



Kuwait PM chairs FATF review meeting
Page 2



Crackdown unfolds across Kuwait against crime wave

Stabbings, drug seizures, liquor busts highlight police action

By Munif Naif
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: In a series of security operations recently, anti-narcotics officers arrested three citizens in possession of narcotics.

According to a security source, officers from the narcotics investigation unit appre-

hended the suspects after closely monitoring them. Narcotics were found in their possession, so they were referred to the concerned authorities along with the confiscated items. Meanwhile, two young Kuwaiti men were involved in a public brawl in Firdous, and one of them sustained several stab wounds that required hospitalization.

Security sources revealed that the confrontation was the result of a long-running disagreement between the two.

Continued on Page 5

Ramadan Timings

Imsak Thursday..... 05:04
Iftar Thursday..... 17:41
Imsak Friday..... 05:03

Day by Day

THE most beautiful description of Ramadan is that of Ibn al-Jawzi, "Ramadan is to the months as Joseph was to his brothers. Just as Joseph was the most beloved son to his father Jacob, so too is Ramadan the most beloved month to God.

Ramadan is too short to be wasted without worship of God. It comes to us fleetingly, so lethargy and laziness are unacceptable during this month.

Joseph had eleven brothers, and Ramadan too has eleven brothers, which are the other months of the year. Ramadan stands among eleven months as Joseph stood among eleven stars. Hence, do not kill Ramadan, do not throw it into the well, and do not sell it for a cheap price, as Joseph's brothers tried to do with him."

... Yet tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar



A vendor sells dates at an old market in Kuwait City on Feb. 17. (Xinhua)

Türkiye-Kuwait ties strengthened with launch of modern visa center

By Fares Ghaleb
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: Ambassador of the Republic of Türkiye, Tuba Nur Sönmez, affirmed the strength of the growing partnership between Türkiye and Kuwait, noting the steady increase in people-to-people contact in recent years.

She said this during the opening ceremony of the Turkish Visa Application Center, attended by prominent guests, media and business representatives, including Q'go Group Director Maisam Al-Dabbous and VisaFT –



Ambassador Sönmez

Visa for Türkiye CEO Bülent Aydın.

Ambassador Sönmez affirmed that the new center will enhance service capacity, reduce application processing times, and provide a smoother, more customer-focused experience for applicants.

She emphasized that Türkiye is a favored destination for Kuwaiti travelers, and highlighted that the upgraded center reflects Türkiye's ongoing commitment to facilitating travel and strengthening cooperation in the fields of tourism, education, business, and cultural exchange.

Officials and business representatives at the ceremony noted that improved access to visa services will support further collaboration in multiple sectors, including tourism, trade, and investment.

The new Visa Application Center is located at Al Qibla, Block 11, Abdulaziz Hamad Al-Saqr Street, Building No. 22, first floor.

Kuwait, Canada partnership aims advanced healthcare and research

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi discussed on Tuesday with Canadian Ambassador to Kuwait Tara Scheurwater ways to enhance health cooperation between both countries.

The meeting reinforced the solid Kuwaiti-Canadian relations and keenness to develop them in a way that serves their common interests and enhance expertise and knowledge in health and medical fields, said the Health Ministry in a statement.

The statement added that the meeting discussed a number of topics for cooperation, such as exchanging expertise among health professionals, supporting scientific research, expanding joint research projects, and developing the latest health infrastructure.

The ministry emphasized its commitment to continuing to build effective partnerships with Canada, to enhance the efficiency of the healthcare system in Kuwait with the highest global standards.



KUNA photo
Kuwaiti Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi receives Canadian Ambassador to Kuwait Tara Scheurwater.

Bahrain & UAE roll out single travel point system to boost tourism, trade

MANAMA, Feb 18, (KUNA): The Kingdom of Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, in cooperation with the GCC General Secretariat officially launched on Tuesday the "Single Travel Point" air system at Bahrain International Airport, marking the commencement of the first phase of the GCC project.

The launch ceremony was attended by Bahrain's Deputy Minister of Interior, Lieutenant General Adel bin Khalifa Al-Fadhel; the Director General of the UAE Federal Authority for Identity, Citizenship, Customs and Port Security Major General Suhail Saeed Al-Khaili and the GCC Secretary-General Jasem Al-Budaiwi.



Al-Budaiwi

Al-Fadhel affirmed that the launch of the first phase of the "Single Travel Point" air project stems from the exemplary relations between the Kingdom of Bahrain and its fellow GCC member states.

He underscored the strategic pathway toward Gulf integration aimed at establishing a smart and integrated mobility system that enhances border security and elevates the passenger experience.

Lt. General Al-Fadhel said that the project introduces an advanced operational model enabling travelers to complete their procedures in advance in the country of departure, thereby accelerating transit processes, reducing waiting times, and enhancing the smooth flow of movement at ports of entry.

He noted that this initiative reflects the Kingdom of Bahrain's commitment to adopting innovative digital solutions and leveraging the latest technologies to improve operational efficiency

Continued on Page 5



HORIZON TALK

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

When the Bedouin preceded the Caliph in performing Tawaf and Hajj

The Bedouin said, "God has made the ruler and the ruled equal in this place."

When Harun Al-Rashid heard this, he feared God and ordered his chamberlain to allow the man.

Al-Rashid said, "O brother of the Arabs, may I sit here if you permit?"

"This house is not mine, and this sanctuary is not my property. We are all equal here."

Obediently, Al-Rashid knelt before the Bedouin.

Anger appeared on the Caliph's face, when the Bedouin addressed him by his name "O Harun."

Al-Rashid said, "O Bedouin, you will be spared if you explain what you said; otherwise, I will order your head to be struck off."

The Bedouin said, "I am amazed at you both! I do not know which of you is more ignorant - the one who is already facing his appointed time of death, or the one who is trying to hasten it?"

3

Kuwait tweaks truck hours for Ramadan

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: The General Traffic Department of the Ministry of Interior announced on Wednesday an amendment to the truck traffic ban hours during the holy month of Ramadan, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press release, the department explained that the new hours will be from 8:30 am to 10:30 am and from 12:30 pm to 3:00 pm. The amendment is aimed to maintain smooth traffic flow and prevent congestion during the month of Ramadan.

8 NBK Wealth achieves Best Regional Investment Focus of the Year 2026



KFH celebrates distinguished employees for 2025

Newswatch

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

In a statement, the Committee said it decided to revoke Kuwaiti citizenship from number of cases, with the matter referred to the Cabinet. Those citizenships were revoked due to dual citizenship, forgery, fraud, and conflict with the state's supreme

interest. (KUNA)

GENEVA: In a rare convergence of global diplomacy, two separate high-stakes talks were held on Tuesday in the Swiss city of Geneva, drawing worldwide attention to their potential impact on global geopolitical orders. The second round of indirect U.S.-Iran nuclear talks, mediated by Oman, started on Tuesday morning and concluded with "progress" cited by both sides, with further talks to be scheduled. (Xinhua)

| Prayer Timings | | | |
|----------------|-------|------------|-------|
| Fajr | 05:05 | Asr | 15:14 |
| Sunrise .. | 06:25 | Maghrib .. | 17:39 |
| Zohr | 12:02 | Isha | 18:57 |

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:
By Day: Warm to rather hot with light to moderate southerly wind to southeasterly wind, with speed of 12-38 km/h with a chance for fog forming at night.
By Night: Rather cold with light

| Weather | | | |
|--|---------|---------|--|
| to moderate southeasterly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 08-30 km/h with a chance for fog forming over some areas. | | | |
| Station | Max Exp | Min Rec | |
| Kuwait Airport | 28 | 11 | |
| Abdaly | 28 | 10 | |

| | | |
|----------------|----|----|
| Bubyan | 22 | 08 |
| Jahra | 28 | 13 |
| Failaka Island | 23 | 14 |
| Salmiyah | 22 | 18 |
| Ahmadi | 26 | 13 |
| Jal Aliyah | 27 | 12 |
| Nuwaisib | 24 | 12 |
| Salmi | 28 | 11 |

Government sets plans to meet global standards

Kuwait PM chairs FATF review meeting

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18, (KUNA): His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on Wednesday chaired a meeting at Bayan Palace to review remarks and requirements of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

The meeting discussed ways to enhance cooperation and coordinate action plans among state bodies, reflecting Kuwait's high level of national commitment in handling this file as a strategic priority.

It underscored the State of Kuwait's keenness to meet international standards and complete all requirements within the specified time-frame, in line with its commitment to combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism.

The meeting was attended by Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait, Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Dr. Sabeeh Al-Mukhaizeem, Minister of Commerce and Industry Osama Boodai, Minister of Finance Yaqoub Al-Rifai, Director General of the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority Sheikh Dr. Meshal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Acting Head of the Prime Minister's Diwan Sheikh Khaled Mohammed Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, Managing Director of the Kuwait Investment Authority Sheikh Saud Salem Abdulaziz Al-Sabah, Head



PM Diwan photo
His Highness the Prime Minister chairs a meeting regarding the observations and requirements of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

of the Fatwa and Legislation Department Salah Al-Majed, Chairman of the Kuwait Financial Intelligence Unit Dr. Hamad Al-Mukrad, Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry Marwa Al-Juaidan, and senior officials from the Ministry of Interior and the General Administration of Customs.

Crown Prince, PM extend greetings

Kuwait HH Amir congratulates Gambia on Independence Day

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Wednesday a cable of congratulations to the Gambian President Adama Barrow, on the occasion of his country's Independence Day.

In the cable, His Highness the Amir wished the President of Gambia lasting health and wellness, and further progress and prosperity for his country and people.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent on Wednesday a cable of congratulations to the Gambian President Adama Barrow, on the occasion of his country's Independence Day. In the cable, His Highness the Crown Prince wished the President of Gambia lasting health and wellness, and further progress and prosperity for his country and people.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent on Wednesday a congratulatory cable to the Gambian President Adama Barrow, on the occasion of his country's Independence Day.

Prayers for unity, prosperity for all

Kuwait's Ministers congratulate leadership, people on Ramadan

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18, (KUNA): Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yusuf Saud Al-Sabah 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 Kuwaiti people, on the advent of the holy month of Ramadan.

In a press statement issued by the General Department of Security Relations and Media at the Ministry of Interior, the minister regarded the fasting month as an opportunity to promote the values of tolerance, togetherness, goodness and giving, wishing Kuwait more development and both Arab and Muslim worlds further unity and prosperity.

Kuwaiti Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah extended his highest congratulations and blessings to His Highness the Amir and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, to His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on the occasion of the of the holy month of Ramadan.



Sheikh Fahad

In a press statement issued by the General Department of Security Relations and Media at the Ministry of Interior, the minister expressed hope that this month would be an occasion to enhance the values of faith, mercy and tolerance among people, wishing blessing and goodness to all.

He prayed to Allah the Almighty to return this month to Kuwait, its leadership and people with further progress, stability and prosperity and success to all.

He underlined the importance of getting the goal of Ramadan in boosting co-operation among society's individuals and disseminating the values of love and giving.

The minister further congratulated the ministry's staff, appreciating their efforts and affirming that Ramadan is a chance to serve mosques and worshippers.

Kuwaiti Acting Minister of Information and Culture Omar Al-Omar 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, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on the holy month of Ramadan.

In a statement to KUNA, Al-Omar extended his best wishes to His Highness the Amir for good health and wellness, and to Kuwait prosperity and blessings.

Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) extends its warmest 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, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, citizens and residents on the holy month of Ramadan.



Sheikh Abdullah



Dr. Al-Wasmi



Al-Omar

By Fares Ghaleb, Munif Naif, Abdulrahman Al-Shammari Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staffs

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: The Public Authority for Disability Affairs (PADA), headed by Director General Dr. Dalal Al-Othman, officially notified all ministries and government entities on the reduction in working hours for employees with disabilities and those who take care of them during the holy month of Ramadan.

In a press statement, Al-Othman disclosed that employees with disabilities, as well as those responsible for caring for a person with disability, are entitled to a two-hour reduction in their daily working hours with full pay throughout Ramadan in all government entities, in line with the arrangements applied on regular working days.

This entitlement is pursuant to Article 40 of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Law No. 8/2010.

Al-Othman clarified that the reduced working hours apply to employees with severe, moderate or mild disabilities, employees caring for a person with moderate or severe disability, and employees holding custody or guardianship for a person with moderate or severe disability.

She said the reduction cannot be granted to two individuals from the same family unless there are multiple persons with disabilities and each employee can prove that they are caring for a person with disability. "In such cases, the beneficiaries must coordinate with their employers to determine the timing of the reduction," she added.

She affirmed that the two-hour reduction will be implemented daily during Ramadan with full pay, either at the beginning or the end of the workday. She said it cannot be divided, and its application will be subject to the regulations and systems in force at each government entity and the bodies and institutions affiliated with it.

Meanwhile, The Nationality and

Travel Documents General Department at the Interior Ministry announced the operating hours for national identity centers during the holy month of Ramadan, with two shifts -- morning and evening.

The morning shift will be from 10:00 am to 2:30 pm, while the evening shift will be from 7:00 pm to 11:30 pm.

The implementation of the two-shift system aims to ensure the prompt completion of transactions and the efficient delivery of services, in line with the commitment to facilitate procedures, ease access for the public, and provide the highest standard of service throughout the holy month.

Earlier, the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) approved the class hours for the holy month of Ramadan as part of an academic plan that respects the sanctity of the month while ensuring the educational process continues efficiently.

PAAET announced that morning classes will be from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm daily. After this time frame, academic activities will stop in order to give the students and faculty

and training staff time to perform religious rites and prepare for Iftar (breaking of the fast).

It added that evening classes will be conducted remotely through the Microsoft Teams platform from 8:00 pm to 12:00 midnight.

The Tabaqi application for online courses will continue according to the approved schedule.

Classes schedule after 4:00 pm on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays will be held remotely during Ramadan, shifting to the evening hours from 8:00 pm to 11:00 pm.

Classes scheduled for Mondays and Wednesdays beginning after 3:30 PM will also be conducted online, shifting to the same 8:00 pm to 11:00 pm time slot, according to the original schedule for each lecture.

Regarding exams, if any, will be conducted in-person during the evening hours from 8:00 pm to 12:00 midnight. Faculty and training staff have flexibility in scheduling exams, particularly for courses with a practical component, to enhance the quality of educational outputs and balance academic requirements with the specific needs during Ramadan.

Other Voices

Nicola Klotzer: The Monk of Barqa village

By Ahmad alsarraf

DURING a phase of near-disorientation in his life, the young Dutch Jesuit Nicola Klotzer considered becoming a professional painter.

Something inside him urged him to pursue a different path. He realized that painting was not his true calling. Despite his intelligence and determination, he lacked the natural talent for art and struggled to sit before a canvas and paint whatever came to mind.

His indecision persisted until the idea of becoming a Jesuit priest suddenly took hold. Jesuit priests were known for their tireless dedication to serving remote communities, sacrificing worldly comforts to aid the poor and needy. His wish was realized when the Jesuit Church in the Netherlands accepted him into its missions, and plans were made for him to travel to Lebanon in the 1970s.

After spending a few months exploring the coastal towns and villages, he realized he had been sent to the wrong place. Nothing in the region seemed to warrant his efforts. The majority of the inhabitants had little need, either materially or spiritually, for a Dutch parish priest. He then decided to seek out remote areas historically neglected by the state. These were regions marked by deprivation and even ecclesiastical neglect.

Many priests and deacons avoided these areas due to their isolation, poverty, or the prospect of living for months in dilapidated churches in sub-zero temperatures, not to mention the difficulty of reaching them because of the rugged terrain.

Some people advised him to go to the village of Barqa, possibly founded in 1840 by Simeon Geagea, the subject of yesterday's article, and the first Maronite in the region. In Barqa, Nicola found what he had been searching for. The village lacked almost everything. He accepted the challenge and became its parish priest.

He built himself a room, began learning Arabic, and quickly succeeded in raising funds from various sources. His efforts first



alsarraf

focused on schools, which the region desperately needed. He improved the standard of living, established local crafts and industries, and encouraged villagers to stay rather than emigrate.

After achieving what seemed impossible for the village, he planned to leave for Sudan to dedicate himself to volunteer work, where his services were in even greater demand despite the country's harsh conditions, civil wars, and hardships.

The villagers were shocked by his decision and pleaded with him to stay. Having accomplished what many others, including the government, had failed to do, he postponed his departure.

Shortly thereafter, at the height of the Lebanese Civil War, an outlawed Shiite militia kidnapped, tortured, and murdered him, dumping his body in a deep mountain ravine in May 1985.

□ □ □

I recently returned from a visit to Barqa and sat in the modest room where Father Nicola had lived during his time in the village, a room he built with his own hands.

The space measured no more than 10 square meters, with a low ceiling one could almost touch. Inside stood a small, worn iron cupboard with old jackets hung on one side, clothes on the other, along with a couple of pairs of shoes. There was a faded rug, pictures of saints, samples of his Arabic writings, a simple bookcase, an Arabic copy of the Bible, and a few of his modest drawings in inexpensive wooden frames. These were all his earthly possessions. He had no car, no house, no permanent address, nothing more.

In recognition of his invaluable service to the people of the region and the ecclesiastical mission others had declined to undertake, the Vatican found his life and sacrifice worthy of consideration for canonization, given his selflessness and tragic end. Perhaps he will be canonized by the time we make our second visit to Barqa.

Note: All of Barqa's inhabitants are Maronites, and about 85 percent belong to the Ja'ja' family or clan, whose origins trace back to Bsharri.

□ □ □

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

KFF handles 3,468 fires in 2025

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: Director for Public Relations and Media at Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) Brigadier General Mohammad Al-Gharib revealed that KFF dealt with 3,468 fire incidents last year, reports Al-Rai daily.

Al-Gharib said the firefighters responded to 14,310 other inci-

dents in 2025, while the number of reports received totaled 17,778.

He underscored the importance of strict compliance with the prevention and safety regulations to prevent fire incidents and accidents, in addition to raising public awareness to mitigate the risks.

MoSA maintains ISO certification

Audit records zero remarks

By Fares Ghaleb
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: The Ministry of Social Affairs renewed its accredited quality management certification, as confirmed by a recent audit conducted by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

The audit — which included comprehensive field visits and was conducted in light of the new organizational structure of the ministry and recent administrative appointment — did not record observations or non-compliance.

Dr. Sayed Issa, acting Assistant Undersecretary for Financial and Administrative Affairs and Director General of the Department of Planning and Administrative Development, affirmed that the ministry remains committed to maintaining its institutional quality management system in accordance with the international standards.

The quality team at the ministry initially carried out internal audits to verify that all work procedures were consistent with the requirements of ISO 9001:2015, particularly after the implementation of the new organizational structure and the consolidation of several departments.

These efforts were followed by field visits conducted by the certificate-issuing company in coordination with the ministry's audit team.

The favorable audit findings underscored the sustained effectiveness of the institutional work system and reaffirmed the retention of the international quality certification of the ministry.

The absence of remarks or violations affirmed the capacity of the sectors and departments in the ministry to adapt efficiently to the new organizational structure, while maintaining a high standard of institutional performance and operational excellence.

Such measures are part of the routine periodic monitoring process aimed at ensuring continuous compliance with all certification requirements, especially during the organizational transition.

The quality team remains dedicated to implementing the periodic audit plan in the remaining departments.

This process aims to reinforce adherence to quality standards, advance performance development, and elevate service delivery, thereby, entrenching a sustainable culture of institutional excellence. In support of these initiatives, the ministry recently concluded two training programs aimed at equipping and certifying internal audit teams for field inspections, further strengthening the efficiency of the quality management system and ensuring its continuous conformity with international standards.

Expansion boosts workforce readiness: Al-Jalal

PAAET opens new applied studies hub

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Nader Al-Jalal said the opening of the Applied Studies Building at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) is a crucial step in developing the infrastructure of the higher education and training system of the country.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Al-Jalal pointed out that the opening of the building is in line with the commitment of the State to support applied education and guarantee that the graduates are fully prepared to enter the labor market.

He said the new building will enable PAAET to increase its capacity in all applied disciplines, particularly in health and technology fields, due to the expansion and equipping of classrooms according to the latest academic standards.

He believes this will enhance the ability of PAAET to accommodate more students in vital specializations, including nursing, which is a priority at present due to the shortage of national personnel in the health sector. He added this will have a positive impact on the output of the medical sector and raise the efficiency of the healthcare system.

He revealed that the classrooms, training halls and state-of-the-art theater in the building proves the commitment of PAAET to provide a comprehensive learning environment that combines theoretical and practical aspects to hone the students' skills and prepare them for the labor market according to the highest academic and professional standards. He pointed out that developing education and training facilities is the core of the strategy of the ministry, aligning with the vision of the State to train qualified nationals who contribute to the comprehensive development process, particularly in technical, vocational and health-related fields, which are considered the pillars of the national economy.

He praised the efforts of the director of PAAET,



Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Dr. Nader Al-Jalal, during the inauguration of the Applied Studies Building as part of the development of the infrastructure of the education and training system.

KUNA photos

its leadership, academic and training staff, and all the teams that contributed to the completion of this project.

He disclosed that the next phase requires more institutional integration and enhanced standards of quality and excellence to solidify the position of applied education in supporting the national economy.

He added the ministry remains committed to empower the authority and provide the necessary resources to develop its educational environment and enhance its developmental impact in serving its students — the true foundation for building a diversified and sustainable economy, while stabilizing the regional and international position of Kuwait in education, training and innovation.

Kuwait partakes in Arab meeting on backing Somalia

CAIRO, Feb 18, (KUNA): Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the Arab League Ambassador Talal Al-Mutairi took part on Tuesday in the meeting of the Arab countries on helping Somalia build its institutions, and cement stability and security.

In a statement, Somalia's permanent representative to the Arab League Ambassador Ali Abdi said the meeting discussed means of strengthening Somalia's national institutions to help the country continue its path toward sustainable development and openness to its Arab, regional and international regions. Abdi expressed great appreciation to the key role by Saudi Arabia and all Arab countries in support of Somalia, affirming that this backing mir-

rors historical and fraternal bonds, and embodies Arab countries' unwavering commitment to Somalia.

