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## DECREE LAW TIGHTENS OVERSIGHT OF DIGITAL COMMERCE SECTOR

**Opinion**

**Ahmed Al-Jarallah**  
Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times



# Online sellers must now secure license in Kuwait

### Jail, closure, fines for e-commerce violations

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: Decree Law No. 10/2026 was issued on Sunday for regulating the digital commerce sector, reports Al-Seyassah daily.**

The decree aligns with global developments and ensures a balance between encouraging innovation and protecting consumers while guaranteeing transparency and fairness in transactions.

It establishes a legislative framework to regulate the digital commerce sector in the State of Kuwait, enhancing trust in digital transactions, creating a secure and competi-

tive environment that fosters investment and innovation, and contributing to the goals of Kuwait's development vision, New Kuwait 2035.

The decree also takes into account laws related to electronic transactions, consumer protection, copyright and neighboring rights, cybersecurity, and competition protection.

The decree comprises 45 articles in 10 chapters, covering comprehensive provisions related to the regulatory, procedural, supervisory, and punitive aspects of the digital commerce sector.

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## The Diwaniya: A center for Kuwaiti unity

THE diwaniya, a unique social custom in Kuwait, has distinguished the country as a social and political entity for about 400 years. While rarely found or only present in a limited, perhaps borrowed, capacity elsewhere, this phenomenon is deeply rooted in Kuwaiti culture.

Its significance was formally recognized last year when UNESCO officially inscribed the diwaniya on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

More than just a social gathering place, the diwaniya serves as an institution with a significant political function, playing a key role in gauging public opinion.

Consequently, visits are frequent, drawing both official figures and ordinary citizens, along with sheikhs and princes who are keen on attending such gatherings.

This custom becomes particularly vital during Ramadan, a time when it embodies tolerance, brotherhood and affection.

The emphasis on reconciliation and goodwill during this holy month is so strong that even those who are estranged visit one another.

The holy month highlights core Arab and Islamic values, especially since they are expressed in the traditional Kuwaiti gathering places, known as diwanis. Here, doors and hearts are equally open to everyone, exemplifying an authentic communal spirit.

In the diwaniya, everyone meets as an equal -- from ministers and officials to ordinary citizens, facilitating comfortable and informal interaction.

This practice is deeply woven into the Kuwaiti culture, with an etiquette that adapts over time, and it holds a key position in the political and economic life of the nation.

We recently witnessed the true nature of Kuwaitis during this period, as they demonstrate noble values like kinship, compassion, friendship and love.

Daily diwaniya visits attract people of all ages, eager to connect regardless of external challenges, because these gatherings are fundamental to human communication. This essential role is the reason why the diwaniya is often called 'the gathering place of the people of Kuwait.'

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Kuwait glows under a sky painted with Ramadan serenity.

Photo by Samer Shiqer



Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs with UK Ambassador.

## Awqaf Minister, UK Ambassador review shared religious priorities

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23, (KUNA): Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Dr. Mohammad Al-Wasmi discussed ways to enhance cooperation with UK Ambassador to Kuwait Qudsi Rasheed at the General Secretariat of Awqaf headquarters.

The Ministry said Monday that Minister Al-Wasmi affirmed commitment to

strengthening cooperation with international institutions in a manner reflecting Islam's tolerant message and highlighting its religious and awareness role.

Both sides reviewed shared priorities in religious and awareness activities and discussed supporting initiatives that promote moderation and balanced discourse.

### Day by Day

YOUR Highness the Crown Prince, people admire the way your face lights up with a smile when you visit the citizens' diwanis. Such a cheerful face embodies nobility and reflects the deeply rooted values of your nation, including kindness and compassion.

Your Highness, may God bless your steps and keep your warm smile.

It is said that what is in the heart shines on the face.

May God keep Your Highness safe and sound for the sake of Kuwait and its people, and may God bless His Highness the Amir.

... Yet tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar

### Ramadan Timings

Imsak..... Tuesday.....05:00  
Iftar..... Tuesday.....17:44  
Imsak..... Wednesday.....04:59

### Newswatch

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwait's Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) participated in an international virtual workshop organized by the United Nations' GlobE Network.

Nazaha said on Monday that this workshop is subsequent to its participation in a discussion panel on beneficial ownership transparency, held on the sidelines of the Conference of States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption in December 2025. (KUNA)

GENEVA: United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Monday warned of "flagrant violations of human rights, human dignity and international law in the occupied Palestinian territories" stressing the need for international action at a time when the "Two-State solution is being stripped away in broad daylight." (KUNA)

## Gulf solidarity with Kuwait grows as Iraq's maps spark maritime tensions

RIYADH, Feb 23, (KUNA): The Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs reaffirmed its categorical rejection of any external claims to rights in the Saudi-Kuwaiti Divided Submerged Zone, stressing adherence to bilateral agreements, international law, and relevant United Nations resolutions.

In a statement, the ministry expressed serious concern over coordinate lists and maps recently submitted by Iraq to the United Nations, noting that they include encroachments on

parts of the submerged area adjacent to the Saudi-Kuwaiti Divided Zone. It emphasized that the zone is jointly owned by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait under binding bilateral accords and governed by the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which regulates natural resource rights in such areas.

The ministry added that Iraq's submitted coordinates constitute a violation of Kuwait's sovereignty over its maritime areas and water elevations,

including Fisht Al-Eid and Fisht Al-Eij, which fall under Kuwaiti jurisdiction in line with international law and recognized boundary frameworks. It also cited UN Security Council Resolution 833 of 1993, which delimited the land and maritime boundaries between Kuwait and Iraq, urging dialogue, restraint, and responsible engagement in accordance with good-neighborly principles and international norms.

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### Only sons, pre-2012 exempted

## Kuwait Armed Forces announces amendments to conscription rules

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23, (KUNA): The Kuwait Armed Forces announced on Monday the issuance of Decree-Law No. 9 of 2026, introducing amendments to Law No. 20 of 2015 on national military service.

In a press statement, the Armed Forces said the amendments aim to further develop the legislative framework governing national service in line with

practical requirements and to address observations that emerged during implementation.

The changes seek to remedy legislative and procedural gaps that had led to delays in processing certain transactions and difficulties in handling cases not explicitly covered under the original law.

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## E-payments mandatory across health institutes, salons, clubs

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: Minister of Health Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadhi emphasized to all facilities under public health supervision the necessity of collecting fees for services only through banking channels and electronic payment methods, completely refraining from

cash collection.

This directive is in line with the commitment of the State towards digital transformation and enhancing transparency in healthcare services.

The newspaper obtained a copy of the official letter that the minister addressed to Assistant Undersecretary for Public Health Affairs at the Health Ministry Dr. Al-Mundhir Al-Hasawi, in which he stressed the importance of circulating the directive to all facilities under public health supervision.

These facilities include health institutes, salons for men, women and children, sports clubs, private nurseries,

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## Violators apprehended, vehicles impounded in nationwide sweep

By Munif Naif  
Al-Seyassah /Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Ministry of Interior on Monday launched a large-scale security campaign on the Second Ring Road, resulting in the issuance of 230 traffic tickets and the impoundment of five vehicles and a motorcycle within a few hours.

The ministry confirmed the participation of several security sectors in the campaign, including the Traffic and Operations Sector (traffic patrols and traffic investigation patrols), Security Directorates Affairs Sector, and Human Resources and Information Technology Sector.

The campaign is part of the ongoing security efforts to strictly enforce the law, apprehend violators and wanted individuals and reduce dangerous traffic behaviors, based on the directives of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef.

The ministry added that the campaign utilized smart patrols equipped with the latest technologies, which contribute to supporting real-time monitoring and tracking operations, identifying wanted individuals and vehicles, enhancing the efficiency of security operations, and apprehending violators.

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'Dar Yamama' overflows with well-wishers



Al-Dughaishim Diwaniya welcomes Ramadan well-wishers



Boursa Kuwait achieves over 55% increase in its net profit for 2025

## Prayer Timings

Fajr ..... 05:01 Asr ..... 15:17  
 Sunrise .. 06:20 Maghrib .. 17:43  
 Zohr ..... 12:01 Isha ..... 19:00

# Local

## Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

**By Day:** Warm to rather hot with light to moderate freshening at times southeasterly wind changing to northwesterly wind, with speed of 15-50 km/h causing

## Weather

rising dust and some high clouds will appear.

**By Night:** Rather cold with moderate to fresh strong at times northwesterly wind, with speed of 20-60 km/h with a chance for airborne dust.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait Airport	33	13
Abdaly	34	16
Jahra	34	16
Salmiyah	28	19
Jalaliyah	32	14
Nuwaisib	29	15



HH the Amir

HH the Crown Prince

HH the Prime Minister

## Amir congratulates Japan Emperor on his birthday

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Monday a cable of congratulations to Japan Emperor Naruhito on the occasion of his birthday.

His Highness the Amir wished the Japanese Emperor good health and further welfare for the people of Japan.

## Crown Prince

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent on Monday a cable of congratulations to the Emperor of Japan Naruhito on the occasion of his birthday.

His Highness the Crown Prince wished the Japanese Emperor long-lasting health and well-being.

## Prime Minister

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent on Monday a cable of congratulating him on his birthday.

## First Deputy PM, DM congratulate Saudi on Founding Day

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23, (KUNA): Kuwaiti First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah congratulated on Sunday Saudi Interior Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Nayef bin Abdulaziz on the Kingdom's Founding Day.

In a news statement, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior said Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef sent a cable to his Saudi peer, expressing pride for the deep-rooted historic relations and fraternal bonds between the two sides.

The Kuwaiti minister affirmed permanent keenness on boosting and developing these relations in a manner that brings benefits and



Fahad Al-Yousef



Sheikh Abdullah

goodness to both nations, it added.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef prayed to Allah the Almighty to bestow Saudi Arabia fur-

ther progress and prosperity, under the wise leadership of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and Crown Prince and Prime Minister Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the statement concluded.

Kuwait's Defense Minister Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Sabah also sent a cable of congratulations to counterpart in Saudi Arabia Khaled bin Salman Al-Saud on occasion of the Kingdom's Founding Day.

