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to rehabilitate ecosystems Page 2

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Kuwait Amir, Crown Prince, Al-Sabah family receive Ramadan greetings from well-wishers

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, as well as members of the ruling family received greetings from citizens and ex-

patriates on the holy month of Ramadan.

The event, hosted at Al-Sabah Diwan, Bayan Palace, on Wednesday evening, materialized the traditional bonds of amity and fraternity characterizing the Kuwaiti society, read an Amiri Diwan statement.



Top and above: Photos show HH the Amir, HH the Crown Prince as well as members of the ruling family receiving greetings from citizens and expatriates on the holy month of Ramadan.

Amiri Diwan photos

Billions pledged for Gaza

FM represents Kuwait at Peace Council meet

WASHINGTON, Feb 19, (Agencies): Washington on Thursday hosts a Peace Council meeting on Gaza, chaired by US President Donald Trump, with the State of Kuwait participating among council member states.

Kuwait is represented at the meeting by Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, who is taking part in discussions addressing Gaza's reconstruction, governance arrangements, security frameworks, and humanitarian assistance following the ceasefire agreement.

The host country said more than 20 states are attending the meeting, including Arab countries such as Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

Ahead of the meeting, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said President Trump would announce pledges exceeding USD 5 billion for humanitarian efforts, Gaza reconstruction, and support for security and stabilization forces.

She described the pledges as a major step toward implementing the president's vision for rebuilding Gaza and achieving lasting stability, adding that detailed plans would be presented during the meeting, including mechanisms to ensure security as a foundation for prosperity.

Continued on Page 4

KNG urges vigilance to ensure national security

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19, (KUNA): Undersecretary of Kuwait National Guard (KNG), Lieutenant General Hamad Al-Barjas, emphasized on Thursday the need for vigilance, caution, and following all KNG security duties to ensure the country's safety and stability.

During a visit to personnel at KNG Headquarters, Lt. Gen. Al-Barjas conveyed congratulations and best wishes from the National Guard Chief, Sheikh Mubarak Hamoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and his deputy, Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan.

He also expressed pride and appreciation for the National Guard leadership's role in securing camps and vital sites.

Kuwait court upholds Cabinet's exceptional pension reductions

By Jaber Al-Hamoud
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The Third Administrative Circuit of the Court of Cassation ruled to accept the appeal in form but reject it on its merits in the case filed by ten former judges against Cabinet's Decision No. 294/2025 regarding the reduction of their exceptional pensions.

The appellants had requested the annulment of the Cabinet's decision, along with all its consequences, and temporary compensation of KD 10,000 each.

According to the appellants, the decision was issued by an unauthorized entity, violated the law, lacked legal justification, and constituted an abuse of power, after they were notified via the Sahel application of the reduction of their exceptional pensions effective May 1, 2025.

The court rejected the procedural objections submitted by the government. It affirmed the jurisdiction of the Judges' Requests Circuit to hear the dispute, as it pertains to pensions due to their judicial positions, clarifying that this falls under the concept of "judges' professional affairs" according to Article 50 of the Judicial Organization Law.

Continued on Page 5

Newswatch

TEHRAN: The Naval Forces of Iran and Russia on Thursday held a joint drill in the Gulf of Oman and the Northern Indian Ocean, successfully carrying out a series of operations.

Iranian media outlets said that the special operations teams of the navies of Iran's army, and Russia successfully carried out an operation to liberate a hijacked ship. The vessels and aerial units of the two countries also took part in the operation, which involved aerial reconnaissance. (KUNA)

GENEVA: A UN Human Rights Office report released Thursday raised concerns over "ethnic cleansing" by Israeli occupation authorities in Gaza and the West Bank, warning that certain conduct may amount to "genocide" if intent to destroy a group is proven.

The report emphasized that using starvation as a method of war constitutes a war

crime, may amount to crimes against humanity, and could qualify as genocide when carried out with intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. (KUNA)

WASHINGTON: The US Treasury Department issued a new general license allowing certain companies to conduct oil and gas transactions in Venezuela under specific conditions imposed by the United States.

A Treasury statement late Wednesday, said any contracts signed with the Venezuelan government or the national oil company must be governed by US law, with all disputes required to be settled within the United States.

Washington also stipulated that all financial payments related to the licensed activities be deposited into accounts designated by the US Treasury Department, ensuring direct oversight of financial flows. (KUNA)

Minors nabbed in traffic sweep

By Munif Naif
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The General Traffic Department (GTD) has intensified its surprise field campaigns in various governorates as part of its ongoing efforts to ensure traffic safety and protect all road users.

These expanded campaigns focused on serious traffic violations, particularly the illegal operation of vehicles by minors who do not possess a valid driving license.

A security source told the newspaper that these campaigns, carried out over a 24-hour period recently, led to the apprehension of 15 minors.

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Alghanim unveils 'Sina'at Al-Amjad' for Kuwait's National Days



Continued on Page 5

Prayer Timings

Fajr 05:05 Asr 15:15
 Sunrise .. 06:24 Maghrib .. 17:40
 Zohr 12:02 Isha 18:57

Local

Japan Ambassador Ramadan greetings

On the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan, I extend my sincerest congratulations to H.H. the Amir of the State of Kuwait, H.H. the Crown Prince, H.H. the Prime Minister, the government members, and the friendly people of Kuwait.

This is my second Ramadan in Kuwait, and I have the privilege of experiencing firsthand the depth of the customs and traditions, which reflect the spirit of harmony and solidarity within Kuwaiti society. From the welcoming diwanis to the heartfelt Ramadan's Ghabqa and the exchange of "Neqsa", these practices embody core values of generosity, unity, and community. Ramadan in Kuwait seamlessly blends spirituality with social connection, highlighting the nation's rich cultural and religious heritage. Popular dishes like harees and jareesh, which



Mukai Kenichiro

adorn Iftar tables, add a special touch that reflects the authenticity of Kuwaiti cuisine.

I also extend my warmest congratulations and best wishes on the occasion of National Day and Liberation Day, two occasions that reinforce the values of solidarity and unity that have always been the foundation of Kuwait's stability. I firmly believe that Kuwait's rich history, marked by experiences and achievements, continues to pave the way toward an even brighter and more prosperous future.

Wishing Kuwait continued progress and prosperity ... Ramadan Mubarak.

Mukai Kenichiro

Japan Ambassador to Kuwait

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Warm to rather hot with light to moderate freshening at times southeasterly wind to southerly wind, with speed of 08-40 km/h with a chance for fog forming at night.

By Night: Rather cold with light

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait Airport	29	15
Abdaly	30	15
Bubyan	28	15
Jahra	30	15
Failaka Island	26	13
Salmyah	25	19
Ahmadi	25	12
Jal Aliyah	31	14

Weather

to moderate southeasterly wind to northwesterly wind, with speed of 08-30 km/h with a chance for fog forming over some areas.

Other Voices

No honeymoon lasts in foreign policy

By Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri

Relations between states are more human than diplomats like to admit. Every so often, politics enters a period of warm rhetoric, glowing praise, and symbolic gestures that suggest distance has vanished and interests have fused. It feels decisive. It rarely is.

Foreign policy does not run on sentiment. Differences are not a failure of diplomacy. They are its normal condition. Interests diverge, priorities shift, and domestic pressures pull governments in different directions. The real measure of a relationship is not whether disagreement appears, but whether it is managed with enough trust, respect, and discipline to keep it from turning



Al-Anjeri

ing into an open crisis.

That is why flashy rapprochement is often fragile. It generates headlines, but not necessarily resilience. Durable ties are built more quietly, through institutions, cultural exchange, professional networks, and steady habits of communication. Those layers create ballast. They reduce misreading when difficult issues return and make it easier to contain friction before it becomes rupture.

Ramadan offers a useful metaphor. During this month, etiquette rises, lovely messages multiply, visits resume, and courtesy expands. This is not hypocrisy by definition. It can be social glue. The danger comes when courtesy becomes camouflage, masking rancor or settling scores in a softer register.

States sometimes do the same. The wiser goal is not perfect harmony, but preserved bridges, so difference does not harden into a break.

'Diwaniyas' core of Kuwaiti culture

Kuwait built on solidarity of its leadership, people

By Bassam Al-Qassas

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: Sheikh Fahad Jaber Al-Ali stated that the coincidence of Kuwait's National Day and Liberation Day celebrations with the holy month of Ramadan carries profound national and spiritual significance, reflecting the unity and cohesion of Kuwaiti society during moments of pride and honor, as well as seasons of generosity and giving.

He emphasized that these occasions recall the journey of a nation whose history was built on the solidarity of its leadership and people, grounded in values of belonging, loyalty, and collective action.

Sheikh Fahad explained that Kuwait was founded on principles of compassion, cooperation, and responsibility - values that are renewed during the holy month of Ramadan. The convergence of religious and national occasions sends a strong message about the importance of preserving the national fabric and strengthening the spirit of citizenship. The coming period requires everyone to uphold national principles and work together for a stable and prosperous future for Kuwait under the wise leadership of its rulers.

Sheikh Fahad Jaber Al-Ali extended his highest congratulations and blessings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and the generous Kuwaiti people, praying to God to continue granting Kuwait security, unity, and prosperity.

Fahad Abdulrahman Al-Muajil

Fahad Abdulrahman Al-Muajil, Secretary General of the Kuwaiti Diwaniyas, stated that the coincidence of the 65th National Day and the 35th Liberation Day with the holy month of Ramadan represents a unifying occasion that reflects the authenticity of Kuwaiti society and its adherence to its deeply rooted values and traditions.

Al-Muajil extended his congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and the generous Kuwaiti people, praying to God to continue granting Kuwait security, unity, and prosperity.



Fahad Al-Muajil

mad, the Kuwaiti people and government, and all residents of Kuwait.

He explained that these national occasions commemorate the sacrifices of the men who shaped Kuwait's history.

The wise leadership, represented by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, continues today the journey of preserving national identity and strengthening unity among the people of the nation.

The holy month of Ramadan reinforces the role of Kuwaiti diwaniyas as centers for gathering, consultation, and social solidarity. Diwaniyas have played and continue to play a vital role in strengthening national cohesion and consolidating the values of dialogue and tolerance. Fahad Al-Muajil concluded by praying that God would perpetuate the blessings of security and stability upon Kuwait and that He would return these blessed occasions to the nation and its people with goodness and blessings.

Khaled Al-Jumayan

Khaled Al-Jumayan, former Minister of Social Affairs and Labor, extended his warmest congratulations and blessings to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, coinciding with Kuwait's National Day and Liberation Day celebrations.



Al-Jumayan

Al-Jumayan emphasized that these blessed occasions provide an important opportunity to strengthen the spirit of compassion and solidarity, recall noble values, and extend a helping hand to those in need.

He highlighted that Ramadan is a season of giving, during which humanitarian initiatives multiply, reflecting Kuwait's role as a pioneering nation in charitable work.

Al-Jumayan noted that the overlap of the holy month with the national holidays gives these days a unique significance, combining pride in the nation and its glorious history with the values of faith that promote mercy and coexistence. He concluded by praying that God will return these blessed occasions to Kuwait, its leadership, and its people with greater security, stability, and prosperity, and that He will continue to bless the nation with goodness and generosity.



PM Diwan photo

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah chairs the 47th ministerial committee meeting.

PM, ministers review plan to rehabilitate ecosystems

Panel urged to identify major projects priorities

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19, (KUNA): His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah chaired on Thursday the 47th ministerial committee meeting at Bayan Palace to follow up on the implementation of major development projects.

The meeting reviewed the latest reports from relevant government bodies on procedures related to key development projects, including Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port, the electricity sector, renewable energy development, low-carbon green waste recycling systems, housing development, environmental infrastructure for wastewater treatment plants, free zones, economic zones and efforts to combat desertification.

His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah directed the members of the committee to review the plans in place and identify priorities related to the implementation of major development projects and to adopt programs that support sustainable economic development paths.

On Afforestation projects, combating desertification, and reducing sand encroachment in the country, His Highness the Prime Minister and the members of the committee listened to a detailed explanation from the delegation of the government company tasked with implementing projects to develop and rehabilitate ecosystems and the executive plans for environmental development using modern technologies and benefiting from its expertise in the field of combating desertification and environmental development.

The visiting delegation presented a visual report and a lengthy explanation during the meeting after completing their field visits to some areas in the country that require land reclamation, and in this regard, they presented appropriate solutions

and modern technologies that help to address these natural phenomena.

Attending the meeting were Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan, Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Abdulatif Al-Mashari, Minister of Electricity, water and Renewable Energy Dr. Subeih Al-Mukhaizem, Minister of Finance Dr. Yaqoub Al-Refaai, Advisor at the Prime Minister's Office Dr. Khaled Al-Fadhel, Director General of the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) Dr. Meshal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Acting Director of Premier's Diwan Sheikh Khaled Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, Head of the Fatwa and Legislation Department Counselor Salah Al-Majed, Assistant Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs and committee rapporteur Ambassador Sameeh Hayat, CEO of Kuwait Oil Company Ahmad Al-Eidan and the Secretary-General of the Kuwaiti Liaison Point for Environmental Projects Nahil Abdulla Al-Abdulrazaq.

14 illegals held in homes used for selling food, grocery items

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The Capital Security Directorate shut several grocery stores that were operating illegally from private homes in the Jaber Al-Ahmad Residential area, reported Al-Seyassah daily.

After completing investigations, obtaining the necessary legal permits, and coordinating with relevant authorities, the offending locations were raided. It was discovered that private residences were being used for unlicensed commercial activities, including selling food and receiving customers on-site. The operation resulted in the arrest of 14 workers in violation of labor and residency laws who were staying in these grocery stores.

Several workers were also apprehended for delivering orders using motorcycles. Serious violations were detected, including the misuse of private residences for purposes other than those for which they were designated, in violation of

housing laws.

The sale of gas cylinders was also discovered, which constitutes a violation of trade laws. Seven delivery motorcycles without license plates were confiscated. Adulterated and expired food products were found at some locations.

In coordination with the Public Authority for Food and Nutrition (PAFN), 33 violation reports were issued against the inspected establishments. The violations included operating food establishments without a health license, handling food without meeting health and technical requirements, handling food prepared under unsanitary conditions, handling food unfit for human consumption and adulterated food due to the absence of nutritional information labels, failure to comply with general hygiene requirements, and employing workers without health certificates.

Mol all set to maintain security, traffic control

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior, Major General Abdulwahab Al-Wuhaib, highlighted the completion of comprehensive security, traffic, and awareness preparations for the holy month of Ramadan to enhance public safety, regulate traffic, and promote positive community behavior during the special month, reports Al-Anba daily.

In an official statement issued by the ministry, Major General Al-Wuhaib explained that security deployments have been intensified around mosques, markets, shopping malls, and other public gathering areas. Traffic patrols will also be strengthened on main and secondary roads, particularly during peak hours before Iftar and after Taraweeh prayers, to ensure smooth traffic flow and address any congestion promptly. Security teams will actively monitor and address negative phenomena, including begging and illegal street vending, with necessary legal action taken against offenders.

Major General Al-Wuhaib stressed that no illegal behavior will be tolerated, and these measures aim to maintain public order and preserve a safe and civilized environment.

He emphasized that the Ministry of Interior will not tolerate any negative behaviors or actions that violate the law, stressing the importance of refraining from publicly breaking the fast during Ramadan.

Major General Al-Wuhaib explained that the law punishes those who eat or drink in public during the fasting period with a fine and/or imprisonment for a period not exceeding one month. The penalty also applies to anyone who compels, incites, or assists in such public displays, with the possibility of closing the public establishment used for this purpose for up to two months.



Photo by Rizq Tawfiq

Ready ... Fire! The Ramadan cannon, known as the 'Midfa al-Iftari', is fired daily to announce the end of a day-long fast by Muslims.

Mol hosts Ramadan Futsal tourney

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The first Ramadan Futsal Tournament of the Ministry of Interior, organized by the Police Sports Federation in cooperation with the Public Relations and Security Media General Department, is being held under the patronage of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef.

Brigadier General Abdulmohsen Al-Akash, Director of the General Directorate of Force Affairs, announced that the Police Federation Central Market is sponsoring this event.

Al-Akash pointed out that this sponsorship is in line with the commitment of the Board of Directors of the Police Federation

Central Market to shoulder their social responsibility and to support sports and cultural initiatives.

He said this support aims to strengthen bonds and enhance communication among the ministry personnel and the community, in line with the vision of the leadership on the role of the ministry in serving society.

He affirmed that the Ramadan tournament is a model for promoting friendship and cooperation through competitive sports and cultural activities, while reinforcing the values of mutual respect and sportsmanship.

He also stressed that such events play a vital role in consolidating the concept of community partnership and encouraging the adoption of a healthy lifestyle through sports, thereby, benefiting the individuals and society as a whole.

Kuwait consulate in Houston marks National Days

WASHINGTON, Feb 19, (KUNA): The General Consulate of the State of Kuwait in Houston held a celebratory event marking the 65th National Day and the 35th Liberation Day of Kuwait.

The consulate extended its highest congratulations and blessings to 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, His Highness the Prime Minister Ahmad Abdulla Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti people.

The consulate also announced February 25 as a Friendship Day between Houston and Kuwait, reinforcing cultural ties and cooperation, while highlighting Kuwait's national heritage, achievements, and the longstanding strategic partnership between the two communities.

diwaniya

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

'Reorganize and discover a new you in Holy Month'

"BLESSED Ramadan to you all, and many happy returns. I pray to God Almighty to keep your days always happy and blessed, and to make our homeland safe, secure, prosperous, and abundant," Imam and preacher Mohammad Al-Fawzan wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"One day, I was heedless and disobedient, keeping the company of bad friends and enjoying their presence, believing they entertained and amused me.

"We all thought that prayer was only for the elderly and that fasting had no meaning. We were disobedient, missing the sweetness of faith and the peace of the heart. When I heard the call to prayer, my heart would soften and I would try to change the course of my life, but my bad companions would follow me and distract me from achieving my goal.

"One day, while passing by a large mosque, I noticed a crowd of cars parked around it. The drivers were getting out, eagerly heading toward the mosque, their faces radiant with joy and happiness. I wondered what the reason was. Was it a celebration, a lecture by a respected sheikh, or a religious occasion?

"I stopped someone and asked, 'What's going on?' He replied, surprised, 'Today is the first of Ramadan, and people are heading to the mosque.' At that moment, I heard the call to prayer. The sound was so sweet, as if I were hearing it for the first time. A wonderful feeling drew me into the mosque. I went to where the imam was sitting, greeted him, and asked, 'Uncle, is this where you pray Taraweeh, Friday prayers, and the five daily prayers?'

"I shared my story with the imam, explaining that I was a young man who had disobeyed God for many years, and I asked if there was any way to repent and atone for the great sins I had committed.

"The sheikh said, 'Of course, my son. I saw in your eyes your determination to repent.' After we finished praying, I sat with the sheikh so he could teach and guide me, and I listened carefully to his advice.

"I followed his instructions and began memorizing the Quran until I had memorized it completely and perfectly. I even received a valuable prize in a Quran recitation competition, and all praise is due to Allah, who guided me.

"I am happy in my life after receiving this guidance. I have reorganized my life. Ramadan is a school for time management and for investing time in what brings me closer to Allah.

"Ramadan has arrived, so what will you do, O Muslim? Have you prepared your spiritual plan? What is your program for reading and memorizing the Quran? Will you maintain your prayers in the mosque? If you struggle with smoking, Ramadan is an opportunity to quit this harmful habit.

"Quit smoking before it is too late. Ramadan is an opportunity to reorganize your life, to get closer to your distant dreams, and to discover the goodness and virtue within you. Ramadan is a chance to train yourself to control your desires. I ask Allah to grant us all the ability to be grateful to Him, to thank Him, and to worship Him properly during Ramadan."

Also:

"The month of Ramadan has arrived, bringing with it mercy, forgiveness, and salvation from Hellfire. Ramadan is not merely a month on the calendar, but it is a great season for renewing our covenant with God and a priceless opportunity for those who wish to cleanse their hearts and purify them from the stains of sin and heedlessness," journalist Hamed Al-Hamli wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"The most beautiful way to welcome this blessed guest is not only by decorating our homes and preparing our tables, but also by refining and purifying our hearts. Many people fast physically while their hearts remain filled with resentment, hatred, and envy.

"Many spend long hours of the night in prayer yet fail to refrain from backbiting and gossip. God does not look at our bodies or outward appearances; rather, He looks at our hearts and our deeds.

"To purify our hearts, we need sincere repentance. Let each of us hold ourselves accountable, resolve to abandon sin, and put an end to any injustice we may be committing.

"Turn to God with a contrite heart, repentant and determined to give up sin. Repentance is like a key that unlocks the doors of mercy.

"God Almighty says, 'And turn to God in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed.'

"We must purify our hearts of malice. Do not enter Ramadan with resentment in your heart toward a brother or sister, neighbor, or relative. Take the initiative to apologize, begin



Mohammad Al-Fawzan

with peace, and offer forgiveness.

"The most beautiful adornment of Ramadan is a heart free from hatred. Remember that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) praised the companion Abu Dhamdhan because he would not sleep until he had forgiven those who had wronged him; his heart was pure and white.

"Make Ramadan the beginning of a new chapter with everyone.

"Let's make this Ramadan different from previous years. Make your fasting, prayers, recitation of the Holy Quran, and charity purely for the sake of God. Intention is the essence of action, and through it, ordinary deeds are transformed into great acts of worship.

"Get into the habit of reducing your food intake during the last days of Sha'ban, the month preceding Ramadan. Reducing food consumption softens the heart and nurtures humility and supplication.

"Organize your time and dedicate a clear portion to the Holy Quran and remembrance of God. Do not let Ramadan pass haphazardly. Create a daily schedule that structures your worship and your drawing closer to God. Let us seize this opportunity and honor this month with pure hearts, tranquil souls, and righteous deeds."

□ □ □

"For the past three weeks, I have been immersed in reading and writing, deleting and adding, researching and refining a literary text, a critical essay. I never expected that such long hours of intense concentration over consecutive days could affect my health. On the fourth day, I felt dizzy, my vision blurred, I was short of breath, and I became nauseous," Kuwaiti writer Hussein Al-Rawi wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"After examining me at his clinic, a doctor friend explained that prolonged, uninterrupted concentration exhausts the brain and body, causing headaches, tension, fatigue, weakened immunity, and sleep disturbances. This condition is medically known as 'mental fatigue.' It is a real condition that many writers and critics experience when they push their brains to the limits of continuous, unbalanced focus. Like a muscle, the brain accumulates metabolic byproducts, such as glutamate, during prolonged cognitive effort, increasing the 'cost' of mental control. The body then begins to send signals to stop, including headaches, dizziness, tummy upset, and shortness of breath. My doctor friend advised me to take a three-day break from reading and writing and to avoid any thoughts related to the article.