Somalia nowadays is witnessing a new phase of development and tangible improved security conditions as well as continued progress in the path of building the state's institutions, he noted.

He referred to the development in infrastructure, ports, energy, education and basic services, adding that this would contribute to strengthening sustainable development bases, and achieving economic prosperity. He pointed out that Somalia hopes for continued support of Arab countries to enable his country to complete its national priorities and boost development and institutional potential.

Kuwaiti envoy presents credentials as non-resident ambassador to Moldova

CHISINAU, Feb18, (KUNA): Kuwait's Ambassador to Romania, Abdullah Abdulrahman Al-Shatti, presented his credentials as non-resident ambassador to Moldova to President Maia Sandu in a high-level ceremony at the presidential palace in the capital Chisinau.

During the ceremony, Ambassador Al-Shatti conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince, Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister, Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, to the President of Moldova.

He also conveyed the Kuwaiti leadership's wishes for the continued progress and prosperity of the friendly country of Moldova.

For her part, President Sandu reciprocated the sentiments, requesting that her highest regards be extended back to Kuwait's political leadership.

She also expressed her country's aspiration to bolster and expand bilateral cooperation across various sectors of mutual interest.

Ambassador Al-Shatti affirmed Kuwait's keenness to strengthen its rela-



Kuwait's Ambassador to Romania, Abdullah Abdulrahman Al-Shatti, and the President of Moldova.

KUNA photo

tions with the Republic of Moldova, expand bilateral cooperation and continue coordination and consultation in a way that serves the common interests of the two friendly countries. He noted that relations between the two countries are based on mutual respect and a shared vision for broader cooperation.

Fixed-line network upgrade advances

KAPP secures conditional nod for KD19.9mn telecom project

By Mohammad Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: The Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects (KAPP) on Tuesday obtained conditional approval from the State Audit Bureau (SAB) to award a contract for the fixed-line telecommunications network development project to a specialized company at a total cost of KD19.928 million.

KAPP submitted the tender to SAB on Jan 14 for pre-audit, audit and review procedures, followed by approval of the contract and commencement of implementation.

This is a strategic initiative aimed at modernizing and expanding the fixed-line telecommunications infrastructure of the country. It is implemented through the concerted efforts of KAPP and the Ministry of Communications, including the design, financing, construction, operation and maintenance of the fixed-line network.

The company in charge of the project will operate the existing network that belongs to the ministry and expand it to cover all areas.

The project aims to improve high-speed internet services, enhance the user experience and support advanced digital applications. It contributes to digital transformation by providing a sophisticated infrastructure that facilitates the provision of e-government services and boosts the efficiency of digital processes.

It strengthens the economy and competitiveness by enabling local businesses to benefit from modern communication technologies, thereby, increasing their competitiveness and attracting investment.

The main aspect of the project is the commitment to generate job opportunities for Kuwaiti citizens, aiming for a minimum localization rate of 65 percent, which contributes to the development of national

skills in the telecommunications sector.

The project supports smart city services by providing an infrastructure capable of accommodating modern technologies.

It intends to achieve the 'New Kuwait 2035' vision by strengthening the digital infrastructure and supporting the transition to a sustainable knowledge-based economy.

The relevant authorities are counting on this project as a crucial development initiative that will modernize and upgrade the fixed-line telephone network using cutting-edge technologies. This will enable the network to compete effectively amidst the evolving landscape of the telecommunications and information technology sector.

The project is expected to contribute to the annual revenues of the ministry, which currently relies on fixed-line telephone service fees, but witnessed a remarkable decline in recent years.

The newspaper obtained a copy of the report of KAPP, indicating that the project aims to provide a network with unprecedented speeds, initially reaching 10 gigabits per second.

Regarding coverage and fiber optic network deployment, the project will reach at least 90 percent of homes by 2028, offering commercial packages and better services for subscribers.

The report explained that the project covers the design, financing, construction, operation, maintenance and transformation of the networks of the ministry, including active and passive infrastructure, as well as the copper fixed-line telephone network.

The project consists of active infrastructure, equipment and devices (transformers, ONT and OLT), as well as passive infrastructure, central exchanges/buildings and offices, spaces in local exchanges, routes, cables, and dark fiber and copper networks (fixed telephone lines).

MoF OKs 140 new posts for MEWRE

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: Ministry of Finance has approved the allocation of job positions to the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, enabling it to appoint new employees to vacant posts, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to sources from the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable

Energy, the Ministry of Finance approved the allocation of 140 job positions for the appointment of new candidates in place of employees who have retired or resigned. The ministry had previously sought approval from the Ministry of Finance to increase the number of allocated positions in order to fill existing vacancies.



| Weekdays (Saturday - Wednesday) | | Price |
|--|--|-------------------|
| One night stay in a Queen Bed Cabana for 2 persons with inclusive of Breakfast | | BHD 46.000 |
| One night stay in a Two Bedroom Chalet for 4 persons inclusive of Breakfast | | BHD 102.148 / Net |
| Weekends (Thursday & Friday) | | Price |
| One night stay in a Queen Bed Cabana for 2 persons with inclusive of Breakfast | | BHD 53.361 / Net |
| One night stay in a Two Bedroom Chalet for 4 persons inclusive of Breakfast | | BHD 119.173 / Net |

Terms & conditions apply



Officials and dignitaries in Oman (left) and Ghana (right) gather to mark Kuwait's National and Liberation Days, underscoring deep-rooted ties, diplomatic goodwill and a shared commitment to strengthening bilateral cooperation.

Milestones spotlight enduring partnerships

Kuwait's national pride echoes in Oman, New Zealand, Ghana

MUSCAT, Feb 18, (KUNA): In a Gulf atmosphere showing brotherhood spirit and pride for deep-rooted ties, Oman marked on Tuesday Kuwait's National Day through a night activity organized in an area in the capital.

Oman's General Secretariat for National Celebrations organized the activity in the presence of its secretary general Sheikh Sebaa Al-Saadi, Kuwait's Ambassador to the Sultanate Dr. Mohammad Al-Hajri, a wide participation of Omanis.

The activity featured some varied items and a musical performance echoed in the sky of the Omani capital where the two countries' flags were flying over and their leaders' photos were displayed.

The scene showed the deep-rooted historical bonds, sincere cohesion and the clear symbol of the shared destiny between both countries.

Elsewhere, Kuwait's embassies in New Zealand and Ghana have celebrated the 65th National Day and the 35th Liberation Day, in the attendance of several ambassadors and dignitaries.

In a reception held by the Kuwait Embassy in New Zealand's capital, Wellington, Sheikh Sabah Nasser Al-Malek Al-Sabah received Paula Wilson, the guest of honor and New Zealand government representative, and Deputy Secretary for the Europe, Middle East and Africa, and Australia Group at the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The ambassador extended sincere and great congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the government and the Kuwait people, lauding growing ties with New Zealand.

In Accra, Ghana's capital, Kuwait's charge d'affairs Hussein Al-Ibrahim held a reception on these two dear occasions.

The reception featured many Ghanaian officials, the heads of the accredited diplomatic missions and international organizations, and several dignitaries.

Among the attendees were Ghana's sports minister Kofi Adams who took part in the festival as a guest of honor representing his government, Deputy Minister for Local Government Rita Sowah and others.

The ceremony showed the deep-rooted ties between Kuwait and Ghana and their keenness on developing cooperation in different fields to serve their nations' interests.



Group photos of the Ministry of Oil delegation during a visit to the Jahra Reserve.

Kuwait oil ministry lauds Jahra Reserve excellence

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18, (KUNA): Undersecretary of the Ministry of Oil, Sheikh Dr. Nimer Fahad Al-Malik Al-Sabah, praised on Monday, the advanced level of the Jahra Reserve, saying it reflects strong institutional efforts in environmental protection and biodiversity preservation.

In a ministry statement issued after a field visit to the reserve, affiliated with the Environment Public Authority, he said the visit aimed to strengthen cooperation and exchange expertise in sustainability, highlighting national institutions' commitment to balancing development with natural resource preservation. He also commended the Authority's management of reserves according to top scientific standards.

Acting Director General of the Environment Public Authority, Nouf Behbehani said the visit reflects close coordination between the two sides and stressed the importance of partnerships in advancing environmental sustainability. She noted that joint efforts, particularly along the reserve's coastline, have enhanced environmental protection.

Director of Public Relations and Petroleum Media Sheikhha Tamader Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said the visit supports the ministry's efforts to highlight integration between the energy and environmental sectors and promote sustainability awareness.

During the tour, the delegation reviewed the reserve's facilities, biodiversity, observation towers, and visitor areas. Established in 1987, the 18 square kilometer reserve allocates about 4,000 square meters for visitors, balancing conservation with educational access.

Municipal panel clears Wafra zone, key infrastructure plans

Green standards proposed for gov't buildings

By Inaas Awadh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: The Technical Committee in the Municipal Council deliberated on various economic, regulatory and service-related matters in its recently concluded meeting.

Committee Chairperson Munira Al-Amir disclosed that the panel approved the following during the meeting:

- Request of Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) to adopt the final structural plan for Wafra Economic Zone, which measures seven square kilometers, including the endorsed land uses and building regulations in accordance with the attached schedule and approved plans.
- Allocation of access roads serving the zone and their transfer to the Ministry of Public Works. This approval is subject to coordination with the Environment Public Authority (EPA), in consideration of the proposed railway connection between Kuwait City and Riyadh, as well as full compliance with the Environmental Protection Law and all applicable regulatory requirements.
- Request of the Ministry of Oil to amend the decision on the development of fuel stations operated by Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC). The amendment allows the inclusion of supporting commercial activities not exceeding 20 percent of the total station area, while the allocation and nature of such activities will be determined in accordance with the classification of the adjoining roads.

The committee stipulated that building heights must be limited to a ground floor, adequate on-site parking must be provided, and direct access from surrounding roads should be prohibited.

It stressed the need to comply with the requirements of the relevant authorities, foremost among them are EPA, Ministry of Interior and Kuwait Fire Force (KFF).



Committee Chairperson Munira Al-Amir

- Request of the Ministry of Public Works to allocate a 102,000-square-meter site in Jahra Industrial Area II for the establishment of a sewage pumping station serving the North Kabad project.

This allocation is conditional on modifying the site dimensions to meet the requirements of the General Traffic Department (GTD).

The concerned authority must also submit an environmental and social impact assessment study, approved by EPA, prior to implementation.

- Allocation of a stormwater drainage conduit in Fahaaheel (Sector Six) with a length of 1,120.5 meters and width that gradually increases in accordance with the approved plans. This is contingent upon adhering to the recommendations of the Subcommittee for Public Utilities and Services and submitting the required technical studies before commencing execution.
- Land subdivision project in Shaab Al-Bahri (Block Eight).
- Request to annex and purchase State-owned land, Plot Four in Qibla.
- Request of Kuwait Finance House (KFH) to reorganize part of Block 14 in Qibla, in accordance with Law No. 40/1978.

This is subject to compliance with the relevant ministerial decision, the applicant bearing the cost of modifying any existing services, provision of multi-storey public parking facilities, and adherence to the approved traffic study.

Regarding other matters, Al-Amir disclosed that the request to relocate the service center in the Ninth Commercial Zone on Mubarak Al-Kabeer Street, as well as the request to add commercial activities to the licenses of health institutes, were referred to the executive body for the preparation of a detailed study, and then resubmission to the committee for final consideration.

Meanwhile, Municipal Council member Sharifa Al-Shalafan has proposed the mandatory adoption of a recognized green building classification system for all future government buildings.

This proposal is designed to ensure the efficiency of government infrastructure by requiring all entities to implement the approved green building system during the design and construction of new buildings.

The objectives include boosting energy and water efficiency, improving indoor environmental quality, and developing the operational performance of these facilities.

Furthermore, the proposal of Al-Shalafan addresses existing government buildings through a phased approach. It mandates an initial performance assessment, followed by the implementation of necessary operational and technical improvements.

The proposal also calls for the use of Operations and Maintenance (O&M) systems on current buildings to achieve measurable performance gains.

Al-Shalafan emphasized that this initiative is in line with the sustainability pillar of Kuwait Vision 2035, which focuses on infrastructure development, increasing the efficiency of public facilities, and improving the quality of life.

She pointed out that the proposed system could serve as a national platform for promoting health and well-being, reducing operational expenses, and increasing the efficiency of energy and water consumption, thereby, contributing to resource sustainability and more effective government spending.

Continued from Page 1

Crackdown unfolds

The argument turned physical, such that one man stabbed the other before fleeing. The injured man was rushed to the hospital, while the attacker later surrendered to the police.

An investigation was launched to establish the circumstances leading to the incident.

In other news, Andalus police officers arrested an Asian man for the possession of locally produced liquor intended for sale.

According to a security source, the suspect was apprehended during a sting operation. Police found the man carrying water bottles filled with the homemade alcohol. The suspect and the confiscated items were referred to the concerned authorities.

Jaber Al-Ali

He insisted that installation work must be carried out by companies accredited by the KFF.

Brigadier General Al-Gharib explained that company accreditation ensures elevators comply with approved safety and security standards, particularly those related to emergency systems, rescue equipment, and safe operating procedures, thereby helping protect lives and property and minimizing potential risks.

He urged property and office owners to ensure all technical requirements are met before operating elevators, emphasizing that adherence to safety measures is the first line of defense.

Bahrain &

and enhance service quality.

For his part, Maj. Gen. Al-Khaili noted that the Single Travel Point project is among the innovative initiatives reflecting GCC states' commitment to facilitating passenger journeys and providing a safe and seamless travel experience.

He highlighted the Authority's keenness to strengthen cooperation and partnerships with strategic partners at the local, regional, and global levels through electronic connectivity and the deployment of advanced technologies and applications for data exchange and processing.

He added that the project will contribute to increasing tourism and intra-regional trade between the two countries in particular, and among GCC states in general, by transforming the airports of both countries into key departure hubs that boost tourism and travel and support economic activity. The system covers citizens of both countries and allows the completion of all travel procedures at a single point without repeated checks at multiple control points.

The project is the implementation of a decision taken in the regard by the Ministers of Interior of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States at their 42nd meeting, held in the State of Kuwait on November 12, 2025.

It will later expand to include GCC citizens and residents in both countries, marking a qualitative transformation in the mechanism for completing travel procedures, reducing time and effort, and enhancing the smooth flow of movement, particularly during peak periods.

Minister Al-Sumait appoints Sheikha Jawaher Al-Sabah secretary general of IHL committee

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18, (KUNA): Kuwait's Ministry of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait issued a ministerial decision on Tuesday appointing Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Affairs, Ambassador Sheikha Jawaher Ibrahim Al-Duaij Al-Sabah, as Secretary-General of the Permanent National Committee on International Humanitarian Law (IHL).


In a press statement, Al-Sumait expressed his sincere thanks and appreciation to Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah for his continuous and constructive cooperation in supporting the committee's efforts and in implementing the provisions of international humanitarian law.

He also commended Ambassador Sheikha Jawaher for accepting this responsibility, wishing her success.

The Secretary-General of the committee is responsible for preparing plans and programs related to international humanitarian law, coordinating with relevant authorities, organizing training programs and seminars, and supervising the technical and administrative preparations to ensure the achievement of its goals.



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This image provided by the Nevada County Sheriff's Office shows members of a rescue team in Soda Springs, California on Feb 17. (AP)

9 skiers missing in Calif avalanche

Crews pushed through mountainous wilderness near Lake Tahoe during a snowstorm to rescue six backcountry skiers who survived an avalanche but were trapped by its snow and ice. Nine others from their tour group remained missing.

Two of the six were taken to a hospital for treatment, said Ashley Quadros, a spokesperson for the Nevada County Sheriff's Office.

The sheriff's office said Tuesday night that there were 15 skiers on the trip - not 16 as initially believed.

Search and rescue crews were dispatched to Frog Lake in the Castle Peak area, northwest of Lake Tahoe, after a 911 call reporting an avalanche and people buried. A powerful winter storm was moving through California at the time.

Extreme conditions in the Northern California mountains slowed the rescue effort. It took crews several hours to reach the skiers and take them to safety, where they were evaluated by the Truckee Fire Department. (AP)

Paxton steps up Senate bid against GOP Senator Cornyn

TYLER, Texas, Feb 18, (AP): It was an unfamiliar setting for Texas Attorney General **Ken Paxton** Monday night: walking out to the applause of supporters at his first campaign rally since the Republican announced his candidacy for the US Senate 10 months ago.



Paxton

Paxton's appearance before about 100 supporters in a bar in east Texas is part of his stepped-up campaign to unseat four-term Republican Sen. John Cornyn and add a "Make America Great Again" devotee to the Senate, a bid that has set up one of this year's most contentious GOP primaries.

Until Monday, Paxton had waged a lower-wattage campaign, spent relatively little money and drew attention primarily by pursuing conservative causes as the state attorney general. But with early voting starting Tuesday for the

March 3 primary, Paxton is scheduled to make stops across Texas this week. He also has begun airing ads linking himself with President Donald Trump as he takes on Cornyn and Rep. Wesley Hunt.

Despite being the target of millions of dollars in attack ads from Cornyn and his allies, and opposition from Senate Republican leaders who say Cornyn is the stronger candidate in a general election, Paxton is heading into the GOP primary with the look of his party's front-runner.

"His money is coming from the D.C. establishment," Paxton said of Cornyn as he spoke from the bar's bandstand. "That's how he can afford these commercials and that's how they always try to convince us from Washington with their money that we should select their person. Well, I'm not their person and I'm never going to be their person."

The comment sparked a round of applause.

Paxton's political survival would appear to defy convention, much like Trump's did. Paxton beat impeachment on fraud charges in 2023, and today is shadowed by claims of marital infidelity made by his wife, state Sen. Angela Paxton.



Emergency personnel work the scene of a crash involving 30-plus vehicles including six semi trucks on Interstate 25 south of Pueblo, Colo on Feb 17. (AP)

4 dead in Colorado vehicle crash

Four people died in crashes involving over 30 vehicles, including six semitrailers, on an interstate in Colorado Tuesday after blowing dirt made it nearly impossible to see, authorities said.

Dirt kicked up by heavy winds blew across Interstate 25 just south of Pueblo around 10 a.m. causing a "brown out," Maj. Brian Lyons of the Colorado State Patrol said.

Twenty-nine people were taken to the hospital with injuries ranging from minor to severe, Lyons said.

There were crashes on either side of the interstate, but the one on the southbound side only led to property damage, the patrol said.

One of the vehicles was a pickup hauling a trailer carrying 32 goats, four of which died, the patrol said.

The cause of the crashes about 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) from Pueblo is still being investigated. The lack of visibility will be considered as one of the factors, but others may also be involved, said Trooper Sherri Mendez, a patrol spokesperson. (AP)

ICE operation not moving with proper accountability measures: Moore

Trump recruits thousands of local officers to aid immigration effort, some states say no

WASHINGTON, Feb 18, (AP): Over the past 18 years, officers at Maryland's Frederick County jail have asked thousands of inmates two standard questions: What country are you a citizen of? And where were you born?

If the answer was anything other than the United States, local officers deputized with special federal authority launched an investigation into whether the person was in the country illegally. Since 2008, Frederick County has turned over 1,884 people to US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Sheriff Charles Jenkins said.

But that is coming to an immediate halt under a law signed Tuesday by Democratic Gov Wes Moore that prohibits immigration enforcement agreements with the federal government.

The new Maryland law highlights the extent to which Democratic-led states are pushing back against President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown. Ten states — all led by Democrats — now have statewide policies prohibiting law enforcement officers from cooperating in one of the primary programs Trump is using to carry out his agenda of mass deportations.

Laws banning cooperative agreements with ICE were signed earlier this month in New Mexico and took effect last month in Maine. New York Gov Kathy Hochul also is backing legislation that would ban local law officers from being deputized by ICE.

And Virginia Gov Abigail Spanberger recently terminated state ICE agreements signed under her Republican predecessor, though her order didn't cancel existing arrangements with local sheriffs.

Democratic resistance has increased as the Trump administration faces mounting scrutiny over its large-scale immigration enforcement efforts in several cities and the fatal shootings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti by federal agents in Minnesota.

"There needs to be accountability for this organization, because right now the Trump-Vance ICE operation is not moving with proper accountability measures," Moore told reporters after signing the new restrictions.

The longtime Republican sheriff of Frederick County contends the termination of a cooperative agreement with ICE will force him to let some people out of jail who may later commit more crimes.

"I'm extremely disappointed with the legislation," Jenkins said, "because really and truly, it's going to put the public at risk in a lot of ways."

Upon taking office last year, Trump revived a decades-old program that trains local law officers to interrogate and detain people suspected of being in the U.S. illegally.

The 287(g) program — named for a section of the 1996 law that created it — had been used during President Joe Biden's administration only for im-



Maryland Gov Wes Moore, (center), smiles before signing legislation that prohibits immigration enforcement agreements with the federal government during a bill-signing ceremony on Feb 17, in Annapolis, Md. He is joined, (from left), by Maryland Secretary of State Susan Lee, Lt Gov Aruna Miller, House Speaker Peña-Melnyk and Senate President Bill Ferguson. (AP)

migrants already jailed or imprisoned on charges. But Trump expanded it to include local task forces that can make arrests on the streets, resurrecting a model that former President Barack Obama had discontinued amid concerns about racial profiling.

Participation in the program has exploded, from 135 agreements in 20 states before Trump took office to more than 1,400 current agreements

in a total of 41 states and territories. Some local agencies have multiple agreements covering different immigration enforcement functions.

About 800 entities have task force pacts, granting the most expansive authority. As an incentive, ICE offers local agencies that sign task force agreements \$100,000 for new vehicles. And for each trained task force officer, ICE covers the salary, benefits and \$7,500

for equipment.

Arkansas, Florida, Georgia and Texas — all led by Republicans — require local jails to participate in the program. Those states account for half of all 287(g) agreements.

The growth in ICE agreements has come alongside a surge in federal immigration enforcement funding. A big tax-cut law Trump signed last year allots \$150 billion for immigration enforcement, including more than \$46 billion to hire 10,000 ICE agents and \$45 billion to expand immigrant detention centers.

Nine Maryland counties with Republican sheriffs have cooperative agreements with ICE. Those pacts must end under the new law, which passed overwhelmingly in the Democratic-led General Assembly.