The Ministry of Defense mentioned in a statement that Minister Al-Sabah relayed his best wishes of further progress and prosperity of the leadership of Saudi Arabia and its people.

## Italy's envoy congratulates Kuwaitis on National Days

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: Italian Ambassador to Kuwait Lorenzo Morini extended his congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, the Kuwaiti government, and the entire people of Kuwait on the occasion of the 65th National Day and the 35th Liberation Day.

Ambassador Morini affirmed the deep-rooted friendship and cooperation between Italy and Kuwait, indicating

that these ties are built on the shared values of tolerance and mutual respect. He highlighted the growth of this relationship in recent years in several fields of mutual interest like business, education, security, and people-to-people exchange.

He confirmed the strength of the bond between the two nations, stating that "Italy's contribution to the liberation of Kuwait is a testament to the strong ties that bind our two peoples and countries."

He reiterated the commitment of his country to continue the collaboration with Kuwait. "We look forward to working together to support peace, stability and economic and human development. I wish Kuwait continuous progress and prosperity," he concluded.



Morini

## Guyana Embassy extends congrats on National Days

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Embassy of Guyana in the State of Kuwait extends the warmest felicitations to His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Crown Prince of the State of Kuwait and the Government and all the people of the State of Kuwait on the National Day and Liberation Day of Kuwait.

Kuwait has distinguished itself through its consistent development efforts and admirable achievements at home and its growing stature in the global community.

It is our fervent hope that the peace, progress and prosperity of Kuwait will continue unabated.

Guyana looks forward to strengthening the amicable bonds of friendship and cooperation with Kuwait in the years ahead. Congratulations! Long Live Kuwait!

## Troy Torrington

Chargé d' Affaires, Guyana Embassy Kuwait



Torrington

## PAI new services on Sahel app

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Public Authority for Industry (PAI) announced the addition of new services through the unified government application - Sahel, as part of its plan to simplify procedures and expedite client transactions electronically without

the need for in-person visits.

The new services include issuing temporary release certificates for vehicles, motorcycles and tyres.

Users can access the application, select the services menu, choose 'Public Authority for Industry' and then click the 'Temporary Release Certificate for Vehicles, Motorcycles and Tyres' service.

## 'Dar Yamama' overflows with well-wishers



HH the Crown Prince arrives.



Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef at the event.



Editor-in-Chief of Al-Seyassah and Arab Times newspapers Ahmed Al-Jarallah congratulating. Colleagues Saud Al-Farhan and Mohammad Al-Farhan attended.



Sheikh Faisal Al-Nawaf and Sheikh Salem Al-Nawaf



Sheikh Ahmad, Sheikh Turki Jaber Al-Duaij and Sheikh Nawaf Ahmad Al-Nawaf



US Charge de Affaires arrives. Photos by Rizk Taufiq

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The sons of HH the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received well-wishers at Dar Yamama in Al-Siddiq suburb recently on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan.

Among those present were His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, along with a number of ruling family members, senior officials, diplomats, public figures, and a large crowd of citizens who filled Dar Yamama to

capacity.

This scene reflected the spirit of national unity and the esteemed position that the Al-Sabah family holds in the hearts and minds of Kuwaitis.

Those present affirmed that these Ramadan gatherings are a deeply rooted tradition that reinforces the values of compassion and solidarity, embodying the spirit of one family that characterizes Kuwait.

They consider this a renewed manifestation of social unity, which shines brightly during national and religious occasions.

## KISR working on rebuilding Ahmadi Market

## 'Collaboration supports sustainability of heritage sites'

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: In line with the efforts of Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) efforts to strengthen regional and international scientific cooperation and activate strategic partnerships with national entities, researcher Dr. Anfal Al-Aibani participated in the Third International Conference on Developments and Innovations in Sustainability held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Al-Aibani presented two scientific lectures on the architectural and structural conditions of the Ahmadi Heritage Market.

This project is being implemented by the institute in cooperation with the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters (NCCAL). It is an integration of institutional roles in supporting national efforts aimed at preserving and protect-

ing architectural heritage according to advanced scientific principles.

The first lecture titled, "Comprehensive Characterization of Limestone Bricks in Local Heritage Buildings in Kuwait: Mineralogical, Structural and Thermal Analysis for Documentation and Preservation Purposes," focused on the comprehensive scientific characterization of the yellow limestone bricks used in Ahmadi Market.

This characterization utilized advanced mineralogical, microscopic and thermal analyses to support restoration decisions and the selection of compatible materials based on accurate diagnostic results.

The second lecture titled, "A Methodological Framework for Evaluating the Materials and Structural Condition of Historic Concrete Buildings in Kuwait: from On-Site Diagnosis to Laboratory Testing," outlined a methodological framework for assessing the physical and struc-

tural conditions of historic concrete buildings in Kuwait. This integrates non-destructive field testing with laboratory analyses, contributing to the development of evidence-based and sustainable conservation and restoration strategies.

Dr. Zainab Mortadavi, the project manager and a research scientist, emphasized the significance of the project, highlighting the applied scientific methodology employed in various phases. She said the analytical findings serve as a scientific reference, enhancing subsequent phases of the project.

The institute affirmed that this scientific participation reflects its commitment to harness applied research to serve national heritage issues and strengthen institutional cooperation with NCCAL. The collaboration supports the sustainability of heritage sites and solidifies Kuwait's position in research and innovation related to the preservation of architectural heritage.

## Kuwaiti FM receives call from Jordan and Egypt counterparts

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received a phone call on Monday from Jordanian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister for Expatriate Affairs Ayman Safadi, during which they discussed the latest regional and international developments.

## Egypt

Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah

received on Monday a phone call

from Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation, and Egyptian Expatriates Badr AbdelAati, during which they discussed the latest on regional and international developments.



Sheikh Jarrah

## Kuwait fortifies its 'institutions'

### Anti-graft fight on track

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23, (KUNA): The State of Kuwait is steadily advancing foundations of its national integrity system, relying on integrated institutional and legislative efforts that have successfully aligned international standards with national priorities.**

Legal amendments have worked to close legislative gaps, alongside strict oversight measures covering various sectors.

Kuwait's position in the 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) reflects this reform path, maintaining its score of 46 out of 100, ranking 65th globally out of 182 countries and territories, confirming the resilience of its system amid declines in the global average.

The Public Authority for Anti-Corruption (Nazaha) affirmed that Kuwait's stable position in the international ranking came despite the expanded scope of countries included in the index and a sharp global decline, with most countries scoring below the global average, which reached its lowest level in more than a decade.

Nazaha stated in a press release marking the release of the CPI report the concerning global downward trend highlights the importance of Kuwait maintaining performance above the global average and working toward gradual and sustainable improvement in future.

The year 2025 witnessed several achievements that positively strengthened transparency, accountability, institutional culture across state institutions, and raised levels of compliance and awareness of anti-corruption prevention.

On the legislative front, significant reforms were enacted through the approval of Law No. (69) of 2025 amending provisions of the law establishing Nazaha. The step aims to strengthen the transparency and integrity framework, support national anti-corruption efforts and address gaps that emerged during the practical application of the law.

The amendment expands the scope of those subjected to the law, including embezzlement crimes involving cooperative societies. It also enhances Nazaha's powers to enable it perform its role more effectively, particularly in evidence collection, hearing testimonies, and detecting financial and administrative corruption violations.

ly-taken decisions when closing complaints, making it mandatory for such decisions to be issued by the Board of Directors of Nazaha with stated justifications, thereby enhancing transparency and oversight.

The new legislation provides an additional legal safeguard to ensure that no corruption suspicion escapes judicial oversight, while also allowing settlements in cases involving delays in submitting financial disclosure statements, achieving a balance between deterrence and flexibility in application.

In parallel, Nazaha completed a guideline for the mechanism and content of annual reports for government entities, serving as a roadmap to align periodic reports of public institutions with the goals of the "Kuwait 2035" vision.

The guideline aims to establish a unified practical framework ensuring that reports reflect actual government performance, emphasizing strict standards such as clear language, data accuracy and issuance within the first quarter of each fiscal year, enabling decision-makers to take corrective or developmental actions based on reliable data.

Nazaha also completed data-link integration with 13 government entities to obtain the necessary information to verify the accuracy of financial disclosure statements. In 2025, it referred 1,035 individuals to the Public Prosecution, including those who delayed submitting financial disclosures, provided incomplete information, or were subject to corruption complaints.

In promoting integrity in education, the "Banki" program made promising progress in 2025, expanding to more than 100 public and private schools across Kuwait. The program involves over 10,000 teachers and benefits more than 47,740 students.

The program, the first of its kind in Kuwait, aimed at enhancing financial literacy and ethical values among school students through a partnership between the public and private sectors.

These efforts were crowned by the Kuwait Strategy for Promoting Integrity and Combating Corruption, winning the 2025 Arab Government Excellence Award as the best Arab initiative for developing government action plan.

The strategy is based on four main pillars and objectives, encompassing 13 priorities distributed across 47 initiatives, each built on selected activities, standards and indicators.

At the executive level, various ministries strengthened their anti-corruption and justice measures by issuing regulatory decisions and forming committees to receive reports of suspected corruption.

# diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

## Kuwait role significant in transformed world order

"KUWAIT enjoys a unique strategic location in the northern Arabian Gulf, serving as a natural crossroads between the Arab region, Central Asia, and Europe. This location is not only a geographical advantage but also a significant economic driver," columnist **Sheikh Engineer Fahad Dawood Al-Sabah** wrote for *Al-Seyassah* daily.

"The development of major projects such as Silk City and Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port is central to this strategy, especially given their proximity to Iraq and Iran. Kuwait has the potential to become a re-export gateway for landlocked Central Asian countries and an integrated logistics hub, linking maritime trade with land routes and, in the future, rail networks. This would allow goods to move from southern Gulf ports to Europe faster than traditional maritime transport via the Suez Canal in some cases.

"However, geographical location alone is not enough. A flexible legislative environment is essential to support the establishment of advanced free trade zones near the northern borders, attracting global companies seeking regional warehousing and distribution. This, in turn, would enhance the integration of supply chains in the region and the world. Kuwait can expand its manufacturing industries rather than relying solely on crude oil exports. This will help transform the country into a global financial and commercial hub in line with its "New Kuwait 2035" vision.