"I diligently followed this advice and didn't touch the article for the entire break. People take time off work for travel and leisure, and I took a break from reading and writing to reconnect with them in a healthy and positive way. A colleague who had moved to Norway introduced me to the Pomodoro Technique, a time management method developed by Francesco Cirillo, an Italian software developer and entrepreneur.

"He created the technique during his university studies in the late 1980s, inspired by a tomato-shaped timer (pomodoro in Italian). The method involves 25-minute periods of focused work followed by a five-minute break, and after four cycles, a longer break of 15–30 minutes. It helps boost concentration, reduce cognitive fatigue, and break large tasks, such as writing a critical essay, into smaller, manageable units. To apply this technique, define one clear task for each period, use a simple timer, and avoid interruptions, with the option to extend the duration to 35–40 minutes when in-depth writing is required. This method proved invaluable when I returned to complete the article later. Interestingly, this critical essay went through several drafts due to constant revisions and new ideas that emerged with each review.

"I gave my drafts different names to distinguish them and avoid confusion: the Apple Draft, the Grape Draft, the Potato Draft, the Jewel Draft, the Diamond Draft, and finally, the Dhofar Draft. It seems the Dhofar Draft marked the point where much of the article was completed. Ultimately, I realized that writing, whether critical or creative, is not a race to finish at any cost, but a long-term process that requires care and attention.

"The brain, like any living organ, needs rest to come back stronger. Those drafts, from 'The Apple' to 'Dhofar' aren't just playful names, but testaments to the fact that persistence requires balance; otherwise, it can become self-destructive. Perhaps the greatest lesson is that cognitive exhaustion is not a weakness of will, but a signal from the body that creativity thrives within limits, not beyond them."

— Compiled by Simi K. Kutty



PM Diwan photo
His Highness the Prime Minister and Chairman of the Supreme Defense Council Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chairs the meeting.

PM and Supreme Defense Council discuss scenario

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19, (KUNA): His Highness the Prime Minister and Chairman of the Supreme Defense Council Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chaired on Thursday a meeting of the Supreme Defense

Council at Bayan Palace to discuss the most recent regional developments.

The council members followed the coordination by authorities to ensure swift action and enhance their level of preparedness.

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: An expatriate has been accused of breach of trust for allegedly selling two iPhones and replacing a 75-inch company-issued TV with a smaller, lower-quality model, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to security sources, the management of a local company, through its lawyer, filed a report at the Kaifan Police

Station, accusing a former employee of misappropriating company property after his contract expired and his employment ended.

The company had entrusted the employee with an American-made vehicle, a 75-inch Korean-brand TV, two iPhones, and a SIM card as part of his official duties three years ago.

Retired expat in breach of trust

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: An expatriate has been accused of breach of trust for allegedly selling two iPhones and replacing a 75-inch company-issued TV with a smaller, lower-quality model, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to security sources, the management of a local company, through its lawyer, filed a report at the Kaifan Police

Station, accusing a former employee of misappropriating company property after his contract expired and his employment ended.

The company had entrusted the employee with an American-made vehicle, a 75-inch Korean-brand TV, two iPhones, and a SIM card as part of his official duties three years ago.

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The Criminal Court, presided over by Judge Ahmad Al-Saadi sentenced a famous female artist (a 'fashionista') and her husband to three years in prison, the implementation of which is suspended for a similar period.

The couple was convicted of smuggling and consuming narcotics. The court obligated each of them to pay KD1,000 bail, maintain good conduct for the duration of the suspension of the implementation of the sentence, and pay a fine of KD2,000 each.

Moreover, court acquitted them on the charge of failing to declare \$26,705 at Kuwait International Airport, citing insufficient evidence.

The judgment is still subject to appeal within the legal timeframe.

□ □ □

Awareness campaign: In cooperation with the National Guard, the Ministry of Education

19 driving sans license

Crackdown on traffic 'violators' intensified

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The General Traffic Department and the General Directorate of Emergency Police have been carrying out traffic and security campaigns across the country to apprehend violators and lawbreakers, and to respond promptly to reports and incidents, ensuring the protection of lives and property and upholding the rule of law, reports Al-Anba daily.

The campaigns conducted between February 5 and February 13 resulted in the referral of 19 juveniles to the Juvenile Prosecution for driving without a license, the arrest of 45 reckless drivers, the issuance of 24,855 various traffic citations, the apprehension of 122 wanted individuals, and the handling of 1,588 accidents, ranging from minor incidents causing only material damage to those involving injuries or fatalities.

According to official statistics, traffic officers issued 22,970 various traffic citations, impounded 322 vehicles and 59 motorcycles, apprehended 38 individuals with expired residency permits, and detained 58 wanted persons for absconding or outstanding arrest warrants. They also impounded 20 vehicles wanted by the courts.

Also, traffic officers responded to 205 collisions resulting in injuries and 1,258 collisions without injuries.

Meanwhile, emergency police officers apprehended 64 wanted individuals and issued 1,885 traffic citations.

PACI announces work time during Ramadan

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) has set the official working hours for receiving visitors and issuing civil ID cards during the holy month of Ramadan, as part of its commitment to providing efficient and organized services to citizens and residents, while taking into account the special nature of the holy month, reports Al-Anba daily.

It announced that Kuwaiti citizens will be received during the morning from 10:00 am to 1:30 pm, and non-Kuwaiti residents will be received in the afternoon from 2:00 pm to 4:30 pm.

Passing gates must

How to detect radiation traces at border posts?

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The Director General of General Customs Administration, Yousef Khaled Al-Nuwaif, issued customs instructions on the operation of radiation screening gates, in accordance with laws and regulations related to nuclear and radiation security, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to Customs Instruction No. 11/2026, Article 1 mandates the continuous and effective operation of radiation screening gates at all customs ports. Goods, vehicles, and containers must be inspected using these gates and other supporting equipment.

Article 2 prohibits stopping, disabling, or bypassing the radiation screening gates except in emergency technical situations, and only after notifying the relevant liaison officer at the Radiation Protection Department of the Ministry of Health, with proper documentation following established procedures.

Article 3 outlines the procedures to be followed in the event of radiation detection:

1. Immediately stop the vehicle or shipment.
2. Verify, through the customs declaration, that the shipment does not contain naturally occurring radioactive materials.
3. Ensure the vehicle driver has not been exposed to radiation.
4. Confirm a positive alarm using a portable radiation detector.
5. Isolate and secure the vehicle or shipment in accordance with physical protection and radiation safety requirements.
6. Notify the designated liaison officer at the Radiation Protection Department of the Ministry of Health.
7. Do not release the shipment until official written approval is received from the competent authority.
8. Prepare an official report of the incident and file it in the approved records.

supporting and implementing high-quality national initiatives that strengthen national identity and cultivate student awareness.

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'Acquire fire blankets': The Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) has urged citizens and residents to obtain fire blankets as a fast and effective way to deal with small household fires, particularly kitchen fires caused by burning oil, reports Al-Anba daily.

Director of Public Relations and Media at KFF, Brigadier General Mohammed Al-Gharib, explained that fire blankets are essential safety equipment in homes. They work by covering the fire and cutting off its oxygen supply, extinguishing it quickly and preventing it from spreading.

Brigadier General Al-Gharib stressed the importance of not using water to put out oil fires, as this can cause the flames to spread and intensify.

He noted that keeping a fire blanket in the kitchen can help minimize material damage and injuries, and allows individuals to act quickly until firefighters arrive.

Brigadier General Al-Gharib reiterated the need to follow safety guidelines and to contact the Emergency No. 112 in the event of any incident.

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Hawally water project awaits nod

MEW pushes ahead with power expansion

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy has moved forward with the tender for the construction, completion, maintenance and development of Hawally Water Distribution Complex, requesting approval from the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) to award the contract to the lowest bidder who met the requirements at a cost of KD42.268 million.

This request was made during the meeting of the Agency on Feb 11, following the completion of the preliminary budget.

The ministry submitted the required approval letter from the Ministry of Finance -- a prerequisite under applicable laws and procedures for the Agency's sign-off.

The CAPT Board of Directors authorized the preparation of a preliminary budget, in line with Article 60 of Public Tenders Law No. 49/2016, and instructed the entity to select the lowest bidder and submit its final recommendation within 10 working days.

This is essential in achieving the goal of the ministry to increase freshwater storage capacity by 66 million gallons per day, boosting potable water pumping rates to 54.5 million gallons per day, and elevating brackish water pumping to 23.5 million gallons per day.

The Hawally Water Distribution Complex is a vital facility serving one of the most densely populated governorates, and the anticipated development is expected to resolve the chronic issue of weak water pressure in the network, particularly during the high-demand summer months, thus, ensuring water availability and good pumping power for citizens and expatriates round the clock.

Meanwhile, the continuous rise in global turbine prices is expected to affect the cost of planned power generation projects in the coming period, say reliable sources.

Sources confirmed that despite these challenges, the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy remains committed to completing projects aimed at increasing its production capacity in order to meet the growing demand for electricity.

Sources said this step is being taken amid a backlog of purchase orders at international turbine manufacturers, which are witnessing heightened demand due to the global shift toward highly efficient combined cycle power plants.

Sources added that the ministry is working hard to boost its production capacity in anticipation of new housing and major development projects.

Sources said the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) estimated that the electricity needs of three new housing projects will total around 16,000 megawatts, in addition to the need to meet peak consumption during the summer season.

Sources disclosed that the ministry signed the contract for North Zour Power Plant - Phases Two and Three, and it is now waiting for the financial closure of Kharain Power Plant-Phase One, prior to awarding the

contract to the selected investor.

Sources stated that the ministry is also waiting for the approval of its finance counterpart regarding the financial support clause for the Subiya Power Plant-Phase Four, which is expected to generate 900 megawatts.

In a related development, the ministry indicated that it is currently reviewing bids for the first phase of Shagaya Renewable Energy Park, which has a production capacity of 1,100 megawatts.

It is also awaiting the closing of bids for the second phase of the same project, with a capacity of 500 megawatts, before proceeding to award the contract to the winning investor.

Sources explained that the gas turbine market experienced substantial changes in recent years due to rising raw material costs, supply chain disruptions, and growing demand from Asian and European markets.

Moreover, major manufacturers are currently operating at near-maximum production capacity, with delivery timelines in some cases extending for several years.

This situation could restrict future flexibility in negotiations over both pricing and delivery schedules, particularly if the expansion plans of the ministry coincide with new regional or global surges in demand.

Sources recommended accelerating tendering and contract-awarding procedures and securing supply agreements in a timely manner.

Sources added that such measures will help the ministry and other relevant entities avoid escalating project implementation costs and will enable contractors to adhere more effectively to the timelines in order to meet the steadily increasing demand for energy.

Continued from Page 1

FM represents

The Peace Council was established following the Gaza ceasefire, with its chair stating that its objectives include promoting peace in the besieged territory, coordinating humanitarian assistance, and supporting recovery efforts through international cooperation and sustained financial commitments.

"We have the greatest leaders in the world joining the Board of Peace," Trump told reporters earlier this week. "I think it has the chance to be the most consequential board ever assembled of any kind."

The board was initiated as part of Trump's 20-point peace plan to end the conflict in Gaza.

But since the October ceasefire, Trump's vision for the board has morphed and he wants it to have an even more ambitious remit - one that will not only complete the Herculean task of bringing lasting peace between Israel and Hamas but will also help resolve conflicts around the globe.

But ahead of the board's first gathering, the Gaza ceasefire deal remains fragile and Trump's expanded vision for it has triggered fears the U.S. president is looking to create a rival to the United Nations. Trump earlier this week said he hoped the board would push the U.N. to "get on the ball."

"The United Nations has great potential," he said. "They haven't lived up to the potential."

More than 40 countries and the European Union

have confirmed they will send officials to Thursday's meeting, according to a senior administration official who was not authorized to comment publicly. Germany, Italy, Norway and Switzerland are among more than a dozen countries that have not joined the board but are expected to attend as observers, the official said.

The U.N. Security Council held a high-level meeting Wednesday on the ceasefire deal and Israel's efforts to expand control in the West Bank. The U.N. session in New York was originally scheduled for Thursday but was moved up after Trump announced the board's meeting for the same date and it became clear that it would complicate travel plans for diplomats planning to attend both.



Hans-Christian Freiherren von Reibnitz, German Ambassador to Kuwait



Tuba Nur Sönmez, Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait



Mazen Abu Al-Hassan, Chief of Mission for IOM in Kuwait



Ali Bin Issa, Ambassador of Morocco to Kuwait



Armen Arakelyan, Ambassador of Armenia to Kuwait



Qudsi Rasheed, British Ambassador to Kuwait



Sinan Al-Majali, Ambassador of Jordan to Kuwait



Ayub Khan Yunusov, Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Kuwait



Ioannis Platas, Greek Ambassador to Kuwait

National unity and progress hailed

Diplomats congratulate Kuwait on Ramadan and national milestones

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: Ambassadors and heads of diplomatic missions in the country continued to express their greetings on the occasion of the 65th National Day and the 35th Liberation Day, asserting that these milestones prove the resilience and determination that define this esteemed nation and its people.

They also commended the development achievements of Kuwait and its prominent humanitarian role.

Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the State of Kuwait, Hans-Christian Freiherren von Reibnitz stated "the State of Kuwait is celebrating its 65th National Day and 35th Liberation Day. These two occasions affirm the resilience and determination of this dear country and its generous people. The liberation of Kuwait 35 years ago marked a pivotal chapter in its modern history, as it restored its sovereignty with the support of an expansive international coalition. Kuwait subsequently embarked on a confident and steadfast path of reconstruction and development, continuing its progress with firm steps toward a promising future. I wish Kuwait continuous security and stability."

Turkish Ambassador Tuba Sönmez stressed that the National Day and Liberation Day are cherished national occasions, reflecting the unity, resilience and commitment of the Kuwaiti people to preserve their sovereignty and stability.

She said "we remember with utmost reverence the souls of those who lost their lives during the 1990 invasion, a defining moment in the region's history. The Republic of Turkey stood firmly by Kuwait from the earliest moments of the crisis."

She reiterated her greetings and expressed wishes for the permanent security, prosperity and progress of Kuwait, affirming that Turkey will always stand by Kuwait, as it has been doing consistently.

Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia Arsen Arakelyan stated that he is proud of the deep-rooted ties between the Republic of Armenia and the State of Kuwait, underscoring his country's commitment to strengthen bilateral cooperation in various fields in a manner that serves mutual interests and reinforces the friendship between the two nations.

He confirmed that the humanitarian values embedded in the holy month of Ramadan are considered a valuable opportunity to promote intercultural understanding and dialogue, praising the spiritual and social atmosphere that distinguishes the holy month in Kuwait.

Head of Mission of the International Organization for Migration Mazen Abu Al-Hassan commended the unwavering support of Kuwait for humanitarian causes at the regional and international levels.

He stated that the strong partnership between the organization and Kuwait is built upon decades of cooperation, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to serve humanity, wishing the country continuous progress and prosperity.

Ambassador of the Kingdom of Morocco Ali Ibn Issa pointed out that the National Day and Liberation Day celebrations coinciding with the holy month of Ramadan carries profound symbolism and reflects the depth of shared Arab and Islamic values that unite the Kingdom of Morocco and the State of Kuwait, at the leadership and popular levels.

He added that these occasions highlight the journey of a nation founded on the principles of wisdom and balance, which established itself as a stable and influential State regionally and internationally, guided by a forward-looking vision that puts human development at the forefront of its priorities.

He also emphasized that relations between the two brotherly countries are rooted in constructive cooperation, solidarity, and a unified stance on Arab and Islamic issues.

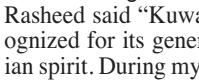
British Ambassador to Kuwait Qudsi



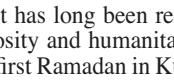
Apostolic Nuncio to Kuwait, Archbishop Eugene Martin Nugent



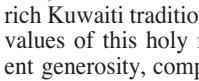
Emil Karimov, Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Kuwait



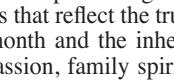
Mazen Abu Al-Hassan



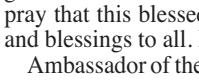
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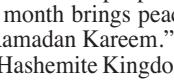
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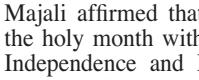
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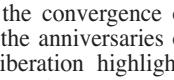
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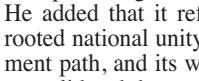
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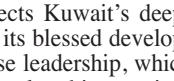
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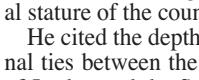
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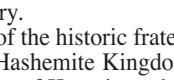
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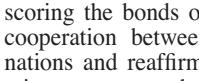
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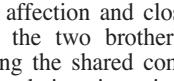
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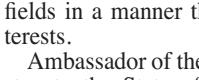
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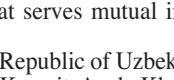
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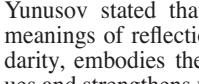
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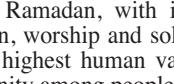
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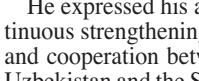
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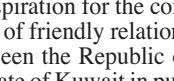
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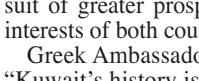
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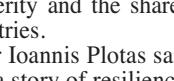
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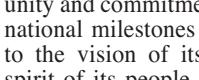
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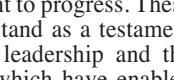
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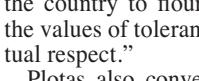
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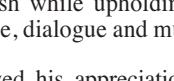
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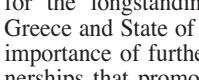
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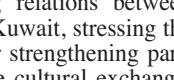
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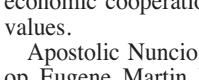
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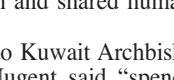
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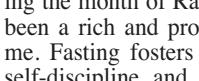
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Kuwait prepares

He stressed that the ongoing citizenship forgery investigation has no time limit, with new cases being uncovered regularly by the higher committee.

He confirmed that the new Citizenship Law is expected this February, designed to resolve the status of several existing categories.

He clarified that the new system will not grant Kuwaiti citizenship to the current population of illegal residents (stateless persons).

Addressing domestic progress, he affirmed that major development projects resumed at full speed, including a three-year plan to repave roads and the weekly monitoring of stalled projects.

He added that the rigorous campaigns against corruption, money laundering, and drug trafficking are ongoing.

He mentioned that two major corruption cases, involving high and low-ranking officials, are currently under investigation, revealing instances of bribery and embezzlement among government employees.

He said drug cases now subject to unprecedented scrutiny following the enactment of what he described as a "most stringent and severe" law.

Following are excerpts of the interview:

Question: How many citizenship revocation decrees were issued last year and this year?

Answer: We had Article Eight, which pertains to the wives of Kuwaiti citizens, those who performed distinguished service and forgers. Last year, we concluded the Article Eight case. More than 60 percent have regained their original citizenship. The directives of HH the Amir were clear: those under Article Eight who were Kuwaiti citizens and have regained their original citizenship retain all the rights they enjoy as Kuwaiti citizens, living in Kuwait with permanent residency, as long as they wish to reside in Kuwait.

Regarding the distinguished service, we finished that one week ago, and they still enjoy the same privileges.

Article Eight differs from the privileges of the distinguished service category. This stage was completed through the last Amiri decree issued on this regard a week ago.

The issue of citizenship forgers remains. Every week we discover new cases. The Supreme Committee for Citizenship meets every two to three weeks. It is impossible for a session to be without discussions of the activities of forgers. Many of them have fled Kuwait because they realized they were being discovered. Some took half their families out of Kuwait, while others live in Kuwait. I do not have a date for the completion of the forgery process.

Q: Have you reached a specific number?

A: The figures are not simple. At the

beginning of our work as a citizenship committee, we used to put the numbers, and then we were satisfied with putting the cases whose citizenship was withdrawn, and the numbers are in the official gazette, Kuwait Al-Youn.

We do not withdraw citizenship without announcing the names or numbers. In order to prevent becoming a public opinion issue, we put all the categories in Amiri decrees that are published in the official gazette.

From one family with a single name, we reached 650 in a week, and within two months we will reach 1,060 from one person, all with fictitious affiliations. One uses his real name with six or seven wives. Only one wife has real children, and the rest are given fake names to have children who then obtain Kuwaiti citizenship. The Kuwaiti citizenship process in the past was not as rigorous as it is now.

In approximately two years, let us say two committees a month, we have reached over 33 meetings of the Higher Committee for Citizenship. This is unprecedented in the history of Kuwait.

There is only one reason – the forgers we are uncovering. The forgery cases are so egregious that even a movie would not make sense the way people were forging documents.

Q: Have you restructured the distinguished services or abolished them entirely?

A: Honestly, there are no 'distinguished deeds' in the new Citizenship Law. There is no such thing as a 'distinguished deed' except for 'martyrdom,' which is a given and will have its own specific article regarding naturalization.

Q: What is the current status of those whose citizenships were revoked, especially if they do not hold another citizenship? Will they be excluded from Kuwait?

A: A large portion of those who performed 'distinguished deeds' are doctors and engineers. They all had other citizenship. When they got Kuwaiti citizenship for 'distinguished deeds,' they surrendered their original passports. Many of them rectified their status quickly – within a week.

As for those residing illegally, Kuwait and the government are working diligently with several countries to obtain citizenship for them.

However, their residency and work are in Kuwait. I reiterate that His Highness said they will enjoy all the rights they had in Kuwait, regardless of any other citizenship they hold while living in Kuwait.

Q: What about the children of those who performed 'distinguished deeds' and held sensitive positions in the government?

A: Every country only employs its own citizens in sensitive positions, whether for important work or not. Even those who are not originally from Kuwait, their children fill sensitive positions. This is true everywhere, not just in Kuwait. The children of Kuwaitis fill

sensitive positions.

The Citizenship Law – after a long period of deliberations between committees and its presentation to the Cabinet, and with some observations – will be ready, God willing, within February.

Q: Is the stateless person file included in the Citizenship Law? Is there a solution for them, or have we forgotten their file?

A: There is no such thing as a stateless person becoming Kuwaiti. This matter was settled in the new Citizenship Law, which abolished several existing categories of citizenship.

The stateless persons file has been closed for a long time. Those who are stateless should know that we are working to resolve this, but Kuwait is not willing to let them live without identity.

If they do live without identity, they cannot travel or work. God willing, this week or next week, the Minister of Foreign Affairs will be traveling to several countries that have expressed their willingness to provide us with quotas.

Q: What are these countries?

A: We are not certain at this moment, but around five or six countries have promised us good things. I do not want to talk about them now.

God willing, the issue will be resolved.

The stateless population exists in every Gulf country, and each country has its own approach to resolving it. God willing, we will find a solution that suits both Kuwait and them.

Q: What is your personal opinion on how many development projects you have revived?

A: I challenge any Kuwaiti to say they have not noticed the development. All Kuwaitis used to feel their cars getting damaged on the roads. Today, we have a three-year plan to resurface every meter of road in Kuwait so that its streets become respectable, like those in developed countries. Two years ago, you could not drive on the streets, driving in the desert was better than driving on the streets of a country like Kuwait.