Maryland House Speaker Joseline Peña-Melnyk, who immigrated from the Dominican Republic when she was 8, said the bill shows that Maryland values civil rights.

"We value empathy," she said. "We value peoples' contribution. We value the Constitution. We value and support and protect civil rights."

But banning cooperative agreements could lead ICE to send more of its own officers to the state, some Republican sheriffs and lawmakers said.

"I think what you'll see is more immigrant enforcement, not less," said Harford County Sheriff Jeffrey Gahler, whose agency has turned over

about 430 inmates to ICE for over the past nine years. "Our program was the safest way and the best way to identify people" in the US illegally.

The Department of Homeland Security said the new law "will make Maryland less safe" and increase its workload there.

"When politicians bar local law enforcement from working with DHS, our law enforcement officers have to have a more visible presence so that we can find and apprehend the criminals let out of jails and back into communities," the department said in a statement.

About 6 in 10 US adults say Trump has "gone too far" in sending federal immigration agents into U.S. cities, according to an AP-NORC poll that suggests political independents are increasingly uncomfortable with his tactics.

"The growing public pushback against Trump's immigration enforcement — especially in more Democratic-leaning states — has created political pressure and a political opening to pass laws like the one in Maryland," said Nayna Gupta, policy director at the nonprofit American Immigration Council.

On Tuesday, the Virginia Senate passed a bill on party lines that would place hefty guardrails on any proposed 287(g) agreements. That bill now goes to the House, which previously passed a similar version.



Thousands of people attend a huge protest in support of ex-leaders facing a trial for alleged war crimes during a 1998-1999 war for independence from Serbia, in Pristina, Kosovo on Feb 17. (AP)

Thousands in Kosovo march against war crimes trials

An air of defiance marked Kosovo's independence celebrations on Tuesday as thousands of people joined a march in support of former fighters who are facing trial at a Netherlands-based court for alleged war crimes during a 1998-1999 separatist war from Serbia.

Protesters, many wrapped in red and black Albanian flags, braved cold and snowy weather in

the capital, Pristina, to voice their opposition to the proceedings in The Hague against former president and rebel leader Hashim Thaci and three others accused of atrocities during and after the conflict that killed some 13,000 people.

Earlier on Tuesday, Kosovo's security forces paraded in Pristina as part of the independence ceremonies,

and Parliament held a special session.

The war started in 1998 when the rebel Kosovo Liberation Army launched its struggle for independence and Serbia responded with a brutal crackdown. The war ended after NATO bombed Serbia for 78 days in 1999, eventually forcing it to pull out its troops from the territory. (AP)

Envoys signal no breakthrough on bridging Russia, Ukraine differences

GENEVA, Feb 18, (AP): The latest US-brokered talks between envoys from Moscow and Kyiv over Russia's all-out invasion of Ukraine ended Wednesday with no sign of a breakthrough and with both sides saying the talks were "difficult," as the war's fourth anniversary approaches next week.

The negotiations in Switzerland were the third round of direct talks organized by the US, after meetings earlier this year in Abu Dhabi that officials described as constructive but which also made no major headway. Expectations for significant progress in Geneva were low.

"The negotiations were not easy," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said after the talks broke up and he spoke briefly by phone from Kyiv with his negotiating team.

He earlier accused Russia of "trying to drag out negotiations" while it presses on with its invasion - an accusation he and European leaders have repeatedly made in the past.

Despite that, some progress was made on military issues although political differences remain deep, including over the future of land in eastern Ukraine that is occupied by the Russian army and that Russian President



In this photo provided by Ukraine's 93rd Kholodnyi Yar Separate Mechanized Brigade press service, soldiers are at a pickup before assignments on the frontline near Kostyantynivka, Donetsk region, Ukraine on Feb 17. (AP)

Vladimir Putin wants to keep, Zelenskyy said.

The head of the Russian delegation, Putin adviser Vladimir Medinsky, told reporters that the two days of talks in Geneva "were difficult but businesslike."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that it's "too early" to speak about the outcome of the talks.

Putin has been receiving reports about progress in Geneva, he said.

Both sides said a new round of talks is set to take place.

Zelenskyy described the military discussions as "constructive," adding that the armed forces of both countries considered how any future ceasefire might be monitored.

Georgia pursues policy of peace: prez

TBILISI, Feb 18, (Agencies): Georgia remains committed to a pragmatic, multi-vector foreign policy focused on safeguarding peace and independence, Georgian President **Mikheil Kavelashvili** said Tuesday.

"Georgia pursues a policy of peace, and we have proved this in deed, which carries fundamental importance not only for our own country but for the security of the entire region," Kavelashvili said in his annual address to parliament.

He noted that Georgia has the potential to strengthen its role to "facilitate economic integration between Asia, Europe and the Middle East" and reinforce the South Caucasus as a strategic regional hub.

Meanwhile, Georgian Foreign Minister Maka Botchorishvili said Tuesday that funds channeled through the United



Kavelashvili

States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other international foundations were used to support political groups involved in attempts to destabilize the country, Imedi News reported.

Botchorishvili said that such support included what she described as financing "revolutions" and facilitating efforts to change the government through unlawful means.

"This is exactly what the Georgian government is fighting against and continues to fight. This is unacceptable for us and contradicts the development of democracy," she added.

Her remarks followed comments by Mike Benz, a former US Department of State official, who on Monday referred to the mass protests in Georgia in May 2024 against the foreign influence transparency law, accusing Washington of applying double standards toward countries adopting legislation similar to the US Foreign Agents Registration Act.

Benz indicated that individuals participating in the 2024 demonstrations had been funded under the previous US administration via structures such as the USAID.

Europe

Spain storage room fire kills 5: A fire broke out in a top-floor storage room at an apartment building in northeastern Spain, killing five children who were trapped inside and injuring five other people elsewhere in the building, officials said Tuesday.

The fire started around 9 pm Monday in Manlleu, a town of about 21,000 people in the Catalonia region north of Barcelona. The victims who died were identified as minors who ranged in age from 14 to 17 and who did not live in the building, Catalan police said.

Police were investigating the cause of the fire and the reason why the children were not able to escape the room. Police declined to say whether they were considering the case a possible homicide.

Four of the injured people were released from hospitals and the other injured person didn't require hospitalization, emergency services said. (AP)

France releases shadow fleet tanker: French authorities said Tuesday they released a tanker intercepted last month in the Mediterranean Sea which is suspected of being part of Russia's sanctioned shadow fleet shipping oil in violation of international sanctions.



In this photo, provided by the French Army on Jan 22, 2026, an oil tanker in the Mediterranean Sea that traveled from Russia, is pictured after being intercepted by France's Navy. (AP)

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot said in a post on X that the tanker Grinch is to leave French waters after having paid a penalty of "several million euros" and "three weeks of costly immobilization."

"Circumventing European sanctions comes at a price. Russia will no longer be able to finance its war with impunity through a ghost fleet off our coasts," Barrot said. (AP)

INTERNATIONAL

'This administration has long destroyed my name'

Philippine Vice President Duterte to seek presidency in '28 but faces impeachment bids

MANILA, Philippines, Feb 18, (AP): Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte said Wednesday she would seek the presidency in the 2028 elections - a bid that would have to withstand new impeachment attempts in Congress and criminal complaints that could ban her from public office if convicted.

She made the announcement in a televised speech where she renewed allegations of corruption and misuse against President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. They were running mates in a whirlwind alliance in the 2022 election but have since had a bitter falling out.

She and her family have blamed Marcos for the detention of her father, former president Rodrigo Duterte, who faces a potential trial for crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Court, which ordered his arrest and detention in the Netherlands last year over his deadly anti-drugs crackdown.

Sara Duterte accused Marcos of reneging on his campaign promises and of misuse. She repeatedly asked for public forgiveness for problems such as government corruption, law-and-order issues and inflation.

"Politicians often avoid announcing their plans early so they wouldn't be the target of attacks," Duterte said. "But this administration has long destroyed my name."

She then announced her presidential bid and left a news conference without taking any questions.

Marcos, who is limited to a single, six-year term, did not immediately react to the vice president's presidential bid and her allegations. A presidential spokesperson, Claire Castro, said Duterte should apologize to the public for the many irregularities and corruption allegations she's facing along with her frequent personal trips abroad.

"She should ask forgiveness for focusing on destroying reputations of other people instead of doing her work and helping the government," Castro said.

Most of the allegations against Duterte had been included in an impeach-



Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte speaks during a press conference on Feb 18, in Manila, Philippines. (AP)

ment complaint she survived on a technicality last year.

The House of Representatives had voted to impeach her and sent the case to the Senate for trial. The Supreme Court, however, later ruled that the lower

chamber violated a constitutional rule that only one impeachment case could be processed by it in a single year against an impeachable official.

The impeachment complaints filed this month centered on her alleged illegal use and mishandling of \$10.3 million in confidential funds from the vice president's office and from her time as education secretary under Marcos.

Another complaint accused her of having unexplained wealth, including in personal bank accounts. An anti-graft prosecutor has said his agency was trying to gain access to those accounts as part of a separate criminal investigation.

The vice president's threat during an online news conference in 2024 to have the president, his wife and House of Representatives speaker killed if she herself was assassinated was cited in one of the impeachment complaints.

During the House's original investigation into the allegations, Duterte refused to respond in detail to questions and skipped some of the televised hearings.

The vice president's lawyer, Michael Poa, has said Duterte was prepared to confront these allegations and was confident "that a fair and impartial review will demonstrate that the accusations are devoid of both factual and legal basis."

Rodrigo Duterte aligned himself closely with Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin during his stormy presidency, which ended in 2022. He was succeeded by Marcos, who has deepened defense and military ties with Washington to confront an increasingly assertive Beijing in the disputed South China Sea.

Sara Duterte has been criticized for failing to publicly call out China for its aggressive actions against the Philippines in the disputed waters.

"Let's be cautious and analytical. Somebody who is seeking your vote may be a Manchurian candidate," Castro said.

Takaichi reelected as Japan's PM with goal of pushing to the right

TOKYO, Feb 18, (AP): Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi was reappointed Wednesday by Parliament to form her second Cabinet, following last week's landslide election win that she hopes will allow a hard-right move to the country's policies. All previous ministers are expected to be retained.

Takaichi will look to use the symbolism of the day, seen as a formality, to further boost her ruling Liberal Democratic Party as it looks to capitalize on a two-thirds supermajority in the lower house, the more powerful of Japan's two parliamentary chambers.

Her goals include an increase in military power, more government spending and strengthened conservative social policies.

Having two-thirds control of the 465-seat lower house allows Takaichi's party to dominate top posts in house committees and push through bills rejected by the upper house, the chamber where the LDP-led ruling coalition lacks a majority.

Takaichi wants to bolster Japan's military capability and arms sales,

tighten immigration policies, push male-only imperial succession rules and preserve a criticized tradition that pressures women into abandoning their surnames.

Her ambition to revise the US-drafted postwar pacifist Constitution might have to wait, for now, as she is facing pressure to deal with rising prices, a declining population and worries about military security.

Her first urgent task is to address rising prices and sluggish wages and pass a budget bill to fund those measures, delayed by the election.

Takaichi proposes a two-year sales tax cut on food products to ease household living costs.

Experts caution that her liberal fiscal policy could drive up prices and delay progress on trimming Japan's huge national debt.

Takaichi is maneuvering for a crucial summit next month with US President Donald Trump, who will visit Beijing in April.

The US president endorsed Takaichi ahead of the Japanese election, and

hours before Takaichi's reappointment as prime minister, US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick announced Japan will provide capital for three projects under a \$550 billion investment package that Japan pledged in October.

Japan is committed to the \$36 billion first batch of projects - a natural gas plant in Ohio, a U.S. Gulf Coast crude oil export facility and a synthetic diamond manufacturing site.

Japan is also under pressure to increase annual defense spending.

"Japan will keep spending more and more for the US. ... The question is whether the public wants her to speak out against Trump or be obedient to ensure Japanese security," said Masato Kamikubo, a Ritsumeikan University professor of policy science. "For China, it's simple. Japanese people want her to be tough."

Takaichi in November suggested possible Japanese action if China makes a military move against Taiwan, the self-governing island that Beijing claims as its own. That has led to Beijing's diplomatic and economic reprisals.



Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, (center), is applauded by members of the lower house of Japan's parliament as Takaichi was reelected as prime minister during a special session in Tokyo, Japan on Feb 18. (AP)

Jeri faces corruption probe

Peru's Congress removes interim president

LIMA, Peru, Feb 18, (AP): Peru's Congress voted Tuesday to remove interim President José Jerí from office as he faces corruption allegations, triggering a fresh wave of political instability just weeks before the nation's April presidential and congressional elections.

Jerí is under a preliminary investigation into corruption and influence peddling, stemming from a series of undisclosed meetings with two Chinese executives.

With 75 votes in favor, 24 against and three abstentions, Peru's legislature voted to remove Jerí from the position he had assumed on Oct. 10 when predecessor Dina Boluarte was dismissed as a crime wave gripped the country.

Jerí's removal from office is the latest chapter in a prolonged political crisis in a country that has seen seven presidents since 2016, and is about to hold a general election amid widespread public outcry over the surge in violent crime.

Lawmakers will choose a new president from among their members to govern until July 28, when the interim leader will hand over the office to the winner of the April 12 presidential election. Jerí will return to his position as a legislator until July 28, when the new Congress also takes office.

A vote on the interim leader will take place Wednesday, after lawmakers register their candidates.

The accusations against Jerí stemmed from a leaked report regard-



Photographed through a gate, Peru's President Jose Jeri, (right), stands with Prime Minister Ernesto Alvarez during the changing of the guard ceremony at the government palace in Lima, Peru on Feb 17. (AP)

ing a clandestine December meeting with two Chinese executives. One attendee holds active government contracts, while the other is currently under investigation for alleged involvement in an illegal logging operation.

Jerí has denied wrongdoing. He said he met the executives to organize a Peruvian-Chinese festivity, but his opponents have accused him of corruption.

Despite a revolving door of presidents, Peru's economy has remained stable. The Andean nation had a public debt to gross domestic product ratio of

32% in 2024, one of the lowest in Latin America, and the government has welcomed foreign investment in areas like mining and infrastructure.

As Peru heads into this year's general election, Rafael Lopez Aliaga, a conservative businessman and former mayor of Lima is leading a crowded field that also includes Keiko Fujimori, a well known former legislator whose father was Peru's president in the 1990s. If none of the candidates gets 50% of the vote there will be a runoff in June between the top two contenders.

'Pre-election campaign promise'

Sri Lankan lawmakers scrap pensions

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka, Feb 18, (Agencies): Sri Lankan legislators overwhelmingly voted Tuesday to scrap their pensions, in a bid to fulfill a key pre-election campaign promise by the ruling Marxist-leaning government following anger over the country's economic crisis.

Lawmakers passed the bill on Tuesday by 154 votes in the 225-member House, with only two against. The remaining legislators were not present during the vote.

In Sri Lanka, a lawmaker was previously entitled to a pension after serving a five-year term. The new law stops payments to anyone who already receives, or qualifies for, the pension. President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, voted into office in 2024, pledged to end the practice during his election campaign.

In a similar move, Dissanayake's government abolished perks provided to former presidents in September in response to popular demand. Those included state funding for housing, allowances, pensions and transport. An office and a staff for former presidents and their widows were also scrapped. There are currently five living past presidents and a widow.

Dissanayake won the vote, riding on public resentment against politicians accused of being responsible for the country's worst economic plight in 2022. The crisis led to a severe shortage of food, medicine, fuel and electricity, and triggered protests that forced then-President



Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake arrives at the country's 78th Independence Day ceremony in Colombo, Sri Lanka on Feb 4. (AP)

Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign.

Justice Minister Harshana Nanayakkara presented the bill in parliament, saying an election promise had been fulfilled and that lawmakers had no moral right to receive a pension at a time when the country was struggling to emerge from its worst economic crisis.

Sri Lanka declared bankruptcy in April 2022 with more than \$83 billion in debt, more than half to foreign creditors. It sought the help of the International Monetary Fund, which approved a \$2.9 billion four-year bailout package in 2023, under which Sri Lanka was required to re-

structure its debt.

The island-nation said it had concluded the debt restructuring process after reaching agreements with bilateral and multilateral creditors and private bondholders. Sri Lanka is seeking to obtain \$17 billion in debt service relief.

Sri Lanka's crisis was largely the result of economic mismanagement combined with fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the 2019 terrorism attacks that devastated its important tourism industry. The pandemic also disrupted the flow of remittances from Sri Lankans working abroad.

Bid to reclaim territory

Somalia renews its US-backed fight against al-Shabab

MOGADISHU, Somalia, Feb 18, (AP): US-backed airstrikes and recently expanded ground operations have shifted momentum in Somalia's long-running war against al-Qaeda-linked al-Shabab militant group, the government says, touting successes in the fight such as efforts to reclaim territory from the extremists and the targeting of the group's leadership and bomb-making network.

The turn comes at a pivotal moment: African Union peacekeeping forces are gradually drawing down and Somalia is assuming greater responsibility for its own security, nearly two decades after al-Shabab emerged as a dominant insurgent force.

Al-Shabab emerged in the mid-2000s as the armed wing of the now outlawed Islamic Courts Union coalition before aligning itself with al-Qaeda. At its peak, it controlled much of southern and central Somalia, including parts of Mogadishu, the country's capital.

African Union troops pushed al-Shabab out of Mogadishu in 2011, but the group adapted, reverting to guerrilla warfare, suicide bombings, and targeted assassinations. It continues



Armed al-Shabab fighters ride on pickup trucks as they prepare to travel into the city, just outside the capital Mogadishu, in Somalia on Dec 8, 2008. (AP)

to raise millions of dollars annually through taxation and extortion, according to UN monitors.

The United States has carried out

airstrikes in Somalia for more than a decade. In 2020, during his first term in office, President Donald Trump ordered most US troops withdrawn. In

2022, President Joe Biden approved the redeployment of US forces to Somalia, restoring a more sustained advisory and counterterrorism presence.

Authorities say Somali troops have retaken areas in the regions of Lower Shabelle, Hiiraan, Middle Shabelle and parts of Jubbaland that had been under the militants' control for years.

Omar Ali Abdi, Somalia's state minister for defense, told The Associated Press that locations in Lower Shabelle, including Jilib Marka, Gendershe, and Dhanaane, which had long served as al-Shabab strongholds, are now in military hands.

The minister also cited gains in the central Hiiraan region, including Taydaan and Yasooman, and operations near Masjid Ali Gaduud in Middle Shabelle. In the Kudhaa area of Jubbaland, he said joint operations involving regional Darawiish forces and Somalia's US-trained Danab special forces have killed dozens of militants and seized vehicles.

Al-Shabab has not confirmed the reported losses. Access to many contested areas is restricted, making independent verification difficult.

WASHINGTON, Feb 18, (AP): The US military said Tuesday that it carried out strikes on three boats accused of smuggling drugs in Latin American waters, killing 11 people in one of the deadliest days of the Trump administration's monthslong campaign against alleged traffickers.

The series of strikes conducted Monday brought the death toll to at least 145 people since the administration began targeting those it calls "narcoterrorists" in small vessels since early September.

Like most of the military's statements on the 42 known strikes, US Southern Command said it targeted alleged drug traffickers along known smuggling routes. It said two vessels carrying four people each were struck in the eastern Pacific Ocean, while a third boat with three people was hit in

the Caribbean Sea.

The military did not provide evidence that the vessels were ferrying drugs but posted videos on X that showed boats being destroyed.

The videos posted by Southern Command show the boats either moving or bobbing in the water before the explosions engulf them in flames. People can be seen sitting in two of the small, open vessels before they're destroyed.

President Donald Trump has said the US is in "armed conflict" with cartels in Latin America and has justified the attacks as a necessary escalation to stem the flow of drugs.

Critics have questioned the overall legality of the strikes as well as their effectiveness, in part because the fantasy behind many fatal overdoses is typically trafficked to the US over land from Mexico, where it is produced with chemicals imported from China and India.

The boat strikes also drew intense criticism following the revelation that the military killed survivors of the very first boat attack with a follow-up strike.



Trump

Boursa Kuwait closes higher

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait ended Wednesday's trading session on a positive note, with the general index climbing 44.42 points, or 0.51%, to close at 8,741.88 points.

Trading activity saw a total of 169.8 million shares exchanged in 13,888 transactions, with a combined value of KD 69.6 million (approximately USD 212.2 million).

Business

Supporting student initiatives and strengthening knowledge platforms to empower youth

Markaz concludes sponsorship of Dal Talks Conference to promote legal & academic dialogue among youth in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: Kuwait Financial Centre “Markaz” concluded its participation as the main sponsor of the Dal Talks Conference for the 2025/2026 academic year, organized by the Kuwait International Law Society at the Faculty of Law, Kuwait University, and held at Sheikh Jaber Al Ahmad Cultural Centre. The conference was attended by a wide range of students, academics, and professionals, fostering the exchange of expertise and dialogue and promoting a culture of constructive, knowledge-based and responsible discussion.

Markaz’s sponsorship of the conference is part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy, one of whose key pillars is building human capital and empowering youth. The sponsorship reflects Markaz’s commitment to supporting youth-led initiatives that contribute to developing leadership skills and broadening professional horizons.

As the main sponsor, Markaz was represented by Mr. Ahmed F. Al-Falah, Managing Director – Investment Banking, Markaz, who highlighted Markaz’s journey and evolution as a leading Kuwaiti institution in the region. He emphasized that sustainable institutional success is built on good governance, building capacities, and continuous in-



Dal Talks Conference group photo.

vestment in human capital while preparing the next generation. He noted that Kuwait’s advanced legislative and regulatory environment, along with its qualified national talent, has been a fundamental pillar of Markaz’s regional growth and expansion. He concluded by encouraging youth to adopt strategic mindset and embark on their investment journeys to achieve long-term goals.

Mr. Al-Falah stated: “Our sponsorship of the Dal Talks Conference underscores our continued commitment to supporting initiatives that promote dialogue, learning, and community engagement. Such platforms play an important role in broadening young people’s perspectives, refining their skills, and building the confidence necessary to enable them to lead and

contribute effectively to the development of their communities. Markaz’s sponsorship of the conference aligns with its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy, which focuses on building human capital and strengthening partnerships with academic institutions. Through investing in such student platforms, Markaz continues to expand its engagement with academic

and professional communities, driven by our belief that knowledge and dialogue form the foundation of sustainable progress.”