"There is a growing need for specialized Kuwaiti personnel in international supply chain management, artificial intelligence (AI), and logistics. This calls for intensive training programs for Kuwaiti youth and a shift from traditional higher education, creating entirely new specializations to meet the urgent demands of the evolving job market. Kuwait's unique geostrategic location positions it as a natural gateway connecting the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries with Europe. By linking transportation routes with Iraq and Turkey, Kuwait becomes an important transit point for goods traveling from India and the Gulf to Europe.

"With recent regional security developments and the many challenges they have created, the concept of maritime and land connectivity has changed, giving rise to a new approach based on establishing secure zones and alternative routes. We must acknowledge that the global order established after World War II ended years ago. This impacted the movement of goods, the distribution of economic influence, and maritime and land routes. As the world enters a new global order, any step to strengthen this new power structure will be a step in the right direction. Kuwait's unique location positions it to play a significant role in this new global order, enhances its economic presence and reduces its dependence on the fluctuating prices of oil."

Also:

"How beautiful the month of Ramadan is, when the values a true Muslim believes in come alive and become guiding principles in daily life. These are values instilled in us from a young age," columnist Eng. **Adel Al-Jarallah Al-Kharafi** wrote for *Al-Seyassah* daily.

"I remember our childhood, when everyone at home fasted and the whole neighborhood felt immersed in a spiritual atmosphere. School taught us the true meanings of fasting, and people lived in the embrace of faith. Thank God that our country remains committed to this great religion. On Ramadan nights, you see worshippers flocking to the local mosques for Taraweeh prayers. The mosques are filled with those observing i'tikaf and reciting the Holy Qur'an. Everyone is mindful of their words, careful to avoid anything offensive. During this blessed month, society embodies the most beautiful morals and teachings of Islam.

"Visits and gatherings abound during Ramadan nights. As children, we would stay up late into the night and sleep through much of the day, savoring the special atmosphere of Ramadan and feeling the blessing in its days. Each of us carries beautiful memories of this month, whether Kuwaiti or expatriate. Even non-Muslims in our community respect the spirit and etiquette of fasting along with us. Now that we have grown older, those memories remain unforgettable. They have become a way of life. We do not observe these rituals merely because they are obligatory, but because we have come to understand their deeper meaning.

"Habituating certain behaviors from a young age helps one grasp the deeper meaning of life. For instance, visiting others during this blessed month instills, from childhood, the habit of maintaining family ties, and checking on everyone,

men and women alike. It also teaches the practice of visiting the elderly in the community, offering them kindness and assistance, which is a core aspect of Islam. Ramadan provides even greater opportunities to fulfill these obligations, enriching our good deeds and strengthening the bonds of community. I must admit that when I became involved in union activities, I naturally adopted the practice of visiting elders, whether they are family members, neighbors, community members, or acquaintances, even if I do not share a close relationship with them, because it had become a habit.

"When I miss someone who regularly attends the mosque, I call to check on them. There are many beautiful Ramadan traditions that we are accustomed to, which distinguish Kuwaitis. These customs reflect the beauty of human nature and warmth. That is why I make a point of visiting my elderly neighbors, as it gives a sense of community. Kuwait takes on a unique rhythm during this holy month. We are accustomed to performing Umrah during Ramadan, and we must acknowledge the facilities provided by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for visiting the Holy Mosque, for which we are grateful.

"During Ramadan, the month of forgiveness, everyone finds the opportunity to connect with their Lord through worship and experience the warmth of faith. O God, forgive all Muslims in the world, and all the people of Kuwait."

"The Kuwaiti Constitution guarantees the right to litigation as a fundamental public right, explicitly stating that access to the courts is ensured for all and cannot be undermined under any organizational or financial pretext," **Jassem Mohammad Al-Mutairi**, College of Business Studies, Law Major, wrote for *Al-Seyassah* daily.

"Based on this constitutional principle, the issue of raising court fees presents a serious legal concern. It cannot be treated as a mere administrative matter but must be seen as a decision that affects the very foundation of justice. Court fees, according to proper legal understanding, are intended as a limited regulatory measure, not as a deterrent or a means of exclusion. They should never become a barrier that prevents individuals from exercising their constitutional right to litigation. However, in practice, raising fees generally and without precise controls inevitably imposes an indirect restriction on this right, which is no less serious than an outright prohibition.

"Jurisprudence and legal precedent have established that the legislature's authority to regulate rights does not grant it unlimited power to restrict them. Acceptable regulation is that which serves the public interest without violating or obstructing rights. However, when fees become a burden that exceeds the capacity of a significant segment of litigants, it constitutes a clear violation of the principle guaranteeing the right to litigation and an unjustified infringement on the rule of law.

"Moreover, imposing excessive fees without differentiating between the type and nature of the case, between legitimate claims and malicious lawsuits, or between the financial standing of litigants, violates the principle of equality before the law guaranteed by the Kuwaiti Constitution. Justice should not depend on financial ability, nor should its doors be open to one group and closed to another, despite equal rights and legal standing.

"From a legal standpoint, it is unacceptable to use the pretext of reducing frivolous lawsuits to justify raising court fees. Kuwaiti legislation already provides sufficient tools to address abuse of the right to litigation through fines, compensation, and procedural penalties, without infringing on the rights of legitimate litigants.

"Imposing a financial burden on all based on the actions of a few is a legislative approach incompatible with justice. More seriously, increased fees may discourage those with legitimate claims from approaching the courts, or force them to accept unfair settlements or relinquish established rights. This undermines the judiciary's role as a means of redress, weakens public trust in the justice system, and negatively affects legal and social stability.

"Justice in a state governed by the rule of law is not measured by the amount of fees collected, but by its accessibility to all without discrimination or artificial barriers. Any financial measure that makes exercising the constitutional right to litigation dependent on the ability to pay requires reconsideration and correction. Therefore, reviewing the policy of raising court fees in the State of Kuwait, ensuring it is linked to fair regulations, a logical progression, and genuine exemptions for deserving cases, is not merely an administrative matter. It is a constitutional obligation imposed by respect for the right to litigation, preserving the authority of the judiciary, and upholding the principle of the rule of law."

— Compiled by Simi K. Kutty



Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah receives senior traffic and security officers in his office.

## Governor seeks solution to traffic and security matters

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: Governor of Farwaniya Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah on Sunday met with Director of Farwaniya Governorate Traffic Department Colonel Raed Mohammad Al-Sulaiman and Head of the Farwaniya Governorate Emergency Patrols Section Lieutenant Colonel Hamad Mutlaq Al-Mutairi to discuss ways to strengthen coordination in addressing traffic and security matters.

During the meeting, His Excellency emphasized the importance of intensifying field efforts and raising the level

of preparedness to contribute to smooth traffic flow and ensure security and safety in all areas of the governorate to better serve the residents of Farwaniya and its visitors.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the traffic and emergency patrol officials expressed their sincere thanks and appreciation to His Excellency for his support and continuous commitment to strengthen cooperation, while affirming their continuous efforts to better serve the residents of the governorate and to maintain security and safety.

## Mol launches service to book prison visits

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: As part of its efforts to streamline procedures and enhance digital services for the public, Ministry of Interior has launched a new online service through the Sahel app, which allows people to submit requests online to reserve a visit to inmates in correctional facilities, reports *Al-Seyassah* daily.

## Long-term jail, heavy fines in funds scandal

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Criminal Court, presided over by Judge Ahmad Al-Sadi, concluded the embezzlement case involving funds from the Public Institution for Social Security (PIFSS).

The court sentenced the first defendant, a Gulf national, to 15 years in prison, a female PIFSS employee to 10 years, and the bank employee to 10 years, and imposed fines exceeding KD 12 million. The defendants were found guilty of embezzling more than KD 4 million from PIFSS funds.

According to the case file, the defendants manipulated inheritance data of Gulf nationals by exploiting forged powers of attorney. They altered the records of married individuals, students, and employees between 2007 and 2022, which enabled them to carry out illegal fund transfers.

The first defendant offered bribes of KD 10,000 to the bank employee and KD 3,940 to the PIFSS employee to facilitate and process the illegal transactions.

The bank employee embezzled over KD 78,000 from PIFSS funds by forging salary transfer certificates and fraudulent powers of attorney in collusion with the first defendant.

The court fined the first defendant KD 8,272,000 and ordered him, together with the PIFSS employee, to return KD 4,136,000, representing the embezzled funds. The bank employee was fined KD 5,928,000 and ordered to return KD 2,964,000.

Two other defendants were sentenced to prison terms ranging from three to seven years and fined amounts between KD 132,000 and KD 311,000 after being convicted of laundering money obtained from the embezzlement of public funds by providing false information.

Several other bank employees and individuals were acquitted due to insufficient evidence proving their knowledge of or involvement in the forgery.

## PADA overruled, court says man handicapped

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The 17th Administrative Circuit of the Court of First Instance overturned the decision issued by a committee of the Public Authority for Disability Affairs (PADA) to refuse classifying a citizen as visually impaired.

The court ordered his classification under the provisions of Law No. 8/2010, the opening of a file with PADA, and the issuance of a certificate confirming his moderate visual impairment, along with all legally mandated benefits and financial allowances.

Lawyer Ali Jawhar filed the lawsuit on behalf of his client, challenging the technical committee's decision issued on October 16, 2024, which had determined that his client's condition did not meet the definition of visual impairment, despite his client suffering from a loss of useful vision in his left eye.

He explained that the committee's decision contradicted the submitted medical reports. After his client's appeal went unaddressed, he turned to the courts, seeking annulment of the decision and a forensic medical examination.

The court appointed a three-member committee from the Forensic Medicine Department, which concluded in its report that the plaintiff was effectively blind in his left eye, with vision limited to counting fingers, while relying on his right eye for daily tasks.

In its reasoning, the court affirmed that the legislation defines a person with a disability as anyone suffering from a permanent or partial impairment that leads to a deficiency in physical or sensory abilities, potentially preventing full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

The court relied on the principles of the Court of Cassation, whose established jurisprudence holds that a person blind in one eye is considered to have a moderate visual impairment, representing a 50 percent loss of total visual function, and that the technical committee has no discretionary authority to deviate from this classification.