Every Kuwaiti has noticed the roads. In the past, we suffered from 100 percent of the road problems, now we suffer from 50 percent. Every day, we see improvements to the roads and all the ground services.

Regarding development projects, HH the Prime Minister meets with half the Cabinet every Thursday to follow up the projects.

We have stalled projects in the Ministry of Interior. We have projects that were delayed by contractors, but the follow-up was not as thorough as it is today.

There are also projects that have been completed, and the length of the project has been extended.

The Justice Palace, one of the stalled projects, was opened a year ago in the presence of His Highness the Crown Prince.

The Mubarak Port project, one of the largest development projects in Kuwait,

was signed a month ago by the government with one of the largest Chinese companies, and they will start work in April.

There are also residential buildings that have been constructed recently. Kuwait Airport, which previously had an unknown opening date, now has a known date that is not far off.

We have projects that have been opened in the Ministry of Health, such as the Maternity and Child Hospital in Adan and the Cancer Hospital, one of the largest hospitals in the Middle East, as well as other huge hospitals with a large number of beds.

Some of these hospitals, including the Cancer Hospital, had agreement signed with one of the largest cancer treatment hospitals in France in the presence of His Highness the Amir, who met with them personally during his visit to France.

On corruption and money laundering, he asserted "I believe Kuwait is committed to combating corruption."

Q: What about corruption, money laundering and the money of celebrities?

A: I believe Kuwait has a clear vision for combating corruption. We do not have a Ritz-Carlton in Kuwait, but we do have a central prison where celebrities are held. A large number of celebrities have been summoned, and we are opening their files.

The Financial Investigations Unit is one of the most distinguished units working to uncover money laundering. We discover money laundering cases every week, involving large sums of money. A large number of those involved are in prison.

We are talking about sums of 20, 30, 40 and even 100 million in money laundering operations, and all of them are in prison. Those who are detained are detained, and those who have been sentenced have been sentenced.

Corruption exists in Kuwait in various forms. Bribery is practiced by some government employees. Today, I have two major corruption cases under investigation by the time the episode airs during Ramadan. These cases are of great concern to His Highness the Amir and to me personally.

Unfortunately, we are uncovering cases of bribery and embezzlement among some government employees. These cases are still under investigation, and the crimes have been proven. Some of those involved are still at large, including former officials, both high-ranking and low-ranking, some of whom are fugitives. They know who they are. Since the reform process began, those who knew they were corrupt have fled Kuwait.

It is not just one, two, or three people, but we will not remain silent. We are filing lawsuits against them and will request Interpol red notices.

His Highness the Amir affirms there is no one bigger than Kuwait. This is what encourages all the officers of the Ministry of Interior, and I am speechless with

gratitude for these people who are working tirelessly.

Q: What about the security campaigns against drugs?

A: A new anti-drug law has been passed. It is the most stringent and unique law in the world. Its impact is evident in the Ministry of Interior's fear of enforcing it because it's so harsh.

We have eliminated 90 percent of that smuggling from outside Kuwait. We have a new, modern security system installed on the borders that helps combat drug trafficking. If a smuggler is caught, it means execution.

The Minister of Justice is active, and the Judicial Council is helping to expedite cases. The faster the sentences are handed down, the more deterrent the punishments become.

Q: What about drug cases?

A: Raids are almost daily. Unfortunately, government lands and plots that are given as parks to people will not protect them. If you rent your place for drugs or immoral activities, we are taking action.

We are raiding large warehouses containing all kinds of drugs. Today, drugs are not only natural but also synthetic. We, in the Gulf countries, are blessed with abundance and prosperity.

We have reached advanced stages in combating drugs, and after the new drug law, families are helping us at this level.

We have methods for treating addiction, including personal follow-up. There is a shelter for treating addicts. They wear bracelets. We monitor them with the bracelets. They come to the hospital three days a week.

For two months, the withdrawal symptoms subsided, and they reintegrated into society.

Minors nabbed

These minors were found driving without a license, a traffic violation that poses a grave threat to their own safety as well as to the lives of others.

The apprehended minors were referred to the juvenile detention center to complete the necessary legal procedures.

The source underscored that these campaigns are part of a comprehensive strategy aimed at curbing the phenomenon of minors driving on public roads, given its serious repercussions on accident rates and injury statistics.

GTD urged parents to shoulder their responsibility by closely supervising their children and preventing them from driving vehicles.

It also emphasized that community cooperation is vital in supporting the efforts of traffic officers and in achieving the desired level of traffic discipline.

In other news, the Ministry of Interior announced the official working hours during the holy month of Ramadan for the General Traffic Department, the

General Department of Service Centers and the General Department of Nationality and Travel Documents, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement, the Ministry of Interior explained that the Traffic Licensing Department, the Traffic Violations Investigation Department, and the Driving Test Departments will operate from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm.

The Vehicle Inspection Departments will operate from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm.

The General Directorate of Service Centers will also operate in two shifts: from 10:00 am to 2:30 pm and from 7:00 pm to 11:30 pm.

The National Identity Centers will operate in two shifts daily - from 10:00 am to 2:30 pm and from 7:00 pm to 11:30 pm.

Kuwait court

The court established important constitutional and administrative principles, affirming that the rule of law, equality, and social justice require that administrative decisions be subject to oversight for their legality.

It confirmed that the administrative authority possesses inherent discretionary power in managing public funds and re-prioritizing spending in line with economic developments.

The court explained that Article 80 of the Social Security Law grants the Cabinet the discretionary power to award exceptional pensions, thereby creating a legal status. Consequently, this authority also has the power to review the value of such pensions to serve the public interest and maintain financial balance.

Protecting acquired legal statuses is not an absolute principle. Rather, it is permissible, as an exception, to modify their future effects when considerations of justice, the public interest, or the need to correct situations that violate the principle of equality so require.

The court found the reasons presented by the Cabinet, namely, reviewing areas of waste in the general budget, rationalizing spending, and ensuring fairness among those subject to the social security system, to be sufficient and valid justifications. These reasons give the decision a social dimension that maintains equality among similar positions, without any deviation or abuse of power.

The court affirmed that continuing to disburse the exceptional pensions at their previous value, despite changed financial circumstances, could place an undue burden on the public treasury, adding that this situation justifies adjustment without constituting a violation of acquired rights.

The court ruled that the contested decision was issued by the competent authority and was based on factual and legal grounds that justify it.



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SPECIAL REPORT



Kuwait's urban overhaul stirs traffic, economic debate

Relocation order puts private schools at crossroads

By Chaitali B. Roy
Special to the Arab Times

The government's decision to relocate private schools from residential neighbourhoods has triggered widespread concern, uncertainty, and frustration. For years, the possibility lingered over many well-established institutions like a Damocles' sword, raised but never brought down. This time, however, the decision appears resolute, with a firm deadline and renewed regulatory conditions that make postponement unlikely.

Education in Kuwait has long been more than a public service; it has been a pillar of national development. From the early Katateeb (traditional schools) to the establishment of Al Mubarakia School in 1911—the country's first formal school, education has shaped Kuwait's social and economic trajectory. Today, approximately 1,200 public and private schools serve more than 600,000 students. Of these, around 349,000 attend private schools. With a literacy rate of 97%, Kuwait stands as a regional example of educational advancement.

The recent municipal decision mandates the closure of private schools operating in residential areas by the end of the 2027–2028 academic year. New conditions require that relocation land be approved by the General Traffic Department and supported by a formal traffic impact study before handover. Officials argue that relocating schools will ease congestion, reduce noise, and improve safety in residential neighbourhoods—objectives aligned with broader urban planning reforms. This decision is likely to have far-reaching impacts, affecting not only schools and potentially their very existence but also the broader economy. Many families choose their homes based partly on proximity to schools. If schools are relocated away from residential neighbourhoods, families may reconsider their housing choices, potentially reducing demand in certain areas. In turn, this could influence property values across both established and outlying districts.

At face value, the recent ruling seems reasonable. Residential communities deserve thoughtful planning, reduced traffic strain, and improved safety. However, the question is not whether urban reform is necessary, but whether the chosen solution places disproportionate strain on institutions that have operated legally, responsibly, and with municipal approval for decades. Private schools that go back more than 4 decades are not temporary establishments occupying makeshift facilities. They are purpose-built campuses that were municipally approved and have functioned continuously for more than forty years. Over generations, they have educated thousands of Kuwaiti and expatriate students, many of whom now hold influential roles in Kuwait and abroad. These institutions have provided continuity through times of war, regional instability, and the COVID-19 pandemic, all without financial subsidy or state compensation.

For such schools, relocation is not a simple logistical shift; it is a complex and costly undertaking that affects infrastructure, staffing, student stability, and long-term planning. Securing land, obtaining approvals, designing facilities, and constructing campuses are multi-year processes that require substantial capital investment. "Two and a half years is hardly enough time to plan a new school campus, let alone to plan it and build it and that without even knowing where we are supposed to go," says Humam Dashti (name changed), director of the first private coeducational school in Kuwait to offer a British-style curriculum. The human dimension must also be considered. According to Fahad Al Garadi (name changed), a leading British-curriculum school in Kuwait in Salwa, approximately 55 per cent of private-school students are Kuwaitis, and this recent decision will also

have a strong impact on them.

Not everyone agrees that the relocation will benefit communities. According to Fahad Al Garadi, the decision risks undermining long-standing community structures. "Kuwait's residential neighbourhoods have long been home to private schools serving both Kuwaiti and expatriate families. These institutions are more than just classrooms; they are central hubs of community life, offering education, sporting activities, cultural programmes, and safe spaces for children to grow close to home. Yet, recent moves by the Municipality, in coordination with the Ministry of Education, to push these schools out of inner-city areas and into distant zones threaten to unravel decades of careful planning, community cohesion, and quality education."

Speaking of how this decision will affect a well-established British curriculum-based private school, which has been rooted in its neighbourhood for decades, Humam Dashti says, "It will be very difficult for our parents, most of whom are based in Kuwait City. Having been on this site for the past 53 years and in the greater Kuwait City area for 57 years - this relocation represents a significant disruption for our community. If we are allocated land within Kuwait City to construct a new campus, the impact would be far less severe than if we were moved to a distant area such as Jahra. Our school is deeply rooted in the city. We now teach students whose grandparents once attended the school, and the majority of our families continue to reside in Kuwait City."

From a different perspective, Saif Shamalan Al Musallam, a Kuwaiti businessman with professional interests in real estate, believes the government's move is justified. "Schools cause disruption for the people living in their neighbourhoods. I know a lot of people who have been suffering for years. I would not rent a house near a school," he says. "This is a good decision." But Al Garadi disputes the reasoning behind the relocation. He says, "The official argument that schools are causing traffic congestion and noise pollution is deeply flawed. The reality is that well-managed schools, operating within regulated time zones, do not create more strain than residential towers and apartment complexes that have been approved and expanded often without proper oversight. Many houses that were originally licensed for single-family occupancy, particularly in areas such as Salwa and Jabriya, have been converted into multiple apartments through lax enforcement or favouritism. This has dramatically increased traffic, energy, and water consumption." It is these types of developments not schools that are creating congestion, he argues. "Municipal authorities should focus on ensuring that homeowners revert to the original single-family licences or relocate multi-apartment living to designated commercial zones. Streets and road systems should also be properly planned and maintained, with the Ministry of Interior playing a stronger role in ensuring compliance with traffic rules, regulating parking, and supporting municipal planning. Suburbs like Shuweikh, Keifan, and Mansouriya demonstrate the benefits of well-designed roads and proper zoning."

Al Musallam, meanwhile, points to demographic realities. He notes that the highest population density is in southern Kuwait, where both locals and expatriates live in large numbers. According to him, "The affected schools should relocate to Mahboula because land prices remain affordable there. I know a person who wanted to build a school in Bneid Al Gar. However, 4,000 square metres of land in Bneid Al Gar is priced at 14 million dinars. Finding it very high, he moved towards Mahboula, where land is still affordable." He maintains that southern Kuwait is the logical destination for relocating schools. "The best bet is to lease the land, make another capital invest-

ment as needed, and return to operations. 4,000 square metres of land in southern Kuwait will cost approximately 7.5 million, so it's wiser to lease the land. Areas like Sabah Al Salem is exhausted." Location, however, may determine which schools are ultimately affected. According to a source who doesn't want to be named, "Salmiya, for example, is not a residential area, nor are parts of Jleeb Al Shuweikh and some other areas in Kuwait. Schools in these localities will not relocate." Al Musallam agrees, stating that schools in commercial areas will not have to relocate.

Ravi Ayanoli, Principal of FAIPS, one of Kuwait's largest Indian schools, located in Ahmadi offers a more balanced assessment. He says, "Relocating schools to purpose-built campuses ensures safer environments with appropriate infrastructure, better compliance with modern educational standards, and room for future expansion. Additionally, the move opens up opportunities for some institutions to evolve into boarding schools or comprehensive development centers, focusing not only on academics but also on holistic student growth through sports, arts, and life-skills education." At the same time, he acknowledges the practical challenges involved. "On the other hand, the decision presents several challenges for students, parents, and school management. Relocation may result in longer daily commutes for students and staff, increasing travel time, costs, and fatigue. The financial burden of acquiring land and building new infrastructure could strain school management and lead to higher school fees (especially for Indian schools, where fees have traditionally remained far lower than those of British or American schools). Moreover, schools often act as social and cultural anchors within neighborhoods, and their removal may weaken community bonds and reduce parental engagement. Concentrating many schools in designated zones could also shift, rather than solve, traffic congestion problems by creating new bottlenecks in those areas."

In theory this move, this would improve residents' quality of life, less noise from buses, horns, and announcements; reduced roadside crowding; and greater privacy and safety for families living nearby. Authorities argue that purpose-built campuses will provide adequate parking, safer bus circulation, and room for expansion, advantages that villa-based or space-constrained schools often lack. Yet the decision is not without significant drawbacks.

One major concern is reduced convenience for families. Many parents deliberately choose homes close to schools. Relocation could mean longer daily commutes, higher fuel costs, and more time lost in traffic, particularly for working parents placing additional strain on daily family life. There may also be economic consequences. Some residential areas especially villa zones known for school clusters and popular among expatriate families could lose part of their appeal. This may reduce rental demand and slow property price growth in affected neighbourhoods. Moreover, there is the risk that traffic congestion will simply shift rather than disappear. Concentrating multiple schools in designated zones could create new bottlenecks elsewhere. Sabah Al Salem already offers a glimpse of this possibility. "You should see how bad the traffic is at Sabah Al Salem in the mornings and afternoons," says Snehika Gupta (name changed), owner of a chain of Indian schools who resides in the area. In such cases, traffic problems are not solved but relocated.

Another pressing concern is cost. Relocation to approved zones often entails acquiring expensive land and constructing entirely new campuses. This implies higher operating costs, which could ultimately make education more expensive for fami-

lies. Schools will face significant construction expenses, infrastructure investment, and possible rent increases—costs that may inevitably be passed on through higher tuition fees. Fahad Al Garadi addresses this concern directly. "Private school owners, all Kuwaiti citizens, have operated under stringent financial controls, often maintaining fees at the same level for a decade while upholding international-quality education. Meanwhile, similar institutions across the GCC have adjusted fees to reflect economic realities. The unfair scrutiny and restrictive policies targeting Kuwaiti-owned private schools raise serious questions: why are these schools consistently penalised, suffocated, and treated as if they were the source of societal problems rather than as vital educational partners?"

Humam Dashti also highlights the financial implications of relocation. "Constructing a new campus is not cheap," he says. "It'll likely be in the millions, and so raising the capital, of course, will be an issue in terms of expenditure and will also affect operating costs. Student enrolment will be affected depending on where land is allocated. If the land is in a far-flung area, our profile might change." Alok Srivastav (name changed), Principal of an Indian school in Khaitan, says, "If they are shifting the schools, are they going to provide ready-made infrastructures for schools to shift? The key question is who will build the school's infrastructure? There is also worry about the new area getting crowded in the future. A lot of questions need answers." Shaheen, a parent whose child studies in the same Indian school, shares, "Truly speaking, this decision is going to affect a lot of families, not only financially. It poses a big dilemma. My husband and I are both working, so it's convenient to stay near the school. Financially, if a family has three children, it will need to cover transportation for all three. Moreover, it will be a big strain on the student to travel a long distance. Wherever they plan to move the school, it will, in time, transform into a residential area. What will they do after that?"

Compensation is another unresolved issue. According to the owners and management of these Kuwaiti-owned private schools, no clear support mechanisms have yet been communicated. "We have heard nothing yet about subsidies or support from the authorities," says Humam Dashti. "For now, we are waiting for updates and trying to get more details about the decision and how flexible it is."

Fahad Al Garadi raises a broader fairness argument. "If private landowners are displaced for public infrastructure projects, they are usually compensated fairly. So what compensation or plan exists for these schools, which have invested heavily in buildings and infrastructure while contributing immeasurably to Kuwait's social and economic fabric? Rather than penalising established schools, authorities should focus on correct urban planning, reviewing current homeowners' compliance with single-family occupancy rules, and expanding new residential zones responsibly."

Ultimately, the question is not simply whether schools should relocate, but how Kuwait chooses to balance urban reform with educational stability. Reducing congestion and improving residents' quality of life are legitimate goals. Yet schools are not temporary commercial ventures; they are long-standing institutions woven into the nation's social and economic fabric. Any policy that reshapes their future must weigh traffic flow against community continuity, infrastructure planning against generational legacy, and administrative efficiency against the lived realities of families. If reform is to succeed, it must be thoughtful, phased, and fair, ensuring that in solving one problem, the country does not inadvertently create several others.

Mayor Mamdani reboots homeless encampment sweeps in New York

NEW YORK, Feb 19, (AP): New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani says the city will resume clearing makeshift homeless encampments, promising to take a more humane approach to a practice he previously criticized.

Mamdani paused the previous mayor's policy for clearing encampments days after he took office in January, arguing that it did not do enough to get people into housing.

But the Democrat on Wednesday said his new approach - led by the city's homeless services department, rather than police, and involving days of sustained outreach - will be more successful.

"We will meet them looking to connect them with shelter, looking to them with services, looking to connect with a city that wants them to be sheltered and indoors and warm and safe. And that is something that I believe will yield far better results," he said at an unrelated news conference.

The decision came as at least 19 people have died outside over several days of brutal cold in the city, prompting concerns about the city's response. There is no evidence that anyone who died had been living in encampments, according to the mayor's office, which has conducted an aggressive campaign to coax homeless people into new shelters, heated buses and warming centers.

Still, the spate of outdoor deaths has posed an early test for the Mamdani administration, raising questions about whether the city could have done more and refocusing criticisms about the new mayor's relative lack of managerial experience.



Mamdani

US Democrats recruit popular content creators in new strategy to win back Latino voters

WASHINGTON, Feb 19, (AP): An evening rally to boost Democratic turnout for Texas' rapidly approaching primary featured plenty of the state party's political star power, but it was someone who won't be on a ballot who drew the most attention.

Carlos Eduardo Espina, a progressive political influencer who boasts more than 14 million followers on TikTok, mingled with lawmakers and took selfies with attendees who eagerly posted them online.

The Tuesday night gathering at a Houston Mexican restaurant was more than just a pre-primary rally. It also was a curtain-raiser of sorts for a campaign strategy Democrats hope will help them in this year's midterms and beyond.

Espina and nine other Houston influencers invited to the event are at the center of that strategy, which seeks to build a network of online content creators to better engage Latino voters after many of them gravitated toward



Election signs crowd an intersection near a polling place, in Austin, Texas on Feb 17. (AP)

Republicans two years ago.

Espina, who has promoted Democratic candidates and policies in the

ways to connect with voters outside of traditional campaign events.

"I do think there's a lot of failures in the past Democratic Party, but I think initiatives like this one are pretty cool," Espina said in an interview.

The strategy, developed by the Congressional Hispanic Caucus' political arm, is being rolled out in the Houston area as early voting begins for Texas' statewide primary on March 3. The idea is to capitalize on the popularity of local influencers and social media superstars such as Espina to more effectively spread Democrats' messaging to Latino voters.

Strategists hope to expand the effort, called "RUIDO" - Spanish for noise - which consists of a network of online content creators, into other competitive primary and general election races where Latino candidates and voters could prove decisive. However, leaders of the Hispanic Caucus PAC have yet to decide when or where to invest next.

North Korea's Kim deploys 50 new rocket launchers ahead of major party congress

Former South Korean president Yoon receives life sentence for imposing martial law

SEOUL, South Korea, Feb 19, (AP): Former South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol was sentenced to life in prison for his brief imposition of martial law in a dramatic culmination to the country's biggest political crisis in decades.

Yoon was ousted from office after a baffling attempt to overcome an opposition-controlled legislature by declaring martial law and sending troops to surround the National Assembly on Dec 3, 2024.

Judge Jee Kui-youn of the Seoul Central District Court said he found Yoon guilty of rebellion for mobilizing military and police forces in an illegal attempt to seize the liberal-led Assembly, arrest politicians and establish unchecked power for a "considerable" time.

Yoon's martial law imposition, the first of its kind in more than four decades, harkened back to South Korea's past military-backed governments when authorities occasionally proclaimed emergency decrees that allowed them to station soldiers, tanks and armored vehicles on streets or at public places such as schools to pre-

vent anti-government demonstrations. As lawmakers rushed to the National Assembly, Yoon's martial law command issued a proclamation declaring sweeping powers, including suspending political activities, controlling the media and publications, and allowing arrests without warrants.

The decree lasted about six hours before being lifted after a quorum of lawmakers managed to break through a military blockade and unanimously voted to lift the measure.

Yoon was suspended from office on Dec 14, 2024, after being impeached by lawmakers and was formally removed by the Constitutional Court in April 2025. He has been under arrest since last July while facing multiple criminal trials, with the rebellion charge carrying the most severe punishment.

Yoon Kap-keun, one of the former president's lawyers, accused Jee of issuing a "predetermined verdict" based solely on prosecutors' arguments and said the "rule of law" had collapsed. He said he would discuss whether to appeal with his client and the rest of



Supporters of former South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol stage a rally outside of Seoul Central District Court in Seoul, South Korea on Feb 19. A sign reads 'Not Guilty.' (AP)

the legal team.

Yoon Suk Yeol told the court the martial law decree was only meant to raise public awareness of how the liberals were paralyzing state affairs, and

that he was prepared to respect lawmakers if they voted against the measure.

Prosecutors said it was clear Yoon was attempting to disable the legislature and prevent lawmakers from lifting the martial law. Yoon's critics gathered nearby, demanding the death penalty.

There were no immediate reports of major clashes following the verdict.

A special prosecutor had demanded the death penalty for Yoon Suk Yeol, saying his actions posed a threat to the country's democracy and deserved the most serious punishment available, but most analysts expected a life sentence since the poorly-planned power grab did not result in casualties.

Also:

SEOUL, South Korea: North Korea said Thursday leader Kim Jong Un held a ceremony to unveil the deployment of 50 new launch vehicles for nuclear-capable short-range missiles threatening rival South Korea as he flaunted his expanding military capabilities ahead of a major ruling party congress.

