mina Al-Ahmadi, Mina Abdullah and Zour—as well as the overseas refineries in which KPC has varying stakes like Nghi Son in Vietnam, Duqm in Oman and Milazzo refinery in Italy.

He stated that the unavailability of crude oil at certain times led to a decline in refining rates at Zour Refinery.

He commended the government's recent statements regarding attracting foreign investment companies to Kuwait, particularly those specializing in the oil sector.

He emphasized the importance of utilizing the expertise of Kuwaiti nationals with specialized oil experience to develop the Kuwaiti oil sector, considering these retired experts have the experience surpassing that of foreign consultants. He stressed that the cost of hiring foreign consultants is a huge burden on the budgets of KPC's subsidiaries.

Kuwait boosts economic ties at AIUla conference

JEDDAH, Feb 8, (KUNA): Kuwait's Minister of Finance, Dr. Yaqoub Al-Refaei, met Sunday with his Saudi counterpart, Mohammad Al-Jadaan, on the sidelines of Kuwait's participation in the second edition of the AIUla Conference for Emerging Market Economies.

According to a press statement by the Ministry of Finance, Dr. Al-Refaei also met with Sherard Cooper-Koles, Vice President of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and with Dr. Abdulhamid Al-Khalifa, Director General and Chief Executive Officer of the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID).

The meetings were attended by Sheikh Saud Salem Al-Sabah, Managing Director of the Kuwait Investment Authority, who participated in discussions on enhancing financial and investment cooperation.

These engagements highlight Kuwait's continued efforts to strengthen regional and international economic partnerships and support emerging market economies through active dialogue and collaboration.

Supporting underprivileged families ahead of the Holy Month of Ramadan

Gulf Bank participates in 'Joy Land' initiative

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: As part of its ongoing commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and its dedication to supporting underprivileged families in Kuwait, Gulf Bank participated in the "Joy Land" initiative under the umbrella of Nama's Charity in cooperation with the Voluntary Work Department at the Public Authority for Youth. The initiative focuses on distributing Ramadan food baskets, essential household supplies, and Eid clothing to underprivileged families ahead of the Holy Month of Ramadan.

Gulf Bank's participation reflects its strong humanitarian values and its continued efforts to enhance the quality of life of underprivileged families by addressing their basic needs and extending meaningful support, particularly during significant religious and social occasions. Through such initiatives, the Bank seeks to foster dignity, reassurance, and a sense of belonging among beneficiaries.

The "Joy Land" initiative aims to promote the principles of social solidarity, compassion, and shared responsibility by providing in-kind assistance to underprivileged segments of society. This support helps alleviate daily pressures during Ramadan and enables families to prepare for Eid in an atmosphere of stability, comfort, and hope.

Gulf Bank affirmed that its participation in this initiative forms part of a comprehensive annual program of community engagement implemented before and throughout the Holy Month of Ramadan. These efforts are rooted in the Bank's belief in the value of strategic partnerships and their role in advancing sustainable development and strengthening social cohesion. The program encompasses a diverse range of charitable, social, and sports initiatives designed to reinforce humanitarian values and deliver lasting positive impact.

The distribution activities were carried out by the Sawaed Al-Khaleej volunteer team, comprising Gulf Bank employees who actively participate in the Bank's social and charitable initiatives, reflecting a strong culture of volunteerism and civic responsibility.

Gulf Bank remains committed to building an inclusive and supportive work environment that empowers employees, delivers high-quality customer experiences, and upholds a sustainable approach to community service. Through its extensive branch network and advanced digital platforms, the Bank continues to provide customers with flexible, secure, and efficient banking solutions.



A bank employee distributes gifts to children.



Group photo of the Gulf Bank team.



Part of the events.

In line with Kuwait Vision 2035, "New Kuwait," and its commitment to collaboration with national stakeholders, Gulf Bank continues to advance sustainability across environmental, social, and governance (ESG) dimensions.

Through carefully selected and impactful initiatives, the Bank remains focused on driving meaningful progress that supports national development priorities and contributes to the long-term wellbeing of society.

Boursa Kuwait closes higher on broad gains

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait ended Sunday's trading session on a positive note, with all major indices advancing. The general market index climbed 64.32 points, or 0.74 percent, to close at 8,756.09 points.

Market activity was strong, with 274.3 million shares changing hands through 15,177 transactions, generating a total value of KD 65.9 million (approximately USD 201 million).

The main market index registered the biggest gain, rising 79.87 points, or 0.98 percent, to settle at 8,189.57 points. Trading on this market included 141.16 million shares across 7,837 deals, worth KD 21.19 million (around

USD 64.6 million).

The premier market index also advanced, adding 64.29 points, or 0.69 percent, to reach 9,330.36 points. It recorded 133.13 million shares traded through 7,340 transactions, valued at KD 44.7 million (approximately USD 136.3 million).

The Main 50 Index performed particularly well, jumping 205.21 points, or 2.38 percent, to close at 8,825.27 points. It saw 129.7 million shares traded in 6,728 transactions, totaling KD 19.18 million (roughly USD 58.4 million).

Delivering an integrated and unprecedented digital experience

Warba Bank introduces enhanced services in its app Marketplace

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Warba Bank launched the newly redesigned and fully upgraded Marketplace within its mobile banking app, marking a step forward in enhancing its customers' digital banking experience. Available now on the Apple App Store and Google Play, the enhanced Marketplace reflects the Bank's ongoing commitment to digital innovation and to delivering a secure, seamless and fully integrated customer experience.

The upgraded Marketplace has been developed as part of Warba Bank's broader digital strategy, aimed at enabling customers to manage a wide range of daily needs through a single, unified digital platform. Designed to go beyond traditional banking services, the Marketplace brings together essential lifestyle services in one convenient and secure environment, helping customers save time and effort while enjoying greater flexibility and control.

With a refreshed interface that prioritizes ease of use and intuitive navigation, the Marketplace offers customers a smooth and reliable digital

journey. It features a comprehensive range of services tailored to modern lifestyles, including the ability to purchase digital vouchers for leading global retailers and platforms, as well as gift cards from a variety of brands for online or in-store use.

In line with its focus on delivering added value, Warba Bank has also introduced a dedicated section within the Marketplace for exclusive offers, discounts and promotional codes from selected partners and brands. These benefits are designed to enrich customers' everyday experiences and provide advantages that are not available through other channels.

The Marketplace is structured around key service categories, including electronic payment services, discounts, a premium services hub, digital vouchers, and gift-giving options. All services are consolidated within the app, allowing customers to easily access offers, track updates, and review previous purchases through a dedicated, secure interface. This integrated approach ensures transparency,



Nasser Al-Mutawa

convenience, and peace of mind, enabling customers to monitor and manage their transactions with confidence.

Commenting on the launch, Nasser Maher Al-Mutawa, Head of the Digital Group at Warba

Bank, said: "The launch of the enhanced Marketplace marks an important milestone in our efforts to deliver a truly integrated, customer-centric digital experience. We believe the future of banking lies in seamlessly combining financial and everyday services within one secure and trusted platform. This upgrade is not simply a redesign; it reflects our vision of positioning Warba Bank as a digital partner in our customers' daily lives, offering convenience, security and exclusive value through a single touchpoint."

Al-Mutawa added that the new Marketplace further reinforces Warba Bank's role as a leading provider of advanced digital solutions, supporting higher levels of customer satisfaction while contributing to the broader digital transformation vision of Kuwait.

The enhanced Marketplace builds on the strong foundation established over previous years, during which it served as a reliable platform for a wide range of digital services. These included prepaid mobile recharge cards

for local telecom operators, internet subscription vouchers, and an extensive selection of digital gift cards for international retailers, entertainment platforms, and gaming services. The Marketplace also gained strong customer adoption through its fast and secure payment capabilities and attractive discount offerings, becoming a daily digital companion for many users. Today, it enters a new phase that integrates these core services with additional logistical features, curated offers, and exclusive benefits.

Warba Bank is among the banks that have achieved notable progress in a relatively short period, securing a strong position in Islamic digital banking. With one of the largest shareholder bases among local banks, Warba Bank remains closely connected to all segments of society. This latest development further underscores the Bank's position as a trusted financial partner that combines innovation with social responsibility in delivering high-quality, customer-focused financial solutions.

KFH holds earnings webcast for FY-2025

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) held the earnings webcast for highlighting the Group's financial performance and results during the fiscal year 2025. The meeting was attended by KFH Group Chief Executive Officer, Khaled AlShamlan, Group Chief Financial Officer, Abdulkarim Al-Samdan, and Group Chief Strategy Officer, Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem.

KFH Group Chief Executive Officer, Khaled AlShamlan commenced the meeting by shedding light on the Bank's financial performance for the year ended 2025. He said: "With the grace of Allah, KFH has reported a net profit of 632.1 million KD for the year, reflecting an increase of 5% compared to FY 2024. This achievement marks the highest profit within the Kuwaiti banking sector. Earnings per share reached 35.64 fils, up 5.8% from the previous year. Our net financing income also saw significant growth, totaling 1.3 billion KD, an increase of 11.5%. Net operating income increased to 1.2 billion KD, a 10.7% increase, financing receivables reaching 21.8 billion KD increased by 14.4%, compared to last year. Our Total assets reached 42.8 billion KD for the year 2025, an increase of 6.1 billion KD, or 16.5%, compared to last year."

He added: "Our capital adequacy ratio stands at 19.81%, exceeding the minimum regulatory requirement, which underscores KFH's strong capital base. The Board of Directors considered the distribution of cash dividends to shareholders of 24% (including 10% in H1 2025 and a proposed 14% cash dividend for year-end). The Board of Directors also considered the distribution of bonus shares of 7% after the approval of the General Assembly and the relevant authorities."

AlShamlan stated that: "KFH's solid FY 2025 performance reaffirms our commitment to sustainable growth. Our strategic roadmap focuses on enhancing liquidity, capital, and risk management while aiming to position KFH among the world's top 100 banks. The record profits reflect our market leadership and resilience during global economic fluctuations."

"As a leading global economic entity, KFH benefits from a vast international network of over 600 branches. This geographic diversity and our varied revenue streams have significantly supported our operational performance, delivering strong results for both shareholders and customers. In 2025, we successfully expanded our Private Banking and Wealth Management services and invested in modern banking technology. Our focus on digitalization and innovative product development enhances customer experience and solidifies our competitive edge in the rapidly evolving banking landscape," he added.

He mentioned that KFH continues to play a pivotal role in supporting economic growth and aligning with the State's vision for a more prosperous financial future. We are committed to diversifying the national economy and achieving sustainable development in line with Kuwait Vision 2035. Our efforts include financing mega-projects in infrastructure, energy, oil and gas, and urban development, as well as providing credit facilities to Kuwaiti corporates and SMEs.

"Recently, KFH signed a KD 1.5 billion credit facilities agreement with the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation the largest KD-denominated deal of its kind of which 675 million KD is allocated to Islamic finance, with KFH contributing 405 million KD as the lead strategic partner," AlShamlan highlighted.

Meanwhile, he added: Our commitment to the community remains strong, highlighted by a 15 million KD donation for a specialized heart disease center, the opening of a tenth ward at the Addiction Treatment Center, and support for the development of Al Watanaya area in Kuwait City. Additionally, we released our fifth Sustainability Report



Khaled AlShamlan



Abdulkarim Al-Samdan



Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem

AlShamlan:

■ KFH continues to achieve record profits and outstanding results for shareholders and customers

Al-Samdan:

■ Strong growth achieved across all core banking activities and operating income

Al-Mukhaizeem:

■ Our flexible business model and clear strategic priorities enhance opportunities for 2026

and third Carbon Footprint Report, showcasing our proactive social responsibility efforts and environmental impact."

"In 2025, we successfully issued 1 billion USD in Senior Unsecured Sukuk as part of our 4 billion USD Sukuk Program, aimed at strengthening long-term funding sources and supporting our operations. Our digital transformation accelerated in 2025, enhancing our value proposition and partnerships while expanding smart branch services. This brought the total number of digital services on the KFHonline app to over 200," he added.

"In 2025, our customers completed over 600 million digital banking transactions, underscoring their confidence in us and reinforcing our leadership in delivering innovative financial solutions."

He further said: "As a testament to our successes, KFH received 58 awards in 2025, including "World's Best Islamic Bank" by Global Finance and "Bank of the Year – Kuwait" by The Banker, along with awards for Most Innovative Islamic Bank in Kuwait and Best Islamic Private Bank - Digital Innovation 2025."

"We look forward to continuing our journey of growth and innovation, driving positive change in the banking sector and contributing to Kuwait's economic vision." AlShamlan emphasized.