The court concluded that the appealed decision lacked a valid basis and contravened the law, making its annulment, along with all its consequent effects, necessary.

## Smooth flow eyed

## Traffic Dept issues 200 citations near hospitals

By Munif Naif  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: Traffic patrols launched a major field campaign near hospitals in various governorates recently, resulting in the issuance of 200 violation citations.

The campaign focused on violations that obstruct traffic flow, particularly in vital areas around the medical facilities.

A security source informed the newspaper that the campaign was carried out in areas surrounding Jaber, Adan, Farwaniya, Jahra and Sabah hospitals. He said the uncovered violations include illegal parking and obstructing traffic in front of the main entrances and emergency departments. He confirmed that these traffic campaigns around hospitals will continue.

The concerned authorities emphasized that grave violations, such as obstructing traffic or illegal parking in front of hospitals, may lead to vehicle impoundment for up to two months as per the Traffic Law.

## Egyptian loses his life in 'Airport Road' accident

By Munif Naif  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: A fatal accident on Airport Road, opposite Subhan, claimed the life of a 35-year-old Egyptian. Upon receiving a report on the accident, the Operations Unit at the Ministry of Interior dispatched security and ambulance personnel to the location.

A security source revealed that the medics found the Egyptian had already succumbed to his wounds when they arrived at the accident site. His body was transferred to the Forensic Medicine Department.

A case was registered and investigations are ongoing to establish the circumstances leading to the tragic accident.

## CID tracks down KD2m gold thief

Cloth merchant's cheques bounce

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Criminal Investigation Department in the Capital Governorate arrested an Asian expatriate in connection with the theft of jewelry worth two million dinars, reports *Al-Anba* daily.

During intensive questioning, the suspect admitted that the sharp rise in gold prices over the past four years motivated him to commit the crime, revealing that he had transferred part of the stolen funds and kept the rest in the form of gold bars.

Following the investigation, the accused was referred to the Public Prosecution, which remanded him to the Central Prison and issued a travel ban until authorities find a way to recover the illegally obtained funds.

According to security sources, the case began when a citizen, who is the owner of several gold shops, reported a huge financial shortage discovered during an audit conducted by a specialized company. The shortage, estimated at around two million dinars, was traced to one of the shops.

Further investigations by the Criminal Investigation Department revealed that the

expatriate acted as the de facto manager of the shop and was responsible for the large financial loss. He confessed to manipulating invoices and misappropriating gold bars and jewelry as prices soared.

The sources emphasized the importance of businesses conducting regular inventories and maintaining systematic accounting practices to prevent similar crimes and protect their assets.

**Cloth merchant held:** Capital detectives arrested an Arab expatriate who owns approximately six clothing stores in Farwaniya, Dajeej, and Kuwait City for issuing six bounced cheques totaling KD 1.6 million, reports *Al-Anba* daily.

According to security sources, the arrest of the Arab national followed reports from several companies confirming that the accused had issued cheques, which were found to lack sufficient funds when presented for payment on the agreed dates.

During initial questioning, the accused claimed that the stores he manages could cover the amounts on the cheques.

He stated that he had attempted to reschedule the payments with the company owners, but they refused and pursued legal action.

# Kuwait backs stronger UN Human Rights Council role

Al-Hayen urges accountability, civilian protection at 61st session

GENEVA, Feb 23, (KUNA): Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva, Nasser Al-Hayen, affirmed his country's keenness to strengthen the pivotal role of the UN Human Rights Council and to continue cooperation with international partners to develop its mechanisms further and enhance its effectiveness.

In a statement to KUNA ahead of the 61st session of the Council, which begins Monday in Geneva, Ambassador Al-Hayen stressed that the current critical phase requires the Council to fully assume its responsibilities in protecting civilians, promoting accountability and addressing human rights situations without selectivity or politicization, in line with the principles of the UN Charter and international efforts aimed at achieving peace, security and sustainable development.

He underscored Kuwait's active diplomatic efforts to unify Gulf and regional positions and mobilize international support to confront grave violations, urging the international community and the Human Rights Council to take urgent action to protect human rights worldwide.

Ambassador Al-Hayen expressed deep concern over the continued violations by the Israeli occupation of the ceasefire agreement in Gaza, calling for ensuring the safe and sustainable flow of humanitar-



KUNA photo  
Ambassador Nasser Al-Hayen, Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva

ian aid without obstacles and for protecting civilians and civilian infrastructure in accordance with international humanitarian law.

He also condemned decisions issued by the occupation authorities to expand settlement activities in the West Bank, describing them as a flagrant violation of international law and relevant UN Security Council resolutions, directly undermining prospects for achieving a just and comprehensive peace.

The ambassador reiterated Kuwait's firm position rejecting all unilateral measures aimed at altering the legal and historical status of the occupied Pal-

eststinian territories, calling on the international community to assume its responsibilities to halt such violations and ensure accountability.

He stressed the need to create conditions conducive to resuming a serious political process leading to a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian cause on the basis of the two-state solution and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state along the June 4, 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative.

Ambassador Al-Hayen affirmed Kuwait's principled positions toward just humanitarian causes, particularly in Palestine and Sudan, and its commitment to the principles of international humanitarian law and the promotion of justice and accountability, stressing that the Palestinian cause will remain at the forefront of Kuwait's foreign policy priorities.

He added that Kuwait, guided by its diplomatic approach based on moderation and dialogue, will continue its active contribution to the Council's work and constructive participation in interactive dialogues and high-level discussions, reflecting its firm commitment to promoting and protecting human rights at the regional and international levels.

The 61st session of the Human Rights Council will be held in Geneva from February 23 to March 31, 2026, with a high-level segment scheduled from February 23 to 25, attended by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, President of the General Assembly Annalena Baerbock, and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk, along with senior officials from more than 100 countries.



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



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah

## Crown Prince, PM extend greetings

### Kuwait's HH Amir congratulates Brunei and Guyana on Nat'l Days

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah congratulated on Monday Bruneian Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah Muiz'zaddin on the advent of his country's national day.

In a cable, His Highness the Amir wished the Sultan lasting-health and his people evermore progress and development.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent Monday a cable of congratulations to President of Guyana, Dr. Mohammad Irfan Ali, on occasion of the national day.

His Highness the Amir wished the president good health and the people of Guyana further progress and prosperity.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent a cable on Monday to the Sultan of Brunei Hassanal Bolkiah Muiz'zaddin, congratulat-

ing him on his country's national day.

His Highness the Crown Prince wished the Sultan good health and more progress to his country.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent Monday a cable of congratulations to President of Guyana, Dr. Mohammad Irfan Ali, on occasion of the national day of his country, and wished the President good health.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent a cable on Monday to the Sultan of Brunei Hassanal Bolkiah Muiz'zaddin on the occasion of his country's national day.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent Monday a cable of congratulations to President of Guyana, Dr. Mohammad Irfan Ali.

## PAAET opens partial withdrawal for 2nd semester

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Deanship of Admissions and Registration at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) announced the opening of the partial withdrawal period for students in the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year.

The deanship indicated that the partial withdrawal period begins on Monday and will continue until March 1. It clarified that withdrawals will be subject to the academic regulations and procedures.

It explained that this step aims to provide students with academic flexibility, enabling them to reorganize their course schedule to suit their abilities and circumstances during the semester, without disrupting the systems or the educational process.

It urged all students wishing to take advantage of the partial withdrawal period to adhere to the specified dates and follow its official channels for any additional guidelines or instructions related to the withdrawal procedures.

It then affirmed its commitment to provide academic support and guidance in the interest of the students and to guarantee the stability of their academic journey.

## Mongolia's Ambassador congratulates Kuwait on National & Liberation Days

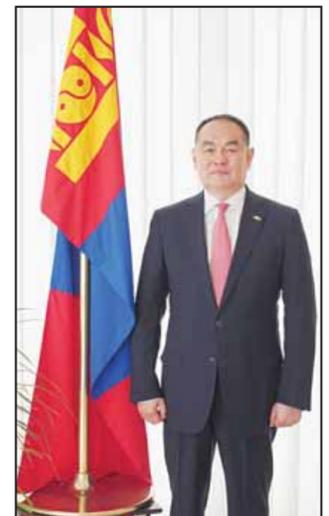
On behalf of the people and the Government of Mongolia, I extend my warmest congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, the Government, and the friendly people of the State of Kuwait on the auspicious occasion of the 65th Anniversary of the National Day and the 35th Anniversary of the Liberation Day of the State of Kuwait

Mongolia attaches great importance to the relations and cooperations with the State of Kuwait and we feel proud and honoured that Mongolia was among the first countries to denounce the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and to stand firmly in solidarity with our Kuwaiti brothers and sisters during that critical time.

Last year marked the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Mongolia and the State of Kuwait. The milestone was celebrated with due solemnity in the State of Kuwait through the organization of a grand reception, a Mongolian traditional food showcase, and the "Legend of Nomads" Mongolian cultural concert.

The relations and cooperation between Mongolia and the State of Kuwait have been steadily strengthening in recent years in the field of trade, economy, investment, agriculture, culture, sports, tourism and road and transport marked by the commencement of meat and meat product exports from Mongolia to the State of Kuwait, the signing of an Air Services Agreement establishing the legal framework for the launch of direct flights between the two countries, and the conclusion of a veterinary certificate facilitating the export of livestock from Mongolia to the State of Kuwait.

Mongolia stands ready to seize every opportunity to promote more frequent high-level exchanges and expand practical cooperation across



His Excellency Sergelen Purev, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Mongolia to the State of Kuwait

a wide range of fields, including civil aviation, economy, agriculture, meat export, culture, education, trade, investment, and tourism. We also look forward to strengthening people-to-people ties and elevating our bilateral cooperation to an "Expanded Partnership" in our shared effort to take relations between our two countries to a new and higher level.