In a separate statement, Kim's sister, who is a key foreign policy official, acknowledged a South Korean minister's apology regarding alleged civilian drone incursions, but said the North is bolstering border security against the "enemy" South.



Rescue workers load a body into an ambulance after recovering it from the rubble following a gas explosion at an apartment building, in Karachi, Pakistan on Feb 19. (AP)

Gas explosion kills 16 in Pakistan apartment building

A gas explosion ripped through an apartment building in Pakistan's largest port city of Karachi on Thursday, killing at least 16 people, including women and children, and injuring several others after part of the structure collapsed, police and rescue officials said.

The explosion happened when people were preparing a pre-dawn meal on the first day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan in a residential area of Karachi, the capital of Sindh province, local police chief Rizwan Patel said. Rescuers were still removing rubble to search for any survivors trapped under the debris, he added.

The death toll was initially reported at 13 but Patel said it rose to 16 after three more bodies were pulled out from the rubble.

Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari expressed sorrow and condolences to the victims' families and directed authorities to ensure the best possible treatment for the injured. He also called for a swift completion of rescue operations and urged the Sindh provincial government to enforce building codes, check gas cylinder safety and conduct a thorough inquiry to help prevent similar incidents. (AP)

Balcázar becomes Peru's eighth president in decade

LIMA, Peru, Feb 19, (AP): Peru's Congress late Wednesday elected legislator José María Balcázar as the country's eighth president in a decade, replacing another interim leader who was ousted the previous day over corruption allegations just four months into his term.

Balcázar, an 83-year-old former judge representing the leftist Perú Libre party, defeated three other candidates with a majority of the 130-member legislature.

The revolving-door presidency in Peru reflects a political crisis fueled by a lack of legislative majorities for leaders. Lawmakers have frequently used a broad interpretation of a constitutional article regarding "permanent moral incapacity" to remove sitting presidents.

Balcázar, a retired judge with nearly 30 years of experience in the judiciary, was sworn in shortly after the vote by the president of the Congress, Fernando Rospigliosi.

He will govern for five months before handing over power to the winner of upcoming elections. Peruvians will choose a new president and legislature on April 12. If no presidential candidate receives more than 50% of the vote, the two front-runners will advance to a runoff in June.

Balcázar's successor will confront a surge in murders and extortion that continues to devastate small business owners and the working class.

Various political groups are demanding firm guarantees for a transparent election.



In this photo released by Peru's Congress, Jose Balcázar addresses lawmakers after Congress elected him interim president in Lima, Peru on Feb 18. (AP)

Balcázar told journalists that he will ensure that the upcoming elections are "unquestionable," that macroeconomic policies will remain unchanged, along with sound monetary policy "so that economic agents can work without concern," and that he will seek to refocus the fight against organized crime.

Congress had voted Tuesday to remove conservative interim President José Jerí after four months in office. The current Congress, which began its term in 2021, has now impeached three heads of state: Pedro Castillo, Dina Boluarte and Jerí.

Africa

Toxic gas leak at mine in Nigeria kills 37: A toxic gas leak at a mine in north-central Nigeria killed 37 people and led to the hospitalization of 26 others, according to police.

The incident occurred in the early hours of Tuesday in Kampani Zurak community, located in the Wase area of Plateau state, police spokesman Alfred Alabo said in a statement.

"Preliminary investigation revealed that the miners were affected due to a sudden discharge of lead oxide and other associated gases like sulphur and carbon monoxide which are toxic and poisonous to humans, particularly in a confined or poorly ventilated environment," he said. "The corpses of the deceased victims have been released to their families for burial according to their religious practices."

The Nigerian government has closed the mining site and an investigation into the leak is underway.

The miners were unaware of the toxic nature of the emissions and continued their operations, Nigeria's Minister of Solid Minerals Development Dele Alake said in a statement.

It's not clear what was being mined at the site and whether the mine was operating legally. Nigeria is trying to rein in illegal gold mining operations across the country that have killed hundreds of people over the years. (AP)

Bus crash in South Africa leaves 4 dead: A bus crash in South Africa's Limpopo province on Thursday has left at least four people dead and 31 injured, authorities said.

The bus was traveling from the Gauteng province in South Africa to Zimbabwe when it lost control and swerved into a ditch on the N1 highway close to the border with Zimbabwe, according to the provincial minister for transport, Violet Mathe.

"So far we have confirmation of four fatalities, while some other people have been transported to hospital. We will give other numbers as we get them," Mathe told public broadcaster SABC. The bus was still trapped in the ditch with passengers inside.

The Limpopo transport department said in a statement that the cause of the accident was initially unknown.

The accident occurred around the same area where 42 people were killed during another bus crash in October. (AP)

5 trapped underground in S.African diamond mine: Five miners were trapped deep underground at a South African diamond mine after a mudslide flooded a shaft they were working in, mine officials and a labor union said Thursday.

The miners have been trapped since the early hours of Tuesday, according to the Congress of South African Trade Unions - an alliance of labor unions that includes the main miners union. The congress said the miners were thought to be trapped around 800 meters (half a mile) underground.

Ekapa Mining General Manager Howard Marsden, whose company operates the mine, told national broadcaster SABC on Wednesday that rescuers were pumping water out of the shaft while a separate team was trying to drill a hole to where the miners were believed to be trapped to try to establish communication with them "or any proof of life."

The mine is in the central city of Kimberley, which is renowned for its diamond



Sudanese families displaced from El-Fasher reach out as aid workers distribute food supplies at the newly established El-Atad camp in Al Dabbah, Sudan's Northern State on Nov 16, 2025. (AP)

mines and was at the heart of the global industry after diamonds were discovered in the area in the late 1800s. (AP)

Gabon suspends access to social media: Gabon has suspended access to social media and digital platforms throughout the central African nation until further notice, the authorities said as critics accuse the country's leader of crackdown on dissent.

The communications agency said it had observed on social media and digital platforms what it described as inappropriate, defamatory, hateful and insulting content that undermines human dignity, the country's institutions and national security.

The agency's statement added that this constitutes offenses punishable under national and international laws, as well as under policies on moderation adopted by major digital platforms.

"The High Authority for Communication has decided to immediately suspend social media throughout Gabon until further notice," Jean Claude Franck Mendome, the spokesperson for the agency, known as High Authority for Communication, said in a statement that was read out on national media on Tuesday evening. (AP)

'Hallmarks of genocide' found in El-Fasher — UN: A "campaign of destruction" in October by Sudanese rebels against non-Arab communities in and near a city in Sudan's western region of Darfur shows "hallmarks of genocide," UN-backed human rights experts reported Thursday, a dramatic finding in the country's devastating war.

The Rapid Support Forces carried out mass killings and other atrocities in El-Fasher after an 18-month siege during which they imposed conditions "calculated to bring about the physical destruction" of non-Arab communities, in particular the Zaghawa and the Fur communities, the independent fact-finding mission on Sudan reported.

UN officials say several thousand civilians were killed in the RSF takeover of El-Fasher, the Sudanese army's only remaining stronghold in the Darfur. Only 40% of the city's 260,000 residents managed to flee the onslaught alive, thousands of whom were wounded, the officials said. The fate of the rest remains unknown.

Sudan plunged into conflict in mid-April 2023, when long-simmering tensions between its military and paramilitary leaders broke out in the capital Khartoum and spread to other regions including Darfur.

The devastating war has killed more than 40,000 people, according to UN figures, but aid groups say that is an undercount and the true number could be many times higher. (AP)

Kuwait CPI rises 2.07% YoY in Dec

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: Data released by the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) showed a 2.07 percent year-on-year increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) at the end of December 2025, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a report to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on Tuesday, the bureau stated that in-

flation in Kuwait remained stable in December, unchanged from November.

The bureau attributed the year-on-year rise to increases in important categories that influence the CPI, particularly food, health, clothing, education, and miscellaneous goods and services.

Sustainable and eco-friendly solutions

KFH deploys 'Water Maker' technology across branches

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) General Services Department has successfully deployed innovative Atmospheric Water Generator (AWG) technology across its branches. By extracting clean water from air humidity, this initiative reinforces the Bank's commitment to environmental preservation, sustainability, and securing a greener future through responsible practices.

The state-of-the-art devices use a patented Italian technology, manufactured by a Kuwaiti company. They have been installed and are currently operating in 6 branches: Bayan, Salwa, Sabah Al-Salem, Jaber Al-Ahmad, Ghernata, and Khaldiya. KFH is the first and only bank in Kuwait to adopt this innovative technology to produce water and meet the daily needs of its branches.

The water produced by these devices is of high purity, thanks to their advanced filtering and purification stages.

Executive Manager General Services at KFH, **Ayman Altabtabaei**, stated that the "Water Maker" technology is designed to secure alternative water sources and ensure reliable access to clean water across branches. "This innovative solution aligns with our commitment to environmental protection and sustainability," he noted. "Operating in accordance with recognized public health and safety standards, this



Ayman Altabtabaei

cutting-edge technology provides clean water while promoting responsible energy consumption and addressing climate change within sustainable industrial practices."

Altabtabaei added that a single device provides approximately 250 liters of clean water on a daily basis to meet the branch's needs. The system is designed for optimal performance in areas with humidity levels above 30%, while remaining functional at levels as low as 18%.

KFH continues to advance its sustainability, environment preservation, and carbon-emission

reduction efforts through a comprehensive strategy. It seamlessly integrates financial and economic aspects with the preservation of community life and mobility in line with sustainability standards.

Recently, KFH was awarded two certifications in quality management system and facility management system by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), underscoring its commitment to the highest international standards in business excellence, service quality, operational efficiency and alignment with the State's sustainability objectives.

Additionally, the Bank received the prestigious Gold certification in Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) from the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). This recognition affirms the compliance of KFH's several branches with the globally approved standards and the USGBC's requirements.

LEED Certificate is a globally recognized system for rating and classifying buildings based on their level of compliance with sustainability and energy efficiency standards. The certification assesses the quality of building design and operation in an environmentally responsible manner, covering key criteria including energy efficiency, water efficiency, carbon emissions reduction, indoor environmental quality, and the use of sustainable building materials.

Kirby, Sama X highlight group's 50-year impact

Alghanim unveils 'Sina'at Al-Amjad' for Kuwait's National Days

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: Alghanim Industries (Kutayba Alghanim Group) has unveiled its latest production, "Sina'at Al-Amjad" (The Making of Glory), a patriotic music video launched in celebration of Kuwait's 65th National Day and 35th Liberation Day. The song, which was written, composed and performed by Kuwaiti artist Bashir Al Shatti, honors Kuwait's remarkable journey and reflects Alghanim Industries' longstanding role as a partner in the nation's growth across generations.

The celebratory work tells a powerful and emotional story that traces Kuwait's evolution through the lens of enterprise, resilience, and progress. Beginning with the early days of trading pearl, timber and building materials in Kuwait before the discovery of oil, the narrative captures the entrepreneurial spirit that laid the foundation for a business legacy that continues to contribute to Kuwait's development today.

The production highlights the evolution of Alghanim Industries alongside the nation, from its early beginnings to the establishment of highly revered businesses across a range of sectors that shape everyday life in Kuwait, including automotive, electronics, retail, and advanced technological solutions, in addition to Kirby Building Systems, which was founded by the Group's Executive Chairman, Kutayba Yusuf Alghanim, around 50 years. The production also reflects the Group's role in supporting Kuwait's future through emerging sectors such as electric vehicles, charging infrastructure, and digital connectivity, including Sama X, which delivers advanced low-earth satellite internet solutions powered by Starlink.

"Sina'at Al-Amjad" was made in collaboration with a local advertising agency, The Channel, with video direction by Khaled Al Rayes, who carefully chose filming locations to reflect a contemporary cinematic style, blending reenactments of historical milestones with modern visuals, and creating a human-centered narrative that connects Kuwait's past with its present and future. The result is a tribute not only to the nation's achievements, but also to its people, businesses, and shared ambitions that continue to shape its path forward.

As Kuwait celebrates its National and Liberation Days, Alghanim Industries reaffirms its dedication to serving the community, supporting economic development, and contributing to the nation's continued advancement. The campaign reflects the Group's belief that business plays an integral role in shaping a prosperous and sustainable future for Kuwait.

The production's crew also included employees of Alghanim Industries from multiple sectors, in addition to a range of professionals including Ammar Al



Cinematic tribute blends history, resilience, progress.

Jeraiwi, Drone Videographer and head of the Drone Team at Kuwait Science Club, Fatima Al Qames, Technical Director, Dalal Al Enezi, Costume Designer, Ahmed Noor, Film Producer, Abdulrahman Al Enezi, Production Head, and the Advertising

Team composed of Baqir Ahmed, Laila Al Mutawa, and Nasser Saidi.

Viewers can watch the 'Sina'at Al-Amjad' video by Alghanim Industries' social media and YouTube channel.

1,600 staff across 78 destinations drive growth

Jazeera Airways certified 'Great Place to Work' in 5 markets

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: Jazeera Airways, Kuwait's leading low-cost carrier, has been officially certified as a Great Place to Work® (Dec 2025 – 2026) across five key markets including its head office in Kuwait, Egypt, Saudi Arabia (KSA), the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and India, recognizing the airline's ongoing commitment to building a people-first culture grounded in trust, collaboration, and high performance.

The certification reflects positive feedback from employees across the airline's diverse workforce spanning flight operations, engineering and maintenance, ground operations, safety and quality, commercial and marketing, digital and technology, finance, customer experience, and corporate functions. It also highlights Jazeera Airways' focus on employee engagement, professional development, wellbeing, and a strong safety-first culture.

Commenting on the achievement, Barathan Pasupathi, Chief Executive Officer, Jazeera Airways, said: "Being recognized as a Great Place to Work as we mark 20 years of flying makes this milestone even

more special. Receiving this certification not only in Kuwait, but across multiple markets across our network, is a powerful testament to the culture our teams have built together. At Jazeera Airways, our people power everything we do, from delivering safe and reliable operations to creating meaningful travel experiences for millions of customers. This recognition belongs to every team member who brings passion, accountability, and excellence to work each day."

Over the past year, Jazeera Airways has continued to invest in employee development and workplace initiatives that foster inclusion, collaboration, and growth. From structured training programs and leadership development opportunities to employee recognition platforms and wellness initiatives, the airline remains focused on creating an environment where individuals feel safe, valued and supported.

Ginny Sethi, Chief People Officer, Jazeera Airways, added: "Today, Jazeera Airways is powered by more than 1,600 employees across our network of 78 destinations. Our people strategy is centered on listening, evolving, and creating meaningful experiences for our employees across all markets. Achieving the Great Place to Work certification in Kuwait, Egypt, KSA, UAE, and India is a testament to the collective efforts of our teams and leaders who bring our values to life every day. This recognition affirms that a strong culture, mutual respect, and shared accountability are the key drivers of sustainable growth and long-term performance."

Jazeera Airways connects Kuwait to a growing network of more than 78 destinations across the Middle East, Central and South Asia, Africa, and Europe, serving over 5 million passengers annually. The airline operates a modern and efficient fleet of 24 Airbus A320neo and A320neo aircraft. Three aircraft from an additional order book of 26 aircraft are expected to arrive this year, supporting its long-term growth strategy.

As Jazeera Airways continues to expand its network, enhance digital capabilities, and strengthen operational performance, the airline remains committed to nurturing a culture that empowers employees to thrive and contribute to the company's long-term growth.



Jazeera Great Place to Work 2026

Business

Global markets digest mixed data despite easing inflation

By National Bank of Kuwait

Global markets navigated a host of data this week, characterised by moderating inflation expectations, resilient labour conditions, and shifting rate pricing across major economies. In the United States, December retail sales came in flat versus 0.4% expected, while January nonfarm payrolls rose 130K against a 65K consensus and unemployment declined to 4.3%, with average hourly earnings up 0.4% MoM; initial jobless claims eased to 227K as existing home sales fell 8.4% MoM to 3.91M. Headline CPI increased 0.2% MoM and 2.4% YoY, undershooting the 0.3% and 2.5% expected, while core CPI rose 0.3% MoM and 2.5% YoY, matching consensus. DXY closed the week at 96.915 (-0.74%). In Europe and the United Kingdom, the European Union's trade surplus narrowed to EUR 12.9B in December from EUR 14.2B a year earlier, as exports to the United States fell 12.6% YoY and the trade deficit with China widened to EUR 26.8B; meanwhile, UK Q4 GDP rose 0.1% QoQ, below 0.2% forecasts, with business investment down 2.7% and construction contracting 2.1%; swap markets currently price two additional Bank of England rate cuts this year, EUR/USD closed the week at 1.1869 (+0.45%), and GBP/USD at 1.3655 (+0.29%). In Asia-Pacific, Japan's ruling coalition secured a two-thirds super majority in the 465-seat lower house, lifting the Nikkei 225 by 4.4% on the news, while the yen also gained, closing the week 2.96% higher at 152.69. In China, PPI declined 1.4% YoY while CPI slowed to 0.2% YoY, extending deflationary pressures; USD/CNY last printed at 6.9049. Core sovereign yields broadly declined across major curves, with the US yield curve flattening over the week as the 2s10s and 5s30s spreads narrowed by 6.5 bps and 0.37 bps, respectively. Equity markets experienced heightened volatility amid economic data releases and repricing within the technology sector. Brent and WTI hovered around USD 67.75 and USD 62.89, respectively, both posting weekly losses as geopolitical tensions eased; gold settled near USD 5042.04 per ounce.

United States and Canada

US Headline CPI Falls to 0.2% MoM and 2.4% YoY as Services Drive January Inflation; Core CPI Rises 0.3% MoM

US core CPI increased 0.3% MoM in January, matching expectations and marking the strongest monthly gain since August. Core inflation eased to 2.5% YoY, the lowest since 2021, while headline CPI rose 0.2% MoM and 2.4% YoY, undershooting consensus. Services prices - including airline fares, medical care, communication, and recreation - drove the monthly increase, offsetting declines in used vehicles, household furnishings, and auto insurance. Treasury yields declined, with the two-year yield briefly falling 6bps to 3.40%, as markets increased pricing for approximately 63bps of easing in 2026, equivalent to a 50% chance of three rate cuts by year-end. The release follows solid labour market data and precedes further Fed assessment as policymakers seek sustained disinflation before adjusting policy. DXY last printed at 96.915.

United States and Canada

United States and Canada

US retail sales were unchanged in December at 0.0% MoM, undershooting the 0.4% consensus and indicating softer year-end consumer activity. Weakness was broad-based, with eight of 13 categories declining, including clothing, furniture, and autos, while sales excluding autos and gasoline also registered 0.0% MoM. Control-group sales, which feed into GDP calculations, fell 0.1% MoM. Labour market data released subsequently showed nonfarm payrolls rising 130K in January, double the 65K estimate, while the unemployment rate declined to 4.3% and average hourly earnings increased 0.4% MoM. Initial claims edged down to 227K, signalling limited layoff pressure. The combined data point to moderating consumer momentum alongside stabilising labour market conditions at the start of 2026.

Europe and the United Kingdom

EU Trade Surplus Narrows to EUR 12.9B in December; US Exports -12.6% YoY, China Deficit Widens to EUR 26.8B

The EU's trade surplus declined to EUR 12.9B in December 2025 from EUR 14.2 billion a year earlier, driven by a 12.6% YoY drop in exports to the US as tariff measures reduced demand and lowered the bilateral surplus to EUR 9.3 billion. Concurrently, the trade deficit with China widened to EUR 26.8 billion from EUR 24.5 billion, reflecting a 15% annual increase in Chinese imports, particularly in high-tech goods. Weakness in machinery, vehicles, and chemicals continued to offset gains from lower energy imports, though a monthly rebound in these sectors provided marginal relief. Despite external pressures, domestic resilience persisted: euro-area GDP grew 0.3% in Q4 2025, employment rose 0.2%, and Germany's planned fiscal expansion is expected to support growth through 2026. EUR/USD last printed at 1.1869.

UK Q4 GDP +0.1% QoQ, Below 0.2% Forecast; Business Investment -2.7%, Services Flat

The UK economy expanded 0.1% QoQ in Q4, undershooting the 0.2% consensus and matching Q3 growth, while December output rose just 0.1%. According to the Office for National Statistics, services stagnated for the first time since the end of 2023, construction contracted 2.1% - the steepest decline in four years - and business investment fell 2.7%, the largest drop since 2021. Manufacturing increased 0.9%, partly reflecting recovery at Jaguar Land Rover following earlier disruptions. Government spending rose 0.4%, offsetting subdued consumer expenditure of 0.2%, while net trade detracted from growth. For FY 2025, GDP rose 1.3%, though momentum weakened in the second half. The Bank of England recently downgraded its 2026 growth forecast to 0.9%, with swap markets pricing 49 bps of rate cuts this year. GBP/USD last printed at 1.3655.

Digital services available 24/7

Warba Bank extends Ramadan greetings & sets branch hours

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: Warba Bank announced the official working hours for its branches across Kuwait during the Holy Month of Ramadan, extending its warmest congratulations and best wishes on the occasion.

Warba's branches will welcome customers from Sunday to Thursday from 10:00 am to 1:30 pm.

To provide greater flexibility, the Bank has allocated additional evening hours at its Avenues Mall and Egaila Mall branches. These two branches will operate from Saturday to Wednesday in two shifts: a morning shift from 11:00 am to 3:00 pm and an evening shift from 8:30 pm to 11:00 pm. On Thursdays, both branches will serve customers during the morning shift only from 10:00 am to 1:30 pm.

Warba Bank's branch at Terminal 4 (T4) of Kuwait International Airport will continue to provide services to customers and travellers around the clock, seven days a week, with temporary service pauses during Iftar and Suhoor. The first pause will take place from 4:00 pm to 9:00 pm, and the second from 2:00 am to 3:00 am.

On this occasion, Abdullah Nasser Al-Shuail, Senior Director of Branch and Private Banking Services at Warba Bank, said: "We extend our best wishes to His Highness the Emir of the State of Kuwait and His Highness the Crown Prince, may God protect them, as well as to our valued customers and the people of Kuwait on the occasion of the Holy Month of Ramadan. At Warba Bank, we ensure to share in the joy of this blessed month and reaffirm our ongoing commitment to delivering the best banking services to meet our customers' needs and facilitate their transactions with ease throughout Ramadan."

Al-Shuail emphasized that Warba



Abdullah Al-Shuail

Bank's digital banking services remain available 24/7 through the Bank's mobile application and website, enabling customers to complete their transactions conveniently and securely at any time. Customers can also connect directly with the Bank via WhatsApp, the call center as well as on its social media platforms, ensuring that Warba Bank remains close to its customers and responsive to their needs at all times.