Group Chief Financial Officer- Abdulkarim Al-Samdan

Group Chief Financial Officer, Abdulkarim Al-Samdan that KFH Group has achieved solid growth in its core banking activities for the financial year ended 31 December 2025. Key financial performance highlights are as follows:

The Group has achieved Net Profit After Tax attributable to Shareholders for the year ended 31st December 2025 of KD 632.1mn higher by KD 30.3mn or 5.0% compared to 2024. Net financing income stood at KD 1,279.2mn representing an increase of 11.5%. Net Operating income stood at KD 1,209mn representing an increase of 10.7%. Cost to income ratio stood at 34.06% compared to 35.46% for the year 2024. Earnings per share for 2025 reached 35.64 fils; have an increase of 5.8% compared to last year.

Moreover, Financing income increased by KD 364.1mn or 12.6% in comparison to previous year due to increase in both average balance of profit earnings assets and yield by 38bps. Net financing income at KD 1,279.2mn representing an increase of 11.5% mainly due to increase in financing income. Net Operating income at KD 1,209mn represents an increase of 10.7% compared to previous year. Total operating income has increased by KD 141.2mn or 8.3%. Looking at the total operating income profile, there is increased contribution of net financing income to total operating income from 67.8% in 2024 to 69.8% in 2025. Further contribution of fee and commission income has increased from 10.5% to 12.5%. This represents enhancement and strength of our core banking activities. In addition, Total Operating Expenses stood at KD 624.3mn which is higher only by 4.1%.

Al-Samdan added: "It is important to note that expenses of Kuwait Turk increase by 16% mainly driven by the inflation while all other group entities combined decreased by 3% leading to overall marginal increase of 4%, this is a testament to the value creation through operational efficiency within the

group." Furthermore, Average Profit Yielding Assets is higher by 6.0% compared to 2024 driven by increase in financing receivables and investment in debt securities. Looking at provisions and impairments, the group total impairment charge increased by KD 41.4mn compared to 2024.

"As of December 2025, the provision as per CBK instructions exceeds the ECL based on CBK guidelines by KD 527mn compared to KD 539mn in 2024. This provides Group with a very comfortable buffer to withstand possible negative effect of the prevailing uncertainties on ECL provision requirements," he added.

Al-Samdan explained that Total Assets reached KD 42.8bn representing an increase of KD 6.06bn or 16.5%. Net financing receivables increased to KD 21.8bn representing an increase of KD 2.7bn or 14.4% compared to 2024 due to increase in both corporate and retail portfolio. Investments in debt securities reached KD 7.6bn representing an increase of KD 712.8mn or 10.4% compared to 2024. Deposits for the year 2025 have an increase of KD 1.8bn or 9.4% in comparison to year 2024.

ROAE increased from 11.22% to 11.32% mainly from increase in profit attributable to shareholders. ROAA increased from 1.74% to 1.84% similarly mainly due to increase in Net Profit. C/I ratio improved from 35.46% to 34.06% due to value creation through operational efficiency. EPS increased from 33.68 fils to 35.64 fils due to increase in profit attributable to shareholders. Group CAR ratio for 2025 is 19.81%, well above the limit required by regulators, which confirms the solid capital base of KFH.

Group Chief Strategy Officer – Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem

Meanwhile, Group Chief Strategy Officer, Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem highlighted the Kuwait operating environment with an overview on KFH. He also talked about KFH's strategy, as well as FY 2025 results. Al-Mukhaizeem said: "Global economic growth remained resilient in 2025 amid persistent trade tensions, elevated geopolitical uncertainty, and the restraining effects of relatively tight financing conditions on demand and investment. Global GDP growth is estimated at 3.3% in 2025 and is expected to remain stable at 3.3% in 2026, supported by technology-driven investment in advanced economies."

He added that global inflation is projected to moderate to 4.1% in 2025 and further to 3.8% in 2026, reflecting moderating demand and easing energy prices. The outlook remains subject to downside risks related to supply-chain disruptions, commodity price volatility, and rising fiscal and sovereign debt pressures in several major economies.

"The Kuwaiti economy is experiencing a gradual recovery driven by non-oil sector growth, despite continued adherence to OPEC+ production limits. Following a contraction of 2.6% in real GDP in 2024, growth is expected to reach around 2.6% in 2025 and accelerate to 3.9% in 2026, supported by stronger non-oil activity, resilient domestic demand, and sustained momentum in government capital spending." Al-Mukhaizeem highlighted.

In 2025, Kuwait delivered a standout performance in the projects market, recording over 16% growth on an annual basis in awarded contract values to USD 10.2 billion, the highest level in nine years, supported by projects aligned with Vision 2035 and accelerated investment in the energy

(oil and gas), power, and transport sectors—signaling a clear shift from planning to execution. This momentum has supported financing opportunities for KFH, reinforcing its role in structuring and funding large-scale projects across key strategic sectors.

The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) continued to recalibrate its monetary stance amid a benign inflation environment. Annual inflation remained contained at around 2.5% in September 2025, with full-year inflation projected to ease to approximately 2.2%, down from an average of 2.9% in 2024.

The CBK cut its discount rate by 25 basis points in December 2025 to 3.50%, reflecting a measured easing approach aimed at supporting economic activity while preserving price stability and broader macro-financial balance.

He added that the mortgage law draft remains in review. Its approval could generate significant demand for mortgage financing, affecting the banking sector and housing market. Ongoing discussions signal progress toward a new mortgage regulatory framework supportive of long-term banking sector growth, with implementation and impact dependent on the final law and implementing regulations.

KFH remained Kuwait's largest listed company in Boursa Kuwait by market capitalization, with a market value of approximately KWD 14.6 billion as of the end of December 2025, up 17.4% year on year versus end-2024 and accounting for around 27.4% of total listed market capitalization, which stood at KWD 53.2 billion, up 22.1% over the same period.

This reflects sustained investor confidence in KFH's earnings viability, balance sheet strength, and disciplined execution, highlighting its role as a core defensive and growth anchor in the Kuwaiti equity market, supported by strong results from its diversified business model and market leadership.

KFH concluded 2025 with exceptional achievements, securing more than 58 prestigious regional and international awards across banking excellence, digital transformation, sustainability, innovation in Islamic finance, and service quality. This recognition reflects strong international confidence in KFH's strategy execution, operational strength, and governance, reinforcing its position as a leading Islamic financial institution regionally and globally, and its ability to deliver sustainable value in a competitive banking landscape.

KFH has advanced its digital transformation by shifting from basic digitization to value-driven technology adoption. KFH has expanded use of technology across frontline channels, deploying solutions to enhance customer engagement and service efficiency. At the same time, enhancements to the KFH mobile app have strengthened digital journeys and increased migration to scalable, efficient channels, supported by stronger digital governance, cyber risk management, and fraud prevention.

"KFH has reiterated its focus on institutional partnerships and embedding sustainability at the core of its business model, while leveraging advanced digital capabilities to support long-term competitiveness. This is reflected in its role as a strategic partner in international economic forums and the integration of ESG considerations into client engagement—particularly through targeted SME programs—underscoring a disciplined approach to growth, resilience, and long-term value creation," Al-Mukhaizeem emphasized.

"KFH enters 2026 from a position of strength, supported by disciplined execution, a resilient balance sheet, and clear strategic priorities. Our diversified model, digital progress, and sustainability focus position us well for sustainable growth and long-term value creation," he concluded.

In line with its support for the national digital ecosystem and Kuwait Vision 2035

talabat concludes its sponsorship of the biggest e-gaming festival in Kuwait 'The BASE'

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: As a pioneer in and proactive contributor to Kuwait's digital evolution, talabat, the leading on-demand online ordering platform in the MENA region, concluded its platinum sponsorship of The BASE Gaming Festival, the region's largest gaming and esports event, in its debut edition. The event took place on February 5-7 at the Kuwait International Fair Ground, with a total turnout of 15,000 visitors, including professional gamers, novice enthusiasts, and top gaming publishers.

This sponsorship comes as part of talabat's unwavering commitment to supporting the advancement of Kuwait's multifaceted and dynamic technology landscape as well as its ongoing effort to encourage youthful talents in the digital sphere. This further echoes the company's ongoing contribution to the success of Kuwait Vision 2035 and its goal for establishing a robust digital ecosystem that attracts forward-looking investors and talents.

"We are proud to have been part of this exciting landmark event, which raises the benchmark for the esports industry not only in Kuwait, but across the region," said Bader Al-Ghanim, Vice President and Manager



talabat x Base Game

ing Director at talabat Kuwait. "With digital innovation at the heart of our future-ready culture and the country's momentous cross-sectoral development, it is important to recognize the varied opportunities sprouting across the landscape, such as investing in the mega esports industry and the role it

plays in engaging young talents in the technology industry."

On his part, Abdulrahman Sager, CEO at Kuwait Zones, said: "We are grateful for our partners and sponsors at talabat for their immense support and contribution to The BASE's memorable success. As an

icon in Kuwait's digital ecosystem, talabat's participation in the event was valuable and inspirational in numerous ways – both to the organizing team and the festival visitors."

At the center of the event was the main stage where top offline LAN tournament finals took place, of-

fering winners a prize pool of USD 10,000, ranging between USD 500 and USD 5,000 cash prizes. The main stage also featured talks from key industry figures and fun shows, including cosplay. Other zones included PC and PS casual gaming, PC and PS tournaments, mobile games,

arcade and VR, card and board games, as well as a car simulator and a cosplay area. A dedicated F&B corner also offered visitors a variety of options for replenishing and a spacious area for resting in between tournaments and experiences.

As part of its sponsorship, talabat set up an interactive talabat mart booth, featuring a high-energy game that drew festival visitors over three days. The experience challenged two participants to work together as a team. One participant stood outside the booth in front of a TV screen, while the other was inside a curtain-enclosed room, blindfolded and holding a phone with a camera connected live to the screen outside. Using walkie-talkies, the outside participant guided their partner to grab specific items—all available on talabat mart. Participants walked away with talabat mart vouchers, making the experience fun and memorable.

It is worth noting that talabat continues to play a vital role in Kuwait's digital transformation through sponsoring mega digital events and technology education programs that aim to propel national talents and prepare a generation of future-ready professionals capable of driving the country's innovation-fueled digital economy.

Global central bank caution amid soft US hiring and dollar recovery

By National Bank of Kuwait

Global markets delivered a mixed and cautious tone over the week, with U.S. data pointing to slowing momentum beneath the surface despite pockets of resilience. Manufacturing activity returned to expansion for the first time in a year on post-holiday reordering, while the services sector sustained its strongest back-to-back expansion since late 2024, supported by solid business activity but tempered by softer new orders, weak exports, modest hiring and persistent cost pressures. Labor market signals remained subdued, with job openings falling to the lowest level in more than five years, private-sector hiring barely growing in January, and jobless claims rising on weather-related disruptions, reinforcing a "low-hire, low-fire" environment that Fed officials continue to describe as stabilizing rather than weakening. Central banks struck a cautious stance, with the ECB and BoE holding rates while emphasizing data dependence and flagging slower growth and higher unemployment risks. In markets, the U.S. dollar strengthened over the week, pressuring major currencies including the euro and sterling, while gold rallied sharply on safe haven demand and U.S. equities saw mixed activity, amid concerns over growth and policy uncertainties.

United States

President Trump Signs Bill to End Shutdown

U.S. President Donald Trump signed a \$1.2 trillion budget bill to end a partial government shutdown that began over the weekend, after the package narrowly passed the House and earlier cleared the Senate. The measure funds most federal agencies through September, though the Department of Homeland Security received only a two-week extension due to disputes over immigration enforcement. Democrats are pushing for reforms to Immigration and Customs Enforcement following recent fatal shootings, leaving lawmakers divided on long-term DHS funding. The shutdown had temporarily disrupted government services and delayed key data releases, including the monthly jobs report.

U.S. Economic Activity is Robust

U.S. economic activity showed a resilient picture in January, with both manufacturing and services expanding, though underlying momentum remains uneven. Factory activity returned to growth for the first time in a year, as the ISM manufacturing PMI jumped to 52.6 on a post-holiday pickup in orders and some front-loading of purchases ahead of potential tariff-related price increases, even as manufacturers remained cautious amid trade-policy uncertainty and uneven sectoral performance. At the same time, the services sector sustained its strongest back-to-back expansion since October 2024, with the ISM services index holding at 53.8, supported by a sharp acceleration in business activity and broad-based growth across healthcare, utilities, construction, and retail. However, signs of moderation were evident, with softer new and export orders, only marginal employment gains in line with modest ADP payroll growth, and persistent cost pressures reflected in higher prices paid, longer supplier delivery times, and a notable drawdown in service-sector inventories.