Kuwait’s International Law Society, the event’s organizer, is a student organization under Kuwait University’s College of Law and the national arm of the International Law Students Association. The Society works to pro-

mote academic and professional development in the legal field through conferences and cultural initiatives that encourage critical thinking, develop leadership skills, and reinforce the principles of social responsibility among students.

About Kuwait Financial Centre “Markaz”

Established in 1974, Kuwait Financial Centre K.P.S.C “Markaz” is one of the leading asset management and investment banking institutions in the MENA region with total assets under management of over KD 1.52 billion (USD 4.98 billion) as of 31 December 2025. Markaz was listed on the Boursa Kuwait in 1997. Over the years, Markaz has pioneered innovation through the creation of new investment channels. These channels enjoy unique characteristics, and they have helped Markaz widen investors’ horizons. Examples include Mumtaz (the first domestic mutual fund), MREF (the first real estate investment fund in Kuwait), Forsa Financial Fund (the first options market maker in the GCC since 2005), and the GCC Momentum Fund (the first passive fund of its kind in Kuwait and across GCC that follows the momentum methodology), all conceptualized, established, and managed by Markaz.

Slow exports weigh on trade balance

Kuwait trade surplus with Japan falls

TOKYO, Feb 18, (KUNA): Kuwait’s trade surplus with Japan in January narrowed 36.9 percent from a year earlier to JPY 48.5 billion (USD 295 million), down for the third straight month due to slow exports, government data showed Wednesday.

However, Kuwait remained in black ink with Japan for 18 years on a monthly basis, years, as exports still outpaced imports in value, the Finance Ministry said in a preliminary report.

Overall Kuwaiti exports to Japan slid 35.4 percent year-on-year to JPY 65.3 billion (USD 404 million) for the third consecutive month of decline. Imports from Japan also plunged 30.5 percent to JPY 16.9 billion (USD 102 million), down for the first time in two months.

Middle East’s trade surplus with Japan fell 22.6 percent to JPY 645.0 billion (USD 4.2 billion) in January, with Japan-bound exports from the region shrinking 14.5 percent from a year earlier.

Crude oil, refined products, liquefied natural gas (LNG)

and other natural resources, which accounted for 94.2 percent of the region’s total exports to Japan last month, dropped 14.8 percent.

The region’s overall imports from Japan rose 3.0 percent on demand for electrical machinery, although shipment for automobiles declined 7.2 percent. Japan’s global trade balance returned to deficit for the first time in three months at 1.2 trillion (USD 7.5 billion) in January, but its size plummeted 58 percent from a year earlier.

Exports increased 16.8 percent from the year before, buoyed by sales of semiconductors and other electronic parts, non-ferrous metal and plastic. Imports went down 2.5 percent on lower energy bills, including LNG, crude oil and petroleum products.

China remained Japan’s biggest trade partner for both December and the full year, followed by the US. The trade data are measured on a customs-cleared basis before adjustment for seasonal factors.

Partnership targets 280,000 bpd by 2030

KGOC & Chevron enhance efforts to develop Wafra oil field reserves

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: Kuwait Gulf Oil Company (KGOC) and Chevron Saudi Arabia are intensifying efforts to utilize the Wafra oil field reserves -- estimated at 25 to 26 billion barrels, say reliable sources.

Sources told the newspaper that the joint Kuwaiti-Saudi operations of the Wafra field have developed a strategy to increase the production capacity to 280,000 barrels per day by 2030 -- up from the current production of 170,000 barrels per day.

Sources revealed that the new oil discovery in Wafra field, announced by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia last May with an estimated daily production of 500 barrels, will boost the future production of the field.

Sources said this discovery in the northern part of the Wafra field confirms that the joint operations of Wafra and Khafji fields are rich in oil and gas, thus, increasing the two countries’ crude oil reserves.

Sources attributed the decline in production at the Wafra field from 220,000 barrels per day in 2013 to 165,000-170,000 barrels per day to a five-year production halt. They said this followed a 2015 decision by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to cease production at the field, similar to the 2014 shutdown of the Khafji field for environmental reasons. Sources explained that this shutdown, which lasted until 2020, severely affected oil extraction from the fields, particularly Wafra.

They stated that scientific theories confirm that production stoppage in some fields substantially affect

output, with reductions typically ranging from five percent to 20 percent, while returning to previous production levels usually takes about seven to 10 years. “However, using modern technology and artificial intelligence made the process easier than before,” they clarified.

Sources added that the Saudi-Kuwaiti Joint Permanent Committee recently held a meeting in Khafji Governorate. Leaders and members of the committee from both the Kuwaiti and Saudi sides, as well as executive directors of joint operations, attended the meeting.

The meeting focused on the progress of operations in the Khafji and Wafra oil fields, and ways to develop them for the benefit of both sides.

Moreover, sources indicated that KGOC adopted a comprehensive digital transformation strategy aimed at enhancing operational efficiency and improving performance in all of its sectors.

They revealed that this strategy focuses on integrating modern technologies into the management of oil fields and projects, while raising safety standards, reducing emissions, and improving decision-making processes.

Sources said KGOC aims to develop its advanced digital systems to connect fields and operational facilities to the centralized monitoring networks in real time. They pointed out that integrating digital models of surface assets is crucial for predicting failures and improving preventive maintenance.

They also underscored the importance of using artificial intelligence to analyze production and equipment data and enhance energy and production efficiency.

Reinforcing MENA wealth leadership

NBK Wealth achieves Best Regional Investment Focus of the Year 2026

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: NBK Wealth, the leading Group in wealth management, announced achieving a new milestone that reflects its leadership in asset management in the MENA region, winning the award of “Best Regional Investment Focus of the year”, as part of the Asset Management Excellence Awards in the Middle East for the year 2026, presented by the global platform Mandate Wire, which is affiliated with the Financial Times.

These inaugural awards shed light on the institutions leading the future of investment in the region and setting new standards of excellence in the field of asset management, as well as showcasing the contributions of these institutions in promoting economic growth and developing capital markets in the Middle East.

The Mandate Wire Middle East Asset Management Excellence Awards adopted a rigorous methodology for judging and selecting winners, based on four key pillars: evaluating measurable performance and its ability to outperform benchmarks, the level of innovation in products and processes, the actual impact on clients in terms of results and investment experience, in addition to contributing to market development and enhancing industry practices.

The judging committee based its selection of the winning institutions on an evaluation of the participating entities’ performance during the period from June 2024 to June 2025.

Prudent Strategies

Winning this prestigious award demonstrates the strength of NBK Wealth’s investment approach, which combines a constant pursuit of sustainable capital growth with reliance on precise and prudent strategies, along with developing innovative solutions that seek to meet client aspirations and seek to support strong long-term returns. With this approach, the Group has been able to make successive accomplishments, which plays a role in boosting customer confidence and Group leadership.

This recognition also reflects the high level of professional expertise of the Asset Management team at NBK Wealth, which is comprised of leading equity, fixed-income and liquidity specialists with diverse experience spanning several decades in portfolio management, trading, financial and credit analysis, and treasury management. The team has consistently delivered exceptional performance across a group of conventional funds and Shari-



Shadi Khader, Head of Regional Asset Management at NBK Wealth, receives the award.

ah-compliant funds, which contributed to adding value to the Group clients, noting that past performance does not guarantee future results.

The asset management team at NBK Wealth follows a dynamic approach in fund management that deeply understands investor trends and makes continuous efforts to grow the client network in Kuwait and the MENA region, optimizes investment maturities, and develops the best and most innovative equity, fixed-income and liquidity products, while taking into account the changing conditions of global financial markets. The team also manages separate accounts (SMAs) for high-net-worth clients through diverse strategies that suit their various preferences, whether in conventional or Sharia-compliant products.

NBK Wealth enjoys a leading position as the largest wealth management group in Kuwait, and it’s among the largest in the MENA region, based on a global network that extends across nine cities in five countries.

The Group offers comprehensive financial solutions designed to meet the needs of high-net-worth individuals and

families in the Middle East and North Africa region, utilizing its strength, high creditworthiness, and regional and global reach of the NBK Group. The Group also continues to seek to enhance its clients’ ability to achieve their long-term financial goals through its extensive experience and commitment to innovation in investment strategies.

The NBK Wealth’s winning of the “Best Regional Investment Focus” award for 2026 confirms its continued commitment to excellence and innovation and reinforces its position as a trusted destination that combines deep expertise, strategic vision and the ability to seek to deliver sustainable value to clients in rapidly evolving markets.

It is worth noting that NBK Wealth is a brand registered under the name of National Bank of Kuwait S.A.K.P (“NBK”), for use by the Asset Management business of, among other NBK group entities, Watani Investment Company K.S.C.C., a leading investment firm and its affiliates worldwide, combined with the Private Banking services of NBK worldwide, which is one of the largest and oldest financial institutions in the region.

The Australian University successfully organizes AU-ICDSA 2026

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: The Australian University (AU) successfully hosted and organized on campus the fourth annual College of Business International Conference on Digital Transformation, Sustainability, and AI (AU-ICDSA 2026). The conference brought together academics, industry leaders, and technology specialists to explore the theme “Human-Machine Collaboration for Sustainable Growth and Harnessing the Potential of AI.”

The conference was led by AU in collaboration with the Centre for Business Analytics (CBAP) at the University of Surry, United Kingdom; the International Center of Industrial Transformation (INCIT), Singapore; and sponsored by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), aiming to foster inclusive dialogue and actionable strategies to build resilient, AI-enabled futures.

Throughout the two-day program, attendees engaged in a diverse set of keynote presentations, panel discus-



Group photo from the event

sions, and research sessions addressing AI-driven transformation across sectors such as energy, supply chain,

finance, public services, and education. Multiple presentations focused on leveraging machine learning for

environmental sustainability, predictive maintenance, and smarter resource utilization, aligning closely with Ku-

wait’s wider goals for economic diversification and technological advancement.

Commenting on the success of the event, Dr. Farid Abdallah, Conference Chair and Dean of the College of Business at AU, said: “AU-ICDSA 2026 is a powerful reminder of what becomes possible when we bring diverse minds together. By uniting researchers, innovators, practitioners, and leaders from around the world, we create the kind of collaborative energy that drives real progress. At AU, we believe that these shared conversations are essential to shaping an AI-enabled future that is responsible, sustainable, and beneficial for our region and beyond.”

The conference ended with strong engagement from both local and international participants, reaffirming AU’s position as a regional hub for innovation-focused dialogue. As Kuwait continues to accelerate its digital transformation, AU remains committed to providing platforms that support interdisciplinary research, empower future talent, and contribute meaningfully to national progress.

As part of Qadha program

KFH celebrates distinguished employees for 2025

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: As part of its ongoing commitment to investing in promising talent and recognizing potential to foster a positive workplace, Kuwait Finance House (KFH) celebrated the achievements of more than 200 outstanding employees honored under the annual Qadha program for their performance during 2025.

The recognition ceremony was held at the Four Seasons Hotel, in the presence of the Group CEO, Khaled Yousef AlShamlan, senior leaders, employees, honorees and their families.

Culture of Distinction

In his speech, AlShamlan said: “We take pride that Qadha program has been successfully running over three years and has become an impactful initiative to reinforce excellence across the Bank and motivate our human capital to give their best.”

Special significance

“This gathering carries a special significance. It follows the announcement of KFH’s historic annual profits, marking another milestone for KFH in executing its strategic objectives and reinforcing its leading position,” AlShamlan added.

Meanwhile, he pointed out that KFH reported net profit of KD 632.1 million attributable to the shareholders of the Bank for the year 2025, an increase of 5.0% compared to last year. These historic profits are the highest in the Kuwaiti banking sector. Net financing income increased to KD 1.3 billion, an increase rate of 11.5%. Net operating income reached KD 1.2 billion, an increase of 10.7%.

He further noted: “These milestones are the outcome of your exceptional hard work which have had positive impact on KFH’s continuous success. They are key steps of our extended journey towards attaining our



Khaled AlShamlan speaking during the Qadha ceremony

AlShamlan: The Bank’s success is the outcome of its employees’ hard work

strategic objective of becoming among the top 100 global banks within the next decade.”

Earned recognition

AlShamlan emphasized that this earned recognition is a testament for the outstanding performance of KFH employees, noting that they are the main assets of KFH and the cornerstone in maintaining its leadership, and fulfilling the ambitions of its shareholders and customers, who remain the core of the Bank’s priorities.

AlShamlan concluded his remarks by encouraging employees to continue with their dedication to maintain KFH’s leadership on the local, regional and global fronts. He wished employees continued success and further achievements.

Qadha Program

Since its launch in 2022, Qadha program has served as the umbrella for employee recognition initiatives at KFH. The program has also earned the Gold Medal from the Brandon Hall Group for Best Advance in Employee Recognition Program.

Further to being the first of its kind in the Kuwaiti banking sector, Qadha program aligns with global practices in selecting distinguished employees. The process is based on selective criteria and the assessment of employees’ professional and technical attributes.

In addition to employee recognition, Qadha aims to create a competitive environment to drive improvement, enhances customer service and meet their aspirations at KFH, the world’s leading Islamic financial institution.



Photos from the event

Reaffirms commitment to retail growth and national talent

Burgan Bank appoints Bader Mohammed Ali as General Manager – Retail Banking



Mr. Bader Mohammed Ali as General Manager – Retail Banking at Burgan Bank

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: In line with its continued focus on sustainable growth, national leadership excellence, and strengthening its position in the Kuwaiti market, Burgan Bank announced the appointment of **Mr. Bader Mohammed Ali** as General Manager – Retail Banking.

The appointment reflects Burgan Bank’s strategic commitment to advancing its retail banking agenda, empowering national talent in leadership roles, and reinforcing its long-term investment in the local banking sector.

Mr. Bader brings nearly two decades of distinguished experience in the Kuwaiti banking industry, with a strong track record spanning retail banking leadership, branch network management, operations, digital transformation, and regulatory governance. Throughout his career, he has overseen nationwide branch operations, led deposit and sales growth initiatives, managed ATM networks, and driven customer acquisition and retention strategies. He has also successfully delivered major digital and core banking transformation programs, contributing to stronger customer experiences and operational efficiency.

In addition, Mr. Bader has played a key role in strengthening governance frameworks, regulatory compliance, and risk management across complex banking environments, supporting institutional resilience and responsible growth. He is also an alumnus of several leading global institutions, reflecting his commitment to continuous development and strategic excellence.

Commenting on the appointment, Mr. Nageeb Amin, General Manager – Human Resources and Development Group at Burgan Bank, said: “Retail banking remains central to Burgan Bank’s growth strategy and our commitment to delivering differentiated, customer-centric experiences in Kuwait. Bader’s appointment reflects our continued focus on empowering national leadership and advancing Kuwaitization in senior roles. His extensive industry experience, combined with his digital and operational expertise, will play an important role in strengthening our retail proposition and supporting the Bank’s long-term strategic ambitions.”

For his part, Mr. Bader Mohammed Ali said: “I am honored to join Burgan Bank at this important stage of its growth journey. I look forward to working closely with the team to further enhance our retail banking offering, strengthen customer relationships, and continue building long-term value for our customers, employees, and the wider Kuwaiti market.”

This appointment underscores Burgan Bank’s continued commitment to developing national leadership, advancing its customer-centric strategy, and reinforcing its role as a key contributor to Kuwait’s banking sector and economic development.

Distributed via MoSA, KRCS, and KFB

Zain family kicks-off the season of giving with food supplies initiative

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: Zain Kuwait’s annual Ramadan campaign, Zain Alshuhoor, kicked off this year with the preparation and distribution of food supply boxes packed with everyday essentials. The initiative supports underprivileged families and individuals in partnership with a group of strategic partners from official and humanitarian organizations in Kuwait.

Reflecting the campaign’s long-standing spirit of volunteering and teamwork, Zain employees from across departments gathered at the company’s Shuwaikh HQ, joined by Zain Kuwait CEO Nawaf Al-Gharabally, to pack, sort, and prepare the boxes for distribution through certified channels that ensure they reach eligible beneficiaries.

Following the packing activity, the food boxes were delivered through Zain’s strategic partners, led by the Ministry of Social Affairs’ care centers, alongside the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), the Kuwait Food Bank, and others. This helps expand the reach of the initiative and serve a wider range of beneficiaries across different areas of Kuwait.

This initiative embodies Zain’s purpose of Better Lives, Lasting Connections, as the company continues to translate its community presence into meaningful impact that responds to people’s needs and strengthens solidarity during the holy month.

By activating the Zain volunteer team and expanding its network of partnerships with official and humanitarian organizations, Zain reaffirms its commitment to creating real, sustainable change that brings people closer and strengthens the bonds of giving across the community throughout Ramadan.

Through Zain Alshuhoor, Zain continues to reinforce its approach to active community partnership during the holy month, through renewed initiatives that grow year after year in collaboration with state institutions and the humanitarian sector, reflecting the values of generosity and social solidarity deeply rooted in Kuwaiti society.



Nawaf Al-Gharabally with the Zain volunteer team.



The Zain family kicked-off the first of many initiatives during the season of giving.



Delivering the supplies to the Social Care Centers Department.

In cooperation with the KFB

Gulf Bank distributes Ramadan food packages to underprivileged families

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: As part of the qualitative activities and initiatives it organizes during the Holy Month of Ramadan, and within the framework of its “Our Traditions Always Bring Us Together” campaign, Gulf Bank distributed Ramadan food packages to families in need and underprivileged households, in cooperation with the Kuwait Food Bank.

As part of its annual tradition, Gulf Bank is keen to organize a wide range of activities and initiatives during the Holy Month of Ramadan, reflecting its leading role in promoting sustainability within the community. At the forefront of these initiatives is the distribution of Ramadan food packages, carried out in cooperation with the Kuwait Food Bank, to support families facing difficult living conditions.

Through this initiative, Gulf Bank aims to ease some of the financial burdens on underprivileged families, particularly in light of rising living costs. The food packages contain a variety of essential food items sufficient to meet their needs for several days.

The Ramadan food package initiative is one of the key charitable activities organized by Gulf Bank during the Holy Month, reflecting the Bank’s deep-rooted engagement with the community for more than six decades, during which it has remained an integral part of Kuwait’s economic and social development. It is worth noting that Gulf Bank’s “Our Traditions Always Bring Us Together” campaign includes the distribution of Ramadan food packages over four days, in cooperation with the Kuwait Food Bank. The campaign also features participation in the “Joy Land” initiative, during which household supplies and Eid clothing were distributed to families, in addition to the Ramadan packages. The Bank also presented food packages to visitors of Lulu Hypermarket and Al-Zahra Cooperative Society.



Group photo of the Gulf Bank team and the Kuwait Food Bank.

These initiatives reflect Gulf Bank’s strong commitment to community sustainability programs at the social, economic, and environmental levels. They form part of a carefully selected portfolio of initiatives designed to benefit both the Bank and society, in line with its five-year strategic plan, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and Kuwait Vision 2035.



UPAC group photo.

UPAC supports families in need during Ramadan

United Projects for Aviation Services Company (UPAC), a commercial real estate and facilities management company, continued its annual Ramadan tradition by providing essential food supplies to underprivileged families with its ‘Noksat Ramadan’ initiative.

UPAC’s initiative is a charitable partnership with the Kuwait Association for Needy Families, which sourced, prepared, and delivered the food packages to families in need. Each package includes essential groceries and staple items, providing comfort and support throughout the holy month.

Hamad Malallah, Vice Chairman and CEO of UPAC: “UPAC is deeply committed to social responsibility and strives to make a meaningful impact on underprivileged communities in Kuwait. Each Ramadan, we partner with accredited charities as well as our subsidiaries to provide essential food assistance to families in need. This initiative reflects our core values and reinforces our commitment to giving back. We are proud of UPAC’s team dedication and grateful to everyone who contributed to this meaningful effort.”

UPAC has established partnerships with several organizations to support various campaigns that help those in need. To find out more about UPAC’s CSR activities, please visit the company’s bilingual website: www.upac.com.kw

Surpassing 700 regional HQs

Riyadh accelerates rise as global business hub

RIYADH, Feb 18, (KUNA): Saudi Arabia’s Capital City, Riyadh, is moving rapidly to position itself as a leading regional and international hub in the Middle East, driven by the initiatives of Saudi Vision 2030, which aims to make the capital one of the world’s 10 largest city economies.

In 2021, Saudi Arabia launched a national program to attract regional headquarters of multinational companies, with the objective of securing the largest share of such headquarters in the Middle East and North Africa region by drawing 500 regional headquarters to Riyadh by 2030.

At the beginning of 2026, the Saudi Cabinet, chaired by Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman, announced that the program had surpassed its initial target, with more than 700 international companies establishing regional headquarters in the Kingdom to date.

This achievement reflects the rapid development of infrastructure, advanced digital services and an improved business environment, underscoring the attractiveness of the Saudi economy and its ability to draw global investment, supported by structural reforms, future growth prospects and expanded investment opportunities.

Riyadh has undergone a structural transformation through major infrastructure projects, transitioning from traditional urban expansion to integrated planning based on sustainability, operational efficiency and enhanced regional and international competitiveness. Estimates indicate that Riyadh serves as the engine of the national economy, contributing around 47 percent of Saudi Arabia’s non-oil, non-government gross domestic product.

Until 2016, the capital experienced urban expansion that faced several challenges, including heavy traffic congestion on main roads, the absence of a comprehensive public transport network and limited green spaces relative to rapid population growth.

With the launch of Vision 2030, a comprehensive rebuilding phase of infrastructure began based on long-term strategic foundations.

The Riyadh Metro project was implemented with a six-line network covering most districts of the capital, supported by the Riyadh Bus project and the development of ring roads, bridges and tunnels.

US stocks end flat amid volatile trading

NEW YORK, Feb 18, (AP): A quiet finish for the U.S. stock market on Tuesday masked big swings underneath the surface as companies talked about how discouraged their customers are feeling and some tech stocks continued to feel the downside of the artificial-intelligence boom.