Warba Bank's branches are located across the governorates of Kuwait to serve customers efficiently. Branches include the Bank's Head Office at Arraya Tower in Sharq, The Avenues Mall branch, the T4 Airport branch, as well as branches in key residential and commercial areas including Salmiya, Hawally, Kaifan, Adailiya, AlShuhada, Jaber Al-Ahmad, West Mishref (Mubarak Al-Abdullah), Fahheel, Egaila, Mangaf, Jaber Al-Ali, Abu Fatira and Adan. The Bank also provides an extensive ATM network to ensure convenient access to services at any time, in addition to telephone banking services via 1825555 and its comprehensive digital channels designed to simplify all procedures for customers.

IEA, OPEC split on 2026 oil demand outlook

Oil prices start the year higher amid elevated geopolitical risk

By National Bank of Kuwait

Oil prices have been buoyed so far in 2026 by elevated Iran-linked geopolitical risk, supply outages in Kazakhstan, buyer hesitancy over sanctioned Iranian and Russian crude as well as a weaker US dollar.

The tense stand-off between Iran and the US may have cooled recently, pushing Brent down to \$67/bbl from a high of \$71 in January, as the two explore diplomatic options, but prices remain especially sensitive to geopolitical developments given the ramifications of a US-Iran conflict.

The IEA continues to forecast a sizeable supply overhang this year amid soft global oil demand and rising non-OPEC supply. OPEC-8, having paused unwinding supply cuts for Q1, may decide to resume from April if current price levels hold, the physical market continues to absorb barrels and if supply outages, whether geopolitics-related or otherwise, begin to stack up.

We maintain our average Brent price forecast for 2026 at \$65/bbl.

Markets: Prices start year on solid footing amid heightened geopolitical risk, output disruptions

A strong start for oil prices in 2026 saw Brent end January up more than 16% at its highest level, \$70.7/bbl, in six months on the back of intensifying geopolitical risk.

Geopolitical flashpoints in Iran, Venezuela and even Greenland raised oil's risk premium in tandem with material supply losses in Kazakhstan partly caused by the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

A weaker dollar has also been a factor. As of mid-February, however, prices were trending lower, with Brent posting its first back-to-back weekly loss of the year, heading lower to around \$68/bbl as the US and Iran engage in diplomacy to break the impasse, negotiations that Iranian president Pezeshkan called "a step forward" and which President Trump appears content to play out for the time being—while ordering a second aircraft carrier group to the Middle East.

Pressure is also being applied through stricter sanctions enforcement, while the US administration's impact on the oil complex is also being felt indirectly through its pursuit of secondary tariffs on importers of sanctioned Russian, Venezuelan and Iranian crude, which is forcing buyers to look elsewhere for higher priced crude (or risk falling foul of US sanctions and President Trump's ire) and causing a sizeable buildup of oil stocks at sea.

The optics of these 'oil on water' stocks, more than two-thirds of which (179 mb) the International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates are sanctioned Russian and Iranian crude barrels, has tended to skew the overall market assessment, exacerbating the oversupply narrative that dominated oil markets in 2025 and which led to oil prices declining for a third consecutive year and by the most (-19%) since the Covid-19 pandemic.

Oil's geopolitical risk premium is probably in the range of \$5-7/bbl currently.

A look at the Brent forward curve, where near-term prices are much higher than longer-term prices, illustrates the strength of market participants' views on the heightened risk of near-term supply constriction amid still firm demand. Beyond about 17 months, however, the curve becomes upward sloping, signaling a looser market amid ample supply and softer demand and therefore more incentive for storage.

In terms of money manager positioning, it is notable that as Iran-related risks became more acute, speculators rushed to reverse their short positions—which had reached a record 232,000 lots in mid-December—in favor of bets on prices rising.

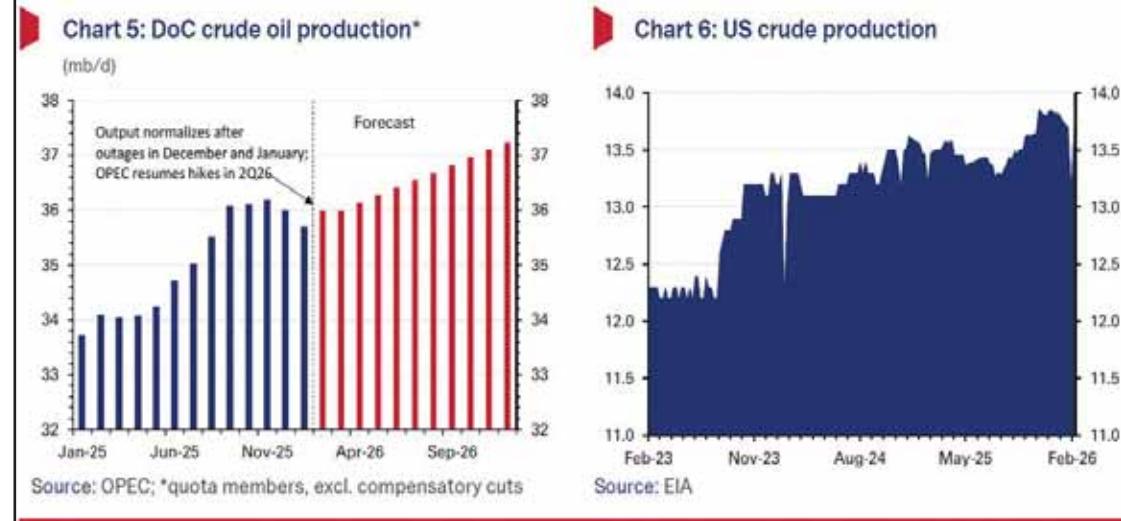
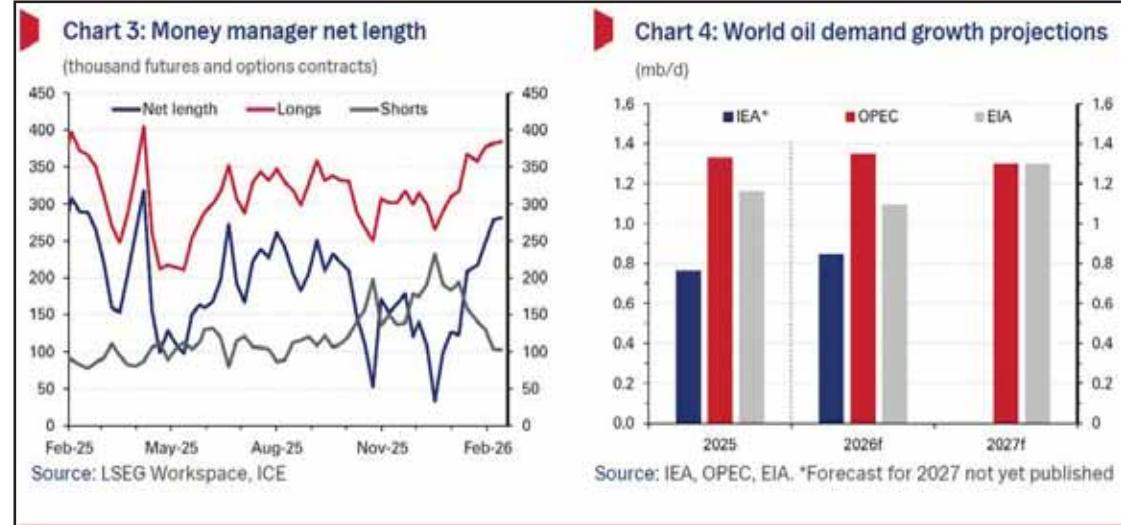
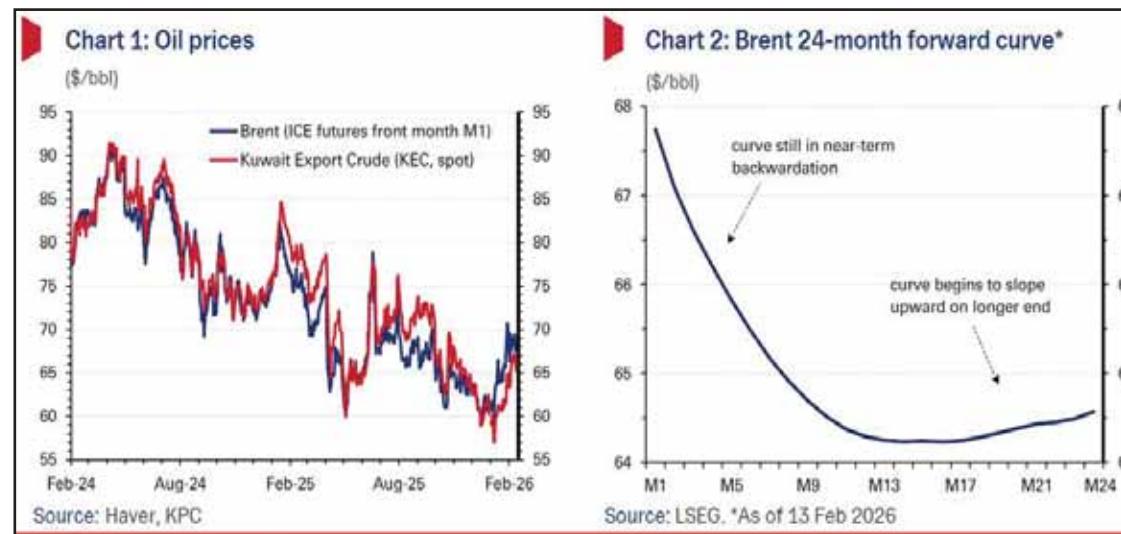
Long only positions on Brent increased by 19,409 lots to 377,371 in the week-ending January 2026, the highest in ten months.

The amplification in near-term Iran-associated geopolitical risk, though, reflects the view held by oil market observers and geopolitical analysts that the possibility of US action in coming weeks is strong.

At risk from conflict escalation is 14.5 mb/d of crude and condensate, 3.8 mb/d of refined products and at least 77 mta of LNG, according to the Middle East Economic Survey (mees). Iran's own production stands at around 3.3 mb/d, just under half of which (1.5 mb/d) is exported to China in violation of US sanctions.

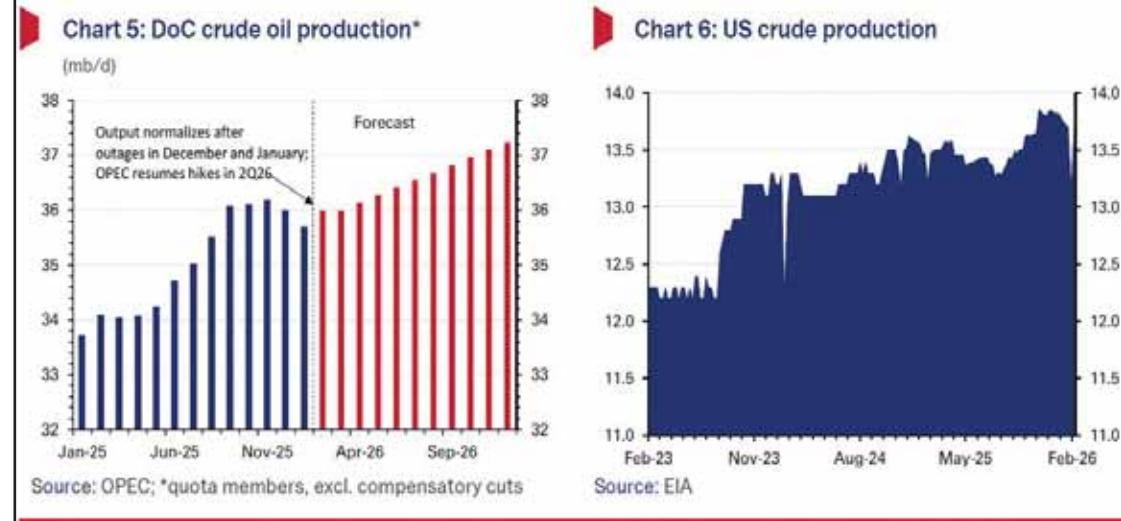
Oil demand: IEA maintains below-trend growth forecast for 2026, OPEC sees demand more robust

The IEA, having upgraded its 2026 oil demand



Source: LSEG Workspace, ICE

Source: IEA, OPEC, EIA. *Forecast for 2027 not yet published



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What's On

SPOTLIGHT



Got a birthday or event?

Share your story and snapshots with Arab Times!
Email your write-up and photos to
arabtimes@arabtimesonline.com
We'll feature it on our What's On page!

Bringing fresh flavors, global brands, and premium shopping under one roof

LuLu Gourmet debuts in Hessah Al Mubarak District, Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: One significant step that redefines modern retail experiences in Kuwait, Lulu Group has inaugurated the Lulu Gourmet, at the prestigious Hessah Al Mubarak District introducing a new concept store designed to bring together premium food selections, international brands, and lifestyle-focused shopping under one roof.

The launch marks the first Lulu Gourmet concept store in the GCC and the 18th Lulu outlet in Kuwait, reflecting the group's continued expansion and commitment to innovation in the retail sector.

The new store was inaugurated by distinguished guests Sulaiman Al - Asaker , chief property management officer - URC, Abdulaziz Alnasser, SVP Operations - URC alongside Sreejith, Director of Lulu Kuwait, Sakeer Hussein, Regional Director of Lulu Kuwait, and other senior management officials, in a ceremony that highlighted the brand's vision of delivering elevated shopping experiences tailored to evolving consumer lifestyles.

Spanning an impressive 11,600 plus square feet, Lulu Gourmet has been thoughtfully developed to cater to customers seeking quality, variety, and convenience in a modern retail environment. The concept centers on offering fresh flavors every day, with a strong emphasis on premium and exotic selections sourced from across the world.

True to its name, Lulu Gourmet introduces a carefully curated range of fresh, organic, and health-focused products, alongside vegan, "free-from," and specialty lifestyle items that respond



Photos during the inauguration.

to the growing demand for wellness-oriented consumption.

The store features an extensive

portfolio of international and imported brands, providing shoppers access to unique ingredients and

gourmet selections rarely found in conventional supermarkets.

The concept reflects changing

consumer preferences in Kuwait, where customers increasingly seek healthier food options, spe-

cialty products, and convenient access to global culinary experiences.

The interior layout of Lulu Gourmet has been meticulously planned to enhance customer comfort and ease of movement, creating a seamless shopping journey. The store's design integrates modern aesthetics with functional convenience, ensuring efficient navigation across product categories while maintaining an upscale ambiance.

Strategically located to connect smoothly with the Hessa district, the store aims to serve residents and surrounding communities by offering retail experience aligned with their lifestyle expectations — combining accessibility, premium quality, and time-saving convenience. To further enhance customer accessibility, the location also features a multi-storey car parking facility, ensuring a smooth and hassle-free visit for shoppers.

The opening of Lulu Gourmet underscores Lulu Group's broader strategy of introducing specialized retail formats that go beyond traditional supermarket models. By blending gourmet selections, wellness-oriented products, and focused lifestyle retail elements, the concept represents a shift toward experiential shopping tailored to modern urban consumers.

With its focus on premium offerings, international diversity, and customer-centric design, Lulu Gourmet is poised to become a distinctive destination for shoppers seeking both quality and convenience — setting a new benchmark for gourmet and lifestyle retail in Kuwait.

Kuwait Airways strengthens its European presence by launching flights to Nice, France, as part of its summer 2026 expansion plan

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: As part of its strategy to expand operations and enhance travel options for its valued customers, Kuwait Airways has announced the launch of scheduled direct flights to Nice, France, with two weekly flights operating on Saturdays and Tuesdays, starting from 4 July 2026. Reservations will open on 20 February 2026, at 12:00 PM.

Kuwait Airways Acting Chief Executive Officer, Captain Abdulwahab Ibrahim Al-Shatti affirmed that the addition of Nice to its flight schedule comes in response to the growing demand for European destinations, particularly popular tourist cities. He noted that the company continues to develop its network of destinations to align with market expectations and to strengthen its competitiveness.

Al-Shatti explained that Kuwait Airways continues to implement its expansion plans in line with a carefully developed operational vision aimed at strengthening connectivity with key global destinations. He added that this approach supports the position of the State of Kuwait as a significant regional and international air transport hub.

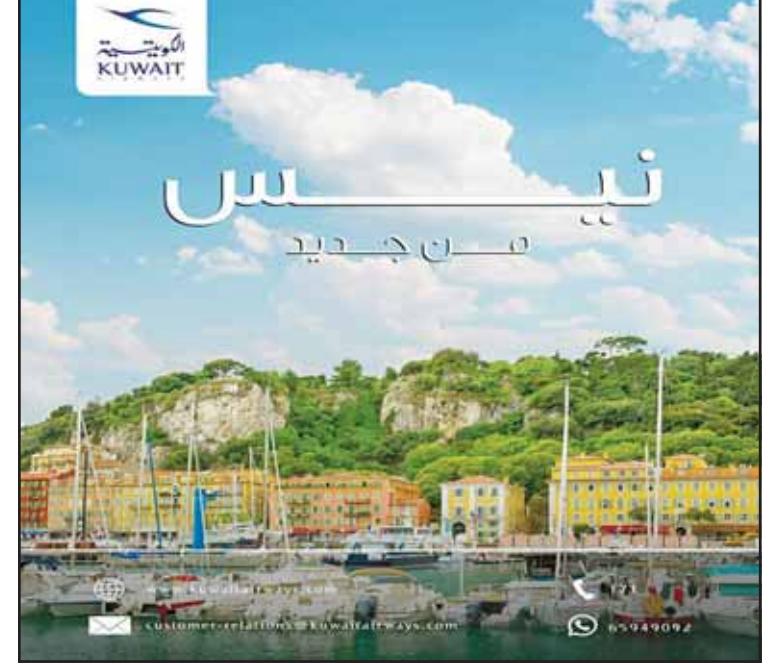
He added that the summer 2026 flight schedule includes the launch and opera-



Captain Abdulwahab Al-Shatti

tion of several new destinations, including Alexandria, Sharm El Sheikh, Salalah, Zurich, Mykonos, Antalya, Trabzon, Sarajevo, Vienna, and Bodrum, as part of the company's strategy to diversify travel options and meet increasing demand during peak seasons.

Al-Shatti pointed out that Kuwait Airways continues to develop its services for its valued passengers through a modern fleet equipped with the latest technologies and advanced in-flight entertainment systems. He added that the company also provides an integrated hospitality experience designed to deliver the highest levels of comfort and luxury from departure to arrival.



He concluded his statement by reaffirming the company's commitment to continuously enhancing the travel experience through its advanced services

at Terminal 4 and onboard its aircraft, in accordance with the highest internationally recognized standards of quality and safety.

UPNRI Forum Kuwait organizes 5th Blood Donation Camp at Kuwait Blood Bank, Adan Hospital Branch

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: UPNRI Forum Kuwait successfully organized its Annual Blood Donation Camp at the Adan Hospital Blood Bank Branch in coordination with the Ministry of Health, Kuwait, and the concerned Blood Bank Authorities. The initiative was conducted as part of the Forum's ongoing humanitarian efforts and community service activities.

The camp coincided with Kuwait's Independence and Liberation Day celebrations, reflecting the Forum's commitment to contributing positively to the society in which the expatriate community resides. The initiative was also strategically scheduled ahead of the holy month of Ramadan, a period during which the demand for blood units typically increases.

A total of 78 donors registered for the camp, with a strong turnout on the day of the event. Following standard medical screening procedures conducted by the Ministry of Health medical team, 54 eligible donors successfully contributed blood units. As per established health protocols, some registrants were deferred due to medical considerations; however, the overall participation was encouraging and demonstrated strong community engagement.

The presence of the Forum of Indian Doctors (FID) was sincerely appreciated, as it added encouragement and moral support to the noble cause. Special appreciation was extended to Dr. Sameer Humad, President of FID, and Dr. Mohan Ram, Vice President of FID, who is also an integral member



Photo during the initiative.

of UPNRI Forum Kuwait, for their professional support and for producing informative awareness videos addressing common concerns related to blood donation.

Promotional outreach was further strengthened by Mr. Mujeeb Akhtar, a prominent Indian community influencer and social media personality in Kuwait, whose efforts significantly enhanced public awareness and registration turnout.

The Forum acknowledged the presence and support of distinguished community representatives, including Mr. Asim Kidwai, President of AMU-

OBA Kuwait, and Mr. Obaid Ahmad, General Secretary of AMUOBA Kuwait, among other dignitaries.

UPNRI Forum Kuwait expressed its gratitude to its annual sponsor, Al Mulla Exchange, Sahari Group, Kuwait for transportation support, Arabia Press, and other sponsors and partners whose contributions facilitated the smooth execution of the program. The event was organized under the leadership of Mr. Zeeshan Ullah Khan, President of UPNRI Forum Kuwait, and Mr. Shafiq Mumtaz, General Secretary, along with the Executive Council members, volun-

teers, and their families, whose coordinated efforts ensured the successful implementation of the camp.

The Forum extended sincere appreciation to all donors who participated in the initiative, emphasizing that voluntary blood donation remains a vital humanistic contribution that supports national healthcare requirements.

UPNRI Forum Kuwait reaffirmed its commitment to continuing collaborative community initiatives in partnership with the Ministry of Health and other stakeholders for the benefit of society at large.

The ITEF launches GCC Connect 2026 in Kuwait

Er. Krishna Jegan, Chairman of ITEF, reaffirmed the organization's long-term commitment to building structured global engineering platforms rooted in institutional credibility and measurable outcomes.

Speaking at the event, Er. Suresh Krishnaswamy, President of ITEF Kuwait Chapter, stated: "Sustainable engineering growth emerges from collaboration built on trust, expertise, and shared regional purpose." Er. Selvam C., Managing Director of ITEF, added: "Institutional vision succeeds when innovation, talent, and execution progress in structured alignment."

The ceremony was attended by distinguished Guests of Honor including Mr. Eid Shamaan Al-Mutairi, Governorate Director (Retd.), Roads and Networks Department, Ministry of Public Works, Kuwait; Er. Mansour Al Saed, Chief Executive Officer, Kuwait Public Transport Company (KPTC); and Er. Senthil Kumar Ganesan, Chief Operating Officer, Heavy Engineering Industries & Shipbuilding Co. (HEISCO).

Keynote insights were delivered by Mr. Sivarajah Ramanathan, Mission Director and CEO of Tamilnadu Startup & Innovation Mission (StartupTN), Government of Tamil Nadu, and Dr. T. M. Gunaraja, Chairman of MIET Group of Institutions and Former President of the Institute of Engineers India. In addition, ITEF Chapter Presidents from all the Chapters in GCC and Global Directors participated in the Curtain Raiser Event. The event was well attended by Sponsors, Patrons & Industry leaders.

GCC Connect 2026 aims to facilitate cross-border collaboration, responsible capital engagement, and innovation-led industrial development aligned with regional transformation priorities.

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Features

ARAB TIMES

FRIDAY-SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20-21, 2026

A father and son journey through grief and uncertainty

A punishing, hypnotic desert rave in Laxe's Oscar-nominated 'Sirat'

LOS ANGELES, Feb 19, (AP): Hell on earth may look different for everyone, and yet a pulsating rave in the Moroccan desert while the world burns has the potential to be a consensus pick - even for Burning Man enthusiasts. The thing is, in "Sirat," that's just the backdrop for the many terrible things that transpire.