U.S. Private Sector Adds Less Jobs than Anticipated

U.S. private sector hiring remained sluggish in January, underscoring a low-hire, low-fire labor market that has shown little momentum since the end of 2025. ADP data showed employers added just 22,000 jobs, well below expectations and December's downwardly revised gain, with overall growth entirely reliant on a surge in education and health services hiring. Outside healthcare, job gains were modest across financial activities,

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month Forward
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	
EUR	1.1852	1.1764	1.1874	1.1816	1.1730	1.1900	1.1865
GBP	1.3685	1.3506	1.3733	1.3609	1.3520	1.3800	1.3610
JPY	154.72	154.53	157.33	157.20	156.00	159.20	156.02
CHF	0.7706	0.7700	0.7817	0.7757	0.7650	0.7800	0.7680

construction, and consumer-facing sectors, while several areas saw outright losses, including professional and business services, manufacturing, and other services. The report highlights a broadly stagnant labor market that is unlikely to ease Federal Reserve concerns over whether additional policy support may eventually be needed.

Unemployment Claims Up Yet Stable

U.S. jobless claims rose more than expected last week, largely reflecting weather-related disruptions from winter storms, while broader labor market conditions remained broadly stable. Initial claims increased by 22,000 to 231,000, the largest weekly rise since early December and well above forecasts, with unadjusted claims climbing sharply in several northeastern and Midwest states affected by heavy snow and freezing temperatures.

Continuing claims, a proxy for hiring momentum, also ticked up to 1,844 million after three consecutive weekly declines. Despite a drop in job openings to a more than five-year low in December, largely concentrated in a single industry, layoffs remained low, and economists said the data do not point to a material deterioration in labor market conditions, which are widely viewed as stabilizing but constrained by tariff-related uncertainty and firms' growing caution amid increased adoption of artificial intelligence.

Job Openings Fall

U.S. job openings fell to their lowest level in more than five years in December, signaling a softening in labor demand toward the end of 2025. Openings declined by 386,000 to 6,542 million, the weakest reading since September 2020, while November's data was revised lower, underscoring a more pronounced slowdown than previously reported. The figure came in well below expectations, though hiring edged up by 172,000 to 5.293 million, indicating that while demand for workers has cooled, firms continue to add staff at a modest pace.

The Greenback was last seen trading at 97.633.

Eurozone

Eurozone Inflation is Below ECB Target

Euro-area inflation decelerated further below the European Central Bank's 2% target in January, with headline consumer prices rising 1.7% YoY, the weakest reading since September 2024 and in line with market expectations. Underlying price pressures also moderated, as core inflation eased unexpectedly to 2.2%, the lowest level since October 2021, while services inflation slowed to 3.2%, according to Eurostat. The disinflationary trend coincides with the ECB's first policy meeting of 2026, where policy rates are widely expected to remain unchanged at 2% for a fifth consecutive meeting. Inflation dynamics remain uneven across member states, with Germany at 2.1% and France recording a five-year low of 0.4%. While euro-area GDP expanded 0.3% QoQ in the fourth quarter of 2025, currency strength and external trade risks continue to shape the policy outlook.

ECB Holds Rates Steady

The European Central Bank held interest rates steady for a fifth consecutive meeting, with President Christine Lagarde emphasizing that poli-

cymakers remain "in a good place" and will not overreact to a single data point despite inflation dipping below target. The deposit rate was kept at 2%, its lowest level since November 2022, while the main refinancing and marginal lending rates remained at 2.15% and 2.40%, respectively. The ECB last cut rates in June, concluding an eight-cut easing cycle that began in mid-2024, and reiterated that its updated assessment supports inflation stabilizing around the 2% target over the medium term under a data-dependent, meeting-by-meeting approach.

The EUR/USD currency pair was last seen trading at 1.1816.

United Kingdom

BoE Maintains Policy Rate

The Bank of England kept interest rates unchanged at 3.75% following a closely split 5-4 vote, reflecting a finely balanced policy outlook after December's rate cut and amid mixed economic signals. Governor Andrew Bailey said further easing is likely later this year, though he stressed rates are unlikely to return to the ultra-low levels seen during the pandemic, which were driven by exceptional circumstances. While inflation is expected to fall back to the 2% target by spring, helped by budget measures such as lower household energy bills, the Bank downgraded its growth forecast and raised its unemployment outlook, increasing the case for future cuts. Policymakers remained divided, with concerns over slowing growth and a softening labor market prompting four members to favor another quarter-point cut, while others, including Bailey, who shifted his stance, opted to hold rates steady for now.

The GBP/USD currency pair was last seen trading at 1.3609.

Asia-Pacific

RBA Raises Cash Rate

The Reserve Bank of Australia raised its benchmark cash rate by 25 basis points to 3.85% at its first policy meeting of 2026, in line with market expectations. This marked the central bank's first rate hike since November 2023, signaling renewed concern over intensifying cost pressures in the second half of 2025. Policymakers cited elevated service-sector costs and a tight labor market as key drivers behind the decision, effectively reversing one of last year's rate cuts. The RBA noted that inflation is likely to remain above its 2-3% target range for some time, supported by resilient economic momentum and solid employment conditions. While acknowledging recent progress in easing price pressures, the board emphasized that price stability remains its primary objective. Going forward, future policy moves will remain data-dependent, reflecting a cautious and balanced approach between containing inflation and sustaining economic growth.

The AUD/USD currency pair was last seen trading at 0.7015.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti Dinar

USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30560.

Feds can't withhold social service funds from 5 Democratic states amid fraud claims, judge rules

A federal judge has ruled that President Donald Trump's administration must keep funds flowing to child care subsidies and other social service programs in five Democratic-controlled states - at least for now.

U.S. District Judge Vernon Broderick in New York, who was nominated by former President Barack Obama, granted the states' request for a preliminary injunction and a stay against the administration to bar it from withholding the money while a lawsuit works its way through the courts.

The states affected include California, Colorado, Illinois, Minnesota and New York. The five states said they receive a total of more than \$10 billion a year from the programs.

Attorneys representing the federal government in the case did not immediately return emails seeking comment Friday night. A spokesperson for the U.S. attorney's office for the Southern District of New York declined to comment.

Two temporary rulings had been issued in January, when the states sued, that blocked the federal government from holding back the funding, with the latest set to expire on Friday.

The programs in question are the Child Care and Development Fund, which subsidizes child care for 1.3 million children from low-income families nationally; the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, which provides cash assistance and job training; and the Social Services Block Grant, a smaller fund that provides money for a variety of programs.

"Every day, hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers rely on these funds to pay for necessities and provide their children a safe place to learn," New York Attorney General Letitia James said in a statement. "This illegal funding freeze would have caused severe chaos in the lives of some of the most vulnerable families in our state. I am proud to have secured another victory in this case to put a stop to it."

California Attorney General Rob Bonta added in a statement, "The Trump Administration's actions are not only unlawful - they are cruel, targeting the most vulnerable among us."

The government's explanation of its actions has shifted.

When the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced it was

withholding the money, it said there was "reason to believe" the states were granting benefits to people in the country illegally. It did not initially explain where the information came from. But in a court hearing, a federal government lawyer said it was largely in reaction to news reports about possible fraud.

HHS did not immediately return an email request for comment.

And while the government's initial news release said it "froze" access to money, federal lawyers told the judge that wasn't what was happening. Rather, they said, the Trump administration was requiring more information from those states.

The government says it wants more records from the group of states, including names and Social Security numbers for beneficiaries of some of the programs.

Advocates warn that cutting off the child care subsidies could have deep impacts. Day cares that accept the subsidies could face the risk of layoffs or closures. And that would affect both the lower-income families who receive the subsidies and families who don't. And for many families, losing child care can make it hard or impossible to work. (AP)

Features

ARAB TIMES
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2026

Chinese digital works draw young visitors at Taipei book fair

Arab publishers bring new titles back to Syrian readers in Damascus

DAMASCUS, Feb 8, (Xinhua): The ongoing International Book Fair in Damascus has reopened a vital channel for new books, reconnecting Syrian readers with global culture after years of war and isolation, Arab publishers said.

Baydar Abu Hashish, representative of Jordan's Fadaat Publishing and Distribution, told Xinhua that the years of conflict cut Syrian readers off from new works. The fair, he said, is a crucial opportunity to reconnect this established readership with contemporary ideas.

"Syrian readers have lacked access to new books in recent years," said Abu Hashish, noting that Arab publishers attended the fair to bridge this gap and reconnect with a culturally-engaged audience.

He highlighted the market's significance and responsiveness, pointing to the strong turnout during the opening hours.

Majid Aqeel of Qatar's Al-Jawad Publishing House agreed, telling Xinhua the Damascus fair is on par with major exhibitions in Cairo and Riyadh. He noted the significance of participating, as it was his house's first time at the event.

Syrian publishers also reported strong engagement from local readers. Ziad Kassara of Al-Safir Publishing House said visitors showed not only interest but active purchasing power from the first day, a response he described as notable compared with other major book fairs in the region.

The Damascus International Book Fair, held from Feb.

6-16, features nearly 500 publishers. On its opening day, organizers reported 250,000 visitors exploring new releases, attending cultural events, and meeting 10 authors for signings.

Meanwhile, at the ongoing six-day 2026 Taipei International Book Exhibition in Taiwan, where most books are printed in traditional Chinese characters, the Simplified Chinese Books Pavilion is not located in a prominent area, and yet groups of young visitors can frequently be seen stopping there to browse.

Jointly organized by Taiwan-based Chinese Creation Publishing Co., Ltd. and Xiamen International Book Company Limited, located in Fujian Province in east China, the pavilion is showcasing nearly 8,000 simplified Chinese books, with digital literature works from the mainland attracting the largest gatherings of young readers.

Lo Ssu-Chia, a 15-year-old secondary school student, came to the pavilion with her friend on the opening day of the book fair on Tuesday and purchased a five-volume print edition of a mainland online novel.

Lo said she began reading works by the author of this novel about a year ago. She and her friends also read novels by other mainland writers online.

"Their writing styles and storylines are very appealing. Compared with online fiction in Taiwan, many mainland

works feel more literary to me," she said.

Although Lo had already finished reading the digital version of the novel she bought, she still wanted to buy the printed edition, which is not easy to obtain since only limited copies were published.

"So I decided to try my luck at the book fair. I saw news about the exhibition online and came on the first day of the event. I also came to the Simplified Chinese Books Pavilion last year, but found then that the books I had wanted had already sold out," she said.

Eason Wang, marketing director of Chinese Creation Publishing, said many visitors arrive with specific titles in mind. Readers of different age groups have varying interests, with those under 30 mainly seeking mainland digital literature and comics.

"Female readers and students are particularly keen on these works. Related content is also easily accessible on platforms such as Rednote, Douyin and Bilibili," he noted.

College student Mina Lin and her friend were also among the young visitors stopping in front of shelves featuring mainland digital literature titles and discussing these books.

"I usually pick novels from rankings on mainland online literature platforms to read in my spare time," she said.

The 19-year-old added that her favorite genres include campus stories and infinite-flow fiction, in which protago-

nists are pulled from their reality into a series of parallel worlds where they must survive various dangers or complete challenging tasks.

"I care a lot about plot, and these stories tend to be very engaging," she said.

Besides simplified Chinese editions, some mainland digital literature and comic works are also displayed in their traditional Chinese editions at the exhibition, with these editions produced by Taiwan-based publishers.

At one Taiwan-based publisher's booth, a volume of the popular mainland comic series "If History Were a Group of Cats" ranked first on the publisher's list of best sellers. Featuring cat characters that retell Chinese history in a humorous and down-to-earth style, the series has become popular among young readers in Taiwan and has been recommended to students by a number of schools.

Chin Yu-Tzu, 28, traveled from Keelung to Taipei for the exhibition. Upon spotting a traditional Chinese edition of the popular mainland online novel series "Daomo Biji (Grave Robbery Notes)" on display, she soon decided to purchase two volumes.

"I've already read the other volumes online, and these two are the only ones I haven't read yet," Chin said, adding that she first watched a television adaptation of the series before becoming a fan of the original novels.

People

Video plea issued

'We will pay,' Guthrie tells potential captors

TUCSON, Ariz., Feb 8, (AP): Savannah Guthrie told the potential kidnappers of her mother Nancy Guthrie on Saturday that the family is prepared to pay for her safe return, as the frantic search for the 84-year-old Arizona resident has entered a seventh day.