Taking this opportunity, I wish the State of Kuwait and its friendly people continued stability, progress, and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

His Excellency Sergelen Purev  
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Mongolia to the State of Kuwait

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## Kuwait Armed

The decree is intended to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the law's application, accelerate procedures, and strike a balance between the public interest and the rights and obligations of those subject to service.

Under the amendments, national military service will apply to all Kuwaiti males upon reaching the age of 18, starting with those born on January 1, 2012. All individuals born before that date are exempt, and any procedures taken in violation of this provision will be canceled.

The revisions also stipulate that employed conscripts will retain their salaries, allowances, and bonuses during their service, with the service period counted toward their total years of employment.

Additional provisions include exempting an only son from service, extending the registration deadline from 60 to 180 days after turning 18, and aligning Kuwait Oil Company firefighters with exemptions granted to the Kuwait Fire Force.

The amendments authorize the National Military Service Authority to assign conscripts to four sectors: the Kuwait Armed Forces, the Ministry of Interior, the Kuwait National Guard, and the Kuwait Fire Force.

## E-payments

private training institutes, companies engaged in rodent and insect control, and those involved in the import, export and storage of public health pesticides.

The letter underscored the need to collect fees only through approved banking channels and electronic payment systems to ensure the documentation of financial transactions, reduce cash handling, and improve oversight and monitoring.

It also stressed the need to monitor the compliance of establishments and take necessary measures against violators.

It affirmed that the decision is part of a package of regulatory measures aimed at developing operational mechanisms, strengthening governance and financial oversight in line with the digital transformation plan, and improving services provided to the public.

In a related development, during its meeting on Monday, the Committee for the Oversight of Salons and Health Institutes emphasized the importance of disseminating the decision to the relevant regulatory bodies and ensuring its proper implementation.



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

Terms & conditions apply



Abdulaziz Al-Dughhaishim with His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammed, First Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Fahd Al-Yousifi, Saudi Ambassador Sultan bin Saad, and Qatari Ambassador Ali Al Mahmoud.



His Highness Sheikh Ahmed Al-Nawaf, Editor-in-Chief Ahmed Al-Jarallah, Sheikh Nawaf Ahmed Al-Nawaf, Mubarak Al-Banwan, Mohammed Al-Barjas, and Khaled Al-Araj

## Brothers Khalid and Abdulaziz stress unity, compassion and social bonds during the holy month

# Al-Dughhaishim Diwaniya welcomes Ramadan well-wishers



KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Al-Dughhaishim Diwaniya welcomed a large number of well-wishers on the occasion of Ramadan, including family, friends and residents of the area, in a warm and friendly atmosphere reflecting the spirit of the holy month.

Brothers Khalid and Abdulaziz Al-Dughhaishim received the well-wishers, while emphasizing the importance of the opportunity this blessed month provides to strengthen social bonds and promote the values of communication and compassion that are part of the traditions of the Kuwaiti society during such occasions.

Attendees exchanged greetings, praying to Almighty Allah that the month will return to Kuwait, its leadership and its people with goodness, prosperity, and blessings and that He will grant them permanent security, tranquility and stability.

The gathering exemplified the social solidarity and mutual support that always characterized Kuwaiti diwanias, serving as platforms for communication among different segments of society and spacious areas that bring together diverse groups in an atmosphere of warmth and respect.



Photos by Rezk Tawfiq

Well-wishers gather at Al-Dughhaishim Diwaniya during the holy month of Ramadan, where brothers Khalid and Abdulaziz Al-Dughhaishim received guests in a warm atmosphere reflecting the spirit of unity, compassion and cherished Kuwaiti traditions.

## Continued from Page 1

### The Diwaniya:

Furthermore, it showcases the inherent generosity and kindness of the Kuwaiti people in times of both sorrow and joy. It also champions the freedom of expression, provided that respect for others is maintained.

The diwaniya is renowned as a vital institution for social learning, fostering social harmony and teaching the etiquette of conversation. It serves as a unique setting where people from all walks of life gather and feel free to voice their opinions on any subject, embodying the true spirit of democracy.

Therefore, the diwaniya is considered an essential feature that citizens include in the construction of their homes.

This thriving cultural phenomenon, with an unofficial estimate of more than 3,000 bustling diwanias, signifies more than just a social tradition in Kuwait. It is a profound expression of national unity – a place where the entire community has historically come together.

### Online sellers

It assigns the Ministry of Commerce and Industry the responsibility of regulating the sector and overseeing the implementation of the decree-law, including its regulations and decisions.

According to the decree, no person may operate in the digital commerce sector without first registering with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The decree also specifies the information that providers of products or services must disclose in their online stores.

It grants consumers the right to cancel or amend any part of a contract where an error occurred, in accordance with specific regulations, if a mistake was made while using the electronic contracting system of a product or service provider.

The decree also allows consumers to withdraw from a contract within 14 days of receiving a product, or to exchange or return it for a full refund

using the original payment method or another agreed-upon method, at no additional cost.

Products must be returned in the same condition as when purchased, except in specified cases.

The decree further regulates advertising and promotion in digital commerce, given its direct impact on trust in online transactions. Advertisements must include clear information about the product or service provider, its price, specifications, contact details, and any other information required by the executive regulations.

The decree prohibits including any false, misleading, or illegal information in advertisements. It also requires product and service providers to comply with cybersecurity standards applicable within the State of Kuwait.

Service providers are obligated to regularly update their data protection systems to address new cyber threats.

The decree mandates that product and service providers work only with electronic payment service providers licensed by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK).

It also prohibits charging additional fees for using electronic payment methods without prior approval from the Central Bank of Kuwait.

Two specialized committees have been established under the decree. They are:

- The Violations Committee, which is responsible for reviewing violations and deciding whether to refer, close, or approve settlements related to them.

- The Dispute Resolution Committee, which handles disputes between product or service providers and consumers, imposes penalties outlined in the Financial Regulations, and refers criminally punishable offenses to the Public Prosecution.

According to the decree, the decisions of these committees are final and enforceable, as detailed in the implementing regulations.

The decree-law also includes several penal provisions, stipulating imprisonment or fines for anyone who violates the core articles, with the possibility of doubling the penalty in cases of repeated violations.

The decree authorizes the confisca-

tion of tools or assets used in committing offenses, as well as the closure of the offending store once a violation is confirmed.

It allows for reconciliation in the crimes specified, under certain controls, to provide procedural flexibility and reduce the burden on the judiciary.

The decree-law grants certain ministry employees the authority of judicial officers to investigate the crimes and violations stipulated in its provisions.

It also mandates the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to publish its implementing regulations and decisions in the official gazette and on the ministry's website.

The decree-law will take effect six months after its publication in the official gazette, giving the ministry time to prepare for its implementation.

### Violators

The violating vehicles, including those emitting disturbing noises, were impounded for two months in the traffic impoundment lot, and the necessary legal measures were taken against the violators.

The ministry affirmed the continuation of intensive security campaigns in all governorates and the implementation of legal measures against those proven to have violated laws and regulations, in order to guarantee the security and safety of the nation and its citizens.

### Gulf solidarity

In Manama, the Bahraini Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it is closely following the Iraqi submissions to the UN, describing them as infringements on Kuwait's sovereignty over its maritime zones and fixed elevations such as Fasht Al-Qaid and Fasht Al-Aij. Reaffirming Bahrain's full support for Kuwait's sovereignty, the ministry categorically rejected any claims affecting Kuwait's territorial integrity. It urged Iraq to consider the historical and brotherly ties between the two

nations and to adhere to international law, the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, and existing bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding.

Meanwhile, Qatar reiterated its absolute solidarity with Kuwait, affirming that it is following the Iraqi coordinate submissions with concern. The Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the maps as an infringement of Kuwait's sovereignty over its maritime territories, including Fisht Al-Eid and Fisht Al-Eij. Qatar reaffirmed full support for Kuwait's sovereign rights, calling for respect of international law, the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, and all bilateral understandings between Kuwait and Iraq.

The United Arab Emirates likewise reaffirmed its unwavering solidarity with Kuwait in defending its legitimate rights and national interests. In a statement reported by the UAE's official news agency (WAM), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed deep concern and rejection of Iraq's coordinate submissions, warning of their implications for Kuwait's maritime sovereignty over areas including Fisht Al-Eid and Fisht Al-Eij. The ministry highlighted the importance of Iraq recognizing the fraternal and historical relations with Kuwait and addressing the matter responsibly, through dialogue and diplomatic channels, and in accordance with international law and the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention to bolster regional security and stability.

Similarly, Oman reaffirmed its solidarity with Kuwait's sovereignty over its maritime areas and water elevations, urging Iraq to respect the deep-rooted ties and good-neighborly principles between the two countries. In a statement, the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it was closely monitoring Iraq's coordinate lists and maps submitted to the United Nations, noting that they encroach on Kuwait's established maritime sovereignty. It reiterated Oman's full support for Kuwait's rights and called on Iraq to honor bilateral agreements, the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, and all related international commitments to preserve stability and mutual respect between the two nations.

## Justice Minister meets number of ambassadors to boost legal co-op

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23, (KUNA): Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait held separate talks with several accredited ambassadors to Kuwait on matters of mutual interest, reflecting strong bilateral relations and advancing legal cooperation.

The Ministry of Justice said Monday the meetings included Algerian Ambassador Omar Belhadj, Egyptian Ambassador Mohammad Abu Al-Wafa, Chadian Ambassador Taher Khater, Mexican Ambassador Eduardo Patricio

Pena Haller, Uzbek Ambassador Ayubkhon Yunusov, and Cuban Ambassador Alain Perez Torres. Discussions covered ways to enhance joint cooperation and exchange expertise in legislative and judicial fields.

Al-Sumait affirmed the Ministry's keenness on continued coordination and constructive consultation to develop the justice system and strengthen the rule of law within a framework of mutual respect.



Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait with Omar Belhadj, Ambassador of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria to the country.



Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait with Eduardo Patricio Peña Haller, United Mexican States Ambassador to the country.



Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait with Ayubkhon Yunusov, Ambassador of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the country.



Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait with Mohamed Abu Al-Wafa, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the country.



Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait with Taher Latif Khater, Ambassador of the Republic of Chad to the country.



Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait with Alan Perez Torres, Ambassador of the Republic of Cuba to the country.

## INTERNATIONAL

## NY Mayor Mamdani issues travel ban amid fierce winter storm

NEW YORK, Feb 23, (AP): Millions of people in New York City and a large swath of the northeastern US were stuck at home under road travel bans and blizzard warnings Monday as a fierce winter storm barreled into the densely populated region with heavy snowfall and high winds.

Cellphones across New York City received wailing push alerts Sunday night announcing a ban on non-emergency travel on all streets through noon Monday because of "dangerous blizzard conditions." Rhode Island and New Jersey implemented similar restrictions. Regional airports saw widespread cancellations and delays, and public transit was suspended in some areas. Even DoorDash announced it was suspending deliveries in New York City overnight.

Blizzard warnings stretched from Maryland to Maine. Snow began falling Sunday as the storm moved north, and the National Weather Service said 1 to 2 feet (30 to 60 centimeters) of snow was possible in many areas, along with low visibility. Officials in several states urged people to avoid venturing out.



A plow starts removing snow from a residential street during the beginning of an intense winter storm on Feb 22, in Fort Lee, N.J. (AP)

Emergencies were declared in New York, Philadelphia and other cities, as well as several states stretching from Delaware to Massachusetts as officials mobilized readiness efforts.

"We expect things to dramatically change here" heading into the overnight, weather service meteorologist Frank Pereira said Sunday.

## Armed man shot, killed after entering secure perimeter of Mar-a-Lago, says Secret Service

WASHINGTON, Feb 23, (AP): An armed man drove into the secure perimeter of Mar-a-Lago, US President Donald Trump's resort in Palm Beach, Florida, before being shot and killed early Sunday morning, according to a spokesman for the US Secret Service.

Although Trump often spends weekends at his resort, he was at the White House when the breach occurred around 1:30 am.

The man had a gas can and a shotgun, authorities said. Investigators identified him as 21-year-old Austin Tucker Martin of North Carolina, according to the FBI, and authorities said his family had recently reported him missing.

He's believed to have purchased his shotgun while driving south, Secret Service spokesman Anthony Guglielmi said, and a box for the weapon was later discovered in the man's vehicle.

Investigators have not identified a motive. However, Trump has faced threats to his life before, including two assassination attempts during the 2024 campaign.

The man entered the north gate of the property as another vehicle was exiting and was confronted by two Se-



A Palm Beach County Sheriff vehicle blocks traffic near Mar-a-Lago. The US Secret Service announced that an armed man was shot and killed after entering the secure perimeter of Mar-a-Lago, US President Donald Trump's resort on Feb 22, in Palm Beach, Fla. (AP)

cret Service agents and a Palm Beach County sheriff's deputy, according to Palm Beach County Sheriff Ric Bradshaw.

"He was ordered to drop those two pieces of equipment that he had with

him. At which time he put down the gas can, raised the shotgun to a shooting position," Bradshaw said at a brief press conference. The two agents and the deputy "fired their weapons to neutralize the threat."

The Moore County Sheriff's Department in North Carolina said a relative of Martin's reported him missing early Sunday morning.

Investigators are working to compile a psychological profile. Asked whether the man was previously known to law enforcement, Bradshaw said "not right now."

The FBI encouraged residents who live near Mar-a-Lago to check any security cameras they may have for footage that could help investigators.

In a post on X, FBI Director Kash Patel said the bureau would be "dedicating all necessary resources" to the investigation.

On Sunday afternoon, vehicles blocked the entrance to a property listed in public records as an address for Martin at the end of a private road in Cameron, North Carolina.

Braeden Fields, Martin's cousin, reacted with disbelief. He described Martin as quiet, afraid of guns and from a family of avid Trump supporters.

"He's a good kid," Fields, 19, said. He said they grew up together. "I wouldn't believe he would do something like this. It's mind-blowing," Fields said.

## Staffing constraints arise

## Dept of Homeland Security suspends Global Entry as partial govt shutdown drags on

DALLAS, Feb 23, (AP): The Department of Homeland Security said Sunday that the Global Entry program would be shut down as long as the partial government shutdown remains in effect.

The announcement comes after the department said Saturday night that it planned to shut down both Global Entry and the Transportation Security Administration's PreCheck program as well, but DHS cancelled the PreCheck closure.

"As staffing constraints arise, TSA will evaluate on a case-by-case basis and adjust operations accordingly," the agency said.

The turmoil at security and customs lanes is tied to a partial government shutdown that began Feb. 14 after Democrats and the White House were unable to reach a deal on legislation to fund the Department of Homeland Security. Democrats have been demanding changes to immigration operations that are core to President Donald Trump's deportation campaign.

The security disruptions come at a time where a major winter storm will hit the East Coast from Sunday into Monday. Nine out of 10 flights going out of John F. Kennedy International Airport, LaGuardia Airport and Bos-

ton Logan Airport have been canceled for Monday.

Global Entry is a US Customs and Border Protection program that allows pre-approved, low-risk travelers to use expedited kiosks when entering the United States from abroad. There's no specific government data that shows how much time passengers save at airports or other ports of entry from Global Entry but travel industry experts estimate that Global Entry cuts the amount of time passengers getting through customs from an average of 30 to 90 mins for regular customs lines to 5 to 10 minutes in Global Entry lines.

Those who have Global Entry also receive TSA PreCheck. The Department of Homeland Security said in 2024 that more than 20 million Americans had TSA PreCheck, and millions of those Americans have overlapping Global Entry memberships.

Airport lines seemed largely unaffected through midday Sunday, with security check line wait times listed as under 15 minutes for most international airports, according to TSA's mobile app.

Blair Perkins, 39, of Dallas, had seen the news about the shutdown of Global Entry before she left Cancun to return home Sunday morning to Dal-



People walk through TSA PreCheck at Dallas Love Field on Feb 22. (AP)

las. She said after she and her friends arrived at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport that the regular line was long but moved fairly fast.

"We went around about four or five different corners to get to the end of the US line," she said.

With Global Entry, it usually takes less than five minutes to get through

customs, she said. Sunday, it took about 30 minutes.

Perkins said the shutdown was frustrating. "It feels like Washington is using travelers as a pawn to try to, I guess, persuade the other side to do what they want," she said.

Homeland Security previously said it was taking "emergency measures to preserve limited funds." Among the steps listed were "ending Transportation Security Administration (TSA) PreCheck lanes and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Global Entry service, to refocus Department personnel on the majority of travelers."

"We are glad that DHS has decided to keep PreCheck operational and avoid a crisis of its own making," said Geoff Freeman, president and CEO of the US Travel Association.

Before announcing the PreCheck shutdown, Secretary Kristi Noem said in a statement Saturday night that "shutdowns have serious real world consequences." Noem said she would take away courtesy escorts from members of Congress at airports during the partial government shutdown as well.

Jean Fay, 54, said she had no issues going through TSA PreCheck at the Baltimore airport for her 6 a.m. Sunday flight back home to Texas. She didn't hear about the shutdown until she was changing planes in Austin, Texas, on her way to Dallas Love Field.

"When I landed in Austin I started getting the alerts," she said.

Airlines for America, a trade group representing major carriers, said Saturday night that "it's past time for

Congress to get to the table and get a deal done." It also criticized the announcement by saying it was "issued with extremely short notice to travelers, giving them little time to plan accordingly."

"A4A is deeply concerned that TSA PreCheck and Global Entry programs are being suspended and that the traveling public will be, once again, used as a political football amid another government shutdown," the organization said.

Democrats on the House Committee on Homeland Security criticized Homeland Security handling of airport security after the initial announcement on Saturday night. They accused the administration of "kneecapping the programs that make travel smoother and secure."

Sen. Andy Kim, a New Jersey Democrat, said Noem's actions are part of an administration strategy to distract from other issues and shift responsibility.

"This administration is trying to weaponize our government, trying to make things intentionally more difficult for the American people as a political leverage," he told CNN on Sunday. "And the American people see that."

## Europe

**France to summon Kushner:** France will summon US Ambassador Charles Kushner to protest comments by the Trump administration over the beating death of a far-right activist, the foreign affairs minister said.

Jean-Noel Barrot was reacting to a statement by the State Department's Counterterrorism Bureau, which posted on X that "reports, corroborated by the French Minister of the Interior, that Quentin Deranque was killed by left-wing militants, should concern us all."

Deranque, a far-right activist, died of brain injuries last week from a beating in the French city of Lyon. He was attacked during a fight on the margins of a student meeting where a far-left lawmaker, Rima Hassan, was a keynote speaker.

His killing highlighted a climate of deep political tensions ahead of next year's presidential vote. French President Emmanuel Macron called for calm on Saturday as some 3,000 people joined a march in Lyon organized by far-right groups to pay tribute to Deranque.

"We reject any instrumentalization of this tragedy, which has plunged a French family into mourning, for political ends," Barrot said. "We have no lessons to learn, particularly on the issue of violence, from the international reactionary movement."

The State Department said in its post that "violent radi-



Kushner

cal leftism is on the rise and its role in Quentin Deranque's death demonstrates the threat it poses to public safety. We will continue to monitor the situation and expect to see the perpetrators of violence brought to justice." (AP)

**Severe floods hit Greek island of Lemnos:** Severe flooding caused by heavy rainfall has brought widespread destruction to the Greek island of Lemnos in the northern Aegean Sea, local authorities said on Sunday.

Floodwaters damaged homes, shops and vital infrastructure, leaving many roads impassable and disrupting daily life on the island, which lies in northeastern Greece, according to Greek national broadcaster ERT.

The mayor has requested that Lemnos be placed under a state of civil protection emergency to speed up recovery.

The worst-hit areas include the island's capital, Myrina, as well as Nea Koutali and Atiski, which had already been under emergency status following earlier floods. Authorities have also requested that Moudros be included. (Xinhua)

**Northern Ireland road accident kills 3:** A late-night traffic collision in Northern Ireland has left three people dead and four others injured, the Police Service of Northern Ireland said Sunday.

The accident occurred at about 10:20 p.m. local time on Saturday on the Armagh Road near Moy in County Tyrone. Police said the incident involved a red BMW, a grey Volkswagen and a white Audi.