There have been some harrowing films released in the past year, the kind that leave you feeling shattered and a little helpless, from "Hamnet" to "The Voice of Hind Rajab." But perhaps none have been quite so punishing, so bleak, or so overwhelmingly hypnotic, as Oliver Laxe's "Sirat." Currently playing in limited release, the Oscar nominated, Cannes prize-winning film is expanding to more North American theaters Friday. It is an experience that is not for the faint of heart.

Laxe opens his film with a group of men methodically setting up speakers in the arid expanse of the Sahara. The desert terrain is vast; the surrounding

mountains ominous and humbling. And then, the music starts - blaring, pulsating, crashing into the silence. Suddenly a crowd is just there, vibrating to the sounds in ecstatic reverie. It feels like ages before a word is uttered.

The people that break the spell don't seem to fit in with the malnourished, tattooed vagabonds swaying and bouncing in a trance. It's a barrel-chested father Luis (a fantastic Sergi López), his 12-year-old son Esteban (Bruno Núñez Arjona) and their dog. They're not there by accident: They're looking for their daughter and sister who left months ago; They suspect it was for this party at the end of the world, or something like it.

The war, or whatever it is, outside is left vague. There's chatter of migrants and military. Among the ravers, there's a kind of hopeless resignation to it all as they drift from rave to rave. One quips that the world has been ending for a long time. That this one family is



This image released by Neon shows Sergi López, (right), and Bruno Núñez in a scene from the film 'Sirat.' (AP)

still attempting to hold onto traditional ties is disarming, to say the least.

But Luis is determined to continue

is not up for the journey. Luis and Esteban are generous travel companions, gifting precious rations and paying for gas. The ravers (Jade Oukid, Stefania Gadda, Tonin Janvier, Richard Bellamy and Joshua Liam Henderson) have more of a wall up. They've been living a postapocalyptic life for too long, but they start to soften to this family nonetheless. And then, halfway through the film, the rug is pulled out from under everyone.

Perhaps by this point the surprises of "Sirat" are already well spoilt, but for those who don't know, the shock is kind of the point of the whole experience. And there's still almost an hour of film left to go, in which everyone, including the audience, is in a sort of hallucinatory, post-traumatic daze - but even the relative comfort of that won't last long.

We see death all the time in films; it's alarming how often it barely even registers. It's a testament to the film-making in "Sirat" that here it's so deeply upsetting. I'm not sure "Sirat"

can even be categorized as a survival movie. It's more like a descent into oblivion. For some that might be spiritual. For others, it might feel more like the depths of despair.

As a piece of cinema, "Sirat" is astonishing. As a contribution to humanity, however, its value is debatable. Art certainly doesn't have to make us feel good all, or even most of the time. Must it make us feel as bad as "Sirat"? Maybe? "Sirat" is the kind of film that will get under your skin and fester, the kind that will leave you with a pit in your stomach. Perhaps simply knowing that going in is enough. It might also be a litmus test for just how long you might hold onto hope at the end of the world. I, for one, would have been out before the first rave began.

"Sirat," a Neon release currently playing in limited release and expanding Friday, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for "some violent content, language, drug use." Running time: 115 minutes. Three stars out of four.

People

Breakthrough hope

Guthrie's case may use genealogy tools

TUCSON, Ariz., Feb 19, (AP): Authorities trying to solve the disappearance of Nancy Guthrie say they might tap DNA genealogy databases, the same step that police took to unravel a decades-old series of murders in California and the fatal stabbings of four college students in Idaho.

The strategy could be fruitful: If unidentified DNA evidence can be connected to someone - even a distant relative - in a common genealogical database, it would give investigators more information and possibly lead to a suspect in Guthrie's kidnapping in Arizona.

"It's a fantastic tool," said Ruth Ballard, a geneticist in California who specializes in

DNA and has testified in hundreds of court cases. "If it's a good quality sample and they're able to get a profile, they could find a hit on that fairly quickly."

The sheriff's department in Pima County, Arizona, said DNA collected so far in the investigation has not turned up any matches in a national criminal justice database known as CODIS, which has DNA profiles from convicted criminals and, in some states, people arrested for certain crimes.

"Investigators are currently looking into additional investigative genetic genealogy options for DNA evidence to check for matches. CODIS is one option of many databases that are available," the sheriff's department said Tuesday.

The department said Wednesday that biological evidence from Guthrie's Tucson-area home was being examined and that DNA profiles were at a lab for analysis.

Guthrie, the mother of NBC "Today" co-anchor Savannah Guthrie, has been missing from her home since Feb. 1. The FBI said gloves found about 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) away appeared to match those worn by a masked suspect who was recorded on a porch camera.

Genealogical sites Ancestry, 23andMe and MyHeritage say they can be asked to comply with court orders seeking information. Another genealogical site, GEDmatch, said its policy is to ask users if they want to opt-in to allow police to look at their data. The Associated Press e-mailed the companies late Wednesday, asking if they have a role in the Guthrie investigation.

Crime

GEDmatch has been credited with helping solve the case of the so-called Golden State Killer. Police used DNA from crime scenes to find a distant relative and build a family tree that led to Joseph DeAngelo Jr. In 2020, he pleaded guilty to 13 killings and dozens of rapes in California in the 1970s and '80s.

In Idaho, DNA from a knife sheath helped point to Bryan Kohberger in the killings of four University of Idaho students in 2022. Investigators used genealogical sites to build a family tree and pulled trash from the Pennsylvania home of Kohberger's parents to make a connection. Kohberger pleaded guilty and was sentenced to life in prison.

Ballard said the source and quality of the DNA evidence held by police can be factors when trying to find matches on genealogical sites.

"It does require a much better sample than CODIS searching does," she said.

And there can be other hurdles.

"There are a lot of unknowns when you go into these databases," Ballard said. "The databases are not equal in terms of ethnic distribution. It's comparatively easier to find a Caucasian because more have uploaded their data and there are more family trees to mine."

DNA from gloves found a few miles from the Arizona home of Nancy Guthrie did not match any entries in a national database, authorities said Tuesday, the 17th day of her disappearance.

"There were no DNA hits in CODIS," the Pima County Sheriff's Department said, referring to the National Combined DNA Index System.

"At this point, there have been no confirmed CODIS matches in this investigation," the department said, suggesting that other DNA samples had been put through the system.

CODIS is a storehouse of DNA taken from crime suspects or people with convictions. Any hits could identify possible suspects in Guthrie's disappearance.

The sheriff's department said it's looking to feed DNA evidence into other "genetic genealogy" databases. It did not elaborate.

Investigators, meanwhile, were seen inspecting exterior cameras at a neighbor's house Tuesday. Vehicles were also arriving and departing from Guthrie's Tucson-area home while a thick line of news media watched from the street.

The 84-year-old mother of NBC "Today" co-anchor Savannah Guthrie was reported missing from her home on Feb. 1 after spending the previous night with family, police said. Her blood was detected on the porch.

Film



This image released by A24 shows Margaret Qualley in a scene from 'How to Make a Killing.' (AP)

Powell's serial-killing heir lacks urgency

'How to Make a Killing' reworks an Ealing classic

LOS ANGELES, Feb 19, (AP): "How to Make a Killing," starring Glen Powell as a working-class man who sets out to murderously reclaim his inheritance, has a clear inspiration: the great Ealing black comedy "Kind Hearts and Coronets."

In that sublimely wicked 1949 film, Alec Guinness played all eight of the relatives that Dennis Price's would-be heir tries to bump off, making the film among the most delightful showcases of Sir Alec's range. Powell, as it happens, has already played a shape-shifter in an assassination comedy, Richard Linklater's "Hit Man."

But the deft tonal balance of "Hit Man," let alone of "Kind Hearts and Coronets," is missing in "How to Make a Killing," a disappointingly flat almost-remake that has neither the biting farce nor the chilling darkness to match its black comedy ambitions.

In the film, written and directed by John Patton Ford, Powell doesn't opt for Guinness' chameleonic path. He plays a version of the Price character: Becket Redfellow, an outcast from an uber-wealthy family. After becoming pregnant at 18, Becket's mother is exiled by her father, Whitelaw Redfellow (Ed Harris). The most compelling thing about "How to Make a Killing" may be that, after an early flashback with Whitelaw, we know Becket will eventually face off with the Redfellow patriarch. There are worse ways to keep an audience around than to tacitly promise more Ed Harris.

Becket is, himself, the narrator of his tale. He's telling it to a priest from a jail cell, four hours before his execution. But Becket is not remorseful for his misdeeds nor particularly anxious about his impending sentence. Disappointed by his last-meal cheesecake, he smirks, "Kill me now."

If "How to Make a Killing" carried this tone - Powell's signature glibness, with an edge - the movie might have



This image released by A24 shows Glen Powell in a scene from 'How to Make a Killing.' (AP)

worked better. Instead, Becket is a curiously uninteresting protagonist whose descent into serial killing happens wanly.

After losing his job as a clerk to make way for the shop owner's son, Becket resolves to track down the cousins that stand to inherit the vast family fortune. He's motivated by advice from his mother - not to rest until he's got "the right kind of life" - and by a chance encounter with his childhood crush (Margaret Qualley) who jocularly tells him to call her when he's killed three or four.

The subsequent encounters give a window into the ultra-rich. Topher Grace plays a cousin, Bill Camp an uncle and Raff Law, son of Jude, another cousin. "How to Make a Killing" has a handful of Hollywood nepo babies (Qualley is the daughter of Andie MacDowell), but going further might have added a meta twist.

The lone standout of a forgettable bunch is Noah Redford (played by the perpetually underused Zach Woods), a painter who touts himself as "White Basquiat." But the cast member that most gives "How to Make a Killing" a lift is Jessica Henwick, who stood out even in a peripheral role in "Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery." She plays Becket's down-to-earth girlfriend, whose warm presence increasingly makes you doubt Becket's already faint motivation for murder.

Ford previously wrote and directed the excellent 2022 thriller "Emily the Criminal," with Aubrey Plaza. That film, about a debt-ridden Los Angeles gig worker drawn into a criminal underworld, showed Ford has the ability to connect contemporary class themes with gritty genre narratives. The more polished "How to Make a Killing," though, never connects those dots.

It also doesn't help that the last few months have already given us a sensational satire about killing to get ahead: Park Chan-wook's "No Other Choice," starring Lee Byung-hun as a newly unemployed family man who aims to eliminate his competition for a new job. Unfortunately for "How to Make a Killing," it would have to bump off quite a few movies to move up the black-comedy ranks.

"How to Make a Killing," an A24 release, opens in theaters Friday. It's rated R by the Motion Picture Association for language and some violence/bloody images. Running time: 105 minutes. Two stars out of four.

'Epic Caribbean Western and historical drama'

Bad Bunny takes lead role in Residente's first film, 'Porto Rico'

LOS ANGELES, Feb 19, (AP): Puerto Rican artists Residente and Bad Bunny are teaming up to tell the story of their home in an original historical drama.

René Pérez Joglar, the Grammy winner known professionally as Residente, will make his directorial debut with "Porto Rico," filmmakers and producers said Wednesday. Bad Bunny, the artist born Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, is set to lead a starry cast which currently includes Viggo Mortensen, Javier Bardem and Edward Norton.

"I have dreamed of making a film about my country since I was a child. Puerto Rico's true history has always been surrounded by controversy," Residente said in a statement. "This film is a reaffirmation of who we are - told with the intensity and honesty that our history deserves."

"Porto Rico" is being described as an "epic Caribbean

Western and historical drama" inspired by true events. Residente co-wrote the script with Alexander Dinelaris, the Oscar-winning screenwriter behind "Birdman."

It will mark the first leading role for Bad Bunny, who has appeared in several supporting roles in movies recently including "Happy Gilmore 2" and "Caught Stealing," and who recently made waves with his historic Super Bowl halftime performance, which highlighted Puerto Rican culture and history.

The film has a bevy of power players behind it, including Oscar-winning Mexican filmmaker Alejandro G. Inárritu, who is executive producing, and backing from Live Nation Entertainment. No details were available about when the film might shoot or be released.

Norton signed on to produce as well, saying in a statement that the film "sits in a tradition of films we deeply love, from 'The Godfather' to 'Gangs of New York,' that both thrill us with visceral drama and iconic characters and eras while also forcing us to face up to the shadow story under the American narrative of idealism."

He added: "Everybody knows what a poet of language and rhythm René is. Now they're going to see what a visual visionary he is as well. And bringing him and Bad Bunny together to tell the true story of Puerto Rico's roots is going to be like a flame finding the stick of dynamite that's been waiting for it."

Bad Bunny

The film has a bevy of power players behind it, including Oscar-winning Mexican filmmaker Alejandro G. Inárritu, who is executive producing, and backing from Live Nation Entertainment. No details were available about when the film might shoot or be released.

Meta CEO denies company deliberately addicts young users

Zuckerberg quizzed on kids' Instagram use in social media trial

LOS ANGELES, Feb 19, (AP): Mark Zuckerberg and opposing lawyers dueled in a Los Angeles courtroom on Wednesday, where the Meta CEO answered questions about young people's use of Instagram, his congressional testimony and internal advice he's received about being "authentic" and not "robotic."

Zuckerberg's testimony is part of an unprecedented social media trial that questions whether Meta's platforms deliberately addict and harm children. During questioning by the plaintiff's lawyer, Zuckerberg said he still agrees with a previous statement he made that the existing body of scientific work has not proven that social media causes mental health harms.

The plaintiff's attorney, Mark Lanier, asked Zuckerberg if people tend to use something more if it's addictive.

"I'm not sure what to say to that," Zuckerberg said. "I don't think that applies here."

Attorneys representing the plaintiff, a now 20-year-old woman identified by the initials KGM, claim 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.

Beginning his questioning, Lanier laid out three options of what people can do regarding vulnerable people: help them, ignore them, or "prey upon them and use them for our own



Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg arrives for a landmark trial over whether social media platforms deliberately addict and harm children, Wednesday, Feb. 18, in Los Angeles. (AP)

ends." Zuckerberg said he agrees the last option is not what a reasonable company should do, saying, "I think a reasonable company should try to help the people that use its services."

Lanier questioned the Meta CEO extensively about a comment he made during a past congressional hearing, where

he said Instagram employees are not given goals to increase amount of time people spent on the platform.

Lanier presented internal documents that seemed to contradict that statement. Zuckerberg replied that they previously had goals associated with time, but said he and the company made the conscious decision to move away from those goals, focusing instead on utility. He said he believes in the "basic assumption" that "if something is valuable, people will use it more because it's useful to them."

Lanier also asked Zuckerberg about what he characterized as extensive media training, including for testimonies like the one he was giving in court. Lanier pointed to an internal document about feedback on Zuckerberg's tone of voice on his own social media, imploring him to come off as "authentic, direct, human, insightful and real," and instructing him to "not try hard, fake, robotic, corporate or cheesy" in his communication.

Zuckerberg pushed back against the idea that he's been coached on how to respond to questions or present himself, saying those offering the advice were "just giving feedback."

Regarding his media appearances and public speaking, Zuckerberg said, "I think I'm actually well known to be sort of bad at this."

The Meta CEO has long been mocked online for appearing robotic and, when he was younger, nervous when speaking publicly. In 2010, during an interview with renowned

tech journalists Kara Swisher and Walt Mossberg, he was sweating so profusely that Swisher asked him if he wanted to "take off the hoodie" that was his uniform at the time.

Lanier spent a considerable stretch of his time with Zuckerberg asking about the company's age verification policies.

"I don't see why this is so complicated," Zuckerberg said after a lengthy back-and-forth, reiterating that the company's policy restricts users under the age of 13 and that they work to detect users who have lied about their ages to bypass restrictions.

Zuckerberg mostly stuck to his talking points, referencing his goal of building a platform that is valuable to users and, on multiple occasions, saying he disagreed with Lanier's "characterization" of his questions or of Zuckerberg's own comments.

As was the case with head of Instagram Adam Mosseri's testimony last week, Zuckerberg was grilled about policies relating to cosmetic beauty filters on Instagram. Zuckerberg said he didn't believe there was enough evidence pointing to harm the filters could cause and said he has a "high bar" for blocking tools or features that would limit people's expression. Lanier pointed to external experts Meta hired to assess the filters and their potential impacts, saying that all 18 of them raised concerns.

Children's advocates slammed Zuckerberg's testimony as disingenuous.

Music



Singer Bono, of the band U2, performs in Washington on June 17, 2018. (AP)

Rare McCartney and Wings trove joins Rock Hall

U2's new music honors Renee Good



Paul McCartney performs at the Glastonbury Festival in Worthy Farm, Somerset, England, on June 25, 2022. (AP)

ing the message of peace in Renee's name," the statement read. "We certainly feel the urgency of the country's situation reflected in the band's powerful call for change and coming together."

□ □ □

A collection of Paul McCartney instruments, outfits, handwritten lyrics, unseen photos and tour memorabilia will be part of an exhibit at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame this summer, billed as the first major museum show to feature McCartney and Wings.

"Paul McCartney and Wings" - made up of items from the musician's personal archive as well as donations from band members and associates - will focus on the period between McCartney's self-titled 1970 solo debut through the 1971 formation of Wings and the band's subsequent breakup in 1981.

The exhibit opens May 15 at the Cleveland home of the Hall, where McCartney has been inducted twice - as a member of the Beatles in 1988 and as a solo artist in 1999. Tickets are on sale now.

The news of the exhibit comes at a time when all parts of McCartney's career are being celebrated, including Sam Mendes' upcoming biopic of the Fab Four and a new upcoming McCartney documentary, "Man on the Run," on Amazon Prime Video.

In recent years, McCartney has offered glimpses of his career and life in such things as images he took during Beatlemania - "Photographs 1963-64: Eyes of the Storm" - and the books "Wings: The Story of the Band on the Run Book" and "The Lyrics."

"It's an incredible honor to have the talent and impact of U2 spread-

First novel since 'Demon Copperhead'

Barbara Kingsolver returns with 'Partita'



Author Barbara Kingsolver appears at the 75th National Book Awards ceremony in New York on Nov. 20, 2024. (AP)

though, because of the sorts of people I write about," Kingsolver said in a statement. "I was the weird country kid who loved reading Tolstoy and playing Bach, but I kept those interests to myself. Finally, now, it strikes me as a worthy project to ask who made these rules, that small-town fiddlers and country music fans don't feel welcome in a symphony hall, and vice versa?"

Kingsolver, 70, has long been known for her socially conscious fiction, often working in themes of class, community, immigration and the environment. The bestselling "Demon Copperhead" - "David Copperfield" that Kingsolver set in modern Appalachia. Published in 2022, it was an Oprah Winfrey book club pick that shared the fiction Pulitzer with Hernan Diaz's "Trust."

Her other honors include a National Humanities Medal, a National Book Award for lifetime achievement and induction into the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

completing her first novel, "The Bean Trees," which came out in 1988.

"All my life, I've loved both language and music in a hungry, passionate way that happily entwines them in my brain. A novel about a classical musician never occurred to me,

Lifestyle

'It is special stone ... a living stone'

Travertine quarries that built Rome shaping new generation of temples



View of the farmhouse, at the Degemar Quarry near Tivoli, Italy, 35 kilometers east of Rome, where 17th-century Baroque architect Gian Lorenzo Bernini selected travertine for the colonnade of St. Peter's Square, is shown on Friday, Feb. 13. (AP)



Workers use a jackhammer to break a block of travertine at the Degemar Quarry near Tivoli, Italy. (AP)



Vincenzo De Gennaro, owner of the Degemar Quarry, is interviewed by The Associated Press at his quarry near Tivoli, Italy. (AP)

All around the Tivoli quarries, the air is heavy with the stench of sulfur and the constant pounding, clinking and cracking of giant jackhammers blasting ancient rock into pieces.

It was here that Gian Lorenzo Bernini, the great Baroque sculptor and architect, sourced the brilliant white travertine for the 284 columns and 88 pillars of the colonnade embracing St. Peter's Square, as well as his other Catholic and Roman marvels.

flat-bed trucks haul stone slabs weighing 33 tons up to street level.

This was vividly illustrated when Italy's Cromosau, featuring a giant dinosaur over 5 meters tall and 7 meters long, appeared alongside China's luminous dragon in collaboration with the Hong Kong Chinese Martial Arts Dragon and Lion Dance Association, to stage a "double dragon dance."

"It is my first time watching the float parade in person. The atmosphere here is much more festive and lively compared with watching the live broadcast on TV," Ms. Lee, a Hong Kong resident, said. (Xinhua)

XIAMEN/TAIPEI: More than 40,000 fireworks illuminated the night on Tuesday as the coastal mainland city of Xiamen in Fujian Province and nearby Kinmen island staged their joint fireworks display to mark the Spring Festival.

The 30-minute show started at 8 p.m. on the first day of the Year of the Horse, with fireworks bursting from both Xiamen and Kinmen, which are less than two kilometers apart at their closest point.

Launched in 1987, the annual event has become a long-standing tradition highlighting close ties between Xiamen and Kinmen. Crowds gathered along waterfronts on both sides to watch the show, accompanied by festive music. Kinmen residents also staged traditional lion dances to bring good fortune for the Chinese New Year. (Xinhua)

Variety

LOS ANGELES: Multiple Chinese films are set for release in North America during the period of Chinese New Year, also known as the Spring Festival, including two highly-anticipated blockbusters premiering Tuesday, the Chinese Lunar New Year's Day.

"Scare Out," a contemporary espionage thriller directed by Zhang Yimou, will be opened by CMC Pictures in nearly 200 select theaters in dozens of cities across the United States and Canada on the first day of the Year of the Horse.

Featuring a star-studded cast including Jackson Yee, Zhu Yilong and Song Jia, the project marks Zhang's fourth Spring Festival release in five years and fuses a major political theme with a faster-paced, youth-oriented cinematic language. The first contemporary national security-themed film directed by Zhang centers on a leakage of classified military aviation data and follows a Chinese counterintelligence team as it navigates shifting loyalties and hidden betrayals. (Xinhua)

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HONG KONG: An international night parade celebrating the Year of the Horse was held in Hong Kong on Tuesday evening, kicking off a series of festive highlight programs for the Chinese New Year.

The parade brought together floats and performing groups to present a spectacular global party in Tsim Sha Tsui, interacting with large crowds of locals and visitors along the route to spread lively blessings.

This year's parade featured 12 floats and performing teams from different countries and regions, creating a vibrant atmosphere that highlighted Hong Kong's role as a hub for international celebrations.

A fusion of local and international, traditional and modern elements could be seen throughout the parade.

This was vividly illustrated when Italy's Cromosau, featuring a giant dinosaur over 5 meters tall and 7 meters long, appeared alongside China's luminous dragon in collaboration with the Hong Kong Chinese Martial Arts Dragon and Lion Dance Association, to stage a "double dragon dance."