"We received your message, and we understand. We beg you now to return our mother to us so that we can celebrate with her," she said in a video posted on social media, flanked by her siblings. "This is the only way we will have peace. This is very valuable to us, and we will pay."

The "Today" show host was referencing a message that was sent to the Tucson-based television station KOLD on Friday afternoon, according to Kevin Smith, a spokesperson for the FBI office in Phoenix.

KOLD said it received an email related to the Guthrie case on social media that day but declined to share specific details about its contents as the FBI conducted its review.

The station was one of multiple press outlets that received alleged ransom letters during the week. At least one letter made monetary demands and established Thursday evening and the following Monday evening as deadlines.

In a news conference Thursday, law enforcement officials declined to affirm that the letters were credible but said all tips were being investigated seriously. They also said one letter referenced Nancy Guthrie's Apple watch and a specific feature of her property.

The video released Saturday was the third this week that pleaded with potential kidnappers.

Investigators think Nancy Guthrie was taken against her will from her home just outside Tucson last weekend. DNA tests showed blood on Guthrie's front porch was a match to her. Pima County Sheriff Chris Nanos has said. Authorities have not identified any suspects or ruled anyone out.

Frustrated

The sheriff said Friday that he was frustrated that a camera at Nancy Guthrie's home was not able to capture images of anyone the day she went missing.

Investigators have found that the home's doorbell camera was disconnected early Sunday and that software data recorded movement at the home minutes later. But Nancy Guthrie did not have an active subscription, so none of the images were able to be recovered.

"It is concerning, it's actually almost disappointing, because you've got your hopes up," Nanos told The Associated Press in an interview. "OK, they got an image. 'Well, we do, but we don't.'"

President Donald Trump, speaking on Air Force One on Friday, said the investigation was going "very well."

"We have some clues that I think are very strong," Trump said, while en route to his Florida estate. "We have some things that may be coming out reasonably soon."

They were back in Nancy Guthrie's neighborhood on Friday.

The sheriff's department posted on social media to say access was restricted to the road in front of the home to give investigators space. Journalists staked out there were directed to move.

The Catalina Foothills Association, a neighborhood group, told residents in a letter that authorities were resuming searches in the area immediately.

"I know we all stand together in our collective disbelief and sadness and greatly appreciate your willingness to speak with law enforcement, share camera images and allow searches of your properties," the association president said in the letter.

The sheriff said Thursday that investigators have not given up on trying to retrieve camera recordings.

Television



This image released by Peacock shows Jack Whitehall, (left), and Keke Palmer in a scene from 'The 'Burbs.' (AP)

New Peacock thriller based on cult movie

Palmer is a fish-out-of-water in 'The 'Burbs'

NEW YORK, Feb 8, (AP): The suburbs are anything but bland in the new Peacock series "The 'Burbs," where strange things are going on. Like how jokes mix with the dread.

Inspired by the 1989 Tom Hanks-led movie of the same name, "The 'Burbs" follows a new mom as she navigates a foreign world of white picket fences and manicured lawns while also investigating a possible suspect.

"It's got the comedy, it has the drama, it's got the mystery, it's got the horror, the thrills, the suspense - all of it," says Celeste Hughey, the creator, writer and executive producer. All eight episodes drop Friday.

Hanks is replaced by Keke Palmer, who plays a new-lying and new mom who moves into her husband's family home in fictional Hinkley Hills, where everyone is in everybody else's business. "Suburbia is a spectator sport," she is told.

Across the street is an abandoned home, where a local teen disappeared decades ago. Palmer's Samira soon joins forces with a band of off-beat suburbanites to help solve the case, even if her own husband had some sort of role.

"I really wanted to focus on that fish-out-of-water feeling, centering Samira as a Black woman in a white suburb who is a new mom, a new wife - new everything - and trying to figure out where she belongs in the environment," says Hughey.

The cast includes Jack Whitehall as Samira's husband and the trio of Julia Duffy, Mark Proksch and Paula Pell as her wine-swilling, investigating neighbors who form

a sort of found family.

"The movie came out when I was quite young, but I remember seeing it as a kid and it being like this terrifying movie to me," says Hughey. "But revisiting it as an adult, it's just like the most timely movie."

The scripts crackle with witty humor, from references to Marie Kondo to "Baby Reindeer," and jokes often improvised by the actors. Chocolate brownies are described as the "Beyoncé of desserts" and there's a joke about how white ladies love salad.

"The 'Burbs" also touches on more serious issues over its eight episodes - microaggressions, racial profiling, bullying and childhood trauma - but takes a kooky, off-beat approach.

"I always look at things with a sense of humor," says Hughey. "I think comedy is a way to be able to examine all these pretty heavy subjects, but in a way that's accessible, in a way that is clarifying."

Palmer says she grew up watching Norman Lear shows and admired his ability to both entertain and address social tensions - something she found in "The 'Burbs."

"When I read this script for the first time, then as we started doing the show, it started to become clear that we had an opportunity to do the same thing," Palmer says. "We can expose clichés, we can lean into things, which is one of the greatest tools of satire and comedy in itself, and horror as well, because horror can play as a good allegory for the issues in our life."

Whitehall, who grew up in the London suburb of Putney, says he appreciates that the social commentary

never feels that heavy handed between the comedy and horror. "It was great to sort of be able to play in both genres."

There are multiple nods to the original movie, like picking the last name Fisher after the late actor Carrie Fisher, who appeared in the Hanks-led version, and naming a dog Darla after the name of the pup who starred in the 1989 version. Hanks, himself, appears in a blink-or-you'll-miss-it image.

There's a scene where Samira steps onto her neighbor's grass and leaves suddenly swirl around her feet menacingly, an echo to the original. And there's a moment when sardines and pretzels are served, a riff off a classic moment in the movie. The creators even asked original actor Wendy Schaal to return to play the town librarian.

"I really wanted to honor the original fans of the movie and make sure that they see that someone who respects the original material and loves the movie had it in their hands," says Hughey. "I see the fans."

Hughey said she wrote the series with Palmer's voice in mind, a piece of manifesting that turned out to actually work when she first met Palmer over a year later.

The music ranges from Bill Withers' "Lovely Day" to Steve Lacy's "Dark Red" to Doeckii's "Anxiety" and Big Pun's "I'm Not a Player."

"Music is very much a part of my creative process and something that I wanted to stand out in the show as well," says Hughey. "I got to pull in so many of my inspiration songs."

Musician suffered from Stage 4 kidney cancer

Brad Arnold, lead singer of rock band 3 Doors Down, dies at 47

LOS ANGELES, Feb 8, (AP): Brad Arnold, the lead singer of the Grammy-nominated rock band 3 Doors Down, died Saturday, months after he announced that he had been diagnosed with Stage 4 kidney cancer. He was 47.

The band said in a statement that Arnold "passed away peacefully, surrounded by loved ones, in his sleep after his courageous battle with cancer."

3 Doors Down formed in Mississippi in 1995 and four years later received a Grammy nomination for the breakout hit "Kryptonite." Arnold wrote the song in math class when he was 15 years old, according to the band statement.

Their debut album, "The Better Life," sold over 6 million copies. A second Grammy nomination came in 2003, for the song "When I'm Gone."

The band said Arnold "helped redefine mainstream rock music, blending post-grunge accessibility with emotionally direct songwriting and lyrical themes that resonated with everyday listeners."

3 Doors Down released six albums, most recently "Us And The Night" in 2016. Singles included "Loser," "Duck and Run" and "Be Like That," which appeared on the soundtrack for the 2001 film "American Pie 2."

While promoting their 5th album, "Time of My Life," Arnold said he considered himself lucky to have

carved out a career in the music business.

"If you do something as long as we've done it, you can't help but get better at it, you know?" Arnold told The Associated Press in 2011.

In 2017, 3 Doors Down performed at the first inauguration concert of President Donald Trump.

Arnold announced his cancer diagnosis last May, saying clear cell renal carcinoma had metastasized to his lungs. The band was forced to cancel a summer tour.

"His music reverberated far beyond the stage, creating moments of connection, joy, faith, and shared experiences that will live on long after the stages he performed on," the band said.



Singer Brad Arnold of the U.S. rock band 3 Doors Down takes to the stage at the opening concert of their German tour in the Columbiahalle in Berlin, on Feb. 21, 2012. (AP)

How simple acts strengthen relationships

Romance doesn't need grand gestures to thrive: experts

LOS ANGELES, Feb 8, (AP): Doing something romantic for special day does not need to involve a heart-shaped box of chocolates, roses or an atypically expensive dinner, according to relationship experts.

In fact, therapists encourage couples craving deeper connection to focus less on grand gestures and more on expressing love with mundane acts that recognize what matters to their partner.

Romance is not one size fits all. For some people, it means holding hands, opening a car door or drawing a bath for their lover. Others respond to receiving a hilarious text, coffee in bed or an offer to run a nagging errand. Either way, demonstrating kindness and care in small ways over time helps to support relationships as they evolve, says Traci Lee, a licensed marriage and family therapist in Dallas.

"The more that early on, you as a couple are able to establish good habits of whatever romance is going to look like for you, the better it is," Lee said.

Couples counselors and people in relationships share ideas for showing a romantic partner love throughout the year:

Early in a relationship, it doesn't take much to show ro-

mantic intentions, but that changes as couples learn more about each other as individuals, discover what their partner needs for emotional and physical well-being, and experience life together.

"Depending on what stage of the relationship you're in, romance can mean different things," Lee said. For example, couples with parenting and caregiving responsibilities have less time to devote to each other than they did during the honeymoon phases right after they started dating or got married.

Gabrielle Gambrell, who lives in New York with her husband of seven years and their two children, thinks romance "should be an evolution" and therefore takes work. One piece of advice she received before getting married stuck with her: Never stop dating.

"You keep romance alive by continuously dating," Gambrell said. "No matter how busy or what happens in the world, me and my husband have a mandatory date night. And every single date night, we leave the date energized and happy and grateful, and reminded what means the most to us."

Special day or anniversary carries a heavy burden of social pressures, fantasies from movies and books, and individual desires and expectations that often go unexpressed. All can be managed with planning and communication, experts say.

"Some people will say, 'If I have to tell my partner what to do, then it won't be romantic.' But I have to remind people that their partner is not a mind reader," Lee said. "I try to blow up the myth that romance can only happen if it's created spontaneously out of thin air."

Gambrell, who describes herself as a planner by nature, says she typically starts asking her husband questions about their plans for Feb. 14 days before. Making assumptions about the best way to celebrate Valentine's Day and comparisons with other couple's relationships are likely to lead to disappointment, she said.

"Love is not perfect. Romance is not perfect. Relationships, there's nothing perfect about them, but they are beautiful," she said.

Clarence Smith IV, a 29-year-old middle school teacher and video content creator in Phoenix, remains a big believer in using traditional acts of chivalry to communicate respect

and care for his girlfriend, such as positioning himself closer to the curb when they are walking together on a street.

"Romance today involves more seen gestures - let this be seen, let this be shown, let this be big," Smith said, adding that in his dating experience some people see his gentlemanly behavior as old-fashioned. "I do little things like that, and they're looked at as superfly impactful. We don't do this anymore. But to me, baby, this is basics."

While some relationship experts recommend establishing traditions around meaningful holidays, anniversaries and birthdays, others say that creating rituals to mark new seasons or weekends are equally valuable as part of the foundation for merging lifestyles and routines.

Lee says she often explains to her clients a popular analogy in the counseling industry: If you get in a fight with your partner and apologize with a dozen roses, that would be great, but bringing one rose every day for 12 days would communicate consistency and dedication.

She asks patients, "What are some small things that you can do that are going to be a way for you to show up for your partner in the way that they need it?"

Variety

WASHINGTON: Washington Post publisher Will Lewis said Saturday that he's stepping down, ending a troubled tenure three days after the newspaper said that it was laying off one-third of its staff.

Lewis announced his departure in a two-page email to the newspaper's staff, saying that after two years of transformation, "now is the right time for me to step aside." The Post's chief financial officer, Jeff D'Onofrio, was appointed temporary publisher.

Neither Lewis nor the newspaper's billionaire owner Jeff Bezos participated in the meeting with staff members announcing the layoffs on Wednesday. While anticipated, the cutbacks were deeper than expected, resulting in the shutdown of the Post's renowned sports section, the elimination of its photography staff and sharp reductions in personnel responsible for coverage of metropolitan Washington and overseas.