The S&P 500 rose 0.1% after flipping earlier between a gain of 0.5% and a loss of nearly 1%. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 32 points, or 0.1%, and the Nasdaq composite gained 0.1%.

Paramount Skydance helped lead the market and rose 4.9% after Warner Bros. Discovery said it would allow Paramount a chance to give its “best and final” bid to buy the entertainment company. Paramount is trying to top an offer from Netflix.

Warner Bros. Discovery rose 2.7%, and Netflix added 0.2%.

On the losing end of Wall Street was General Mills, which sank 7% after warning that its customers are feeling uneasy. The company behind the Cheerios, Nature Valley and Pillsbury brands cut its forecast for an underlying measure of profit for 2026, saying declines would likely be sharper than it earlier expected.

Several surveys have recently shown weak confidence among U.S. households, which are struggling with inflation that remains higher than anyone would like, a job market coming off a weak year of growth and worries about tariffs.


Genuine Parts, which sells auto and industrial replacement parts, said it’s also “navigating a dynamic environment” while reporting weaker results for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

Plans to split into two separate, publicly traded companies in early 2027, with one focusing on auto parts and the other on industrial parts. Genuine Parts’ stock fell 14.6%.

Drops for some Big Tech stocks were the heaviest weights on the market Tuesday, including a 1.2% fall for Alphabet.

The moves were tentative, though, and Nvidia swung between being one of the market’s heaviest weights and one of its biggest strengths.

Markets need such Big Tech companies to stabilize and “need to see less



A screen on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange displays an intraday number for the QQQ, tracking the Nasdaq-100, Friday, Feb. 13, 2026. (AP)

sell first/ask questions later behavior from investors,” according to Sameer Samana, head of global equities and real assets at Wells Fargo Investment Institute.

Last week, Wall Street shook when stocks of software and other companies tumbled as investors hunted for companies that could be potential losers if AI ends up remaking the world and their industries.

“Overall, the market is still close to records highs, but it may not feel that way to some investors because of the sharp sell-offs that seem to derail upswings almost as soon as they begin,” according to Chris Larkin, managing director, trading and investing, at E-Trade from Morgan Stanley.

The market has seen a sharp turnaround from prior years, when the promise of AI helped drive U.S. stock indexes to record after record. Now, companies in industries as varied as software and legal services and trucking have seen investors suddenly turn against them when worries flare that AI-powered competitors could steal their customers.

The companies spending big on AI are feeling their own pressure, too.

Global fund managers say they’re worried about the risk that companies are pouring too many dollars into AI data centers and chips. Those companies will need to see tremendous profits and productivity to make their investments worth it. Alphabet, for example, said its spending on AI and other investments could double this year to roughly \$180 billion.

A survey of global fund managers by Bank of America found a record percentage is saying that companies are “overinvesting.” That could mean an eventual pullback in spending on chips from Nvidia and other companies.

All told, the S&P 500 added 7.05 points to 6,843.22. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 32.26 to 49,553.19, and the Nasdaq composite gained 31.71 to 22,578.38.

In the bond market, Treasury yields held relatively steady.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury edged up to 4.05% from 4.04% late Friday.

In stock markets abroad, indexes rose in Europe following a quiet day in Asia, where most markets were closed for Lunar New Year holidays.

Japan’s Nikkei 225 slipped 0.4%. Weak economic data for Japan appeared to weigh on the market, and a 5.1% decline for tech giant SoftBank Group also pulled shares lower. The decline followed a big rally after a Feb. 8 general election appeared to clear the way for Prime Minister Sanae Takachi’s ruling party to push through policies to help the economy.

Mehdi Mahmoudian in race for best original screenplay

'It Was Just an Accident' co-writer released from Iranian prison

TEHRAN, Iran, Feb 18, (AP): Mehdi Mahmoudian, the Oscar-nominated co-writer of "It Was Just an Accident," has been released from an Iranian prison 17 days after his arrest, according to local media reports.

Mahmoudian was arrested in Tehran shortly after signing a statement condemning Islamic Republic leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the regime's violent crackdown on demonstrators. On Tuesday, he was released from the Nowshahr prison, along with two other signatories of the statement, Vida Rabbani and Abdollah Momeni.

No further details on any charges against Mahmoudian were immediately available. All three were released on bail.

Mahmoudian is nominated for best original screenplay at the Academy Awards, along with Nader Saeivar, Shadmehr Rastin and director Jafar Panahi. The film, a revenge drama inspired by Panahi's own time in jail, is also nominated for best international feature, as a submission from France.

"Mehdi Mahmoudian, Vida Rabbani, and Abdollah Momeni peacefully exercised their right to express their views, but the regime responded by accusing them of 'insulting the Supreme Leader' and 'propaganda against the Islamic Republic,'" Panahi said in a statement Tuesday. "For years, such charges have been used as tools to criminalize thought, silence criticism, and instill fear in society. Turning a civil and peaceful act into a national security case is a clear

sign of intolerance toward the independent voices of citizens."

Mahmoudian, a writer and political activist, has previously been imprisoned multiple times, including a five-year term that ended in 2014 on charges of "mutiny against the regime." Panahi, who has himself been jailed and put under house arrest by the Islamic Republic regime, first met him in prison.

Thousands were killed in last month's nationwide protests in Iran. International pressure has grown over the regime's crackdown on demonstrators, including a mass protest held over the weekend in Munich. On Friday, US President Donald Trump said that regime change in Iran "would be the best thing that could happen."



This image released by Neon shows, (from left), Mohamad Ali Elyasmeh as Hamid, Majid Panahi as Ali, Hadis Pakbaten as Goli, in a scene from 'It Was Just an Accident.' (AP)

Television

Netflix grants waiver

Warner Bros reopens Paramount deal talks

NEW YORK, Feb 18, (AP): Warner Bros. Discovery is briefly reopening takeover talks with Skydance-owned Paramount to hear the company's "best and final" offer, while the Hollywood giant continues to back the studio and streaming deal it struck with Netflix.

In a Tuesday regulatory filing, Warner said it had received a waiver from Netflix to reopen talks with Paramount for the next seven days, or until Monday. Warner said this will allow the companies to discuss unresolved "deficiencies" and "clarify certain terms" of Paramount's latest bid.

But in the meantime, Warner's board is still recommending shareholders support of its proposed merger with Netflix. A special meeting is now scheduled for Friday, March 20 to hold a vote on that deal.

In a statement, Netflix said it was confident that its proposed transaction "provides superior value and certainty" - but recognized "the ongoing distraction for WBD stockholders and the broader entertainment industry caused by PSKY's antics." The streaming giant noted it had granted Warner a seven-day waiver to "finally resolve this matter."

Warner's leadership similarly reiterated its support for the Netflix deal. Meanwhile, Paramount called Tuesday's actions from Warner's board "unusual" and said the company could have determined whether Paramount's offer was superior without a timed deadline. Still, Paramount said it was "nonetheless prepared to engage in good faith and constructive discussions."

Paramount added that it will continue to advance its tender offer priced at \$30 per share, which it maintained was better than Netflix's proposal, while also pursuing a proxy fight.

The battle for Warner Bros. Discovery is complicated because Netflix and Paramount want different things. In December, Netflix agreed to buy Warner's studio and streaming business for \$72 billion, now in an all-cash transaction that would cover its legacy TV and movie production arms, as well as HBO Max. Including debt, the enterprise value of the deal is about \$83 billion, or \$27.75 per share, and would be finalized after Warner completes a previously-announced separation of its cable operations.

Meanwhile, unlike Netflix, Paramount wants to acquire Warner's entire company - including networks like CNN and Discovery - and went straight to shareholders with an all-cash, \$77.9 billion hostile offer just days after the Netflix deal was announced.

The enterprise value of Paramount's bid currently stands around \$108 billion including debt, or \$30 per share. But Warner disclosed Tuesday that a Paramount representative separately informed the company it would up its offer to \$31 per share "pending engagement."

Analysts at Raymond James said they had "long believed" Paramount was willing to raise its offer "and now it seems we are finally moving in that direction." If Paramount were to up its price to \$32 or \$33 per share, they noted it would be "increasingly difficult to argue the Netflix agreement is superior," although Netflix could then move to match the bid.

"Netflix is still in the driver's seat, but now having to make its case," the analysts added in a Tuesday research note.

Paramount has made more attempts to sweeten its offer recently. Last week, the company said it would pay Warner shareholders an added "ticking fee" if its deal doesn't go through by the end of the year - amounting to 25 cents per share, or a total of \$650 million, for every quarter after Dec. 31. Paramount also pledged to fund Warner's proposed \$2.8 billion breakup payout to Netflix under its merger agreement.

The company has been scrambling to solidify more shareholder support. Paramount has extended its tender offer three times, with the latest deadline set for March 2. According to company disclosures, more than 42.3 million Warner shares had been "validly tendered and not withdrawn" from its hostile bid as of the start of last week, down from over 168.5 million Warner shares on Jan. 21 - still a small fraction of Warner's 2.48 billion shares outstanding in series A common stock.

But also last week, one activist investor, Ancora Holdings, publicly expressed opposition to Warner's proposed merger with Netflix. And beyond its tender offer, Paramount has also promised a proxy fight. On Tuesday, the company reiterated plans to nominate its own slate of directors at Warner's upcoming annual meeting.

Berlinale



Juliette Binoche arrives on the red carpet for the film 'Queen At Sea.' (AP)



Julia Jones poses for photographers at the photo call for the film 'The Weight.' (AP)



Florence Hunt arrives on the red carpet for the film 'Queen At Sea' during the International Film Festival, Berlinale, in Berlin, Germany, Tuesday, Feb. 17. (AP)



Festival Director Tricia Tuttle poses for photographers at the photo call for the film 'The Weight.' (AP)



Director Olive Nwosu, (left), and Jessica Gabriel's Ujah pose for a portrait to promote the film 'Lady.' (AP)

Television

Show creators look back ... and ahead

'Simpsons' hits 800 episodes, refuses to age

LOS ANGELES, Feb 18, (AP): Eight hundred episodes, 37 seasons, and one four-fingered family that refuses to age.

As "The Simpsons" hit a milestone few series were glimpsed recently, the architects behind Springfield are reflecting on the choices that turned crude 1987 shorts from "The Tracey Ullman Show" into a cultural juggernaut.

"We've done 800 episodes, and I'm really glad we didn't do a big overarching story," said Al Jean, executive producer and former showrunner. "You always return to square one at the end of the show. And there's no question that was a big influence on the longevity."

For Matt Selman, the current showrunner, the Simpsons' refusal to age is a liberation that simultaneously raises questions about the weight of their long history: "Do these characters have the emotional memory of the 800 things that have happened to them? ... I don't really know the answer to that."

Meanwhile, show creator Matt Groening views reaching nearly four decades' worth of production as a triumph tinged with perfectionism.

"I've spent 38 years now trying to get them to draw the characters correctly," Groening said. "We've got to figure out how to shift perspective and do it more cinematically and we're always trying to improve."

Episode 800, "Irrational Treasure," aired recently on Fox.

Nancy Cartwright arrived at her 1987 audition expecting to read for Lisa Simpson. She had other ideas.

"Hi Matt. Nice to meet you. I was out there and I noticed that there's Lisa, that's fine, 8-year-old middle child, but then there's this Bart," Cartwright recalled saying. "I'd kind of like to do him."

Groening agreed to the "switcheroo" immediately. "She completely channeled him," he said.

Nearly four decades later, Cartwright notes that "there are still people that yet don't know that it's a woman that does the voice."

The role has become inseparable from her identity. "It's become such a part of my lifestyle. I'm used to doing it all the time, and I'm not looking forward to the day when we're done," she said.

Lisa Simpson's defining characteristic emerged just as spontaneously. Animator David Silverman, who drew the original outline for the show's iconic opening sequence, recalled a production meeting where the middle Simpson child lacked a signature moment.

"We don't have a gag for Lisa, we have a gag for everybody else. What should we do for Lisa?" Silverman reflects. "And I suggested, 'Well, maybe she's in the band and maybe she plays a tuba.' And so Jim (James L. Brooks) said, 'Well, I don't know about the tuba but what if she played the baritone saxophone? In fact, what if she played it really well? That could be her



Nancy Cartwright arrives at celebration for 'The Simpsons' 800th Episode 'Irrational Treasure' on Feb. 6 at the Fonda Theatre in Los Angeles. (AP)

character, she could be the genius kid of the family that nobody appreciates."

The show's path to becoming a global institution was paved with early outrage. Groening remembers when Bart Simpson was deemed a threat to American classrooms - he relished every moment of it.

"That was the best move ever when the culture decided 'The Simpsons' was too outrageous," Groening said. "And if you wear a Bart Simpson 'Underachiever' T-shirt to school, you got kicked out. That was the best thing for us."

When Fox executives asked whether the show targeted kids or adults, Groening said the creative team made an immediate choice that defined everything that followed. "We said it's for adults," he recalled. "And that was the best instantaneous decision that we made because it meant that we could do a wide range of jokes."

As the internet arrived, so did a new breed of critic. Groening admits the "Comic Book Guy" character - Springfield's perpetually dissatisfied nerd - was created as a direct response to early online fans declaring every new episode the "worst episode ever."

"I like analysis and I like criticism," Groening said. "But 'That's not funny' and 'That's boring,' that annoys me. Those are to me the laziest reactions you can get."

His prediction for the show's future carries characteristic sarcasm. "Well, I can tell you this because we are time travelers," Groening joked. "The Simpsons will be on in a thousand years. Still on. Unfortunately, fans are going to say the show's been going downhill for the last 500 years."

The show's supposed ability to predict the future - including a 2000 episode where Lisa inherits the presidency from "President Trump" - has become in-

ternet legend.

Jean offered a simple explanation: "Well, the predictions are accidental. We're not from the future."

But modern technology has turned prophecy into fraud, according to Selman.

"The predictions are all fake now," Selman said. "They're just done by AI. And people all go, 'Oh my God, how do they do it?' I throw up my hands in despair for the gullibility of mankind."

Guest stars have become a hallmark of the series, from Michael Jackson to Lady Gaga to the Rolling Stones. Jackson's 1991 appearance in "Stark Raving Dad" came after he cold-called Groening.

"I was working late in my office at 10 p.m. My phone rang ... 'Hi, this is Michael Jackson.' And I hung up because, you know, it was obviously a prank. And he called back, 'No, really, don't hang up,'" Groening recalled.

While the show secured the King of Pop in Season 3, one prestigious group has consistently declined invitations to Springfield. "The ones that never said yes were U.S. presidents and I don't think we're ever going to do that," Jean said.

Disney's 2019 acquisition of 21st Century Fox brought "The Simpsons" to Disney+, introducing the show to new generations - and generating some exclusives not factored into the 800-episode count.

"The fact that 'The Simpsons' is on Disney+ has really exposed us to a new generation," said Selman. "If it's an 8- to 12-year-old's favorite show for two or three years of their life before they move on to something else, that's a big win for us."

Streaming has also liberated the show from commercial constraints. "The thing that's loosened up for us is the time, because things are tied to commercial breaks," Groening said. "We still do three acts, or sometimes four acts, because we're on the Fox network. But for the stuff for Disney, we go wild. And we can stretch out a little bit."

For Jean, the show's greatest achievement is in the personal connections forged over decades. "I'll have people come up to me and say, 'My parents were splitting up. I was going through a bad time as a kid and your show got me through it.' And I just would go, 'Oh, this couldn't mean more,'" Silverman sees that same impact as the fulfillment of a lifelong ambition. "People often asked me when I wanted to be a cartoonist and animator and said, 'What goals do you have?' And I said, 'I don't know. The only goal that I would love to see happen is to be involved in some animation project that makes a difference to people.' So I guess I can check that one off."

"There's no end in sight," Jean said. "We're gonna go to Season 40, at least. Full steam ahead."

For Groening, the future remains as open-ended as the series itself: "Believe it or not, there's still stories that we haven't gotten around to that are just in my head that I want us to do."

Variety

VIENNA: Austrian public prosecutors filed terrorism-related charges Monday against a 21-year-old defendant who they say planned to carry out an attack on one of superstar singer Taylor Swift's concerts in Vienna in August 2024.



Swift

Vienna public prosecutors said in a statement that the unnamed defendant had declared allegiance to the Islamic State group by sharing propaganda material and videos via various messaging services. Vienna prosecutors also accuse the defendant of having "obtained instructions on the internet for the construction of a shrapnel bomb based on the explosive triacetone triperoxide" typically used by IS, and of having produced a small amount of the explosive.

Prosecutors also say that the defendant had made "several attempts" to buy weapons illegally outside the country and to bring them to Austria.

Vienna public prosecutors plan to proceed with a criminal case against the unnamed suspect in Wiener Neustadt, a town near the Austrian capital. (AP)

media reported.

According to local newspaper Corriere della Sera, the blaze erupted at dawn and quickly spread through much of the theater, destroying its dome and affecting a nearby residential building. Parts of the historic venue are made of wood, which contributed to the rapid spread of the flames. Thick smoke was visible from a distance, including along the city's waterfront area.

At least four residents were taken to hospital as a precaution after reporting breathing difficulties, and some nearby inhabitants temporarily left their homes as smoke filled the neighborhood.

Multiple firefighting teams were deployed to contain the blaze, while police have launched an investigation into its cause. Preliminary information from investigative sources suggested a possible electrical short circuit, though authorities have yet to confirm the exact origin. (Xinhua)

ISTANBUL: Several entertainment celebrities are among 17 suspects detained in Türkiye as part of an ongoing investigation into drug use offenses, local media reported on Tuesday.

The 17 people were taken into custody in coordinated operations carried out by Istanbul's anti-narcotics police, the report said.

Detentions were made after police raids on suspects' residences.

The investigation has targeted 25 people on charges including drug use and facilitating the use of narcotic or stimulant substances, the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office said in a release on social platform X.

Authorities said the investigation into the suspects remains ongoing, with one of them found to be abroad. (Xinhua)

ROME: A fire broke out early Tuesday in the Chiaia district of Naples, southern Italy, severely damaging the historic Teatro Sannazaro and causing several residents to be hospitalized for smoke inhalation, local

Chefs redefine Chinese cuisine with upscale menus

Chinese fine dining slices through US’s takeout stereotypes

SAN FRANCISCO, Feb 18, (AP): Taiwan-born chef George Chen, whose family immigrated to Los Angeles in 1967, remembers vividly how his school lunch of braised lamb and Chinese sauerkraut between two pieces of bread was looked at by his classmates.

““Oh, God, what are you eating? That’s gross,”” Chen recalled during a recent busy lunch hour at his San Francisco restaurant and bar, China Live, on the edge of the nation’s oldest Chinatown. “And now everybody wants the braised lamb and Chinese sauerkraut. Hopefully, perception of Chinese (food) has now come a long ways.”

The immigrant kid who felt like he had to hide his food has built a reputation for serving Chinese fine dining in the Bay Area. At China Live, Chen is like a circus ringmaster overseeing a dumpling-making station, a stone oven roasting Peking ducks, a noodle station and a dessert station churning sesame soft serve.

With all this, he hopes to one day revive his upstairs restaurant, Eight Tables, where course-by-course dinners ranged from \$88-\$188. In addition, he and his wife Cindy Wong-Chen are getting ready to launch a similar concept, Asia Live, in Santa Clara.

The Chens aren’t the only ones elevating Chinese cuisine. They’re within walking distance of the equally established Empress by Boon, Mister Jiu’s, and the newer Four Kings.

Upscale Chinese American restaurants, from San Francisco to New York City, have sprung up in recent years, garnering buzz with their refined tasting menus that soar far beyond Chinese takeout-food staples. Many put special spins on traditional Lunar New Year dishes for the Year of the Fire Horse, which started Tuesday. Doing creative deconstructions of Chinese foods is part of their culinary hallmark, as many chefs are hungry to showcase their own culture.

But in an industry where diners rarely question high prices of French haute cuisine or Japanese omakase, Chinese restaurateurs often contend with resistance in getting customers to pay fine-dining tabs. Still, these owners and chefs insist their



Emily Yuen, chef at Michelin-starred Chinese restaurant Yingtao, prepares Lo Mai Gai, sticky rice chicken in New York, Tuesday, Jan. 27, 2026. (AP)

food, labor and cooking techniques are just as worthy.

“Why shouldn’t I?” says Chen about his prices. “Just because we’re in Chinatown? Or just because people’s perception of Chinese food is that it’s only good if it’s cheap? It’s not true.”

Since husband and wife Bolun and Linette Yao opened Yingtao, named for Bolun’s grandmother, in New York’s Hell’s Kitchen in 2023, they have been up-front

about their mission: “contemporary” Chinese food as an elegant dining concept. Their Michelin-starred restaurant offers a \$150 chef’s tasting menu.

“We are trying to break this bias, this boundary of people who only think about like Sichuan food, Cantonese food, the takeout box,” said Bolun Yao, who has nothing but respect for casual Chinese takeout restaurants.

After earning a master’s degree in food studies at New York University, Yao knew he wanted “to build a bridge between traditional Chinese and the fine dining scene that New York people are familiar with.”

Emily Yuen, who was a James Beard Award semifinalist last year for her Japanese American fare at Brooklyn’s Lingo, is helping Yao achieve his goal as Yingtao’s new executive chef. For Yuen, a Chinese Canadian whose culinary education emphasized French cooking, the importance of representation - from who’s in the kitchen to what’s on the plate - has always stayed with her.

“I want go back to like, who I am, and kind of explore that,” Yuen said. “I was really like struck by his (Bolun’s) mission statement and it just really struck a chord with me of wanting to elevate Chinese culture and Chinese food.”

She is eager to play around with typical recipes like the Cantonese custard egg tart, “dan tat,” with a savory makeover with caviar and quail eggs. “Egg on egg on egg,” Yuen said.

Similarly, Ho Chee Boon, the Michelin-starred chef who transformed the long-dormant Empress of China in San Francisco into Empress by Boon in 2021, is pushing for Chinese cuisine to be considered fine dining in the US. The Malaysia-born restaurateur was accustomed to seeing high-end Cantonese food in China and India.