"It is my first time watching the float parade in person. The atmosphere here is much more festive and lively compared with watching the live broadcast on TV," Ms. Lee, a Hong Kong resident, said. (Xinhua)

XIAMEN/TAIPEI: More than 40,000 fireworks illuminated the night on Tuesday as the coastal mainland city of Xiamen in Fujian Province and nearby Kinmen island staged their joint fireworks display to mark the Spring Festival.

The 30-minute show started at 8 p.m. on the first day of the Year of the Horse, with fireworks bursting from both Xiamen and Kinmen, which are less than two kilometers apart at their closest point.

Launched in 1987, the annual event has become a long-standing tradition highlighting close ties between Xiamen and Kinmen. Crowds gathered along waterfronts on both sides to watch the show, accompanied by festive music. Kinmen residents also staged traditional lion dances to bring good fortune for the Chinese New Year. (Xinhua)

New body aims to align patient care with global standards

Kuwait launches Association for Intravenous Nutrition to advance clinical practice

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The Kuwait Pharmaceutical Association launched the "Kuwait Association for Intravenous Nutrition" Wednesday evening, in the presence of the association's President Dr. Ahmed Taqi, and the Head of the Therapeutic Nutrition Department Dr. Al-Jazi Al-Ajmi.

The event was attended by a select group of specialists, pharmacists, nutritionists, and representatives from the Ministry of Health and academic institutions.

It included a coordination meeting with a representative of the European Society for Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism

(ESPEN).

During the meeting, opportunities for cooperation and scientific exchange were discussed, along with ways to benefit from European expertise in the field of clinical nutrition.

Dr. Taqi emphasized that the launch of the Kuwait Association for Intravenous Nutrition marks a significant milestone in the development of specialized pharmaceutical practice in Kuwait.

He highlighted the association's commitment to supporting scientific initiatives that enhance patient safety and improve the quality of healthcare services. Dr. Taqi indicated that cooperation with prestigious international organizations such as ESPEN and the IVPN network reflects the association's dedication to embracing global expertise and providing an advanced scientific environment.

Also, pharmacist Ali Abdullah, a member of the association's board of directors and head of the Parenteral Nutrition (TPN) Unit at Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital, stated that establishing the association and activating cooperation with specialized international entities represents a direct investment in patient safety and the quality of healthcare.

He affirmed that the goal is to develop unified national standards for parenteral nutrition that align with international protocols, in addition to training Kuwaiti pharmacists on the most precise practices in this vital field.

Meanwhile, the association's Secretary, pharmacist Ali

Al-Muhanna, outlined the association's strategic objectives, emphasizing that it will serve as a scientific and organizational umbrella for parenteral nutrition specialists and help unify efforts and facilitate the exchange of expertise.

The event also included a presentation by the association's Secretary-General and IVPN network representative in Kuwait, Dr. Faisal Al-Enezi, on the anticipated partnership with the network, one of the largest in the Middle East specializing in parenteral nutrition.

The meeting also witnessed the announcement of the association's board of directors, chaired by pharmacist Noura Al-Hamdan, with Ali Al-Muhanna as Secretary and Saleh Al-Kandari as Treasurer.

Red alert

Chikungunya kills 3 in Bolivia

LA PAZ, Feb 19, (Xinhua): Bolivia has recorded three fatalities and 2,913 confirmed cases of Chikungunya fever in the eastern department of Santa Cruz, health authorities reported Wednesday.

The victims include two men and one woman, aged 83, 56, and 78 respectively, said Carlos Hurtado, head of Epidemiology at the Santa Cruz Departmental Health Service.

He warned that the epidemic curve has not yet peaked and urged the public to remain vigilant. A red alert was issued on Feb. 9 due to the rapid spread of the disease.

The positivity rate currently stands at 65 percent, the highest since the outbreak began, while 55 percent of the confirmed cases are in Santa Cruz de la Sierra municipality, the department's capital, Hurtado said. Currently, 32 patients are hospitalized, including seven in serious condition, he added.

The red alert, issued by the health authorities shortly after the first death was confirmed, prompted intensified mosquito control, fumigation, and surveillance efforts across 27 affected municipalities.

Chikungunya fever is a viral disease characterized by sudden high fever, severe joint and muscle pain, headache and fatigue.

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Trachoma: The World Health Organization (WHO) announced on Wednesday that Libya has eliminated trachoma as a public health problem, marking a significant public health achievement in the eastern Mediterranean region.

In a statement, the organization said that Libya has become the 28th worldwide and the eighth in the eastern Mediterranean region to achieve this milestone.

In 2022, surveys in six southern districts found the prevalence of active trachoma and trichiasis below the WHO elimination thresholds, except for trichiasis in Wadi Al HayaaGhat, where a surgical campaign was launched to treat remaining cases. A further survey in 2023 confirmed that the prevalence of trichiasis had also fallen below the threshold.

The WHO said that Libya reached the milestone despite years of political instability and humanitarian challenges that affected health services, led to population displacement, and increased pressure on water and sanitation services.

First-trimester care falling in US, CDC says

Early prenatal care vital for overall health for mother and child: study

NEW YORK, Feb 19, (AP): Early prenatal care improves the chances of having a healthy pregnancy and baby. But a new federal report shows it's been on the decline.

The share of US births to women who began prenatal care in the first trimester dropped from 78.3% in 2021 to 75.5% in 2024, according to data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Thursday.

Meanwhile, starting care later in pregnancy or getting no care at all has been on the rise. Prenatal care beginning in the second trimester rose from 15.4% to 17.3%, and starting care in the third trimester or getting no care went from 6.3% to 7.3%.

"We know that early engagement in prenatal care is linked to better overall health outcomes," said Dr. Clayton Alfonso, an OB-GYN at Duke University in North Carolina. When patients delay medical care during pregnancy, "we've missed that window to optimize both fetal and maternal care."

While the trend identified in the report held for nearly all racial and ethnic groups, the decrease in early prenatal care was higher for moms in minority groups. For example, first-trimester care dropped from 69.7% in 2021 to 65.1% in 2024 for Black mothers. Getting late or no prenatal care raises the risk of maternal mortality, which is much higher among Black mothers.

Michelle Osterman, lead author of the report, said the overall findings represent a shift. Between 2016 and 2021, the timing of when U.S. women started prenatal care had been improving.

The earlier prenatal visits begin, doctors said, the earlier problems can be caught. Visits give doctors a chance to share health guidance, and



A pregnant woman stands for a portrait in Dallas, May 18, 2023. (AP)

can include blood pressure checks, screenings, blood tests, physical exams and ultrasound scans.

The report doesn't provide reasons why prenatal care is starting later. But the proliferation of maternity care deserts across the nation is a growing concern, said Dr. Grace Ferguson, an OB-GYN in Pittsburgh.

Many hospitals have shut down labor and delivery units "and the prenatal care providers that work at those hospitals also have probably moved," said Ferguson, who was not involved with the report.

A 2024 March of Dimes report found that more than 35% of U.S. counties are maternity care deserts, meaning there's no birthing facility or obstetric provider. Women living in these areas receive less prenatal care, the report showed.

Ferguson, who provides abortions as part of her OB-GYN care, said post-Roe v. Wade abortion restrictions may play a part because some obstetricians are choosing not to practice in states with more restrictive laws.

Alfonso, who was not involved in the CDC report, said he also suspects that access issues for patients are pushing prenatal care later, particularly in rural areas. Patients may have to travel farther to get to appointments and may struggle to find a practice that accepts their insurance, particularly if they have Medicaid.

Doctors fear that things could get worse.

"If this trend continues," Alfonso said, "I worry about kind of what that would mean for morbidity and mortality for our moms."

FDA to consider Moderna new flu shot

FDA to drop two-study rule for new drug approvals

WASHINGTON, Feb 19, (AP): The Food and Drug Administration plans to drop its long-time standard of requiring two rigorous studies to win approval for new drugs, the latest change from Trump administration officials vowing to speed up the availability of certain medical products.

Going forward, the FDA's "default position" will be to require one study for new drugs and other novel health products, FDA Commissioner Dr. Marty Makary and a top deputy, Dr. Vinay Prasad, wrote in a New England Journal of Medicine piece published Wednesday.

The announcement is the latest example of Makary and his team changing longstanding FDA standards and procedures with the stated goal of slashing bureaucracy and accelerating the availability of new medicines. Since arriving at the agency last April, Makary has launched a series of directives that he says will shorten FDA reviews, including mandating the use of artificial intelligence by staffers and offering one-month drug assessments for new medications that serve "national interests."

It contrasts with the FDA's more restrictive approach to other products, including vaccines.

In their piece published Wednesday, Makary and Prasad state that dropping the two-trial requirement reflects modern advances that have made drug research "increasingly precise and scientific."

"In this setting, overreliance on two trials no longer makes sense," they write. "In 2026 there are powerful alternative ways to feel assured that our products help people live longer or better than requiring manufacturers to test them yet again."

The FDA officials predicted the shift would lead to "a surge in drug development."



A sign marks an entrance to a Moderna building in Cambridge, Mass., May 18, 2020. (AP)

Dr. Janet Woodcock, the FDA's former drug director, said the change makes sense and reflects the FDA's decades-long move toward relying on one trial, combined with supporting evidence, for various life-threatening diseases, including cancer.

"The scientific point is well taken that as we move toward greater understanding of biology and disease we don't need to do two trials all the time," said Woodcock, who led the FDA's drug center for about 20 years before retiring in 2024.

The two-study standard for drugs dates to the early 1960s, when Congress passed a law requiring the FDA to review data from "adequate and well-controlled investigations," before clearing new medications. For decades, the agency interpreted that requirement as meaning at least two studies, preferably with a large number of patients and significant follow-up time.

The reason for requiring the second study was to confirm that the first trial's results weren't a fluke and could be reproduced.

Also:

NEW YORK: FDA will consider whether to approve Moderna's new flu vaccine after all, resolving a dispute that had blocked the company's application for the first-of-its-kind shot.

Moderna announced the change Wednesday, about a week after revealing that the FDA's vaccine chief was refusing to review the new vaccine, made with Nobel Prize-winning mRNA technology.

The dispute centered over a 40,000-person clinical trial that concluded Moderna's new vaccine was more effective in adults aged 50 and older than one of the standard flu shots used today. In the FDA's rare "refusal to file" letter, vaccine director Dr. Vinay Prasad faulted the trial for not including another brand specifically recommended for people 65 and older.

Moderna publicly objected. It said that while the FDA had recommended that approach, the agency ultimately agreed to the study's design - and that the company shared additional comparison data from a separate trial that used a high-dose shot for older people. Nor did the FDA identify any safety concerns.

Still, Moderna said Wednesday that in a compromise, it is seeking full approval for the vaccine's use in adults 50 to 64 and accelerated approval for those 65 and older, with an additional study once the shot is on the market. Shares of Moderna Inc. closed up 6% Wednesday.

The FDA is targeting a decision on the application by Aug. 5, and Moderna said it hoped to make the vaccine available later this year. It also has applied for the vaccine's approval in **Europe, Canada and Australia.**

Fire weather days triple

Global warming boosts days of fire-prone weather worldwide

WASHINGTON, Feb 19, (AP): The number of days when the weather gets hot, dry and windy - ideal to spark extreme wildfires - has nearly tripled in the past 45 years across the globe, with the trend increasing even higher in the Americas, a new study shows.

And more than half of that increase is caused by human-caused climate change, researchers calculated.

What this means is that as the world warms, more places across the globe are prone to go up in flames at the same time because of increasingly synchronous fire weather, which is when multiple places have the right conditions to go up in smoke. Countries may not have enough resources to put out all the fires popping up and help won't be as likely to come from neighbors busy with their own flames, according to the authors of a study in Wednesday's *Science Advances*.

In 1979 and for the next 15 years, the world averaged 22 synchronous fire weather days a year for flames that stayed within large global regions, the

study found. In 2023 and 2024, it was up to more than 60 days a year.

"These sorts of changes that we have seen increase the likelihood in a lot of areas that there will be fires that are going to be very challenging to suppress," said study co-author John Abatzoglou, a fire scientist at the University of California, Merced. The researchers didn't look at actual fires, but the weather conditions: warm, with strong winds and dry air and ground.

"It increases the likelihood of widespread fire outbreaks, but the weather is one dimension," said study lead author Cong Yin, a fire researcher at University of California, Merced. The other big ingredients to fires are oxygen, fuel such as trees and brush, and ignition such as lightning or arson or human accidents.

This study is important because extreme fire weather is the primary - but not only - factor in increasing fire impacts across the globe, said fire scientist Mike Flannigan of Thompson Rivers University in Canada, who wasn't part of the study. And it's

also important because regions that used to have fire seasons at different times and could share resources are now overlapping, he said. Abatzoglou said: "And that's where things begin to break."

More than 60% of the global increase in synchronous fire weather days can be attributed to climate change from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas, Yin said. He and his colleagues know this because they used computer simulations to compare what's happened in the last 45 years to a fictional world without the increased greenhouse gases from burning fossil fuels. The continental United States, from 1979 to 1988, averaged 7.7 synchronous fire weather days a year. But in the last 10 years that average was up to 38 days a year, according to Yin.

But that is nothing compared to the southern half of South America. That region averaged 5.5 synchronous fire weather days a year from 1979 to 1988; over the last decade, that's risen to 70.6 days a year, including 118 days in 2023.



A firefighter monitors flames caused by the Hughes Fire along Castaic Lake in Castaic, Calif., Jan. 22, 2025. (AP)

Arsenal slips at Wolves in Premier League title twist

Late stumble reopens door for Man City



Wolverhampton Wanderers' Andre, left, and Arsenal's Noni Madueke challenge for the ball during the Premier League soccer match between Wolverhampton Wanderers and Arsenal in Wolverhampton, England. (AP)

Russo scores twice

Titleholder Arsenal and Madrid cruise into women's Champions League quarterfinals

LONDON, Feb 19, (AP): Titleholder Arsenal and Real Madrid easily won their home games to reach the women's Champions League quarterfinals.

Alessia Russo scored twice as Arsenal beat Belgian side OH Leuven 3-1 for a 7-1 aggregate win to set up a quarterfinal with English rival Chelsea.

Earlier, Madrid set up a Clasico against three-time champion Barcelona by beating Paris FC 2-0 for a 5-2 aggregate victory.

Striker Naomie Feller opened the scoring for Madrid and defender Melvyn N'Dongala put through her own net.

Russo's brace took her onto a tournament-leading seven goals as Arsenal followed up its 4-0 away win from the first leg.

The England forward fired Arsenal ahead in the 23rd minute with a turn and first-time shot, and her second goal in the 90th was similar as she again used her strength to swivel and plant a low shot into the corner.

Hungary midfielder Sára Pusztai equalized for the visitors in the 29th with a close-range finish at a rain-soaked Meadow Park in Boreham Wood. Mariona Caldentey restored Arsenal's lead with a penalty midway through the second half.

North Londoner Arsenal won the tournament in 2007, when it was called the Super Cup, and



Arsenal's Mariona Caldentey scores from the penalty spot against Oud-Heverlee Leuven during a UEFA Women's Champions League play-off, second leg soccer match in London. (AP)

remains the only English team to do so. West Londoner Chelsea reached the final once, in 2021, but was routed 4-0 when Barca won its first title.

Earlier this month, Arsenal won the inaugural Women's Champions Cup.

In Madrid, Paris' cause was made harder when

defender Théa Greboval was sent off in the fifth minute for pulling back Feller as she ran through on goal.

Still, the visitors came close to taking a 19th-minute lead at Estadio Alfredo Di Stéfano when Océane Picard's low shot from 20 meters was well saved by goalkeeper Misa Rodríguez.

Attacking midfielder Caroline Weir missed a chance to put Madrid ahead from the penalty spot in the 36th after Picard handled a cross. Goalkeeper Mylène Chavas, playing against her former club, pushed away the spot kick with both hands.

Feller broke Paris' resistance in the 54th when she volleyed in from close range following a fine cross from right back Eva Navarro, who also set up the second goal midway through the second half when her cross led to N'Dongala's own goal from near the penalty spot.

The revamped women's Champions League format has followed the men's competition, with an opening league phase of six rounds instead of eight.

The top four in the 18-team league phase - Barcelona, Lyon, Chelsea and Bayern Munich - advanced directly to the quarters and teams placed fifth to 12th went into the playoffs.

Montemurro decides to take a chance on Fowler's fitness

Kerr back to captain Australia for fifth Women's Asian Cup

SYDNEY, Feb 19, (AP): Sam Kerr will captain Australia in her fifth Women's Asian Cup and Matildas coach Joe Montemurro has decided to take a chance on Mary Fowler's fitness by naming her in his squad Thursday for the Australia-hosted regional soccer tournament beginning in 10 days.

Fowler is back in a Matildas squad for the first time since April of last year when she required a right knee reconstruction after sustaining a rupture to her anterior cruciate ligament while playing for Manchester City in the Women's FA Cup semifinals.

She has managed just 15 minutes of match time since suffering her injury, but returns to a squad full of familiar faces. Kerr will have veterans Steph Catley and Ellie Carpenter as her vice-captains as the Australians seek a second Asian Cup win following the country's 2010 title.

The Asian Cup and next year's World Cup in Brazil could be among the last major global tournaments for the bulk of the Matildas squad, most of whom featured in the 2023 World Cup in Australia.

"Selecting a squad is never easy," Montemurro said in a statement. "But it is a privilege to bring together players who truly represent the identity and spirit of the Matildas, and who understand the responsibility of representing Australia."

Australia meets the Philippines in the opening match of the tournament in Perth on March 1 ahead of group games against Iran at the Gold Coast, south of Brisbane, on March 5 and 2022 finalists South Korea in Sydney on March 8.

The 12-team tournament includes defending champion China and ends March 21 with the final at Sydney's Olympic stadium. Matches will be played at five venues - two stadiums each in Perth and Sydney and at the Gold Coast.

Australia squad: Sam Kerr (captain), Mackenzie Arnold, Ellie Carpenter, Steph Catley, Alex Chidiac, Kyra Cooney-Cross, Caitlin Foord, Mary Fowler, Katrina Gorry, Winona Heatley, Michelle Heyman, Clare Hunt, Kahli Johnson, Alanna Kennedy, Holly McNamara, Teagan Micah, Courtney Nevin, Jamilla Rankin, Hayley Raso, Charlize Rule, Amy Sayer, Remy Siemsen, Kaitlyn Torpey, Emily van Egmond, Clare Wheeler, Jada Whymann.

Villarreal tightens grip on third place

Milan falls seven points behind leader Inter in title race

MILAN, Feb 19, (AP): AC Milan fell seven points behind Inter Milan in the Italian title race after drawing 1-1 at home to Como.

Argentine midfielder Nico Paz put the visitors ahead in the 32nd minute following a clumsy error from Milan goalkeeper Mike Maignan.

The France No. 1 tried passing the ball from the edge of his penalty area, but Paz swiftly intercepted it and shot through Maignan's legs for his ninth league goal of the season.

Portuguese winger Rafael Leão equalized midway through the second half for Milan with a neat lob, after being set up by midfielder Ardon Jashari.

Second-place Milan is four points ahead of defending champion Napoli in third.

Como moved into sixth spot on goal difference from Atalanta in the race for a Champions League place next season. Fifth-place Juventus is four points ahead.

Iona and 12 behind leader Real Madrid after 24 rounds.

It was Villarreal's second victory in three matches following a sequence of five straight winless games across all competitions.

Levante, which remained in second-to-last place, has lost three in a row and hasn't won in four matches.

The game had been scheduled for Dec. 14 but was



AC Milan's Rafael Leao, center, scores against Como during the Serie A soccer match in Milan, Italy. (AP)

Villarreal strengthened its hold on third place in the Spanish league with a 1-0 win at Levante in a match that was initially postponed last year.

Georges Mikautadze scored the 57th-minute winner as Villarreal moved three points ahead of fourth-place Atletico Madrid.

Villarreal is 10 points behind second-place Barce-

lona and 12 behind leader Real Madrid after 24 rounds. A weather alert was issued in the region.

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Marseille is looking to reignite its season with a new coach on board.

The nine-time French champion appointed Habib Beye to replace Roberto De Zerbi following a bad patch of form that saw the club exit the Champions League and drop 12 points behind Ligue 1 leader Lens.

Beye, a former Senegal international who played for Marseille, will be in charge of Friday's trip to Brest.

After leading Red Star to promotion to Ligue 2, Beye spent the last year and a half as the Rennes coach. The club sacked Beye this month.

Marseille has failed to win its past three league games, badly damaging its title hopes. The results including a 5-0 mauling at PSG have left fans fuming. The club hopes Beye, a disciplinarian advocating ball possession and a strong attacking identity, will produce a jolt. Beye's hiring "refocuses us on the challenges we still need to tackle between now and the end of the season," Marseille owner Frank McCourt said.

Since McCourt bought Marseille in 2016, the former powerhouse has failed to find any form of stability in a succession of coaches and crises. It hasn't won the league title since 2010.

WOLVERHAMPTON, England, Feb 19, (AP): Arsenal blew a two-goal lead at last-place Wolves to give a huge boost to Manchester City in the race for the Premier League title.

The league leader was held to a surprise 2-2 draw at Molineux, having led 2-0 in the second half.

Teenage debutant Tom Edozie scored in the fourth minute of added time to complete Wolves' comeback.

"There was a big difference in how we played in the first half and the second half. We dropped our standards and we got punished for it," Arsenal forward Bukayo Saka told the BBC.

The draw means Arsenal has dropped points in back-to-back games and leaves it just five ahead of second-place City, having played a game more.

With the top two still to play each other at City's Etihad Stadium, the title race is too close to call.

"(It's) time to focus on ourselves, improve our standards and improve our performances and it is in our control," Saka said.

Arsenal has led the way for the majority of the season and one bookmaker paid out on Mikel Arteta's team winning the title after it opened up a nine-point lead earlier this month.

But the latest result was the sign that it is feeling the pressure, having finished runner-up in each of the last three seasons. It has won just two of its last seven league games.

Having blown a lead against Brentford last week, it was even worse at a Wolves team that has won just one game all season.

Victory looked all but secured after Saka gave Arsenal the lead with a header in the fifth minute and Piero Hincapie ran through to blast in the second in the 56th.

But Wolves' fightback began with Hugo Bueno's curling shot into the top corner in the 61st.

The 19-year-old Edozie was sent on as a substitute in the 84th and his effort earned the home team only its 10th point of a campaign that looks certain to end in relegation. While it did little for Wolves' chances of survival, it may have had a major impact at the top of the standings.

"Incredibly disappointed that we gave two points away," Arteta said. "I think we need to fault ourselves and give credit to Wolves. But what we did in the second half was nowhere near our standards that we have to play in order to win a game in the Premier League."

"When you don't perform you can get punished, and we got punished and we have to accept the hits because that can happen when you are on top."

Arsenal plays Tottenham on Sunday. Its lead could be cut to two points before it kicks off if City wins against Newcastle on Saturday.