They came on top of widespread talent defections in recent years at the newspaper, which lost tens of thousands of subscribers following Bezos' order late in the 2024 presidential campaign pulling back from a planned endorsement of Kamala Harris, and a subsequent reorienting of its opinion section in a more conservative direction. (AP)

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WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump endorsed Nexstar Media Group's \$6.2 billion purchase of broadcast rival Tegna on Saturday, an apparent reversal from earlier criticism of the deal.

"We need more competition against THE ENEMY, the Fake News National TV Networks," Trump wrote on social media. "Letting Good Deals get done like Nexstar - Tegna will help knock out the Fake News because there will be more competition. ... Get That Deal Done."

The acquisition, which Nexstar announced in August and requires regulatory approval, would bring together two companies with significant holdings in local broadcast media. Nexstar oversees more than 200 owned and partner stations in 116 markets nationwide and also runs networks like The CW and NewsNation. Meanwhile, Tegna owns 64 news stations across 51 markets. (AP)

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LAHORE, Pakistan: Pakistan's eastern historical city of Lahore started three-day Basant kite-flying celebrations on Friday, as colorful kites returned to the skies to welcome the spring season after a hiatus of nearly two decades.

The city, with a population of over 13 million, witnessed fireworks lighting the sky, kites rising from rooftops, and music drifting through the city and surrounding neighborhoods as residents poured into streets and terraces to mark the revival of the traditional festival.

Families, young couples, and groups of friends gathered in large numbers at different locations across Lahore, the capital of the country's eastern Punjab province, and historically known for the kite-flying carnival.

Kite flying was banned in the province two decades ago after a series of fatal accidents leading to the killing and injuring of dozens of people due to the use of metal and glass-coated strings in competitive kite fighting. (Xinhua)

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PHNOM PENH: A Chinese-Cambodian cultural exhibition is being held in Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia, to celebrate the upcoming Chinese New Year, or the Spring Festival, which will fall on Feb. 17.

Lasting from Friday to Sunday, the three-day cultural event was designed to provide revelers with an opportunity to experience the rich tapestry of the Chinese New Year.

It featured lion dance, arts performance, and an exhibition of Chinese and Cambodian culture and food. Visitors also enjoy various activities such as writing Chinese characters symbolizing luck and happiness, paper cutting, and a Chinese tea salon.

Kou Somala, a 36-year-old Cambodian housewife, said the event has not only created a joyful atmosphere ahead of the Spring Festival, but also helped promote cultural relations and people-to-people exchange between Cambodia and China. (Xinhua)

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Music



Mariah Carey performs at the Olympic opening ceremony at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Milan, Italy, Friday, Feb. 6. (AP)

Olympic act sparks lip-sync questions

Carey wows and raises eyebrows in Milan

MILAN, Feb 8, (AP): The performance by pop star Mariah Carey at the Milan Cortina Winter Olympics opening ceremony was the talk of the town - but it also raised a few questions.

The rendition by the American singer of Italian classic "Nel Blu Dipinto di Blu" - better known as "Volare" - was a showstopping highlight in the 3½-hour spectacle that kicked off the Games.

"Such a dream come true to perform (in Italian!) at the Milano Cortina 2026 Olympic Winter Games Opening Ceremony," she later wrote in an Instagram post.

She received rave reviews from many, who called her marvelous and touted her high notes.

But her performance Friday also prompted a good deal of criticism online, where commenters were confused why an Italian singer wasn't given the honor. Some noted a large teleprompter with a phonetic breakdown of the song's Italian lyrics, while others wondered if she was lip-syncing.

Three reporters - including The Associated Press - asked the International Olympic Committee and local organizers about her during their daily news conference Saturday to address the teleprompter and doubts about lip-syncing.

Carey was born in New York to an Irish American mother, who was an opera singer, and a Black father with Venezuelan roots.

Despite her non-Italian background, the local organizing

committee asked her to perform at Friday's opening ceremony and touted her for months as a big get to open the Winter Games.

"We believe that Mariah Carey's performance was exceptional," Milan Cortina's director of ceremonies Maria Laura Iascone said Saturday. "She was capable of creating a magic moment."

It's unclear whether Carey chose to sing "Volare," but she told *Vogue* after the ceremony that the song has long been a favorite of hers.

The show did feature the Italian voices of tenor Andrea Bocelli, singer-songwriter Laura Pausini and mezzosoprano Cecilia Bartoli.

While armchair analysts mused online that the "All I Want for Christmas is You" singer appeared stiff, especially while singing in Italian, the crowd inside the San Siro stadium cheered and applauded when they realized she was performing in the local language.

She later stunned the audience with her own "Nothing is Impossible."

Asked Saturday if Carey was lip-syncing, Iascone dodged the question and instead praised her as "really extraordinary."

She said that "in order to be on the safe side," they always record performances ahead of time for internationally broadcast events.

Free tours on the weekends

Olympic fans can snowmobile to Lavaredo Peaks

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy, Feb 8, (AP): For one month starting on Saturday, Olympic spectators keen for a side trip to a UNESCO World Heritage Site can use Uber to reserve a ride on a snowmobile along the snow-covered road to the base of the Three Peaks of Lavaredo.

The dramatic, jagged limestone pinnacles stand just 23 kilometers (14.3 miles) from the Cortina venues where athletes are competing in the 2026 Winter Olympics and Paralympics.

One of the Olympic torchbearers, Giulia Baffetti, runs snowmobiling tours through Cortina-based winter activities outfit Snowdreamers. The company partnered with Uber, the official ride-hailing sponsor for the Games, to offer free tours on the weekends in February to people in town.

"Uber Snowmobile" tours, which can only be booked through Uber, include a ride in an Uber transfer bus for



Associated Press video journalist Brittany Peterson drives a snowmobile during a tour to the Three Peaks of Lavaredo, Thursday, Feb. 5. (AP)

up to eight people from Cortina to the spot where riders mount their snowmobiles for departure. Tourgoers then follow the instructor, who leads the line of snowmobiles.

The first slots offered went fast, but

Uber spokesperson Caspar Nixon said Friday that it planned to add more.

The three peaks are a magical place, Baffetti said, and this is a way for more people to experience it. Hikers and climbers flock there in the warmer months. In the winter, it's a prime spot for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and sledding. Snowmobiling is allowed in a limited area in order to protect the environment.

"We want to give an experience to the tourists, so they can feel the mountains in a different way," she said.

The Associated Press took the one-hour tour on Thursday, ahead of the Saturday launch, along with one other person. Helmets are essential, while heated handgrips are a most welcome feature. And that red button? Passengers can push it to stop the snowmobile if it veers off course or they feel unsafe.

Technology

Benefit or risk?

AI text floods institutions, triggering futile arms race

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

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By Bruce Schneier, Harvard Kennedy School and Nathan Sanders, Harvard University

In 2023, the science fiction literary magazine *Clarkesworld* stopped accepting new submissions because so many were generated by artificial intelligence. Near as the editors could tell, many submitters pasted the magazine's detailed story guidelines into an AI and sent in the results. And they weren't alone. Other fiction magazines have also reported a high number of AI-generated submissions.

This is only one example of a ubiquitous trend. A legacy system relied on the difficulty of writing and cognition to limit volume. Generative AI overwhelms the system because the humans on the receiving end can't keep up.

This is happening everywhere. Newspapers are being inundated by AI-generated letters to the editor, as are academic journals. Lawmakers are inundated with AI-generated constituent comments. Courts around the world are flooded with AI-generated filings, particularly by people representing themselves. AI conferences are flooded with AI-generated research papers. Social media is flooded with AI posts. In music, open source software, education, investigative journalism and hiring, it's the same story.

Like *Clarkesworld*'s initial response, some of these institutions shut down their submissions processes. Others have met the offensive of AI inputs with some defensive response, often involving a countering use of AI. Academic peer reviewers increasingly use AI to evaluate papers that may have been generated by AI. Social media platforms turn to AI moderators. Court systems use AI to triage and process litigation volumes supercharged by AI. Employers turn to AI tools to review candidate applications. Educators use AI not just to grade papers and administer exams, but as a feedback tool for students.

These are all arms races: rapid, adversarial iteration to apply a common technology to opposing purposes. Many of these arms races have clearly deleterious effects. Society suffers if the courts are clogged with frivolous, AI-manufactured cases. There is also harm if the established measures of academic performance - publications and citations - accrue to those researchers most willing to fraudulently submit AI-written letters and papers rather than to those whose ideas have the most impact. The fear is that, in the end, fraudulent behavior enabled by AI will undermine systems and institutions that society relies on.

Upsides

Yet some of these AI arms races have surprising hidden upsides, and the hope is that at least some institutions will be able to change in ways that make them stronger.

Science seems likely to become stronger thanks to AI, yet it faces a problem when the AI makes mistakes. Consider the example of nonsensical, AI-generated phrasing filtering into scientific papers.

A scientist using an AI to assist in writing an academic paper can be a good thing, if used carefully and with disclosure. AI is increasingly a primary tool in scientific research: for reviewing literature, programming and for coding and analyzing data. And for many, it has become a crucial support for expression and scientific communication. Pre-AI, better-funded researchers could hire humans to help them write their academic papers. For many authors whose primary language is not English, hiring this kind of assistance has been an expensive necessity. AI provides it to everyone.

In fiction, fraudulently submitted AI-generated works cause harm, but to the human authors now subject to increased competition and to those readers who may feel defrauded after unknowingly reading the work of a machine. But some outlets may welcome AI-assisted submissions with appropriate disclosure and under particular guidelines, and leverage AI to evaluate them against criteria like originality, fit and quality.

Others may refuse AI-generated work, but this will come at a cost. It's unlikely that any human editor or technology can sustain an ability to differentiate human from machine writing. Instead, outlets that wish to exclusively publish humans will need to limit submissions to a set of authors they trust to not use AI. If these policies are transparent, readers can pick the format they prefer and read happily from either or both types of outlets.

We also don't see any problem if a job seeker uses AI to polish their resumes or write better cover letters: The wealthy and privileged have long had access to human assistance for those things. But it crosses the line when AIs are used to lie about identity and experience, or to cheat on job interviews.

Similarly, a democracy requires that its citizens be able to express their opinions to their representatives, or to each other through a medium like the newspaper. The rich and powerful have long been able to hire writers to turn their ideas into persuasive prose, and AIs providing that assistance to more people is a good thing, in our view. Here, AI mistakes and bias can be harmful. Citizens may be using AI for more than just a time-saving shortcut; it may be augmenting their knowledge and capabilities, generating statements about historical, legal or policy factors they can't reasonably be expected to independently check.

Campaigns

What we don't want is for lobbyists to use AIs in astroturf campaigns, writing multiple letters and passing them off as individual opinions. This, too, is an older problem that AIs are making worse.

What differentiates the positive from the negative here is not any inherent aspect of the technology, it's the power dynamic. The same technology that reduces the effort required for a citizen to share their lived experience with their legislator also enables corporate interests to misrepresent the public at scale. The former is a power-equalizing application of AI that enhances participatory democracy; the latter is a power-concentrating application that threatens it.

In general, we believe writing and cognitive assistance, long available to the rich and powerful, should be available to everyone. The problem comes when AIs make fraud easier. Any response needs to balance embracing that newfound democratization of access with preventing fraud.

There's no way to turn this technology off. Highly capable AIs are widely available and can run on a laptop. Ethical guidelines and clear professional boundaries can help - for those acting in good faith. But there won't ever be a way to totally stop academic writers, job seekers or citizens from using these tools, either as legitimate assistance or to commit fraud. This means more comments, more letters, more applications, more submissions.

The problem is that whoever is on the receiving end of this AI-fueled deluge can't deal with the increased volume. What can help is developing assistive AI tools that benefit institutions and society, while also limiting fraud. And that may mean embracing the use of AI assistance in these adversarial systems, even though the defensive AI will never achieve supremacy.

The science fiction community has been wrestling with AI since 2023. *Clarkesworld* eventually reopened submissions, claiming that it has an adequate way of separating human- and AI-written stories. No one knows how long, or how well, that will continue to work. (AP)

S. Africa releases first locally produced FMD vaccine in 20 years

Bangladesh reports first confirmed Nipah virus fatality in 2026

DHAKA, Feb 8, (Xinhua): Bangladesh has confirmed its first Nipah virus (NiV) death in 2026, with officials reporting that a woman succumbed to the brain-damaging illness after consuming raw date juice.

The case was reported in the northern Naogaon district, Sharmin Sultana, senior scientific officer at the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research, said Saturday.

The patient in her 40s developed symptoms consistent with NiV infection on Jan. 21, including fever, headache, muscle cramps, loss of appetite (anorexia), weakness, and vomiting, followed by hypersalivation, disorientation, and convulsion, according to the World Health Organization.