A 23-year-old woman and two men aged 31 and 48 were pronounced dead at the scene. Four additional individuals sustained injuries, with three currently receiving hospital treatment. Investigations on the accident are still going on. (Xinhua)

## Ukraine will do everything necessary to deliver results for peace: Zelenskyy

KYIV, Feb 23, (Xinhua): The Ukrainian side will do everything necessary so that the next round of negotiations between Ukraine, the United States and Russia can deliver results for Ukraine and peace, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said.

Ukraine will by no means stand in the way of peace, he said in a video address. Zelenskyy announced that his meetings with European partners are scheduled for next week. "We will coordinate in detail so that Europe is involved in all processes and grows only stronger," Zelenskyy said.

The delegations from Ukraine, the United States and Russia held the latest round of talks in Geneva, Switzerland, on Feb. 17-18, with no breakthrough on key issues.

## Also:

**MOSCOW:** South Korea's participation in the NATO "PURL" initiative to allocate funds for Ukraine to purchase weapons only pushes back the prospects for resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said. "This will cause irreparable damage to relations between Russia and the Republic of Korea," Zakharova said, adding Russia will be forced to exercise its right to retaliate. According to Zakharova, Moscow



Ukrainian soldiers fire at Russian positions on the front line in the Kharkiv region of Ukraine on Feb 18. (AP)

was surprised by news of Seoul's possible participation in the program, as it runs counter to its official position.

**MOSCOW:** The development of the nuclear triad "remains an absolute priority" for Russia, President Vladimir Putin said Monday in a video speech on the Defender of the Fatherland Day.

The nuclear triad serves as a guarantee of Russia's security and allows

the effective maintenance of strategic deterrence and the balance of power in the world, said Putin.

Putin emphasized that Russia will enhance the potential of its armed forces and improve their combat readiness, mobility and ability to operate under the most complex conditions. He also vowed to accelerate the pace of research and development of advanced weapons and equipment for the armed forces to ensure that they are in reliable hands.



Ministers of the new three-party minority government pose with King Willem-Alexander, (center right), prime minister Rob Jetten, (center left), and deputy prime minister Dilan Yesilgöz, (front row right), on the steps of Royal Palace Huis ten Bosch in The Hague, Netherlands on Feb 23. (AP)

## Dutch king swears in new coalition govt led by youngest-ever premier Rob Jetten

THE HAGUE, Netherlands, Feb 23, (Agencies): A new minority Dutch coalition government took office Monday led by the Netherlands' youngest-ever prime minister, who will have to use all his bridge-building skills to pass laws and see out a full four-year term in office.

Rob Jetten, 38, heads a three-party administration made up of his centrist D66, the center-right Christian Democrats and the center-right People's Party for Freedom and Democracy.

In a message on X, Jetten said it was "an enormous honor to be able to get to work as prime minister."

The parties together hold only 66 of the lower house of parliament's 150 seats, so Jetten will have to negotiate with opposition lawmakers to find support for every piece of legislation his government wants to pass. The largest opposition bloc, the newly merged Green Left and Labor Party, has already signaled it will push for changes to some of Jetten's plans.

Jetten and his team of ministers were sworn in by King Willem-Alexander in the ornate Orange Hall of the royal palace in a forest on the edge of The Hague. The king wished the new government good luck "in uncertain times."

A small group of demonstrators from the Extinction Rebellion envi-

ronmental group protested outside the gates of the palace during the ceremony and sounded sirens as the new ministers lined up for a formal photo.

Following the traditional photo of the new Cabinet on the steps of the palace, the new government plans to begin work with its first Cabinet meeting in the afternoon.

The government was sworn in 117 days after national elections that Jetten's party won by a narrow margin from the Party for Freedom led by anti-Islam lawmaker Geert Wilders. The final result was decided only after a count of postal ballots after the fourth national election since 2017 in the politically splintered Netherlands.

Jetten's new government took office a day before the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. He has pledged to continue his country's strong support for Kyiv as it battles the forces of President Vladimir Putin.

Jetten also has said he will continue spending to beef up the Dutch military in times of geopolitical uncertainty.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump announced plans to deploy a hospital ship to the Danish autonomous territory of Greenland, alleging that many people there are sick and not receiving care - prompting

a defense of Denmark's health care system from Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen.

"Working with the fantastic Governor of Louisiana, Jeff Landry, we are going to send a great hospital boat to Greenland to take care of the many people who are sick, and not being taken care of there. It's on the way!!!" Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform, referring to his special envoy for Greenland.

## Also:

**THE HAGUE:** Two aircraft operated by Dutch flag carrier KLM collided on the ground without injuries on Saturday morning at Amsterdam Schiphol Airport in the Netherlands, local media reported.

According to Dutch public broadcaster NOS, one flight had just landed from Birmingham, while the other was scheduled to depart for Athens. One of the aircraft was stationary, while the other was moving.

Passengers and crew from both aircraft were taken back to the gate after the incident. KLM said all passengers had been re-booked onto other flights. Both aircraft were moved to a hangar for inspection.

KLM described the incident as "highly exceptional." The cause of the collision is still under investigation.

China's Xi congratulates leader

## Kim reelected to top post of North Korea's ruling party as it hails nuclear buildup

SEOUL, South Korea, Feb 23, (AP): North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was reelected to the top post of the ruling Workers' Party, with delegates crediting him for bolstering the country's nuclear arsenal and strengthening its regional standing, state media reported Monday.

The report from the party congress, a major propaganda spectacle where Kim is expected to outline his political and military goals for the next five years, suggests he will double down on accelerating a nuclear arsenal already equipped with missiles capable of threatening Asian US allies and the American mainland.

The party also released a new roster for its powerful Central Committee that confirmed a generational shift in Kim's leadership circle, with aging military chiefs and the 76-year-old head of Pyongyang's rubber-stamp parliament among dozens replaced in the 138-member body.

The congress, which began last Thursday, comes as Kim grows increasingly assertive in regional politics, following an aggressive expansion of his nuclear arsenal and closer ties with Russia forged through joint war efforts in Ukraine, which have

deepened his standoffs with Washington and Seoul. Kim has also pursued stronger ties with China, traveling to Beijing last September and having his first summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping in six years.

Analysts say Kim will likely use the meeting to unveil new military goals, including strengthening conventional forces and integrating them with nuclear capabilities, while reemphasizing a campaign for economic "self-reliance" through mass mobilization, following gradual post-pandemic gains fueled by rebounding trade with China and arms exports to Russia.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency said Kim was reelected as the party's general secretary with the "unshakable will and unanimous desire" of thousands of delegates on the fourth day of meetings Sunday.

Under party rules, the congress, which Kim has held every five years since 2016, elects the general secretary to serve as the party's top representative and leader. Kim, 42, has held the party's top post throughout his rule, though the title changed from first secretary to chairman at the congress in 2016 and then to general secretary at the congress in 2021.



This photo provided on Feb 23, 2026, by the North Korean government, shows its leader Kim Jong Un, (center), clapping hands as he was re-elected to the top post of the ruling Workers' Party, during the party's Congress in Pyongyang on Feb 22. (AP)

The party said in a statement that by building up nuclear forces, Kim has created a military capable of handling "any threat of aggression" and "any form of war," and credited his leader-

ship with "reliably guaranteeing" the country's future and "boosting the pride and self-esteem" of North Koreans.

It also praised Kim's recent foreign

policy, which it said raised national prestige. China's state-run Xinhua news agency said Xi congratulated Kim on his reelection.

KCNA said the congress adopted revisions to party rules during Sunday's meeting but did not immediately provide details. Experts had anticipated that Kim would use the congress to entrench his hard-line stance toward South Korea and possibly rewrite party rules to codify his characterization of inter-Korean relations as between two "hostile" states.

State media so far haven't mentioned any comments by Kim or other senior leaders at the congress directly addressing relations with Washington and Seoul.

Yoon Min Ho, a spokesperson at South Korea's Unification Ministry, described Kim's reelection as a predictable move to further burnish his leadership and that Seoul will closely watch further messages from the congress.

The most notable change to the new Central Committee list was the exclusion of Choe Ryong Hae, chairman of the standing committee of the Supreme People's Assembly, who during an earlier part of Kim's rule was seen as the second most powerful individual in

Pyongyang. Also left out were military marshals Pak Jong Chon and Ri Pyong Chol, who had rose in the leadership ranks while Kim sped up his nuclear development over the past decade.

Yoon also noted the removal of senior officials who handled inter-Korean affairs, including Kim Yong Chol and Ri Son Gwon, who served key roles in carrying out Kim Jong Un's diplomacy with then-South Korean President Moon Jae-in and President Donald Trump in 2018 and 2019.

North Korea has suspended all meaningful diplomacy with the United States and South Korea since the collapse of a 2019 summit between Kim Jong Un and Trump over disagreements about exchange sanctions relief for steps to wind down Kim's nuclear and missile program.

Kim's government has rejected dialogue offers from Trump since the American president began his second term, urging Washington to drop its demand for North Korea's denuclearization as a precondition for talks. Inter-Korean relations further deteriorated in 2024 when Kim abandoned the North's long-standing goal of peaceful reunification and declared the war-divided South a permanent enemy.

## ICC opens hearings into former Philippine leader Rodrigo Duterte

THE HAGUE, Netherlands, Feb 23, (AP): Prosecutors at the International Criminal Court told judges on Monday that former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte encouraged death squads to carry out extrajudicial killings using fear and financial rewards.

The court in The Hague is holding pretrial hearings for the ex-leader, who is facing three counts of crimes against humanity for deadly anti-drugs crackdowns he oversaw while in office.

According to prosecutors, police and hit squad members carried out dozens of murders at Duterte's behest, motivated by the promise of money or to avoid becoming targets themselves. "For some, killing reached the level of a perverse form of competition," deputy prosecutor Mame Mandiaye Niang said in his opening statement.

Duterte, 80, was not present in the courtroom, having waived his right to appear. He has described the charges as an "outrageous lie."

Last month, judges found he was fit to stand trial, after postponing an earlier hearing over concerns about his health.