Illinois overwhelms USC by 36 points

Arizona bounces back from first two losses of season to beat BYU

TUCSON, Ariz., Feb 19, (AP): Anthony Dell'Orso scored a season-high 22 points after coming off the bench, Ivan Kharchenkov added 18 and No. 4 Arizona bounced back from its first two losses of the season by beating No. 23 BYU 75-68.

Arizona (24-2, 11-2 Big 12) started the season with 23 consecutive wins, spending nine straight weeks as the nation's No. 1 team before losing back-to-back games to No. 9 Kansas and No. 16 Texas Tech.

Dell'Orso - a 6-foot-6 Australian - helped the Wildcats get back in the win column after shooting 8 of 15 from the field, including 4 of 8 on 3-pointers.

BYU (19-7, 7-6) was led by freshman star AJ Dybantsa, who finished with 35 points on 13-of-28 shooting. The 6-foot-9 forward topped 30 points for the sixth time this season.

The Cougars were playing their first game without starting guard Richie Saunders, who tore his ACL in a 90-86 overtime victory against Colorado on Saturday. He's out for the rest of the season.

Australia never trailed in the second half and slowly pulled away, taking a 66-50 lead on Dell'Orso's 3-pointer with 6:40 left. BYU cut the deficit 73-68 with 1:05 remaining but couldn't get any closer.

Illinois 101, USC 65

In Los Angeles, Andrej Stojakovic scored 22 points to lead seven players in double figures and No. 10 Illinois routed Southern California for its 14th win in 16 games.

Blue and orange-clad fans were out in force for the Fighting Illini's first game against the Trojans in Los Angeles since 1975. The Illini (22-5, 13-3 Big Ten) didn't disappoint, leading all the way to maintain a hold on second place in the conference standings behind No. 1 Michigan.

The Illini were up by 22 at halftime, and poured it on to start the second half. They outscored the Trojans 21-10, hitting five 3-pointers and extending the lead to 75-42. Stojakovic capped the spurt with a steal and one-handed slam that drew cheers.

Gonzaga 80, San Francisco 59

In San Francisco, Graham Ike had 22 points and No. 11 Gonzaga cruised to an 80-59 victory over San Francisco.

Ike, the leading scorer in the West Coast Conference, has scored 20 or more in eight consecutive games. That matches the school record shared by Adam Morrison and Derek Raivio, both in 2006.

Utah 61, West Virginia 56

In Morgantown, Seydou Traore scored 17 points and grabbed six rebounds, and Utah held off West Virginia's desperate rally and beat the Mountaineers.

Terrence Brown and Don McHenry each scored 16 points for the Utes, who never trailed and ended a seven-game losing streak. Utah (10-16, 2-11 Big 12) entered the contest having lost 12 of its last 13.



Gonzaga center Ismaila Diagne (24) reaches for the ball against San Francisco guard Ryan Beasley during the first half of an NCAA college basketball game in San Francisco. (AP)

Gulf Bank launches weekly running activities and Health awareness initiative during Ramadan

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: As part of its Ramadan campaign, "Our Traditions Always Bring Us Together", and in line with its ongoing commitment to promoting healthy and active lifestyles, Gulf Bank has launched a series of weekly sports activities in collaboration with Mad Cool Run Club. The initiative includes organized running sessions held every Tuesday throughout the Holy Month of Ramadan.

This initiative aims to encourage community members to integrate physical activity into their daily

routines and to increase their engagement in running as a key contributor to cardiovascular health and overall well-being. It reflects the values of discipline, dedication, and perseverance embodied by the holy month.

The program consists of four weekly running sessions, held on Tuesdays during Ramadan, starting from the Green Island parking area. Each session will take place between 60 and 90 minutes before iftar and will accommodate up to 50 participants. This structure en-

sures a safe, well-organized, and community-oriented experience, with each session delivering a message that reflects the spirit and values of Ramadan.

In recognition of participants' commitment, all runners who take part in any of the four sessions will be entered into a draw to win five valuable prizes, to be awarded following the conclusion of the final session.

This initiative reflects Gulf Bank's continued dedication to supporting impactful community

programs, promoting sustainable healthy lifestyles, and reinforcing the principles of consistency and self-discipline as long-term values that extend beyond the holy month.

In parallel, and as part of its efforts to enhance public awareness of health and nutrition during Ramadan, Gulf Bank will publish a series of four educational messages across its social media platforms, in collaboration with clinical and sports nutrition specialist Dalal Al-Nakheelan.

Al-Nakheelan is a nationally

recognized expert in health and sports nutrition, with extensive experience in developing nutrition programs that support athletic performance and improve overall quality of life.

Through her participation in this campaign, she will provide practical and balanced guidance to help fast-paced individuals maintain energy levels, strengthen cardiovascular and physical health, and maximize the benefits of exercising during Ramadan in a safe and sustainable manner.



A flyer of the Gulf Bank initiative.

Dubois wins men's 500-meter short track speedskating gold



Steven Dubois of Canada competes during the short track speed skating men's 500m at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Milan, Italy. (AP)

South Korea takes women's relay

MILAN, Feb 19, (AP): Steven Dubois prevented Dutch short track speedskating star Jens van 't Wout from making it three victories out of three at the Milan Cor-tina Olympics by winning the men's 500 meters.

And van 't Wout's older brother, Melle van 't Wout, beat him out for silver.

It was Dubois' first individual Olympic gold after helping Canada to the relay title in Beijing four years ago. He picked up bronze in the 500 then as well as silver in the 1,500.

On his 26th birthday, Melle van 't Wout earned his first medal by finishing just ahead of his brother - who had won both the previous men's individual events in Milan.

Jens van 't Wout was perhaps distracted by watching his brother skate to his own glory.

South Korea recovered to edge out Italy to win the women's 3,000-meter relay on and earn its first short track speedskating gold at the 2026 Olympics.

The team of Minjeong Choi, Gilli Kim, Sukhee Shim and Dohee Noh won in a time of 4 minutes and 4.014 seconds, beating Italy and Canada. Choi was part of the team that won silver in Beijing four years ago.

"For the women's relay, there are expectations and a sense of responsibility that we have as Koreans," said Choi, who now has four Olympic gold medals as well as two silver. "Because of that, we wanted to keep up (the good work) this time as well."

It was nevertheless a 14th Olympic medal for Italy's Arianna Fontana at her sixth Winter Games to beat fencer Edoardo Mangiarotti's record for most Olympic medals by an Italian athlete - a mark that has stood since 1960.

There was disappointment for the Netherlands as Michelle Velzeboer - the sister of double Olympic champion Xandra Velzeboer - fell with 16 laps remaining. South Korea was slowed down by the crash but there was enough distance left for the team to recover.

Then Kim lived up to her nickname of "Lamborghini" - after the famous Italian sports car because of her speed - and burst past Fontana with the finish line in sight.

When the U.S. gave up a tying goal to Sweden with 91 seconds left in the quarterfinals at the Olympics, even the most seasoned players were on edge.

When Canada was trailing Czechia with under four minutes left, guys with gold medals and Stanley Cup rings started to feel butterflies.

After plenty of nerves, the U.S. and Canada are moving on to the semifinals, though it took a roller coaster of emotions to get there.

Quinn Hughes scored in overtime to put the U.S. past Sweden 2-1 after

Mika Zibanejad scored to tie it late.

Earlier, Nick Suzuki tied it for Canada late in regulation against Czechia, and Mitch Marner won it 4-3 in overtime to avoid what would have been a stunning early exit.

Finland also escaped an upset bid by rallying to beat Switzerland 3-2 in OT. Sweden is going home early from a tournament that did not go as planned for a team with a full roster of 25 NHL players, while upstart Slovakia is making another improbable run at the Games.

After Canada did its part, the U.S. bounced back from Zibanejad scoring to keep alive the possibility of the North American rivals meeting in the gold medal game Sunday. Goaltender Connor Hellebuyck stopped 28 of the 29 shots he faced, none more important than a Grade-A chance by Lucas Raymond during the second period.

The U.S. will face Slovakia in one semifinal on Friday night. Just before that, also unbeaten Canada plays Finland in the other.

After losing captain Sidney Crosby to injury, Canada was staring down what would have been a stunning quarterfinal exit until Nick Suzuki tied it on a deflection goal with 3:27 left. Then Mitch Marner scored a little more than a minute into overtime to beat Czechia 4-3 and send the tournament favorite into the semifinals.

The nerves were palpable when Canada fell behind with 7:42 remaining on Ondrej Palat's goal on an odd-man rush off a pass from Martin Necas. Replays showed Czechia had six skaters on the ice, which Nathan MacKinnon said he and his teammates were aware of, even if on-ice officials didn't notice.

Suzuki just about did it all on the tying goal, sending the puck out to the point to Devon Toews and then redirecting the defenseman's shot that was going well wide past Lukas Dostal and into the net.

Jordan Binnington denied David Pastrnak on a breakaway with 70 seconds left to send the game past regulation. It was the biggest of Binnington's 21 saves in an excellent performance from Canada's starter.

Then Marner summoned some more heroics playing for Canada, scoring his second OT goal in an international tournament in as many chances. Marner also scored in a similar fashion a year ago at the 4 Nations Face-Off.

Much like Canada, Finland was trailing late in its game against Switzerland. The Finns also got a late goal to avoid an upset defeat.

Miro Heiskanen tied it with 72 seconds left. Arttu Lehkonen scored in overtime and Finland escaped with a 3-2 victory. Heiskanen's shot banked in off Switzerland defenseman Jonas Siegenthaler's stick and past goaltender Leonardo Genoni.

Finland was actually down two goals after Switzerland's Damien Riat and Nino Niederreiter scored 1 minute, 12 seconds apart in the first period. It took until there was 6:06 left before Sebastian Aho got Finland on the board.

Italy finishes maiden appearance with plaudits

West Indies complete T20 World Cup group stage undefeated

KOLKATA, India, Feb 19, (AP): West Indies completed the T20 World Cup group stage undefeated after dismissing Italy for 123 and winning by 42 runs.

Italy finished its maiden World Cup appearance with plaudits after stunning Nepal and losing to England narrowly, Scotland and the West Indies.

Both teams struggled on what appears to be a good batting pitch at Eden Gardens.

West Indies captain Shai Hope starred with 75 off 46 balls, his second straight World Cup half-century, and the next best score was Ben Manenti's 26 for Italy.

West Indies defended a sub-par 165. Italy lost three wickets in the powerplay thanks to medium-pacer Matthew Forde, and pacer Shamar Joseph limited Italy in the middle and death overs with 4-30. Joseph also took four catches.

Hope kept the West Indies from floundering, opening the batting and hitting four sixes and six boundaries until he was bowled by Krishan Kalugamage in the 16th over.

In the Super Eights, the West Indies will face 2024 champion India, 2024 runner-up South Africa, and



Italy's Benjamin Manenti plays a shot during the T20 World Cup cricket match between West Indies and Italy in Kolkata, India. (AP)

Zimbabwe, which knocked out Australia.

"We'll have to find ways to be more forceful when the crunch time comes," Hope said. "We have batting depth but we need to be smart. Need to be clinical with strokeplay. Need to capitalize on deliveries. (We're) in good shape going into the Super Eights."

Hope kept the West Indies from floundering, opening the batting and hitting four sixes and six boundaries until he was bowled by Krishan Kalugamage in the 16th over.

Italy captain Harry Manenti said he was proud of their ability to stay in the fight, notably against full members England and the West Indies.

"We haven't played the perfect game despite showing promise in moments," Manenti said. "It's important for all associate nations to be funded and well looked after, which is tough. If we keep getting support

from the ICC, we'll get more competitive. Lack of games have hurt us (but) the more we play the higher are the chances to close out games like this."

Elsewhere, defending champion India beat the Netherlands by 17 runs to finish unbeaten in Group A, while South Africa chased down a victory target of 123 with 40 balls to spare against the United Arab Emirates to remain undefeated in Group D.

Shivam Dube hit 66 off 31 balls to help India recover from 69-3 to reach 193-6 before the Netherlands replied with 176-7. India, which had already qualified for the Super 8s, stretched its winning record to 12 games in T20 World Cups since 2024.

Abhishek Sharma fell for a third straight duck in the competition, bowled by Aryan Dutt in the first over.

Dube hit six sixes, using the slower pace of the Dutch bowlers to his advantage, and raced to 50 off 25 balls.

Hardik Pandya scored 30 off 21 deliveries as the pair added 76 off 35 balls.

The Netherlands was never likely to reach its target. Bas de Leede made 33 and opener Michael Levitt hit 24.

Burgan climbs to 2nd in Handball Premier League

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: Burgan moved up the Premier Handball League standings, claiming temporary second place with 16 points after a convincing 36-25 victory over Al-Arabi. The match, part of Round 12, was held at Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Complex. Al-Arabi remains fourth with 12 points.

In the same round, Al-Qadsia defeated Al-Nasr 29-24, rising to fifth place with 12 points, while Al-Nasr stays at the bottom with just two points.

In the First Division League, Round 9 continues today, Friday, with Al-Sahef facing Yarmouk at 8:00 PM and Al-Qurain taking on Al-Fahaheel at 10:00 PM.

Khaitan leads the First Division with 14 points, followed by Al-Qurain with 10, Yarmouk with 9, the Youth Team with 5, Al-Fahaheel with 4, and Al-Sahef yet to score.

The First Division champion earns automatic promotion to next season's



Al-Nasr player is well defended by an opponent.

Premier League, while the second-placed team will contest a promotion/relegation playoff against the seventh-placed Premier League team at the season's end.

Title race heats up as Al Hilal hosts Al Ittihad

RIYADH, Feb 19: Al Hilal host fierce rival Al Ittihad at Kingdom Arena in Riyadh on Saturday in the standout fixture of Matchweek 23 of the Saudi Pro League.

League leader Al Hilal, who sits on 53 points, is determined to protect its spot at the summit amid intense pressure from Al Nassr (52 points) and Al-Ahli (50). It faces reigning champion Al Ittihad, whose league campaign has fallen below expectations this season.

Currently sixth with 37 points, Al Ittihad's hopes of retaining the league title appear slim. However, the team remains in contention for silverware in the King's Cup, having reached the semi-finals, and continues to compete in the AFC Champions League Elite.

Portuguese coach Sérgio Conceição



In this file photo, players vie for the ball during the first encounter.

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West Indies' Shamar Joseph bowls a delivery during the T20 World Cup cricket match between West Indies and Italy in Kolkata, India. (AP)
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Sports

Veteran Al-Mutawa seals semifinal spot for Al-Qadsia



Al-Qadsia players celebrate with officials after qualifying for the Gulf Club Champions League semifinals.

Al-Rayyan looms in Gulf Club Champions League

By Hassan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

DUBAI, Feb 19: Al Qadsia secured a semi-final showdown with Qatar's Al Rayyan in the Gulf Club Champions League on March 4 and 11 after edging UAE side Al Ain 1-0 in their decisive Group A finale. Veteran star Bader Al-Mutawa netted the crucial goal to seal qualification.

Al Ain's Ibrahima Nadiya received a red card in

the 12th minute, giving Qadsia the advantage and allowing them to dominate possession and put constant pressure on their rivals' goal.

The victory, which was the only result that would see it through, lifted Al Qadsia to 10 points and second place in the group, behind Iraqi leader Zakho, who finished on 13 points.

Iraq's Zakho secured a thrilling 3-2 victory over Bahraini side Sitra to book its place in the semi-finals.

In the other semifinal matchup, Saudi Arabia's Al Shabab will take on Zakho, with the winners advancing to the final scheduled for April 14.

Head coach Nabil Maaloul admitted the road to qualification was "tough," praising the players, management, and

supporters for standing behind the team. He also expressed appreciation to Kuwait Football Association President Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousuf for providing the necessary support to ensure the club's strong representation of Kuwait abroad.

Al-Mutawa congratulated the fans on the achievement, highlighting their loyalty from the opening round despite inconsistent results. "Making our supporters proud is our priority. They deserve to see us repay their faith and backing," he said.

He acknowledged that Al Ain had shown impressive form in the early rounds but faded toward the end, while Al Qadsia managed to regroup after a shaky start and revive its campaign. According to Al-Mutawa, the squad and staff united

after disappointing early performances to correct their path and restore confidence.

The captain stressed that the team's recent resurgence has been evident in domestic competitions. Having already lifted the Super Cup, Al Qadsia is eager to maintain momentum and compete strongly for the remaining titles this season.

Team manager Musaada Nada reassured fans over the condition of Neskens Kebano, confirming the player is stable after suffering a facial injury following a strong challenge that forced him off during the match.

Nada concluded by thanking Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousuf for his continued backing of Kuwaiti clubs in regional competitions.

Sulaibikhat plays winless Sahel

Clash of titans: Qadsia takes on Arabi in Volleyball League



A file photo of Arabi and Qadsia players fighting for the ball.

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: On Saturday, at 10:00 PM, the spotlight of the Kuwait Volleyball League shines on the clash between Al-Qadsia and Al-Arabi, with an earlier match at 8:00 PM featuring Al Sahel against Al Sulaibikhat. Both games will be held at the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Complex Hall.

League leader Kuwait Club tops the standings with 20 points, followed by Al-Qadsia with 17, and Al-Arabi in third with 15. Kazma sits fourth with 14, Al Sulaibikhat fifth with 13, Burgan sixth with 11, Al Shabab seventh with 10, Yarmouk eighth with 5, Al Nasr ninth, and Al Sahel at the bottom with zero points.

Al-Qadsia aims to bounce back from last round's unexpected 2-3 defeat to Yarmouk, hoping to secure all three points and temporarily share the top spot with Kuwait Club, who faces Al Nasr on Sunday. Coach Sinisa counts on professional players Brazilian Caio and Pakistani Murad Jehan, alongside experienced local talent.

The club has also filed a protest regarding the Yarmouk match, claiming the opponent fielded professional and youth players, violating league rules.

Al-Arabi returns after the league's hiatus since January 10 due to the West Asia Clubs Championship hosted by Kuwait Club. The team's last outing ended in a 1-3 loss to Kazma. Coach Milan aims to challenge Al-Qadsia for second place, relying on professional players Dominican Felix Santos and Uzbek Islam Subirov, complemented by key local stars.

In the earlier fixture, Al Sulaibikhat is expected to secure a straightforward victory over winless Al Sahel.

Best of the Rest

Coutinho exits Vasco: Philippe Coutinho has parted ways with Vasco da Gama, citing mental health and a realization that his cycle at the Brazilian club had ended.

The announcement came four days after Coutinho was booed by fans during Vasco's home clash with Volta Redonda. The 33-year-old was substituted at halftime and did not return to the bench as Vasco won on penalties.

"I would never disrespect the fans, my teammates or Vasco," Coutinho, who has 68 caps for Brazil, said in a social media post.

"I have never done that anywhere I have played. Those who know me know that."

At that moment, as I was heading to the locker room, I felt and realized that my cycle at the club had come to an end, and I did not return in order to prioritize my mental health. It hurts a lot." Coutinho made 81 appearances and scored 17 goals in his second spell with Vasco. He helped the Rio de Janeiro club reach the final of last year's Copa do Brasil, which it lost to Corinthians. (Xinhua)

Atletico blows two-goal lead at Club Brugge

Bodø/Glimt upsets Inter, Gordon hits 4 as Newcastle routs Qarabag

BODO, Norway, Feb 19, (AP): Tiny Bodø/Glimt produced another Champions League shock by stunning last year's beaten finalist Inter Milan 3-1 in the playoffs.

The Norwegian underdog followed up back-to-back wins against Manchester City and Atletico Madrid by securing a two-goal advantage going into next week's second leg in Milan.

Anthony Gordon scored four goals in the first half as Newcastle

roared to a 2-0 lead after its first leg at home.

Atletico drew 3-3 away to Club Brugge and Bayer Leverkusen has a 2-0 lead after its first leg at home.

Bodø/Glimt is fast becoming the unlikely story of this season's Champions League, producing one upset after another.

After booking its place in the playoffs with wins against City and Atletico, it strengthened its chances of advancing to the round of 16 with victory against Italian league leader Inter.

Sondre Fet put the home team ahead after collecting Kasper Høgh's backheel in the 20th minute.

Francesco Pio Esposito equalized before the break, but Bodø/Glimt took control in the second half.

Høgh produced a second assist to set up Jens Petter Hauge in the 61st and then got a goal himself three minutes later.

"I feel amazing, just thankful to play with this team. I'm happy that I could help the team by making assists and scoring a goal. I play in a good team, so that's nice," Høgh said.

Inter was a beaten finalist in two of the last three seasons, but now faces a major test to advance to the

next round.

"A bad result for us and a bad night for us, but we need to stay calm and believe that we can win at home," Inter midfielder Petar Sucic said.

Newcastle was 5-0 up by halftime against Qarabag in Azerbaijan and, barring an unlikely collapse in the second leg at home, is cruising into the round of 16.

Gordon completed his hat trick in 33 minutes at the Tofik Bakhramov Stadium in Baku and got a fourth in first-half added time.

He now has 10 Champions League goals this season, breaking Alan Shearer's Newcastle record of six in a single campaign in European soccer's top club competition.

"He could have had more, but (it was) a very good display," coach Eddie Howe said.

Malick Thiaw was also on target for the Premier League team, which had 16 shots in a rampant first half.

Elvin Jafarguliyev pulled one back for Qarabag, which has been one of the surprise stories of this season's Champions League after qualifying for the playoffs. But Jacob Murphy's deflected strike completed the rout for Newcastle, which will be the fifth English team in the last 16 if it advances.

Atletico blew a two-goal lead at Club Brugge and then saw the Belgians come back again with an equalizer in the 89th to keep the teams neck and neck at 3-3.

Julian Alvarez's eighth-minute penalty was followed by another goal from January signing Ademola Lookman in first-half added time.



Bodø/Glimt's Ole Didrik Blomberg, left, and Inter Milan's Francesco Acerbi (15) vie for the ball during a Champions League soccer match in Bodo, Norway. (AP)

Impressive showing by Kuwait's figure skaters



Lara Al-Barak and Sama Jaragh alongside their coach.

BERLIN, Feb 19: Salem Al-Ajmi, manager of Kuwait's girls' national figure skating team, praised skaters Lara Al-Barak and Sama Jaragh for their strong performance at the Berlin International Figure Skating Championship.

The tournament featured wide participation from more than 20 countries and was held under the direct supervision of the International Skating Union (ISU).

Speaking after the event, Al-Ajmi said both athletes delivered their best performances in their respective categories, in line with ISU regulations. He described the competition as a valuable experience that provided important international exposure and further developed their technical abilities. He added that the Kuwait Winter Games Club, chaired by Fahid Al-Ajmi, is committed to ensuring Kuwaiti female skaters participate in major international events.

This approach forms part of a long-term strategy to elevate their performance levels and prepare them for the 2029 Asian Winter Games, set to take place in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Al-Ajmi also commended the dedication shown by Al-Barak and Jaragh throughout the championship, noting that their display reflects the steady progress of figure skating in Kuwait. He highlighted the key role played by Russian coach Yulia Martysheva and the administrative team in preparing the skaters to appear in such a competitive and commendable form.