On Jan. 27, the woman became unconscious and was referred by a local physician to a tertiary hospital.

Bangladesh reported its first case of NiV infection in 2001.

Since then, human infections have been reported almost every year. In 2025, four laboratory-confirmed fatal cases

were reported in Bangladesh.

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Foot-and-mouth disease: South Africa has released its first locally produced vaccine for foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in nearly two decades, the country's Department of Agriculture said Friday.

At a press briefing, Minister of Agriculture John Steenhuisen, together with the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), the vaccine developer and producer, announced the release of an initial batch of 12,900 vaccine doses, with production expected to rise to 20,000 doses per week by March.

The ARC said plans are being prepared to distribute the vaccine to herds across the country.

According to a statement from the department, the milestone marks a shift from a largely reactive response to a more proactive, science-led campaign against the disease, to help South Africa regain its FMD-free status from the World Organization for Animal Health.

"This will strengthen our frontline defense against foot-and-mouth disease," Steenhuisen said, noting that the country's long-term goal is to reduce reliance on foreign suppliers for the FMD vaccine.

The FMD primarily affects cloven-hoofed animals such as cattle, sheep, and goats. In most cases, the symptoms include fever, painful sores in the mouth, and a rash with blisters on the hands, feet, and buttocks.

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Influenza: The number of influenza cases in Japan is seeing a resurgence, exceeding the alert threshold after easing in December 2025, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare said on Friday.

A total of 114,291 cases were reported across Japan during the week ending on Feb. 1, averaging 30.03 cases per designated medical institution, which exceeded the alert level of 30 and was 1.8 times higher than the previous week, according to the ministry.

The resurgence is believed to be driven by the spread of the influenza B virus since the end of last year. The earlier outbreak was led by subclade K, a new mutant strain of the H3N2 influenza A virus.

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Measles: Mongolia's measles death toll has reached 13 after one more related death was recorded, the National Center for Communicable Diseases (NCCD) said on Saturday.

Meanwhile, 77 people remained in hospital, including nine critically ill children, the NCCD said in a statement.

The NCCD advised parents to protect their children from a potentially severe disease by getting them two doses of the measles vaccine.

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease transmitted by respiratory droplets and direct contact.

Common complications include fever, dry cough, runny nose, sore throat and inflamed eyes. The disease can be prevented by immunization.



This photo provided by the California Department of Public Health shows Death Cap mushrooms. (AP)

Health officials urge caution

Four people die after eating death cap mushrooms in US

SAN DIEGO, Feb 8, (AP): Four people have died and three others have required liver transplants after eating the aptly named death cap mushroom that is proliferating in California following a rainy winter.

The California Department of Public Health is urging people to avoid mushroom foraging altogether this year because death cap mushrooms are easily confused with safe, edible varieties.

Since Nov. 18 there have been more than three dozen cases of death cap poisonings reported, including the four deaths and three liver transplants, according to the health department. Many who sought medical attention suffered from rapidly evolving acute liver injury and liver failure. Several patients required admission to an intensive care unit. They have ranged in age from 19 months to 67 years old.

The death cap is one of the most poisonous mushrooms in the world and is part of a small group of mushrooms containing amatoxins, which are highly potent compounds causing 90% of fatal mushroom poisonings globally. They are in city parks and in forests, often under oak trees.

In a typical year there are between two and five death cap poisonings, said Dr. Craig Smollin, medical director for the San Francisco Division of the California Poison Control System.

Eating even a small amount can be fatal, and experts warn that a mushroom's color is not a reliable way of detecting its toxicity, and whether the death cap variety is raw, dried or cooked does not make a difference.

People can have stomach cramping, nausea, diarrhea or vomiting within 24 hours after ingesting a toxic mushroom and the situation can quickly deteriorate after that, experts say. Early symptoms may also go away within a day, but serious to fatal liver damage can still develop within 2 to 3 days.

Death cap mushrooms have been collected in local and national parks across Northern California and the Central Coast. Clusters have been identified in the Monterey and San Francisco Bay areas as well.

The public health department said those poisoned have included many Spanish, Mixteco, and Mandarin Chinese speakers and the state in response has expanded their warnings in different languages.

Spanish was the primary language for more than 60% of people poisoned, according to the health department.

The death cap resembles many fungi varieties from around the world that are safe to eat, and it changes in appearance in different stages, Smollin said, going from a brownish-white cap to a greenish cap.

"Unless you're an expert who studies mushrooms it can be very difficult to know," Smollin said.

Children have been among those poisoned this year. Officials advise keeping an eye on children and pets outside where mushrooms grow, and buying mushrooms from trusted grocery stores and sellers.

Treatment is more difficult once symptoms start so doctors advise people to seek medical care once someone becomes aware that they have eaten a poisonous mushroom or suspect they have.

FDA warning effect

Hims & Hers halts knockoff of Novo's new Wegovy pill

NEW YORK, Feb 8, (AP): Telehealth company Hims & Hers dropped its plan to offer a knockoff version of the weight-loss pill Wegovy on Saturday - two days after it announced the new drug and one day after the Food and Drug Administration threatened to restrict access to the ingredients needed to copy popular weight-loss medications.

Hims had said Thursday that it would offer a compounded version of the new Wegovy pill that drugmaker Novo Nordisk just began selling last month. Novo immediately threatened to sue Hims, and then the FDA said Friday that it plans to take decisive steps to limit access to the active ingredients in popular GLP-1 drugs like Wegovy, Ozempic and Zepbound.

Hims' own website still touted the new semaglutide pill offering Saturday afternoon - hours after it announced on X that it will no longer sell the medicine. Semaglutide is the chemical name for Wegovy.

"Since launching the compounded semaglutide pill on our platform, we've had constructive conversations with stakeholders across the industry. As a result, we have decided to stop offering access to this treatment," Hims said in its statement. "We remain committed to the millions of Americans who depend on us for access to safe, affordable, and personalized care."

Hims didn't say Saturday whether it will make any changes to the compounded versions of injectable weight-loss medications it has been selling as a result of the FDA action.

The San Francisco-based company had planned to significantly undercut Novo's price of \$149 per month for the Wegovy pill by selling its version at \$49 for the first month and \$99 per month thereafter. Hims and other similar companies got started several years ago by offering cheap generic versions of drugs for hair loss, erectile dysfunction and other health issues before branching out into the multibillion market for obesity medications.

Novo plans to tout its new FDA-approved Wegovy pill in celebrity-filled Super Bowl ad on Sunday. The Danish pharmaceutical giant didn't immediately comment Saturday on Hims' decision to drop the knockoff. Rival drugmaker Eli Lilly has said that it expects the FDA to approve an oral version of its orlistat weight loss medication later this spring. But Wegovy is the first pill to hit the market.

The compounded medicine that Hims had planned to sell wasn't approved and had not gone through trials to demonstrate that it would be effective.

The FDA permits specialty pharmacies and other companies to make compounded versions of brand name drugs when they are in short supply. And the booming demand for GLP-1 drugs in recent years prompted companies like Hims to jump into the multibillion-dollar market for the drugs, with many patients willing to pay cash.

In 2024, the FDA said that GLP-1 drugs were no longer in a shortage, which was expected to put an end to the compounding.

Can AI truly heal emotional gaps?

AI 'companions' promise to combat loneliness, but one-way bonds harm

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

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By Anna Mae Duane

University of Connecticut

The United States is in the grips of a loneliness epidemic: Since 2018, about half the population has reported that it has experienced loneliness. Loneliness can be as dangerous to your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, according to a 2023 surgeon general's report.

It is not just individual lives that are at risk. Democracy requires the capacity to feel connected to other citizens in order to work toward collective solutions.

In the face of this crisis, tech companies offer a technological cure: emotionally intelligent chatbots. These digital friends, they say, can help alleviate the loneliness that threatens individual and national health.

But as the pandemic showed, technology alone is not sufficient to address the complexities of public health. Science can produce miraculous vaccines, but if people are enmeshed in cultural and historical narratives that prevent them from taking the life-saving medicine, the cure sits on shelves and lives are lost. The humanities, with their expertise in human culture, history and literature, can play a key role in preparing society for the ways that AI might help - or harm - the capacity for meaningful human connection.

The power of stories to both predict and influence human behavior has long been validated by scientific research. Numerous studies demonstrate that the stories people embrace heavily influence the choices they make, ranging from the vacations they plan, to how people approach climate change to the computer programming choices security experts make.

There are two storylines that address people's likely behaviors in the face of the unknown territory of depending on AI for emotional sustenance: one that promises love and connection, and a second that warns of dehumanizing subjugation.

Friendship

The first story, typically told by software designers and AI companies, urges people to say "I do" to AI and embrace bespoke friendship programmed on your behalf. AI company Replika, for instance, promises that it can provide everyone with a "companion who cares. Always here to listen and talk. Always on your side."

There is a global appetite for such digital companionship. Microsoft's digital chatbot Xiaooice has a global fan base of over 660 million people, many of whom consider the chatbot "a dear friend," even a trusted confidante.

In popular culture, films like "Her" depict lonely people becoming deeply attached to their digital assistants. For many, having a "dear friend" programmed to avoid difficult questions and demands seems like a huge improvement over the messy, challenging, vulnerable work of engaging with a human partner, especially if you consider the misogynistic preference for submissive, sycophantic companions.

To be sure, imagining a chummy relationship with a chatbot offers a sunnier set of possibilities than the apocalyptic narratives of slavery and subjugation that

have dominated storytelling about a possible future among social robots. Blockbuster films like "The Matrix" and the "The Terminator" have depicted hellscapes where humans are enslaved by sentient AI. Other narratives featured in films like "The Creator" and "Blade Runner" imagine the roles reversed and invite viewers to sympathize with AI beings who are oppressed by humans.

You could be forgiven for thinking that these two stories, one of friendship, the other of slavery, simply represent two extremes in human nature. From this perspective it seems like a good thing that marketing messages about AI are guiding people toward the sunny side of the futuristic street. But if you consider the work of scholars who have studied slavery in the U.S., it becomes frighteningly clear that these two stories - one of purchased friendship and one of enslavement and exploitation - are not as far apart as you might imagine.

Dehumanize

Chattel slavery in the US was a brutal system designed to extract labor through violent and dehumanizing means. To sustain the system, however, an intricate emotional landscape was designed to keep the enslavers self-satisfied. "Gone with the Wind" is perhaps the most famous depiction of how enslavers saw themselves as benevolent patriarchs and forced enslaved people to reinforce this fiction through cheerful professions of love.

In his 1845 autobiography, Frederick Douglass described a tragic occasion when an enslaved man, asked about his situation, honestly replied that he was ill-treated. The plantation owner, confronted with testimony about the harm he was inflicting, sold the truth-teller down the river. Such cruelty, Douglass insisted, was the necessary penalty for someone who committed the sin "of telling the simple truth" to a man whose emotional calibration required constant reassurance.

To be clear, I am not evoking the emotional coercion that enslavement required in order to conflate lonely seniors with evil plantation owners, or worse still, to equate computer code with enslaved human beings.

There is little danger that AI companions will courageously tell us truths that we would rather not hear. That is precisely the problem. My concern is not that people will harm sentient robots. I fear how humans will be damaged by the moral vacuum created when their primary social contacts are designed solely to serve the emotional needs of the "user."

At a time when humanities scholarship can help guide society in the emerging age of AI, it is being suppressed and devalued. Diminishing the humanities risks denying people access to their own history. That ignorance renders people ill-equipped to resist marketers' assurances that there is no harm in buying "friends." People are cut off from the wisdom that surfaces in stories that warn of the moral rot that accompanies unchecked power.

If you rid yourself of the vulnerability born of reaching out to another human whose response you cannot control, you lose the capacity to fully care for another and to know yourself. As we navigate the uncharted waters of AI and its role in our lives, it's important not to forget the poetry, philosophy and storytelling that remind us that human connection is supposed to require something of us, and that it is worth the effort. (AP)

Apes can 'play' pretend: study

NEW YORK, Feb 8, (AP): By age 2, most kids know how to play pretend. They turn their bedrooms into faraway castles and hold make-believe tea parties.

The ability to make something out of nothing may seem uniquely human - a bedrock of creativity that's led to new kinds of art, music and more.

Now, for the first time, an experiment hints that an ape in captivity can have an imagination.

"What's really exciting about this work is that it suggests that the roots of this capacity for imagination are not unique to our species," said study co-author Christopher Krupenye with Johns Hopkins University.

Enter Kanzi, a bonobo who was raised in a lab and became a whiz at communicating with humans using graphic symbols. He combined different symbols to make them mean new things and learned how to create simple stone tools.