“I try to do something for the Cantonese cuisine and for the culture as well, for the young people and to know about and for other people to know about it,” said Boon, who has opened a chain of his Cantonese Hakkasan restaurants from Dubai to Mumbai and in the US

“We can try to something better here,” he said, “and let people come back to Chinatown.”

Variety

BEIJING: China’s 2026 Spring Festival box office, including presales, topped 2 billion yuan (about 290 million US dollars) by Wednesday afternoon, four days into the nine-day holiday, according to industry data.

China’s Spring Festival holiday period, which began on Sunday, is one of the most important periods in the world’s second-largest film market.

A diverse lineup of films has debuted during this year’s holiday movie season, including comedy, action, animation, and science fiction, offering audiences a rich and varied cinematic feast. (Xinhua)

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PHNOM PENH: The eastern causeway of the centuries-old Beng Mealea temple in Cambodia’s Angkor Archaeological Park has become stronger and more attractive following restoration under the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) Special Fund, said an APSARA National Authority (ANA) news release on Wednesday.

ANA’s archaeologist Leu Channora said after many months of dedicated restoration work, the eastern causeway of Beng Mealea Temple has regained its strength and beauty after it had deteriorated to the point of nearly losing its original shape.

“Today, visitors can admire the eastern causeway in its full architectural form, especially the striking Naga balustrades on both sides, a remarkable feature that had been lost for hundreds of years due to severe damage and deterioration,” he said. (Xinhua)

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SAN FRANCISCO: YouTube said Tuesday it resolved an issue that caused a widespread global outage affecting access to the platform.

YouTube experienced the outage earlier on Tuesday, disrupting access for users across multiple countries, including the United States, with hundreds of thousands reporting problems loading videos and using related services.

In a public statement, TeamYouTube acknowledged the outage: “We’re aware some of you are having issues accessing YouTube right now.”

In an update, the team said: “An issue with our recommendations system prevented videos from appearing across surfaces on YouTube (including the homepage, the YouTube app, YouTube Music and YouTube Kids).” (Xinhua)

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LOS ANGELES: A new artificial intelligence video generator from Beijing-based ByteDance, the creator of TikTok, is drawing the ire of Hollywood organizations that say Seedance 2.0 “blatantly” violates copyright and uses the likeness of actors and others without permission.

Seedance 2.0, which is now available in China for now, lets users generate high-quality AI videos using simple text prompts. The tool quickly gained condemnation from the movie and TV industry.

The Motion Picture Association said Seedance 2.0 “has engaged in unauthorized use of U.S. copyrighted works on a massive scale.” (AP)

Art



A building with the mural entitled ‘Kalamata’ depicting opera legend Maria Callas by artist Kleomenis Kostopoulos is seen in Kalamata town, about 240 kilometers (150 miles) southwest of Athens, Monday, Feb. 9. (AP)

Kalamata mural blends art, local identity and goals

Greece’s mural wins ‘Best in the World’

KALAMATA, Greece, Feb 18, (AP): Long known for its olives and sea-side charm, the southern Greek city of Kalamata has found itself in the spotlight thanks to a towering mural that reimagines legendary soprano Maria Callas as an allegory for the city itself.

The massive artwork on the side of a prominent building in the city center has been named 2025’s “Best Mural of the World” by Street Art Cities, a global platform celebrating street art.

Residents of Kalamata, approximately 240 kilometers (150 miles) southwest of Athens, cultivate the world-renowned olives, figs and grapes that feature prominently on the mural.

That was precisely the point.

Vassilis Papaefstathiou, deputy mayor of strategic planning and climate neutrality, explained Kalamata is one of the few Greek cities with the ambitious goal of becoming climate-neutral by 2030. He and other city leaders wanted a way to make abstract concepts, including sustainable development, agri-food initiatives, and local economic growth, more tangible for the city’s nearly 73,000 residents.

That’s how the idea of a massive mural in a public space was born.

“We wanted it to reflect a very clear and distinct message of what sustainable development means for a regional city such as Kalamata,” Papaefstathiou said. “We wanted to create an image that combines the humble products of the land, such as olives and olive oil - which, let’s be honest, are famous all over the world and have put Kalamata on the map - with the high-level art.”

“By bringing together what is very elevated with ... the humbleness of the land, our aim was to empower the people and, in doing so, strengthen their identity. We want them to be proud to be Kalamatians.”



Artist Kleomenis Kostopoulos speaks to The Associated Press in front of a poster with the mural he created depicting opera legend Maria Callas inside his workshop in Patras city about 215 kilometers (134 miles) west of Athens, Tuesday, Feb. 10. (AP)

Southern Greece has faced heat-waves, droughts and wildfires in recent years, all of which affect the olive groves on which the region’s economy is hugely dependent.

The image chosen to represent the city was Maria Callas, widely hailed as one of the greatest opera singers of the 20th century and revered in Greece as a national cultural symbol. She may have been born in New York to Greek immigrant parents, but her father came from a village south of Kalamata. For locals, she is one of their own.

This connection is also reflected in practice: the alumni association at Kalamata’s music school is named for Callas, and the cultural center houses an exhibition dedicated to her, which includes letters from her personal archive.

Artist Kleomenis Kostopoulos, 52, said the mural “is not actually called ‘Maria Callas,’ but ‘Kalamata’ and my attempt was to paint Kalamata (the

city) allegorically.”

Rather than portraying a stylized image of the diva, Kostopoulos said he aimed for a more grounded and human depiction. He incorporated elements that connect the people to their land: tree branches - which he considers the above-ground extension of roots - birds native to the area, and the well-known agricultural products.

“The dress I create on Maria Callas in ‘Kalamata’ is essentially all of this, all of this bloom, all of this fruition,” he said. “The blessed land that Kalamata itself has ... is where all of these elements of nature come from.”

Creating the mural was no small feat. Kostopoulos said it took around two weeks of actual work spread over a month due to bad weather. He primarily used brushes but also incorporated spray paint and a cherry-picker to reach all edges of the massive wall.

Papaefstathiou, the deputy mayor, said the mural has become a focal point.

“We believe this mural has helped us significantly in many ways, including in strengthening the city’s promotion as a tourist destination,” he said.

Beyond tourism, the mural has sparked conversations about art in public spaces. More building owners in Kalamata have already expressed interest in hosting murals.

“All of us - residents, and I personally - feel immense pride,” said tourism educator Dimitra Kourmouli.

Kostopoulos said he hopes the award will have a wider impact on the art community and make public art more visible in Greece.

“We see that such modern interventions in public space bring tremendous cultural, social, educational and economic benefits to a place,” he said. “These are good springboards to start nice conversations that I hope someday will happen in our country, as well.”

Books

Memoir in 22 languages

Pelicot turns her horror into hope for survivors

PARIS, Feb 18, (AP): **Gisèle Pelicot’s** memoir was released on Tuesday in 22 languages worldwide, sharing details of the horror she went through and sending a powerful message of hope and support to victims of sexual abuse.

“I wanted my story to help others,” Pelicot told French national channel France 5 last week ahead of the release of her book, “A Hymn to Life, Shame has to Change Sides.”

Pelicot recounted her story of survival in the book and in her first series of interviews since the landmark 2024 trial that turned her into a global icon against sexual violence and imprisoned her husband, who drugged her so other men could assault her.

“Today I’m doing better, and this book allowed me to engage in self-reflection, to take stock of my life,” she said. “I had to try to rebuild myself on this field of ruins. Today I am a woman standing strong.”

Pelicot said her book is meant to deliver “a message of hope to all the women who are going through a very complicated period in their lives.”

The shocking case - and Pelicot’s decision to waive her anonymity and speak publicly - prompted a reckoning over rape culture in France and beyond, as her dignity and strength impressed many across the world.

Gymnastic superstar and Olympic gold medalist Simone Biles, herself a survivor of sexual abuse, paid tribute to Pelicot in a message broadcast by the BBC.

“Gisèle has demonstrated to the world that it’s not for victims of sexual abuse to feel shame - it’s the perpetrators,” Biles said. “By waiving her anonymity and refusing to feel shame, Gisèle paves the way for other victims to come forward.”

At the “Des Femmes” (“Women’s”) bookstore in Paris, several readers were eager to buy Pelicot’s book on the day of its release.

“I want to read it,” said Cécile Megueulle, who admires Pelicot. “But I tell myself that reading it will be ... actually a little scary. The fact of not being in her shoes but being able to see the other side of the mirror, how she experienced it and how she managed - I don’t know if we can say that - to get through it.”

Selma Memic, a lawyer from Geneva, Switzerland, said: “The case was known as the ‘Pelicot case’ ... and now we’re going to hear about ‘Gisèle’. So, that’s maybe what I’m looking for. Who is Gisèle? What are her feelings? How does she look back at it (the trial)?”

In December 2024, Pelicot’s ex-husband, Dominique Pelicot, and 50 other men were convicted of sexually assaulting her between 2011 and 2020 while she was under chemical submission. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison, while the other defendants received sentences ranging from three to 15 years.

An appeals court later increased the sentence handed to Husamettin Dogan, a construction worker who was the only defendant who challenged his conviction.

Dominique Pelicot, whom Gisèle Pelicot had been married to for nearly 50 years, acknowledged that for years he mixed sedatives into her food and drink so he could rape her and invite other men to do the same.

The unprecedented trial exposed how online pornography, chat rooms and distorted notions of consent can fuel sexual violence.

France passed a law last October that defines rape and other sexual assault as any non-consensual sexual act in the wake of the Pelicot case, joining many other European nations that have similar consent-based laws, including neighboring Germany, Belgium and Spain. Until then, rape under French law was defined as penetration or oral sex using “violence, coercion, threat or surprise.”



Pelicot

EU probes Musk’s Grok

Mark Zuckerberg to testify in watershed social media trial

LOS ANGELES, Feb 18, (Agencies): Mark Zuckerberg will testify in an unprecedented social media trial that questions whether Meta’s platforms deliberately addict and harm children.

Meta’s CEO is expected to answer tough questions on Wednesday from attorneys representing a now 20-year-old woman identified by the initials KGM, who claims her early use of social media addicted her to the technology and exacerbated depression and suicidal thoughts. Meta Platforms and Google’s YouTube are the two remaining defendants in the case, which TikTok and Snap have settled.

Zuckerberg has testified in other trials and answered questions from Congress about youth safety on Meta’s platforms, and he apologized to families at that hearing whose lives had been upended by tragedies they believed were because of social media. This trial, though, marks the first time Zuckerberg will answer similar questions in front of a jury. and, again, bereaved parents are expected to be in the limited courtroom seats available to the public.

The case, along with two others, has been selected as a bellwether trial, meaning its outcome could impact how thousands of similar lawsuits against social media companies would play out.

A Meta spokesperson said the company strongly disagrees with the allegations in the lawsuit and said they are “confident the evidence will show our longstanding commitment to supporting young people.”

One of Meta’s attorneys, Paul Schmidt, said in his opening statement that the company is not disputing that KGM experienced mental health struggles, but rather that Instagram played a substantial factor in those struggles. He pointed to medical records that showed a turbulent home life, and both he and an attorney representing YouTube argue she turned to their platforms as a coping mechanism or a means of escaping her mental health struggles.

Meanwhile, Elon Musk’s social media platform X faces a European Union privacy investigation after its Grok AI chatbot started spitting out nonconsensual deepfake images, Ireland’s data privacy regulator said Tuesday.

Ireland’s Data Protection Commission said it notified X on Monday that it was opening the inquiry under the 27-nation EU’s strict data privacy regulations, adding to the scrutiny X is facing in Europe and other parts of the world over Grok’s behavior.



Bruce Springsteen performs in Asbury Park, N.J., Sept. 15, 2024. (AP)

Bruce Springsteen, E Street Band to launch US tour next month

LOS ANGELES, Feb 18, (AP): Bruce Springsteen is bringing his pointed political commentary back to American stages this spring.

The rock icon and the E Street Band announced Tuesday the launch of their “Land of Hope and Dreams” American tour starting March 31 in Minneapolis, kicking off a 20-date run that blends arena rock with a message centered on democracy, freedom and what Springsteen calls the defense of the American ideal. The tour concludes May 27 with an outdoor performance at Nationals Park in Washington, D.C.

“We are living through dark, disturbing and dangerous times, but do not despair - the cavalry is coming!” Springsteen said in a statement. “We will be rocking your town in celebration and in defense of America - American democracy, American freedom, our American Constitution and our sacred American dream.” Last month, Springsteen dedicated his song “Streets of Minneapolis” to the people of Minneapolis, criticizing President Donald Trump’s ongoing immigration enforcement operations in the city.

“It’s dedicated to the people of Minneapolis, our innocent immigrant neighbors and in memory of Alex Pretti and Renee Good,” he wrote, naming the two people who were fatally shot by federal immigration agents in Minneapolis.

Athlete care goes beyond injuries to mental health

Olympic figure skaters offer wellness tips for weekend athletes

MILAN, Italy, Feb 18, (AP): The figure skaters at the Winter Olympics make it look easy; sheer elegance on hard ice.

But elite skaters also fight injuries, much like the rest of us who work out, go to the gym or swim to stay fit.

“No athlete at this level is 100% fully healthy,” Gretchen Mohney, the director of medical and performance services for US Figure Skating, told The Associated Press from Milan. “It’s about managing whatever it is that may be breaking down.”

The key for Olympic skaters is getting quick treatment. If a knee swells, the back aches or a sharp blade leaves a gash, figure skaters at the Olympics have physicians, athletic trainers and physical therapists to help.

Mohney, who holds a doctorate in interdisciplinary health sciences, listed several red flags that skaters and staff watch for, and wellness tips for weekend athletes.

Dr. Fred Workman has been a team physician for US Figure Skating for 25 years, and lately he’s treating more concussions. This might surprise some who see only the elegance, but figure skating has been pushing the limits of performance, and there’s fallout.

Other frequent injuries include lacerations from knife-edge skates, or hip, knee, ankle and foot injuries - and shoulder injuries for men lifting partners overhead in the pairs event.

“They’re doing overhead lifts, spinning around on the ice - and smiling,” Workman said. “Skaters are doing much more demanding and aggressive - risky if you will - maneuvers. The hard ice always wins. When you fall on the ice, something is going to give.”

Part of Workman’s job is diagnosis and treatment. The other is a holistic approach to guiding young athletes. This also includes managing stress and mental health.

“Life doesn’t always go your way,” Workman said. “We’re in a judged sport.



Ilia Malinin of the United States falls during the men’s free skate program in figure skating at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Milan, Italy, Friday, Feb. 13. (AP)

You may not always get the scores you think you deserve. But how do you handle it? You have to get yourself mentally focused and be ready to perform.”

Ilia Malinin’s two falls last week in Milan remind of the pressure elite skaters face. Malinin described feeling overwhelmed. “I just felt like I had no control,”

he said.

Away from competition, Workman asks skaters to add variety to their training - and to their life.

“Not only cross-train in your sport, but cross-train as a human,” he said. “Diversify your interests. A very common mistake is spending all of your time on the ice and less time in off-the-ice training.”

Workman suggested a wider view, even for elite athletes at the Olympic level. He referenced a television ad the NCAA ran several years ago, which reminded college athletes that their life is now sports - but it won’t always be.

“At the end of the day, competitive careers end,” Workman said. “Why do we even have sport? It’s to build resilience, to build the life skills you need.”

The American pairs team of Ellie Kam and Danny O’Shea knows about injury. Last year, Kam was out for a month with a concussion and O’Shea needed foot surgery.

Unexpectedly, they put on one of the best performances of their lives to help the United States win its second straight Olympic gold medal in the team event.

“We just wanted to kind of give it our all, and I feel like that’s part of the reason why Danny and I have been able to work through so much of what people would see as obstacles,” Kam said. “I think in the obstacles we found a way to connect better and be a stronger team.”

Deanna Stellato-Dudek, an American-born Canadian pairs skater at the Olympics, hit her head on the ice in a training session on Jan. 30. The 42-year-old Stellato-Dudek and partner Maxime Deschamps had to withdraw from the team event during the first week of the Olympics.

“You have to take extremely specific care of your body,” she told The AP. “I don’t smoke, I don’t drink, I’m extremely healthy. And I do think being able to treat my body like that for the last decade has helped me to heal very quickly.”

NASA hopes fuel leaks are fixed

UAE extends Emirates Mars Mission to 2028

DUBAI, Feb 18, (Agencies): The United Arab Emirates (UAE) Space Agency on Tuesday announced the extension of the Emirates Mars Mission (EMM) until 2028, according to local daily Al Etihad.

The mission, carried out by the Hope Probe, was originally launched as a two-year project and entered Mars’ orbit in 2021. The extension seeks to maximize the scientific return on the UAE’s space investments and gain valuable operational experience for future deep-space missions.

Since its arrival at Mars, the Hope Probe has gathered around 10 terabytes of data, shared in 16 datasets with over 200 global research institutions. The mission has also supported pioneering discoveries, including new observations of Mars’ auroral activity and close fly-bys of Deimos, the smaller outer moon of Mars.

In October 2025, the probe expanded its scientific scope by capturing images of Comet 3I/ATLAS, the third known interstellar object that passes through our solar system, offering a rare opportunity to study material from beyond the solar system.

Officials said the decision demonstrates confidence in the probe’s technical readiness and national team capabilities, while supporting the rapid growth of the UAE’s space ecosystem through expanded research and aerospace education.

Meanwhile, NASA began another



This photo provided by NASA shows a full moon shining over NASA’s Space Launch System and Orion spacecraft, atop the mobile launcher at Launch Pad 39B at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, on Feb. 1. (AP)

practice launch countdown Tuesday for its first moonshot in decades with astronauts after making repairs to fix dangerous fuel leaks that already have bumped the flight into March.

The first fueling test was halted two weeks ago by the same kind of liquid hydrogen leaks that disrupted the Artemis program’s first flight without anyone aboard three years ago.

Launch teams replaced a pair of seals and a clogged filter at the Kennedy Space Center pad where the giant moon rocket stands before starting the countdown clocks back up. The two-day test will culminate Thursday with the attempted fill-up of the rocket’s fuel tanks. The four Artemis II astronauts will monitor the crucial dress rehearsal from afar.

A successful, leak-free test is needed before NASA will set a launch date. The earliest the Space Launch System, or SLS, rocket could blast off is March 6. Officials had considered moving it up by three days, but said the extra time was needed to analyze the fueling test results.

The last time astronauts blasted off for the moon was in 1972 during NASA’s Apollo program.

Kuwait’s Dr. Al-Essa joins landmark heart study

Quality of fats and carbs, not quantity, key to preventing heart disease: study

By Marwa Al-Bahravi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: Dr. Hala Bader Al-Essa, a faculty member at the College of Public Health in Kuwait University and a researcher in the Nutrition Department at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, participated in a large-scale global study published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology.

This is a scientific achievement that cements the presence of Kuwait in international research forums.

The study confirmed that the quality of fat and carbohydrate sources is more important than the quantity in reducing the risk of coronary artery disease.

The study, led by researchers from Harvard in collaboration with the University of Cambridge, followed nearly 200,000 participants across three long-term American studies to monitor the relationship between dietary patterns and the risk of heart disease, particularly coronary artery disease -- the leading cause of heart attack.

The results showed that low-carbohydrate or low-fat diets reduced the risk of heart disease, especially when based on healthy food sources, such as whole grains, vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts and healthy vegetable oils.

In contrast, diets based on refined carbohydrates, saturated fats, and red and processed meats are associated with an increased risk of heart disease.

The study showed that adhering to healthy diets — whether low in carbohydrates or low in fat — reduced the risk of coronary artery disease by 13 percent to 15 percent, while unhealthy diets increased the risk by 12 percent to 14 percent.

The results revealed improvements in key biomarkers among those following high-quality diets, including higher level of good cholesterol (HDL), lower triglycerides, and



Kuwaiti researcher Dr. Hala Bader Al-Essa contributes to international cardiac research.

improved inflammation markers. These factors contribute to reducing plaque buildup in the arteries and promoting long-term cardiovascular health.

Al-Essa disclosed that her participation in the study was supported by the Kuwait Heart Association, in line with its commitment to support Kuwaiti researchers participating in international studies and promoting the dissemination of evidence-based scientific recommendations to the local community.

According to Al-Essa, this contributes to raising health awareness and encouraging the adoption of healthier and more sustainable dietary patterns.

Ocean finding surprises scientists

Shark filmed for first time in Antarctica’s deep

MELBOURNE, Australia, Feb 18, (AP): An ungainly barrel of a shark cruising languidly over a barren seabed far too deep for the sun’s rays to illuminate was an unexpected sight.

Many experts had thought sharks didn’t exist in the frigid waters of Antarctica before this sleeper shark lumbered warily and briefly into the spotlight of a video camera, researcher Alan Jamieson said this week. The shark, filmed in January 2025, was a substantial specimen with an estimated length of between 3 and 4 meters (10 and 13 feet).

“We went down there not expecting to see sharks because there’s a general rule of thumb that you don’t get sharks in Antarctica,” Jamieson said.

“And it’s not even a little one either. It’s a hunk of a shark. These things are tanks,” he added.

The camera operated by the Minderoo-UWA Deep-Sea Research Centre, which investigates life in the deepest parts of the world’s oceans, was positioned off the South Shetland Islands near the Antarctic Peninsula. That is well inside the boundaries of the Antarctic Ocean, also known as the Southern Ocean, which is defined as below the 60-degree south latitude line. The center on Wednesday gave The Associated Press permission to publish the images.

The shark was 490 meters (1,608 feet) deep where the water temperature was a near-freezing 1.27 degrees Celsius (34.29 degrees Fahrenheit).

A skate appears in frame motionless on the seabed and seemingly unperturbed by the passing shark. The skate, a shark relative that looks like a stingray, was no surprise since scientists already knew their range extended that far south.

Jamieson, who is the founding director of the University of Western Australia-based research center, said he could find no record of another shark found in the Antarctic Ocean.

Peter Kyne, a Charles Darwin University conservation biologist independent of the research center, agreed that a shark had never before been recorded so far south.

Climate change and warming oceans could potentially be driving sharks to the Southern Hemisphere’s colder waters, but there was limited data on range changes near Antarctica because of the region’s remoteness, Kyne said.