Scientists wondered whether Kanzi had the capacity to play pretend - that is, act like something is real while knowing it's not. They'd heard reports of female chimpanzees in the wild holding sticks as though they were babies and chimps in captivity dragging imaginary blocks on the ground after playing with real ones.

But imagination is abstract, so it's hard to know what's going on in the apes' heads. They could just be imitating researchers or mistaking imaginary objects for the real thing.

Researchers adapted the playbook for studying young children to stage a juice party for Kanzi. They poured imaginary juice from a pitcher into two cups, then pretended to empty just one. They asked Kanzi which cup he wanted and he pointed to the cup still containing pretend juice 68% of the time.



This undated photo provided by the Ape Initiative shows Kanzi, a bonobo who learned to communicate with humans, in Des Moines, Iowa. (AP)

New Zealand wins women's final

South Africa ends drought

PERTH, Australia, Feb 8, (AP): South Africa won the Australian stopover in the sevens world series for the first time in nine years after topping Fiji 21-19 in the Perth final.

It took a phenomenal second try by Ryan Oosthuizen, who crashed past four Fijians, to tie the score at 19 that was then converted from the sideline by Ricardo Duartee.

"I'm not the fastest guy so sometimes I need to run over people," Oosthuizen said.

New Zealand women won their third leg of four in the series, beating defending Perth champion Australia 29-7 in the 31-degree (C) heat and ending Australia's 10-match home win streak.

South Africa pounced on two Fiji errors to blast off 14-0 in four minutes. Duartee converted tries by Oosthuizen and Sebastiaan Jobb.

But Fiji has been the comeback king lately. It rallied from 12-0 down to beat France in the Singapore final last weekend, and beat South Africa from 14-0 down in pool play on Saturday.

Terio Veilawa was at the center of Fiji's rally, setting up tries for Viwa Nanduvalo and captain Jeremai Matana to trail only 14-12 at halftime. Veilawa then claimed the second-half restart and broke two tackles on his own 22 line to score the go-ahead try, converted by Iowane Teba for 19-14.

But South Africa regained the lead when Oosthuizen high-stepped to his second try and Duartee slotted his second big sideline conversion.

The last five minutes were all defense. Nacani Boginisoko made a try-saving tackle near the right corner flag on South Africa's Donovan Don, and Luan Gilomee pulled off a try-saver on Boginisoko on the halfway line.

South Africa last won in Australia in 2017 and is the first two-time men's winner in the ongoing series.

In the season's fourth women's final of four between the neighbors, the Australians, after being smashed by New Zealand 36-7 in the Singapore final, scored first through Heidi Dennis, their youngest player at 20.

But Jordi Miller, on her 22nd birthday, kickstarted New Zealand with a brilliant run. She slipped out of a double tackle near the right touchline in her half, tore away and threw off a third defender, and offloaded to send captain Risi Pouri-Lane over.

Kelsey Teneti then scored on both sides of halftime for a Perth-leading eight tries. Katelyn Vaha'akolo finished off another overlap, and New Zealand, which missed one tackle in the final, capped it in typical style: Stacey Waaka forced a desperation spill by Australia's Maddison Levi near her tryline and Alena Sali snapped up the gift. "After back-to-back tournaments, for the girls to show consistency and connection and still turn up even when it's hot and you're hurting, I'm really proud," Pouri-Lane said.

The series resumes in Vancouver on March 7-8.

Boise State fends off New Mexico

Houston pulls away late to hand BYU fourth consecutive defeat

PROVO, Utah, Feb 8, (AP): Kingston Flemings scored 11 of his 19 points in the second half to help No. 8 Houston beat No. 16 BYU 77-66.

Chris Cenac, Jr. added 16 points and Emanuel Sharp had 14 for Houston (21-2, 9-1 Big 12), which has won four in a row to stay within a game of No. 1 Arizona in the Big 12 standings. The Cougars shot 50% from the field after halftime.

AJ D'yantisa scored 28 points and Rob Wright III added 17 for the Cougars (17-6, 5-5), who dropped their fourth straight game.



Flemings

BYU got Houston into the bonus quickly in the second half, but shot just 16 of 28 from the free-throw line.

Flemings made four baskets to power a 14-5 run that put Houston up 68-59 with 3:06 left. The visiting Cougars scored three second-chance baskets during the run to gradually pull away from BYU.

Dylan Andrews scored a career-high 33 points and Boise State held off New Mexico.

Andrews shot 9 of 14 from the field, including 5 for 10 from 3-point range, and went 10 for 10 from the free-throw line for the Broncos (15-9, 7-6 Mountain West Conference). Drew Fielder totaled 18 points and five rebounds. Pearson Carmichael hit three 3-pointers and scored 16.

Luke Haupt finished with a career-high 30 points, six rebounds and four assists for the Lobos (18-6, 9-4). Jake Hall added 19 points and Uriah Tenette pitched in with 14 points, five assists and two steals.

Andrews' 18-point second half helped Boise State close out the one-point victory.

Jeremy Fears played one of his best games to help No. 10 Michigan State earn a much-needed win after his coach thought about benching him.

Fears started the game and finished with 26 points - 11 in OT - and 15 assists in 42 minutes, lifting the Spartans to an 85-82 win over No. 5 Illinois, after coach Tom Izzo debated whether to discipline the standout point guard after his sportsmanship was called into question in two straight games.

Late in the first half, Fears was scrutinized again.

"If he breathes on somebody now, there's going to be a call," Izzo said after the game.

Fighting Illini coach Brad Underwood asked officials to review whether Fears intentionally tripped David Mirkovic after stopping in front of him.

"I didn't have any worry that it wasn't a basketball play," Fears said.

Underwood lost the appeal.

"They looked at it," Underwood said. "It's always going to be a judgment. He stopped. It's what he does.

"He was terrific. We didn't do a very good job of squaring him up."

Izzo said on the pregame radio show that he doesn't condone what Fears has done in recent games, adding he hasn't done anything to merit a suspension.

"He's remorseful," Izzo said.

In a 76-73 loss at Minnesota on Wednesday night, Fears swung his leg backward into Langston Reynolds' groin area after the whistle when Reynolds was called for a foul on Fears. Officials gave Fears a technical on review.

"I had some mistakes that I made in past game that I don't want to let happen," Fears said. "I hurt my team."

In last week's 83-71 loss to rival and second-ranked Michigan, Fears appeared to intentionally trip preseason All-America forward Yaxel Lendeborg.

The day before facing the Fighting Illini, Izzo said he still was considering benching Fears for at least a portion of the game. Izzo said the redshirt preseason All-American forward Yaxel Lendeborg.

Entering the game against Illinois, Fears led the nation with 204 assists and was averaging nearly 15 points a game as Michigan State's leading scorer.

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Jokic passes Robertson for 2nd-most triple-doubles as Nuggets snap skid



Cleveland Cavaliers guard Donovan Mitchell (45) shoots over Sacramento Kings forward Precious Achiuwa (9) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Sacramento, Calif. (AP)

Harden scores 23 in debut, Cavs send Kings to 12th straight loss

CHICAGO, Feb 8, (AP): Nikola Jokic had 22 points, 17 assists and 14 rebounds to pass Oscar Robertson for the second-most triple-doubles in NBA history and the Denver Nuggets ended a three-game skid with a 136-120 victory over the Chicago Bulls.

It was Jokic's 182nd regular-season triple-double, 19th this season and second in as many games. He trails only Russell Westbrook, who has 207.

Jamal Murray had 28 points and 11 assists and Tim Hardaway Jr. added 23 points for the Nuggets, who capped a three-game road trip with a win after losing at Detroit and New York.

Matas Buzelis scored 21 points and Collin Sexton added 17 for the Bulls, who have lost four straight.

The Bulls led 104-97 after closing the third period on a 16-2 run, but Denver started the final quarter on a 20-2 spurt to take the lead for good. Jokic and Julian Strawther capped the run with consecutive 3-pointers.

Cavaliers 132, Kings 126

In Sacramento, James Harden scored 23 points in his Cavaliers debut and Donovan Mitchell had 35, including a free throw that sealed the win with 35 seconds remaining, in Cleveland's 132-126 victory over Sacramento that sent the Kings to their 12th straight loss.

Harden was acquired by Cleveland from the Los Angeles Clippers on Wednesday for Darius Garland and a second-round draft pick. He shot 7 for 13, including 5 for 8 from 3-point range, and had 13 assists.

Jarrett Allen had 29 points and 10 rebounds for the Cavaliers, who won for the eighth time in nine games.

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Al-Yateem calls Kuwaiti sports media exceptional

Former Al-Mudhar president praises Kuwait's thriving sports scene

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Dr. Sami Al-Yateem, former president of Saudi Arabia's Al-Mudhar Club, praised the state of Kuwaiti sports, highlighting the government's active role in hosting major events across various disciplines. Recent examples include the French Super Cup at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium, the Asian Handball Championship qualifiers for the World Cup, the 4th Division Ice Hockey World Cup, and other international competitions.

In an interview with Al-Seyassah, Al-Yateem said: "The quality of

these events, along with the participation of Arab, continental, and international teams, reflects Kuwait's excellent organization, strong responsibility, and precise execution. This ensures that teams can perform at their best, raising the overall level of competition."

He expressed hope that the Kuwaiti national football team ("Al-Azraq") will regain its former glory, noting that a strong national team would make tournaments more competitive and engaging.

Al-Yateem also praised Kuwaiti sports media, calling it "exceptional," consistently present at events, and professional in its coverage, effectively conveying the right image

to fans, readers, and viewers.

Al-Yateem highlighted the rapid growth of sports in Saudi Arabia, under the leadership of Crown Prince and Prime Minister Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Minister of Sports Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al-Faisal. He noted that this progress is reflected in Saudi Arabia hosting Asian championships, securing the 2034 World Cup finals, and developing new sports facilities – all contributing to the country's long-term sports advancement.

Regarding Saudi handball, Al-Yateem noted that the national team is undergoing a healthy renewal phase, ensuring continuity across generations. "Former players gave

their all; now it's up to the current generation to represent Saudi Arabia in regional, continental, and international competitions," he said, highlighting the support of leadership and young, ambitious sports administrators.

Al-Yateem acknowledged that Al-Mudhar handball team is currently underperforming, which does not reflect the club's stature. He urged the club's management to reassess the team and restore it to its former level, seeking guidance from experienced predecessors. He also recommended seminars, workshops, and meetings to address weaknesses and reinforce strengths, aiming to bring the team back to Asian champion-

ship standards.

On the subject of foreign players, Al-Yateem said: "The number of foreign players in the league has increased. Previously, having two on the court allowed local players more opportunities. Clubs should recruit highly skilled professionals or rely on local talent. I recommend at least one season with no foreign players or only one, to avoid overburdening club budgets, and foreign goalkeepers should be avoided."

In closing, Dr. Al-Yateem thanked the people of Kuwait and Al-Seyassah newspaper for giving him the platform to discuss Gulf sports, particularly developments in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.



Dr. Sami Al-Yateem



A winner hoists trophy as officials look on.

KUNA photo

Kuwait Camel Racing Championship kicks off

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8, (KUNA): The 24th annual Kuwait International Camel Racing Championship kicked off, featuring strong participation from camel owners across Kuwait and other Arab countries.

The six-day event was inaugurated by Bashar Abdullah, Acting Director General of the Public Authority for Sports (PAS), at the Martyr Fahad Al-Ahmad track of the Kuwait Camel Racing Club.

Abdullah told KUNA that he was proud to open a championship that reflects a rich heritage, with the sport's popularity extending from Ku-

wait to the Gulf and internationally. He wished all participants success in achieving strong results.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Camel Racing Club President Hussein Al-Dawas told KUNA that Kuwaiti camels delivered outstanding performances on the first day, signaling a competitive championship ahead. He also expressed gratitude to state authorities for their support in facilitating the event.

The opening day featured 21 of the 78 scheduled races, all dedicated to young camels competing over a distance of four kilometers.

Johnson wins downhill gold on day marred Vonn's crash

Norway's Klaebo grabs sixth skiathlon title

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy, Feb 8, (AP): American ski racer Breezy Johnson won the Olympic downhill Sunday with a hard-charging run on a day marred by teammate Lindsey Vonn's crash that saw her being taken off the mountain in a helicopter.

Johnson was the sixth racer and found speed with a risk-taking trip along the iconic Olympia delle Tofane course on a sunny day in Cortina. She was in the leader's box when Vonn, the No. 13 racer, cut a corner too close and was spun around before crashing. The race was put on hold for more than 20 minutes.

The 30-year-old Johnson joins Vonn, 41, as the only American women to win the Olympic downhill. Johnson finished in 1 minute, 36.10 seconds to hold off Emma Aicher of Germany by just .04 seconds, securing the first medal for the United States of these Winter Games in the process. Italy's Sofia Goggia, the 2018 Olympic downhill winner and 2022 silver medalist, finished with the bronze.

Now, she's an Olympic downhill gold medalist. Teammate Jacqueline Wiles finished just .27 seconds away from a medal in a tie for fourth place.

"I think that this was the best run Breezy's ever skied," teammate Bella Wright said. "I've seen her ski ever since I was 8 years old."

Vonn's crash put a somber mood over the event. Vonn, who won the downhill at the 2010 Vancouver Games, was a gold-medal favorite before her crash in Switzerland last week when she suffered a ruptured ACL for her latest major knee injury.

Cande Moreno of Andorra had her left knee buckle while landing on a jump. Like Vonn, she was taken off the course by helicopter and the race was again put on hold.

Both downhill golds this weekend were won by the reigning world champions after Frango von Allmen of Switzerland won the men's race on Saturday. Both races also featured up-and-coming silver medalists (Aicher, Giovanni Franzoni of Italy) and Italian veterans in bronze position (Goggia, Dominik Paris).

With her bronze medal, Goggia now has an Olympic downhill medal of every color.

Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo used a trademark burst of speed late in the race to pull away for a sixth Olympic gold by winning the men's skiathlon.

His latest win puts the 29-year-old Norwegian just two gold medals away from equaling the Winter Olympic record, and he still has five more chances to add to his haul in Italy.

Klaebo was in the lead pack throughout and then shifted into another gear just before coming into the stadium for the final time, quickly leaving his four remaining rivals in his wake. He could cruise to the line after that to finish in a time of 46 minutes, 11 seconds, ahead of Mathis Desloges of France and Norwegian teammate Martin Loewestrom Nyengen, who were 2.0 seconds and 2.1 seconds behind.

Desloges escaped disqualification earlier in the race after skiing through the cones to cut a corner. Judges cleared him after reviewing the incident.

After leaving the rest of the pack behind, Klaebo eased up in the final meters and waved to the crowd and traveling Norway supporters before crossing the finish line at the Tesero cross-country stadium in northern Italy.

He carries the massive expectations of his cross-country mad home nation at these games after a clean sweep of all six events at last year's world championships.

Two other Norwegians, Marit Bjoergen (cross-country skiing) and Ole Einar Bjoerndalen (biathlon) share the Winter Olympic record of eight golds.

Race challengers Edvin Anger of Sweden and Norway's Harald Oestberg Amundsen suffered falls on the icy course.

Klaebo entered as the clear favorite in the 20-kilometer skiathlon, which splits the race between classic and freestyle techniques, with athletes switching skis midway.

Ester Ledecka's quest to become the first snowboarder to win gold medals at three straight Olympics came to a surprisingly early end Sunday.

She lost her quarterfinal race in the sport's parallel giant slalom by 0.06 seconds to Austria's Sabine Payer.

Instead of Ledecka, the gold medal went to another Czech racer. It was Zuzana Maderova, a 22-year-old with no World Cup wins who opened a gap on the slip-sliding Payer and blew her away by 0.83 seconds in the gold-medal race for her first victory in a major event.

The only repeat on this day belonged to Austria's Benjamin Karl, who won his second straight title, then celebrated by stripping off his shirt, doing a huge weightlifter flex, then falling, bare-chested, into the snow.

That second-place racer was Maderova, and in a sign of how the Czech Republic dominates this sport right now, nobody else was within 1.39 seconds of her.

But in the second round of head-to-head action, Ledecka was done. Payer bolted out to an early lead, carved tight lines between the gates and never trailed. She adds this silver medal to two wins on the World Cup circuit this season.



United States' Breezy Johnson, center, gold medal in an alpine ski women's downhill race, silver medalist Germany's Emma Aicher, left, and bronze medalist Italy's Sofia Goggia, show their medals at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy. (AP)

New Zealand thumps Afghanistan

England survives scare

MUMBAI, India, Feb 8, (AP): Lokesh Bam's sensational 39 not out off 20 balls went in vain as England survived a massive scare against Nepal in Group C to kick off its T20 World Cup campaign in Mumbai on Sunday.

Sam Curran held his nerve at the iconic Wankhede Stadium and defended 10 off the last six balls as Nepal was restricted to 180-6 in 20 overs, replying to England's 184-7 (20 overs).

Bam hit two sixes and four fours to raise the possibility of an improbable and stunning upset, but Curran bowled an exceptional final over to get England across the finish line.

Earlier, England had won the toss and opted to bat. Jacob Bell hit 55 off 35 balls, including four sixes. Skipper Harry Brook added 53 off 32 balls with three sixes.

Will Jacks provided the finishing touch with 39 not out off 18 balls, hitting four sixes, and took England to a more defendable target from a precarious 137-5 in 15.3 overs. In the morning game at Chennai, Tim Seifert's 65 off 42 balls helped New Zealand get off to a winning start in the tournament and beat Afghanistan by five wickets in Group D.

It is expected to be the toughest group that also includes 2024 finalist South Africa, New Zealand cruised to 183-5 – its highest ever chase at the T20 World Cup – with two overs to spare. Afghanistan scored 182-6 after winning the toss.

Curran took 1-27 in four overs, while left-arm spinner Liam Dawson picked up 2-21.

For Nepal, skipper Rohit Paudel hit 39 off 34 balls, and Dipendra Singh top-scored with 44 off 29 balls.

Group C also includes West Indies, Italy and Scotland. Two-time champions West Indies beat Scotland by 35 runs on Saturday.

England was 57-3 after 6.1 overs, when Bell and Brook came together. They added 71 off 45 balls for the fourth wicket.

Bell hit 50 off 28 balls, while Brook hit 50 off 31. Bell and Brook fell in the 14th over, and England slipped further before Jacks came to the rescue.

Gulbadin Naib, batting at No. 3 for the first time in T20s since the 2024 World Cup when Afghanistan knocked out the Black Caps from the race to the semis with an 84-run win at Guyana, smashed 63 off 35 balls.

But opening batter Seifert (65) raised his maiden T20 World Cup half-century to overcome Mujeeb Ur Rahman's twin strike that had rattled New Zealand to 2-14 inside the first two overs.

Mujeeb clean bowled Finn Allen and Ravindra Jadeja off successive balls before Glenn Phillips (42) dealt with the hat-trick ball and then put the chase back on track by putting on an aggressive 74-run partnership with Seifert.

Afghanistan captain Rashid Khan (1-36) also couldn't stem the flow of runs as New Zealand continued to accelerate in the middle overs against the experienced leg-spinner.

Rashid broke the stand in the 10th over when Phillips dragged it back onto his stumps.

Seifert completed his fifty in style by smacking off-spinner Mohammad Nabi for two successive sixes and followed it with a boundary before he was caught at deep square leg.

Mark Chapman (28 off 17 balls) and Daryl Mitchell (25 not out) then accelerated to get Black Caps home in the team's first game of the tournament.



New Zealand's Tim Seifert plays a shot during the T20 World Cup cricket match between Afghanistan and New Zealand in Chennai, India. (AP)

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England's Will Jacks plays a shot during the T20 World Cup cricket match between England and Nepal in Mumbai, India. (AP) — See Page 15

Sports

Al-Seeb defeats Al-Ittihad

Burgan suffers 2nd straight loss at West Asia Volleyball Championship

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Burgan Club's first volleyball team suffered a second consecutive defeat after losing to Bahrain's Dar Kulaib in Group C of the preliminary round of the 4th West Asia Volleyball Championship, currently being held at the Federa-



Burgan player goes for a shot against Dar Kulaib as teammates and officials look on.

tion Hall in the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Complex and running until February 14.

Burgan went down in straight sets, 0-3 (16-25, 19-25, 15-25), marking its second loss of the competition following an identical defeat to Saudi Arabia's Al-Ittihad, a result that significantly weakens its chances of reaching the quarterfinals.

In the same group, Oman's Al-Seeb defeated Al-Ittihad of Saudi Arabia 3-1 (25-20, 26-24, 22-25, 25-14).

In Group B, Qatar's Al-Wakrah beat Lebanon's Shabab Al-Batroun 3-1 (25-23, 19-25, 29-27, 25-19), while Group A concluded with Qatar's Al-Rayyan topping the standings, followed by Iraq's Ghaz Al-Janoub in second place and Oman's Majees in third.

According to the tournament format, the top two teams from each group advance to the quarterfinals, along with the two best third-placed teams from the three groups.

The preliminary stage concluded late last night, with the final round results determining the quarterfinal matchups.

Teams will take a rest day today, with the quarterfinal matches set to be played on Tuesday.

Kuwaiti shooters bag 2 silver medals at AWST



The shooting team celebrates with the national flag.

SHARJAH, Feb 8, (KUNA): Kuwait's women's shooting team claimed two silver medals at the Arab Women's Sports Tournament (AWST), currently underway in the UAE emirate of Sharjah and running until February 12.

Mariam Rzougi secured second place in the individual air rifle event, while the Kuwaiti squad also finished runners-up in the team category of the same competition.

The Arab Women's Club Games, regarded as the largest Arab women's sporting event to date, feature around 65 teams from 16 Arab countries competing across nine different sports.

Kuwait Club extends unbeaten streak

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Kuwait Club continued its dominant run in the 58th edition of the Handball Premier League, securing a ninth consecutive victory to maintain a perfect 18-point record. Its latest triumph came against Al-Qadsia, winning 30-25 at the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Complex, in the conclusion of the ninth round.

The round also featured Kazma defeating Al-Sulaibikhat 33-28. Earlier matches saw Burgan beat Al-Salmiya 30-21, while Al-Arabi overcame Al-Nasr 35-23. Following these results, the Premier League handball standings are:

Kuwait Club—18 points

Kazma—13 points

Burgan—10 points

Al-Qadsia—8 points

Al-Arabi—8 points

Al-Sulaibikhat—7 points

Al-Salmiya—6 points

Al-Nasr—2 points

The current season is structured in three phases (home—home) with eight teams competing in the Premier League, and features a promotion and relegation system to maintain competitiveness between the top two divisions.

The tenth round of the second phase is scheduled for tomorrow and the day after, with Kazma facing Al-Qadsia, Al-Salmiya taking on Kuwait Club, Burgan playing Al-Nasr, and Al-Sulaibikhat clashing with Al-Arabi to close the round.



Kuwait Club player is unmarked as he makes a goal attempt.

Beckham eyes historic Ronaldo-Messi duo at Inter Miami



Cristiano Ronaldo

MIAMI, Feb 8: Reports have emerged suggesting a major development in soccer's future. According to TCR, a news account dedicated to the Portuguese star on X, Inter Miami is closely tracking Ronaldo amid uncertainty over whether he will take on a new challenge before ending his legendary career.

David Beckham, co-owner of the club, reportedly dreams of seeing Ronaldo join Lionel Messi at Miami, creating a historic scenario that would bring together two of football's greatest rivals in the same team before retirement—a moment that could become one of the most iconic images in modern football.

Inside Inter Miami, the proposal is being considered from sporting and commercial angles. On the field, Ronaldo's presence alongside Messi could strengthen the team's performance, while off the field; it could raise the global profile of Major League Soccer, positioning it as a top destination for elite stars in the final stages of their careers.

Although nothing official has been announced and the idea remains under discussion, the very suggestion underscores the club's ambition and Beckham's desire to create a truly historic chapter in football, one eagerly anticipated by fans worldwide.

Neymar: It's World Cup or retirement

SAO PAULO, Feb 8, (Agencies): The website The Touchline has delivered shocking news for Brazilian football fans and Neymar Jr. Supporters.

According to their X account, Neymar could retire this year if he is not selected for the 2026 World Cup.

Winning and participating in the World Cup is now his sole motivation in professional football.

The report added that everything Neymar is currently doing with Santos—from his recovery to intensive training—is focused on one goal: be-

ing fit for the 2026 World Cup in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

The Touchline emphasized that Neymar is entirely focused on representing Brazil at the World Cup, with retirement set to follow immediately after.

□ □ □

Colombian midfielder Jhon Arias said Saturday he is eager to begin a new chapter in his career after completing a move to Brazil's Palmeiras from Wolverhampton Wanderers.

The 28-year-old signed a deal that runs until December 2029 after Palmeiras reportedly agreed to pay Wolves 25 million euros.

"Considering what was possible at this moment, and what was in my hands, I needed to make decisions," Arias said in a social media post.



Neymar