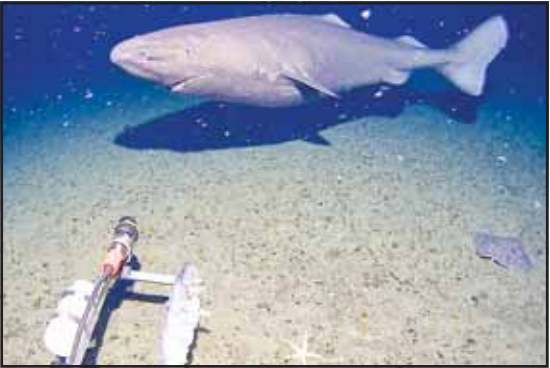
The slow-moving sleeper sharks could have long been in Antarctica without anyone noticing, he said.

“This is great. The shark was in the right place, the camera was in the right place and they got this great footage,” Kyne said. “It’s quite significant.” The sleeper shark population in the Antarctic Ocean was likely sparse and difficult for humans to detect, Jamieson said.

The photographed shark was maintaining a depth of around 500 meters (1,640 feet) along a seabed that sloped into much deeper water. The shark maintained that depth because that was the warmest layer of several water layers stacked upon each other to the surface, Jamieson said.

The Antarctic Ocean is heavily layered, or stratified, to a depth of around 1,000 meters (3,280 feet) because of conflicting properties including colder, denser water from below not readily mixing with fresh water running off melting ice from above.

Jamieson expects other Antarctic sharks live at the same depth, feeding on the carcasses of whales, giant squids and other marine creatures that die and sink to the bottom.



In this image made from video and released by the University of Western Australia, a sleeper shark swims into the spotlight of a video camera in Antarctica in January 2025. (AP)

Kenya launches a carbon registry

Warming pushing farms, wildlife to limits

WBD outbreaks

Floods raise disease risks

HARARE, Feb 18, (Xinhua): The Zimbabwean government said on Tuesday it is intensifying preparedness for possible outbreaks of water-borne diseases (WBD) amid the ongoing rains that have caused flooding in some parts of the country.

So far, the country has experienced sporadic and isolated outbreaks of water-borne diseases typically associated with the rainy season. Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services Minister Zhemu Soda said during a post-cabinet media briefing.

He said that although no major outbreaks have been officially declared, risks remain elevated due to current wet conditions, population movements, and increased strain on water and sanitation infrastructure.

“In response, the government of Zimbabwe has intensified its preparedness efforts by conducting comprehensive risk and hazard mapping, enhancing alertness among response agencies, and expanding public health communication initiatives,” Soda said.

Health services: The Lao Ministry of Health is advancing the transformation of public hospitals into self-governing entities, aiming to improve service standards and attract more patients to state-run facilities.

The ministry aims to improve services for all patients, use resources more efficiently, and encourage VIP and private patients, who often seek treatment at private hospitals or overseas clinics, to choose public hospitals.

The reform seeks to enhance service quality and management efficiency by giving hospitals greater control over administration, personnel, and financial operations, Lao News Agency reported on Tuesday. Hospital autonomy allows management teams to make faster operational decisions and allocate resources more effectively for diagnosis and treatment, improving responsiveness to patient needs.

Malaria: Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan has called for increased domestic financing and sustained political commitment in Africa’s fight against malaria, the Directorate of Presidential Communications said in a statement.

Addressing a high-level media meeting on the sidelines of the 39th African Union (AU) Summit in Addis Ababa, Hassan emphasized that eradicating malaria requires African ownership, accountability, and long-term investment.

Organized by the AU in collaboration with the African Leaders’ Alliance for Malaria Action (ALMA), the meeting focused on mobilizing domestic resources, reducing reliance on foreign aid, and reinforcing health systems across the continent, the statement said.

Nutrition gaps threaten moms

‘Real food’ is out of reach for poor pregnant women

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

By Bethany Barone Gibbs, West Virginia University and Alex Crisp, University of Iowa

The federal government’s message in its new Dietary Guidelines for Americans, released in January 2026, couldn’t be simpler: “Eat real food.”

But for pregnant women in rural America, that straightforward advice runs headlong into a harsh reality: Rural women have less access to healthy whole foods. We are a public health professor and postdoctoral researcher who are working on the Pregnancy 24/7 Cohort Study at West Virginia University and the University of Iowa. The five-year observational study investigated how 24-hour behavioral patterns throughout pregnancy affected maternal and fetal health, including pregnancy complications.

Most pregnant women in the United States aren’t meeting dietary recommendations. This is especially true for women living in rural communities. In our recent study, 500 pregnant were recruited from university-affiliated clinics in Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Iowa reported their dietary habits during each trimester using a questionnaire. About 1 in 5 participants lived in rural areas, as determined by a federal classification system that used the women’s home address. We found that pregnant women living in rural areas consumed more added sugars from sugar-sweetened beverages - about half a teaspoon more per day - than women living in urban areas. Rural women also consumed less fiber and ate fewer vegetables.

Research suggests less healthy dietary habits could be why rural pregnant women tend to have more pregnancy complications, such as preterm birth, gestational diabetes and hypertensive disorders. Diets lacking adequate nutrition during pregnancy can also lead to pregnancy complications, but also result in obesity and diabetes. Left unaddressed, these nutrition gaps could perpetuate cycles of poor health across generations.

Sample

Our study also assessed whether socioeconomic status influenced pregnant women’s diets in both rural and urban areas. West Virginia and Iowa site participants provided the majority of rural data.

There were 124 participants from Pittsburgh, and all but three were considered “urban” based on where they live. Compared to rural participants across the three-state sample, urban women consumed significantly fewer added sugars from sugar-sweetened beverages in the first and second trimesters and had consistently higher fiber intake across pregnancy.

However, socioeconomic status in the Pittsburgh site emerged as the stronger predictor of diet quality: Participants with a low socioeconomic status - including those in Pittsburgh - consumed 1.29 to 1.49 more teaspoons per day of added sugars from sugar-sweetened beverages and 1.5 to 1.6 grams less fiber per day than their high socioeconomic status counterparts. The lower-income women also consumed 31 to 58 milligrams less calcium per day.

While Pittsburgh’s participants and urban participants at the other study sites fared better than their rural peers on some measures, income and education level were more strongly tied to diet quality than geography alone.

About 20% of the US population is rural. Pregnant women in these areas often travel long distances to access fresh produce and whole grains. The food outlets closer to home are often convenience stores, gas stations or dollar stores, which primarily sell processed, calorie-dense foods with lower nutritional value. Even when healthier options are available, they tend to cost more.

These less healthy dietary patterns are particularly concerning since pregnant women have additional dietary needs than women who are not pregnant. Low-income and rural women are often missing out on nutrients such as calcium, iron, folate and choline. Calcium supports bone development and is found in dairy, fortified plant milks and leafy greens. Iron and folate, found in beans, lentils and dark green vegetables, support the growing baby. Choline assists with brain and spinal cord development and can be found in eggs, beans and nuts.

The new dietary guidelines have a few key messages for all adults, including instructions to eat whole and minimally processed foods, and to avoid sugar-sweetened beverages and highly processed foods.

Telling Americans to “eat real food” may seem like straightforward advice based on decades of research. But our study highlights that following this advice might be harder for some women during pregnancy. Pregnant women in rural and low-income communities could benefit from subsidies for fresh produce, or supplemental nutrition assistance. (AP)

One of intriguing storylines for the stretch run

Detroit’s stunning surge: Pistons enter post-All-Star play with best record

WASHINGTON, Feb 18, (AP): The Detroit Pistons had the worst record in franchise history at the All-Star break four years ago. And two years ago, their record at the break was even worse.

Look at them now.

When the NBA starts post-All-Star play on Thursday, the Pistons - a franchise that last won a playoff series in 2008 - will start the night with the best record in the league, a smidge ahead of the defending champion Oklahoma City Thunder. Detroit is 40-13, Oklahoma City 42-14.

The Thunder were expected to be here. The Pistons probably weren't. How Detroit finishes, and if it can hold on to that top spot, is one of the intriguing storylines for the stretch run of the NBA season - with two-thirds of the year complete and teams now set to sprint toward the playoffs or sprint toward the bottom in search of better lottery odds.

“We’re just going to run our race,” Pistons All-Star guard Cade Cunningham said. “We like where we’re at, and we’re going to continue to try to finish our season strong.”

There’s a lot to like about the Pistons going into the home stretch.

They haven’t been prone to any sort of real slide yet; they’re 11-2 after a loss and are one of only three teams (Oklahoma City and San Antonio are the others) yet to have a losing streak of more than two games. They don’t get blown out; they have a league-low three losses by 10 points or more. They’re a league-best 17-6 against teams who were at .500 or better.

Playoff basketball awaits in Detroit, and for the first time since 2008 there should be a Game 1 of a postseason series at home for the Pistons. Plenty of other teams - the Thunder, Boston, New York, San Antonio, Denver, Houston, Cleveland - are probably safe to call playoff locks at this point as well.

The next two months will tell the tale of which teams find their way either into Round 1 or will be trying to land the No. 1 draft pick instead.



Detroit Pistons' Cade Cunningham (2) makes a pass over Toronto Raptors' Grady Dick (1) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Toronto. (AP)

“It’s been hard. It’s been a long journey so far, but just going to work every day, finding ways to connect with my teammates, connect with the city the best I can, and bring wins to the city,” Cunningham said. “That’s what the city respects and

loves is people that go out there and compete every day. There were times they didn’t like how we played. We figured it out, and now we have something going, something building. Just have to keep going now.”

The top five teams in the NBA record-wise right now: Detroit, Oklahoma City, San Antonio, Boston, Denver and New York (the Nuggets and Knicks are tied).

Expect one of those clubs as the champion in June.

Granted, in the early days the league had far fewer teams than it does now. But there have been only four instances of the eventual NBA Finals winner not being among the league’s top-five teams record-wise at the All-Star break.

Milwaukee was seventh at the break in the coronavirus-affected 2020-21 season. Detroit was seventh at the break in 2003-04, Houston was ninth at the break in 1994-95 and Washington was eighth in 1977-78.

It looks like a two-person race for the scoring title: the Los Angeles Lakers’ Luka Doncic and Oklahoma City’s Shai Gilgeous-Alexander.

Doncic is averaging 32.8 points, Gilgeous-Alexander - the reigning champion - is averaging 31.8.

Doncic won the scoring race in 2023-24; Gilgeous-Alexander could become the 14th player in NBA history to win the title in consecutive seasons.

Boston’s Jayson Tatum and Indiana’s Tyrese Haliburton - All-NBA picks last season - were going to be out of the awards mix this season because of their Achilles tendon tears suffered in last season’s playoffs, so it was clear from the outset of this season that the group of award winners this spring would be different. Turns out, it’s going to be very different.

Because of the 65-game rule for eligibility for most player awards, the Lakers’ LeBron James is going to see his 21-year streak of making the All-NBA team end. He’s one of five All-NBA picks from last season who are assured of not making the team this year, joining Tatum, Haliburton, Milwaukee’s Giannis Antetokounmpo and Oklahoma City’s Jalen Williams.

Binding system still in drawing-board phase

Vonn’s skis didn’t release in Oly crash, renewing longstanding safety concerns

CORTINA D’AMPEZZO, Italy, Feb 18, (AP): The images of Lindsey Vonn down on the snow, screaming in pain and then being airlifted off the course by helicopter after her crash at the Olympics were a stark reminder of the dangers of the downhill.

So is this: Her skis didn’t come off.

Vonn’s boots remained locked into her skis even after her pinwheeling fall at the Milan Cortina Games, pointing awkwardly in different directions as she slid to a stop in obvious agony.

It is impossible to know whether Vonn would have suffered a less serious injury - her complex tibia fracture has already required multiple surgeries - had her skis been released. But the devastating injury has put a spotlight on the importance of bindings, which hold boots to the skis and remain some of the oldest technology in the sport.

Officials told The Associated Press that a binding system designed to automatically release skis when a racer like Vonn loses control is still in the drawing-board phase after years of stalled discussions.

“Unfortunately, sometimes it does take horrific accidents to shine even more of a light on what can be done,” said Sophie Goldschmidt, president and CEO of the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association. “It’s an area we can’t be competitive in; we’ve all got to be in it together with our different country counterparts and FIS (the International Ski and Snowboard Federation).”

Bindings haven’t significantly changed in their basic design for half a century: Once a skier steps in toe-first and then locks in by stepping down with their heel, pressure needs to be applied for the system to release the boot. Less-skilled skiers have bindings that release more easily to avoid leg injuries; the higher the skill level and the more serious the skiing, the more the bindings are cranked down to keep elite racers on their skis.

Few were surprised that Vonn’s skis did not release. The question is whether they should have.

A so-called “smart binding” system based on an algorithm and designed to automatically release when a skier loses control “would have surely” helped prevent Vonn from breaking her leg, said

Peter Gerdol, the FIS women’s race director at the Olympics and on the World Cup circuit.

“That’s exactly what the system will be designed to do,” Gerdol told AP. “Her skis would have definitely popped off. ... We’ve seen a lot of other cases in which the bindings don’t open and it results in knee issues, especially when the still-attached ski acts as a lever, either on the net or on the snow or on a gate or on any other obstacle. The leg becomes blocked and the knee gives out.”

Nine days before her Olympic crash, Vonn tore the ACL in her left knee in a crash in Crans-Montana, Switzerland. She ended up in the safety nets with her skis still attached.

A smart-binding system could borrow technology from the safety air bag system that became mandatory for skiers this season in the speed events.

“It’s still going to take time to develop but the idea is that the binding would be triggered by the same algorithm that prompts the air bag to inflate,” Gerdol said. “The heel piece would slide back and the athlete’s skis would pop off.”

Dainese and its sister company, D-Air Lab, spent years developing an algorithm for air bags to inflate under skiers’ racing suits after creating a similar system for motorcycle racing.

In coordination with the FIS, Dainese is sharing the air bag algorithm with top binding suppliers such as Look, Tyrolia, Salomon, Atomic and Marker in order to adapt the formula to release skis.

Releasing skis is potentially more dangerous than inflating an air bag. Elite skiers are sometimes capable of spectacular recoveries after flying into the air and they also can often use their skis to brake before slamming into safety fences.

“It’s a very complicated project,” said Marco Pastore, a Dainese representative on the circuit for the air bag system. “If you release a binding, you’ve got to be absolutely sure you do it at the right moment. For the air bag you can look at the rotations and the entire body position. But with the bindings you’ve got to examine how the feet move, what the trajectory of the skis is - plus a series of other variables.”



United States' Nina O'Brien unlatches her boots at the finish area of an alpine ski, women's giant slalom race, at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy. (AP)

Arizona State upsets Texas Tech as K-St routs Baylor in Driscoll’s debut



Gonzaga guard Mario Saint-Supéry, middle, goes for the ball between Santa Clara forward Elijah Mahi, left, and guard Brenton Knapper during the second half of an NCAA college basketball game in Santa Clara, Calif. (AP)

Iowa overcomes a cold-shooting to defeat Nebraska

TEMPE, Ariz., Feb 18, (AP): **Maurice Odum scored 23 points, Massamba Diop added 14 and Arizona State held on for a 72-67 upset over No. 13 Texas Tech, which lost star forward JT Toppin to an injury in the second half.**

The Red Raiders - who were coming off a 78-75 overtime win at then-No. 1 Arizona - had a three-game winning streak snapped.

It was Arizona State’s first victory against a nationally ranked opponent since beating No. 23 West Virginia 65-57 on Jan. 21, 2025. It was also a big win for embattled coach Bobby Hurley, who has struggled to produce a consistent winner during his 11 years in the desert.

Toppin appeared to hurt his right leg while driving to the basket with 6:03 remaining. The preseason All-America selection - who came in averaging 21.9 points per game - needed assistance to limp off the court and didn’t return. He finished with 20 points and eight rebounds.

Arizona State (14-12, 5-8 Big 12) built a 57-47 lead midway through the second half, frustrating Texas Tech with a full-court press that forced multiple turnovers. The Red Raiders cut the margin to 59-56, but the Sun Devils scored the next eight points.

Texas Tech (19-7, 9-4) had one more run left, trimming it to 70-67 in the final seconds, but then Christian Anderson lost control of the ball for a turnover. Anderson scored 18 points but committed seven turn-

overs.

The 7-foot-1 Diop hit a 3-pointer in the final seconds of the first half to give Arizona State a 37-36 halftime advantage. Odum led the Sun Devils with 10 points before the break.

Iowa 57, Nebraska 52

In Iowa City, Bennett Stirtz scored 25 points and Cooper Koch added 10 as Iowa overcame a cold-shooting second half to defeat No. 9 Nebraska 57-52.

Iowa (19-7, 9-6 Big Ten) won despite not making a field goal over the final 4:59. The Hawkeyes were 7 of 28 from the field in the second half, including 3 for 13 on 3-pointers.

Nebraska (22-4, 11-4), which has lost four of six, wasn’t much better. The Cornhuskers went 9 of 23 from the field, including 2 for 12 on 3s, and missed eight of their last 11 shots, going through an 11 1/2-minute stretch with just one basket.

Stirtz scored 10 of Iowa’s final 14 points. His jumper with 5:38 left gave the Hawkeyes a 47-45 lead, then he added a step-back 3 only 40 seconds later.

Iowa was coming off back-to-back losses last week to Maryland and Purdue after a six-game winning streak.

Pryce Sandfort, making his first appearance at Iowa since transferring after last season, led the Cornhuskers with 13 points. Sandfort was booed and taunted by Iowa’s student section throughout the game, but hit two 3-pointers to become Nebraska’s single-season leader with 90.

Jamarques Lawrence added 11 points for Nebraska.

K-State 90, Baylor 74

In Manhattan, P.J. Haggerty scored 34 points, Nate Johnson added a career-high 33, and Kansas State cruised past Baylor in the debut of Wildcats’ interim head coach Matthew Driscoll.

K-State (11-15, 2-11 Big 12) never trailed and held a double-digit lead for most of the second half to end a six-game skid. Driscoll replaced previous head coach Jerome Tang, who was fired Sunday night after four seasons at the helm.

Johnson’s layup gave the Wildcats a 21-point lead with 10:39 remaining. He surpassed his previous career-best 31 points with a dunk with 1:37 remaining.

Haggerty shot 15 of 23 overall. Johnson was 11-of-16 shooting and made five of the Wildcats’ eight 3-pointers. Johnson also had nine assists and matched a career-high with six steals.

Isaac Williams IV scored 16 points to lead Baylor (13-13, 3-10), which has lost four straight. Tounde Yessoufou added 14 point for the Bears. Cameron Carr chipped in with 12 points and Dan Skillings Jr. scored 11. The Bears made just three of their 24 3-point attempts.

Johnson made four 3s and scored 16 points, and Haggerty added 13 points to help K-State build a 41-34 halftime advantage. The Wildcats shot 5 of 11 from long range while Baylor missed 11 of 12 attempts from beyond the arc.

Michigan State 82, UCLA 59

In East Lansing, Jeremy Fears Jr. had 16 points and 10 assists, leading No. 15 Michigan State to an 82-59 victory over UCLA.

Ryder Cup captaincy uncertain

Tiger Woods isn’t ruling out a return to the Masters

LOS ANGELES, Feb 18, (AP): Tiger Woods did not rule out a return to the Masters just under two months away, even as his immediate future appears to include just about everything but golf.

Woods again painted an uncertain future about when or where he plays next because of a seventh back surgery to replace a disk. He said Tuesday at the Genesis Invitational that he remains plenty occupied, mostly with trying to reshape the PGA Tour schedule.

“I thought I spent a lot of hours practicing in my prime,” Woods said. “It doesn’t compare to what we’ve done in the boardroom.”

Those hours also are an obstacle in his decision whether to be the U.S. captain for the Ryder Cup for the 2027 matches in Ireland. Woods turned down the job two years ago because he didn’t think he had the time to do the job justice.

Foremost this time of the year is the Masters, which Woods last played in 2024 when he made the cut for a record 24th time in a row. Woods is a five-time Masters champion. Asked if playing the Masters, which starts April 9, was off the table, Woods replied without elaboration, “No.”

As for his golf anywhere - he turned 50 at the end of last year and is eligible for the PGA Tour Champions - Woods said he is still working his way back from the disk replace-



Tiger Woods speaks to the media at Riviera Country Club in Los Angeles ahead of the Genesis Invitational, where he is the tournament host. (AP)

ment surgery in October and has no timetable for a return. He has yet to play in the indoor TGL matches, either.

“Well, I’m trying - put it that way,” he said, adding that he can hit full shots but not every day “and not very well.”

Last year was the first time in his career he did not compete in a single tournament. He had surgery in March 2025 for a ruptured Achilles tendon, which is no longer holding him back. He said his lower back was sore, and at his age, “It’s probably going to take me a little bit longer.”

“My body has been through a lot,” Woods said. “Each and every day, I keep trying, I keep progressing, I keep working on it, trying to get stronger, trying to get more endurance in this body and trying to get it at a level at which I can play at the highest level again.”

His chief interest is indoors. He is on the board of the PGA Tour and the commercial PGA Tour Enterprises, heading the “Future Competition Committee” that is trying to create a model to meet CEO Brian Rolapp’s goal of fewer tournaments that are more meaningful for the best players.

The only thing clear is that a new model most likely won’t be ready by 2027. The committee has reached agreement on a big start to the season - that could be the week after or before the Super Bowl - taking the big events to bigger markets and becoming the must-see sport of the summer.

Another players-only meeting was scheduled Tuesday at Riviera. Rolapp is expected to pull back the curtain on some aspects at The Players Championship in March, with a little more clarity expected in the summer.



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Kazma stumbles again in Zain Premier League

By Hassan Mosa
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: Al-Qadsia returns from the UAE today, Thursday, after completing its Gulf Club Champions League campaign. The team will immediately begin preparations for Monday's high-stakes match against Kazma in the 14th round of the Zain Premier League.

Maintaining third place will be no easy task for Al-Qadsia, who sit on 22 points — just one ahead of fourth-placed Kazma. The upcoming clash pits them against a team eager to rebound after a series of setbacks.

Kazma has struggled in cup competitions this year, exiting the Amir Cup in the preliminary round after losing to Khaitan 3-1 on penalties (1-1 in regular time) and bowing out of the Crown Prince Cup to Al-Sulai-

bikhat 4-3 on penalties (2-2 in regular time).

Kazma, despite strong league performances — including wins over Al-Qadsia, Al-Arabi, and Salmiya — failed to capitalize fully and suffered a surprise 1-0 loss to bottom-placed Al-Tadhamon in the rescheduled 11th-round match at Ali Sabah Al-Salem Stadium.

Meanwhile, Al-Farwaniya moved up to ninth place after a crucial win, reaching 8 points—one ahead of Al-Jahra and one behind Al-Nasr. This round also features key battles at the bottom of the table, including a decisive clash between Al-Tadhamon and Al-Jahra to avoid last place.

Elsewhere, Al-Nasr will aim to pull further away from the relegation zone against Al-Fahaheel, while Kuwait Club faces a relatively easier test against Al-Shabab, which could solidify its title bid. Al-Arabi, meanwhile, faces a tough trip to Salmiya, with defeat potentially costing it the runner-up spot and a chance at the championship.



Kazma and Tadhamon players battling for the ball.

Golden masterclass: Norway's Klaebo extends Winter Olympics medal record



United States' Mikaela Shiffrin arrives at the finish area of an alpine ski, women's slalom race, at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy. (AP)

Snowboarder Su Yiming delivers China its 1st gold of Games

TESERO, Italy, Feb 18, (AP): Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo's golden run at Milan Cortina continued Wednesday as the Norwegian star secured his fifth gold at the Milan Cortina Olympics - and a record 10th overall - in the men's team sprint. Klaebo beat back a challenge from the United States to improve on his own record tally, racing with Einar Hedegart to win in 18 minutes, 28.9 seconds. Americans Ben Ogden and Gus Schumacher were just 1.4 seconds behind for the silver, while Italy's Elia Barp and Federico Pellegrino pleased the home crowd and took bronze, 3.3 seconds back.

"It's obviously very satisfying to make this happen," the 29-year-old Klaebo said. "The team sprint is one of the most fun events, but also one of the hardest." Klaebo has won every race he has entered at these Games, breaking the Winter Olympics record in Sunday's 4 x 7.5-kilometer relay. His final race will be in the 50-kilometer mass start at the weekend. "There are so many strong teams and so many fast skiers, so it always comes down to tight battles," Klaebo added. "That makes it even more rewarding." The U.S. racers fought hard for an upset, with Schumacher slipping back only on the final hill

where Klaebo sealed victory.

"Man, we kept the belief and I knew that Gus was not going to let up until the last second. And therefore I couldn't let up to the last seconds. So it was pretty incredible," Ogden said.

Mathis Desloges snapped a pole, in a setback for the strong French team that finished 12th.

In the women's competition, Jonna Sundling and Maja Dahlqvist continued Sweden's winning form.

Switzerland's Nadja Kaelin and Nadine Faehndrich took silver with Laura Gimmler and Coletta Rydzek of Germany taking the bronze. Norway was edged out to fourth place.

Jessie Diggins of the United States pushed the pace early in the race but finished fifth with partner Julia Kern, 11.54 seconds behind Sweden.

During the heats, a dog ran onto the track while the women's heats were in progress, running alongside athletes as they crossed the finish line. The incident did not disrupt the competition, and the dog was cheered on by spectators. It later wandered to the finish area, approaching skiers as they completed their runs.

Venue officials said a spectator had brought the animal into the venue despite a strict no-pets policy. The dog was secured near the finish line and its owner was asked to leave.

Su Yiming sat in the snow at the bottom of the snowboarding course, tears rolling down his cheeks. So close to winning China its first gold at the Milan Cortina Games, he still had a long wait to endure.

Luckily for Su, one by one his rivals either fell or came up short of his winning score.

Another Olympic medal for Su in the Italian Alps, and medal No. 4 in an incredibly successful and still young career for the former child actor.

Su celebrated his 22nd birthday with a second career gold medal on Wednesday. Su was the win-

ner of an error-prone men's slopestyle final, when he was the only one of the 12 finalists to complete his three runs through the course's rails and jumps without any falls or major errors.

The tension seemed almost too much for Su after he failed to improve his best score of 82.41 points on his third run. He knew that he had left the door open. That was when he wiped his cheeks while watching seven opponents each take their final shot - and fail to better his mark.

Moments later, those tears turned to an expression of joy when he stepped onto the top spot on the podium. He had given China its first gold of these Games and medals No. 6 and 7 of the country's overall medal tally.

Su burst onto the Olympic stage when he won gold in big air and silver in slopestyle at the Beijing 2022 Games. Last week, he took bronze in big air at the Livigno snowboarding park.

Taiga Hasegawa was second with his best score of 82.13 and added to Japan's haul of seven snowboarding medals in Livigno.

American rider Jake Canter, 22, claimed the bronze in his first Games.

Mikaela Shiffrin's eight-year Olympic medal drought is over.

The American skiing standout put in two dominant runs to win the women's slalom at the Winter Games on Wednesday by 1.50 seconds.

The race isn't officially over yet, with dozens of lower-tier racers still to take the course. But Shiffrin is the leader after the fastest 30 skiers from the first run.

World champion Camille Rast was in silver medal position and Anna Swenn Larsson in third.

After delivering an exquisite second run to build on her 0.82-run lead from the morning, Shiffrin stopped in the finish area to take it all, slowly squatted and was embraced by the other medalists.

American continues quest for a total of four titles

Stolz chases 3rd Olympic gold after humble Wisconsin start

MILAN, Feb 18, (AP): Jordan Stolz's path to multiple speedskating gold medals at the Milan Cortina Olympics began at age 5 in front of a TV at home in Wisconsin, sitting with his older sister, Hannah, to check out the 2010 Vancouver Games.

"They saw the opening ceremonies. Everything looked pretty and cool. They loved it. Then they started watching the figure skating - and I turned around, and both kids were gone. They were unimpressed," their mother, Jane, recalled. "And then Apolo Ohno came on for short track, and - Boom! - they were right back into it and watching. They liked skiing, too. They liked anything fast, really. They really got obsessed with the speedskating, for some reason."

Soon, their father, Dirk, was in the family's backyard, clearing snow off a frozen pond so the kids could try skating - while wearing life-jackets, at Mom's insistence. "I remember going out there," Dirk said, "and Jane's yelling at me, 'They're not going out on that ice!' They're going to fall through the ice!" And, well, here we are: Jordan Stolz, now 21, already owns a pair of golds from Milan seeks another in Thursday's 1,500 meters.

"It's a success, but it's more so of a partial success if I don't win the 1,500," Stolz said after winning the 500 on Saturday to follow up on his victory in the 1,000 on Feb. 11, both in Olympic-record times, "just because I've been so good in that distance for so long. So I hope I can win that one."

Truth is, he's so good at every distance he commits himself to. That includes a pair of world titles each at 500, 1,000 and 1,500.



Gold medalist Jordan Stolz of the U.S. celebrates after the men's 500 meters speedskating race at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Milan, Italy. (AP)

Stolz's origin story is an oft-told tale, particularly well-known to those who follow speedskating, yet it bears repeating as the American continues his quest for a total of four titles at these Olympics; he's also entered in the mass start on Saturday.

Thinking back all those years to when he cheered for Ohno, an eight-time medalist for the U.S., the generally soft-spoken Stolz's voice rises.

"That really intrigued me. That was something that caught my eye," Stolz said. "All the other sports didn't really interest me."

What was it about speedskating?

Tough to compete, week-in and week-out

Jessica Pegula to lead WTA Tour's efforts to improve tennis calendar

WASHINGTON, Feb 18, (AP): Jessica Pegula, the 2024 U.S. Open runner-up, will lead a new 13-person panel to suggest changes to the women's tennis calendar, rankings points rules and the requirements about competing in certain events, according to a letter sent Tuesday by WTA Tour chair Valerie Camillo to players and tournament officials.

For years, tennis players - women and men - have complained that the sport's season is too long and the offseason is too short and lamented other factors that contribute to injuries and burnout. Camillo said the Tour Architecture Council will make recommendations to the WTA Board; she hopes a revised setup can be approved for 2027.

"There has been a clear sentiment across the Tour that the current calendar does not feel sustainable for players given the physical, professional, and personal pressures of competing at the highest level," Camillo, who became chair in November, wrote in the letter, a copy of which was obtained by The Associated Press.

Camillo's letter said the council "will focus first on areas where the WTA has direct authority to drive change, while also identifying longer-term opportunities that will require broader coordination across the sport" - by working, eventually, with the ATP men's tour and the four Grand Slam tournaments, she explained in a telephone interview.

"We are very open to looking broadly at a host of potential solutions to this. ... The idea is: We go in there with a very open mind and open dialogue," Camillo told the AP. "We're not going to solve the entire world (immediately). ... The reason we don't want to wait for, 'Hey, let's do this as a collective system,' (is) we want to be timely, we want to be focused on making an immediate impact."

The No. 5-ranked Pegula, a 31-year-old American who will chair the council, "has a unique perspective as a top player (and is) widely respected for her thoughtful, collaborative approach," Camillo said.

"It's one of the toughest sports," Pegula said last year, "just when you combine, not



Jessica Pegula

just the physicality of it, but the schedule, the loneliness, the mental side, how tough it is to go out there and compete, week-in and week-out, by yourself."

No. 1-ranked Aryna Sabalenka and No. 2 Iga Swiatek were among more than a half-dozen withdrawals from this week's WTA event in Dubai. During a pre-Australian Open tournament in January, Sabalenka said she planned to skip some tour stops "to protect my body."

"The season," she said then, "is definitely insane."

In addition to Pegula, active players on the council are Victoria Azarenka of Belarus, a two-time Australian Open champion and former No. 1; Maria Sakkari of Greece, a two-time Grand Slam semifinalist who has been ranked as high as No. 3; and Katie Volynets of the U.S., who is currently No. 96.

Camillo, WTA CEO Portia Archer and three other tour officials are on the panel, whose members also include Anja Vreg, an agent, ex-player and ex-umpire who is chair of the WTA Player Board; Bob Moran, whose Beemok Sports & Entertainment runs tournaments in Cincinnati and Charleston, South Carolina; Laura Ceccarelli, who represents the Asia-Pacific region on the WTA Tournament Council; and Alastair Garland, the managing director of Octagon Tennis and member of the WTA Board of Directors.

Best of the Rest

Cerundolo reaches last 16 of Rio Open: Argentine top seed Francisco Cerundolo advanced to the last 16 of the Rio Open with a 6-3, 6-4 win over compatriot Mariano Navone.

World No. 19 Cerundolo won 72 percent of points on first serve and converted four of five break points to prevail in an hour and 32 minutes on the outdoor clay of the Jockey Club Brasileiro.

Navone won 67 percent of points on his first serve but converted just two of 12 break point opportunities.

The result means Cerundolo will meet another Argentine, Thiago Tirante, in the next round of the ATP 500 event.

Cerundolo's brother, Juan Manuel Cerundolo, also progressed with a 6-1, 3-6, 6-4 victory over second seed Luciano Darderi of Italy.

World No. 78 Cerundolo saved six of eight break points and took nine of 13 points at the net to win in two hours and 17 minutes. (Xinhua)

□ □ □

Ghana to play Mexico in friendly: Ghana will play FIFA World Cup co-host Mexico in an international friendly on May 22, the Ghana Football Association (GFA) confirmed on Tuesday.

The match will be the Black Stars' third confirmed warm-up ahead of the World Cup finals in June.

Ghana has already scheduled friendlies against Austria and Germany in March. The West Africans, making their fifth appearance at the World Cup finals, begin their 2026 campaign against Panama on June 17 in Toronto before facing England and Croatia in their remaining Group L matches. (Xinhua)

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NEWS



Silver medalists Ben Ogden and Gus Schumacher, of the United States, gold medalist Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo and Einar Hedegart, of Norway, and bronze medalist Elia Barp and Federico Pellegrino, of Italy, pose after the cross-country skiing men's team sprint free at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Tesero, Italy. (AP)

Sports

Racism row casts dark cloud over Madrid victory

Doue rescues PSG as Galatasaray on fire

LISBON, Feb 18, (AP): The Champions League playoffs were overshadowed by allegations of racism directed at Vinicius Junior in heated scenes after the Real Madrid star scored a brilliant winning goal against Benfica.

Play was halted during Real Madrid's 1-0 victory when Vinicius claimed he had been racially insulted by an opponent.

"He's been subjected to this a few times throughout his career and he's handled it excellently. But for it to carry on and for it to happen tonight, it's a disgrace to football," Madrid defender Trent Alexander-Arnold told Amazon.

Vinicius had just curled a stunning strike into the top corner to give record 15-time European champion Madrid the advantage in the first leg



Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior reacts during a Champions League opening phase soccer match between SL Benfica and Real Madrid in Lisbon, Portugal. (AP)

of its playoff at the Stadium of Light. He celebrated passionately in the corner before the situation escalated.

The Brazilian informed referee Francois Letexier that a racist comment had been made. Vinicius appeared to point toward Argentine midfielder Gianluca Prestianni while lodging his complaint. Letexier crossed his arms to signal the activation of football's anti-racism protocol.

Prestianni had earlier approached Vinicius while covering his mouth with his jersey. Benfica coach Jose Mourinho, who also spoke to Vinicius, said his player denied the accusation.

"They told me different things," Mourinho said, adding that he preferred to remain independent. However, referencing previous incidents involving Vinicius, he added: "There is something wrong because it happens in every stadium. The stadium where Vinicius plays, something happens. Always."

Vinicius later sat alone in the dug-out before play resumed. No players were sent off as a result of the allegations.

Meanwhile, defending champion Paris Saint-Germain endured a scare in its title defense. PSG found itself 2-0 down after just 18 minutes against AS Monaco at Stade Louis-II.

United States forward Folarin Balogun gave Monaco the lead inside a minute and soon doubled the advantage.

After Vitinha missed a penalty, coach Luis Enrique introduced Desire Doue in the 27th minute. Doue made an immediate impact, pulling a goal back within two minutes. Shortly before halftime, after one of his efforts was saved, Achraf Hakimi followed up to equalize.

Monaco was reduced to 10 men early in the second half when Aleksandr Golovin was sent off. Doue



Atalanta's Nicola Zalewski tackles Dortmund's Daniel Svensson during the Champions League knockout playoff first leg soccer match between Borussia Dortmund and Atalanta in Dortmund, Germany. (AP)

sealed the comeback with a clinical finish in the 67th minute to secure a dramatic 3-2 victory.

"The way I played was not the most important thing. The most important thing is the win. We did the job, so we are very happy. It is my job to help the team," Doue said.

In Istanbul, Galatasaray stunned Juventus 5-2 in a thrilling playoff clash at RAMS Park.

After trailing 2-1 at halftime, the Turkish side mounted a remarkable comeback. Noa Lang scored twice in the second half to leave the two-time European champion reeling.

Juventus had responded well after going behind to an early goal from Gabriel Sara, with Teun Koopmeiners equalizing a minute later and adding another before halftime.

However, Galatasaray took full

control after the break. Lang equalized four minutes into the second half. Davinson Sanchez put the home side ahead on the hour mark.

Juventus' task became even harder when Juan Cabal was sent off 22 minutes after coming on as a half-time substitute. Lang added his second following defensive errors, and Sacha Boey completed the scoring in the 86th minute.

Galatasaray will carry a three-goal advantage into the second leg in Turin as it bids to reach the round of 16 for the first time since 2014.

Elsewhere, Borussia Dortmund took control of its tie against Atalanta with a 2-0 first-leg win. Goals from Serhou Guirassy and Maximilian Beier gave the German side a commanding advantage heading into next week's return leg in Italy.

South Africa finishes group stage unbeaten, Australia eliminated

Pakistan crushes Namibia by 102 runs to reach Super 8s at T20 World Cup

COLOMBO, Feb 18, (Agencies): Pakistan produced a commanding performance to defeat Namibia by 102 runs at Colombo on February 18, securing its spot in the Super 8 stage of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026. The victory also marked Pakistan's biggest T20 World Cup win by runs.

Batting first, Pakistan posted a formidable 199/3 in 20 overs. Sahibzada Farhan was the star of the innings, smashing an unbeaten 100 off 58 balls, while captain Salman Agha contributed a brisk 38 off 23 balls. Shadab Khan provided a strong finishing touch with 36 not out off 22 balls.

Chasing 200, Namibia struggled from the start, losing wickets at regular intervals. Louren Steenkamp top-scored with 23, but lacked support from his teammates. Pakistan's bowlers dominated, with Shadab Khan taking 3 wickets and Usman Tariq delivering a sensational spell of 4/16 in 3.3 overs. Namibia was bowled out for just 97 in 17.3 overs.

South Africa chased down a victory target of 123 with 40 balls to spare Wednesday to finish the group stage of cricket's Twenty20 World Cup unbeaten.

South Africa opted to field first and restricted United Arab Emirates to 122-6, with veteran pace bowlers Corbin Bosch returning 3-12 from four overs and Anrich Nortje taking 2-28.

The South Africans raced to 123-4 in 13.2 overs, taking the last seven runs in singles after their fourth wicket fell.

Rain showers delayed the start of South Africa's reply and then the first over netted just one run.

But from that point on, the Proteas accelerated to victory by adding 13 runs off the second over and 18 from the third until Haider Ali bowled skipper Aiden Markram for 28 from 11 balls - all but two of his runs coming from boundaries.

Dewald Brevis led the scoring with 36 before he was out within two scoring shots of victory, and Ryan Rickelton scored 30 as the 2024 runners-up dominated the bowling.

For the UAE, Alishan Sharafu led the scoring with 45 from 38 deliveries before he was caught in the outfield off Nortje's bowling in the 18th over.

It was South Africa's fourth consecutive win in the tournament, including a double-tiebreaker victory over 2024



Pakistan's Sahibzada Farhan plays a shot during the T20 World Cup cricket match between Namibia and Pakistan in Colombo, Sri Lanka. (AP)

semifinalist Afghanistan that required two Super Overs.

The South Africans rested David Miller, frontline spinner Keshav Maharaj, Marco Jansen and Lungi Ngidi ahead of the Super 8 stage.

Mitch Marsh's injury-depleted Australia squad crashed out of cricket's Twenty20 World Cup on Tuesday after Zimbabwe's Group B game against Ireland was abandoned because of rain without a ball being bowled.

The no-result in Palkekele meant Zimbabwe qualified for the second stage of the tournament for the first time. It also ended the slim chance the 2021 champion Australia squad had of advancing after back-to-back group-stage defeats to Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka.

Seven teams have now qualified for the second round. Zimbabwe, which upset Australia on the weekend, will be in Group 1 along with defending champion India, West Indies and 2024 runner-up South Africa. Co-host Sri Lanka is in Group 2 with England, New Zealand and Pakistan or the U.S. team.

Earlier, Canada batter Yuvraj Samra's exhilarating century proved in

vain as New Zealand advanced to the Super 8s with an eight-wicket win in Chennai.



South Africa's Corbin Bosch bowls a delivery during the T20 World Cup cricket match between South Africa and United Arab Emirates in New Delhi, India. (AP)

New Zealand's resounding victory knocked 2024 semi-finalist Afghanistan out of the tournament.

Samra's 110 off 65 balls, which included six sixes and 11 fours, had earlier guided Canada to 173-4 after captain Dilpreet Bajwa won the toss and elected to bat.

Nepal registered its third win in T20 World Cups when it beat Scotland by seven wickets in Mumbai. It was the last game for both teams which had already been eliminated from Group C.

Dipendra Singh Airee scored 50 not out off 23 balls with three sixes and four fours as Nepal finished with 171-3, securing victory with four balls to spare. Opener Kushal Bhurtel scored 43, including four sixes.

Earlier, medium pacer Sompal Kami picked 3-25 as Scotland posted 170-7, powered by opener Michael Jones's 71 off 45 balls.

It was the third-highest successful run-chase for an Associate nation in tournament history and a first win for Nepal in 12 years at the T20 World Cup. It had earlier beaten Hong Kong and Afghanistan in 2014, but went winless in 2024.

Al-Qadsia files protest

Kuwait Volleyball Federation welcomes new board members Al-Namsh & Al-Anzi

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 18: Kuwait Volleyball Federation's ordinary general assembly approved Talal Al-Namsh of Kazma as Secretary-General and Ziad Al-Anzi of Al-Nasr as a board member to complete the remainder of the 2024-2027 term.

The assembly was held at the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Complex under the leadership of Federation President Dr. Jaber Al-Merri, with the participation of Assistant Secretary Naif Al-Khamili, Treasurer Talal Al-Adwani, and representatives from Kuwait Club, Kazma, Al-Sahel, Al-Jahra, Al-Nasr, Al-Sulaibikhat, Burgan, and Al-Shabab clubs.

The current board now includes:
Dr. Jaber Al-Merri – President (Al-Sahel)
Nasser Al-Anzi – Vice President (Al-Jahra)
Talal Al-Adwani – Treasurer (Burgan)
Hamad Al-Badhali – Assistant Treasurer (Al-Sulaibikhat)
Naif Al-Khamili – Assistant Secretary (Al-Tadhamon)
Naif Al-Felkawei – Member (Yarmouk)
Dhari Al-Areefi – Member (Kuwait Club)
Jassim Al-Felkawei – Member (Al-Shabab)
Talal Al-Namsh – Secretary-General (Kazma)
Ziad Al-Anzi – Board Member (Al-Nasr)

Meanwhile, Al-Qadsia lodged a formal protest over its 2-3 loss to Yarmouk in the league, claiming the opponent fielded both professional and youth-bound players simultaneously — a violation of league regulations. Club administrator Ismail Dashti stated that the infraction should result in a 3-0 victory being awarded to Al-Qadsia.

Elsewhere, Al-Sulaibikhat defeated Burgan 3-2. The league standings are now:

Kuwait Club – 20 points
Al-Qadsia – 17 points
Al-Arabi – 15 points
Kazma – 14 points
Al-Sulaibikhat – 13 points
Burgan – 11 points
Al-Shabab – 10 points
Yarmouk – 5 points
Al-Nasr – 0 points
Al-Sahel – 0 points



Al-Shuraidah, Al-Anzi, and Al-Otaibi attend Kuwait Volleyball Federation's General Assembly.