Former president of the Philippines Rodrigo Duterte speaks inside the Southern Stadium during a thanksgiving gathering organized by Hong Kong-based Filipino workers for the former populist president in Hong Kong on March 9, 2025. (AP)

The Hague hearing is not a trial, but allows prosecutors to outline their case in court. After weighing the evidence, judges have 60 days to decide whether it is strong enough to merit putting Duterte on trial.

The charges date from Duterte's time as mayor of the southern Philippine city of Davao and later as president, and include dozens of

killings as part of his so-called war on drugs.

In the Philippines, dozens of activists with relatives of suspects killed in Duterte's anti-drugs crackdowns held a noisy protest in metropolitan Manila on Monday. More than 100 relatives gathered to watch the pretrial hearings on big TV screens in three venues organized by civic groups in the capital region.

## Japan emperor expresses concern about 3/11 disaster survivors on 66th birthday

TOKYO, Feb 23, (Agencies): Japanese Emperor Naruhito expressed concern about the scars that remain for survivors of the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster in comments released for his 66th birthday Monday just weeks before the March 11 anniversary.

"While recovery of infrastructure has made progress, I feel that reconstruction of livelihoods and community still needs to be addressed," Naruhito said in the remarks made last week. "As I think of those who lost their loved ones and had to cope with complete change of their living environment, I feel their scars have not healed yet ... they stay despite the passage of time."

Naruhito, Empress Masako, their daughter, Princess Aiko, and his younger brother Crown Prince Akishino's family waved from the palace balcony in an appearance to thank cheering well-wishers waving small rising-sun flags.

Later Monday, the emperor hosted a palace banquet, attended by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi and other top officials and members of the imperial family.

The 2011 earthquake and tsunami killed nearly 20,000 people, forced hundreds of thousands from their homes and caused reactor meltdowns at the wrecked Fukushima Daiichi nu-



Japan's Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako, center, along with other members of the imperial family, wave to well-wishers from a balcony during a public appearance marking the emperor's 66th birthday at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo on Feb 23. (AP)

clear power plant. Most communities that were evacuated due to radiation have since reopened, but few people have returned due to the lack of jobs and sense of community.

Japan in April also marks the 10th anniversary of the Kumamoto earthquake that killed nearly 300 people.

Naruhito stressed the need to keep telling the lessons learned from past disasters to younger generations, while preparing for the next one. He pledged to stay close to the people, share their joys and sorrows and listen to the voices of those in disaster-affected areas, while praying for the absence of disasters.



The wreckage of a bus is seen on the banks of the Trishuli River after it drove off a mountain highway near Benighat, west of the capital, Kathmandu, Nepal on Feb 23. (AP)

### 19 dead as bus plunges off Nepal highway

A packed bus on its way to Nepal's capital drove off a mountain highway in Nepal early Monday, killing 19 people including a British national and leaving another 25 wounded.

There were dozens of people on board the bus, which was heading from the resort city of Pokhara to Kathmandu when it drove off the Prithvi highway after midnight,

police said. The bus rolled down a mountain slope and landed on the banks of Trishuli river near Benighat, about 80 kilometers (50 miles) west of the capital, Kathmandu.

Among those who died was a 24-year-old British national, according to a statement from the Dhading district police office. Only nine bodies have been identified.

The injured included a Chinese national, who is being treated at the National Trauma Center in Kathmandu, and a 27-year-old woman from New Zealand who received minor injuries and was being treated at a local hospital. China's official Xinhua News Agency, citing the Chinese Embassy in Nepal, reported earlier that one other Chinese national was missing. (AP)

### Mexico fears more violence

## Army kills leader of Jalisco cartel

GUADALAJARA, Mexico, Feb 23, (AP): School was canceled in several Mexican states and local and foreign governments alike warned their citizens to stay inside, as widespread violence erupted following the army's killing of the powerful leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel.

Nemesio Rubén Oseguera Cervantes, known as "El Mencho" was the boss of one of the fastest-growing criminal networks in Mexico, notorious for trafficking fentanyl, methamphetamine and cocaine to the United States and staging brazen attacks against government officials who challenged it.

He was killed during a shoot-out in his home state of Jalisco as the Mexican military attempted to capture him. Cartel members responded with violence across the country, blocking roads and setting fire to vehicles.

President Claudia Sheinbaum urged calm and authorities announced late Sunday they had cleared most of the more than 250 cartel roadblocks across 20 states. The White House confirmed that the US provided intelligence support to the operation to capture the cartel leader and applauded Mexico's army for taking down a man who was one of the most wanted criminals in both countries.

Mexico hoped the death of the world's biggest fentanyl traffickers would ease Trump administration pressure to do more against the cartels, but many remained hunkered down



National Guards patrol the area outside of the General Prosecutor's headquarters in Mexico City on Feb 22, after authorities reported that the Mexican Army killed Jalisco New Generation Cartel leader Nemesio Oseguera, known as 'El Mencho'. (AP)

and on edge as they waited to see the powerful cartel's reaction.

Guadalajara, the capital of Jalisco state and Mexico's second-largest city, was almost completely shut down on Sunday as fearful residents stayed home.

Passengers arriving to the city's international airport Sunday night were told it was operating with limited personnel because of the burst of violence.

Jacinta Murcia, a 64-year-old nutrition products vendor, was among those

nervously walking late Sunday night through the airport, where earlier in the day travelers sprinted and ducked behind chairs fearing violence. Most flights into the city were suspended on Sunday.

Murcia anxiously scrolled through news stories on social media showing the face of "El Mencho" and sent messages to her children, who were tracking her location as she tried to travel across the city to her home after dark.

### 16 prisoners released under Venezuela amnesty: group

CARACAS, Venezuela, Feb 23, (AP): Venezuela-based prisoners' rights group Foro Penal said on X Sunday that it had verified the release of 16 people since an amnesty bill for people in held for political reasons was signed into law this week.

That number is far below those given by National Assembly leader Jorge Rodríguez a day prior. On Saturday, he said that 1,557 applications were being processed immediately and that hundreds of people deprived of liberty benefiting from the amnesty law were already being released.

Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodríguez signed the amnesty measure into law on Thursday, signaling a major shift in policy following last month's stunning U.S. military raid in the capital, Caracas, to capture then-President Nicolás Maduro.

It is expected to benefit opposition members, activists, human rights defenders, journalists and many others detained for months or even years.

But human rights organizations have reacted with distrust to the approval of the law, calling it insufficient because it leaves out, for example, imprisoned military personnel.

The new law also excludes those convicted of homicide, drug trafficking and serious human rights violations.



Opposition figure Juan Freites, (center), stands with relatives of people they consider political prisoners, after his release from El Helicoide, an intelligence headquarters and detention center, in Caracas, Venezuela on Feb 22. (AP)

### Africa

**7 migrants die east of Libya's capital:** At least seven migrants died at a beach in Qasr al-Akhyar, a coastal town east of Libya's capital Tripoli, local media reported on Saturday. The bodies of the migrants, including a woman and a child, were washed ashore by sea waves, a judicial officer at the Qasr al-Akhyar Police Station was quoted by social media as saying.

The number of potential missing persons remains unknown amid rough sea conditions, the official said, adding that an investigation is ongoing to determine the circumstances of the incident. (Xinhua)

**S.African president reaffirms policy:** South African President Cyril Ramaphosa paid tribute to the country's soldiers and reaffirmed the nation's foreign policy of non-alignment while addressing Armed Forces Day commemorations in Thohoyandou, Limpopo Province.

Speaking at the annual event, Ramaphosa honored members of the South African National Defence Force who "paid the ultimate sacrifice while serving the Republic both abroad and in internal operations."

"This day is a tribute to the courage of those who wear uniform, and we bow our heads in memory of those who never returned from the horizon," he said. (Xinhua)

### Pakistan army kills 70 militants in strikes along Afghan border

KABUL, Afghanistan, Feb 23, (AP): Pakistan's military killed at least 70 militants in strikes along the border with Afghanistan early Sunday, targeting what it described as hideouts of Pakistani militants it blamed for recent attacks inside the country, the deputy interior minister said. Kabul rejected the claim.

Talal Chaudhry, Pakistan's deputy interior minister, offered no evidence for his claim in an interview with Geo News that at least 70 militants were killed in the strikes. Pakistan's state-run media later reported that militant fatalities jumped to 80.

The Afghan Defense Ministry said in a statement that "various civilian areas" in the provinces of Nangarhar and Paktika in eastern Afghanistan were hit, including a religious madrasa and multiple homes. The statement called the strikes a violation of Afghanistan's airspace and sovereignty. Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari said late Sunday Islamabad's recent strikes along the Afghan border were "rooted in (Pakistan's) inherent right to defend its people against terrorism," after repeated warnings to Kabul went unheeded.



Zardari

## Boursa Kuwait general index up 0.44%

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait's general index ended Monday's session higher, gaining 37.56 points or 0.44% to close at 8,642.66 points. Trading involved 151.9 million shares across 15,880 cash transactions, totaling KD 52.5 million (about USD 160 million).

The main market index advanced 43.39 points, or 0.55%, to 7,964.68 points. It saw 65.8 million shares traded in 6,598 transactions worth KD 12.2 million (roughly USD 37.2 million).

# Business

Board of Directors recommends distribution of 127 fils per share as cash dividends

## Boursa Kuwait achieves over 55% increase in its net profit for 2025

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: Boursa Kuwait held its Board of Directors meeting today, 23 February 2026, with the Board approving the Company's consolidated financial statements for the fiscal year ended 31 December 2025. The Company reported a net profit of KD28.18 million, representing an increase of 55.01% compared to last year's profit of KD 18.18 million.

Boursa Kuwait continued to deliver strong financial and operational performances, recording notable growth across various key performance indicators, which reflects its proactive strategic vision, the resilience of its business model and its solid financial position, and enables it to further cement its standing as a leading national institution and a benchmark among listed companies in the Kuwaiti capital market.

The Company announced total operating revenues of KD 50.33 million during the fiscal year ended 31 December 2025, representing an increase of 38.60% compared to the same period in 2024, when total operating revenues amounted to KD 36.31 million, while operating profit rose to KD 34.54 million, reflecting an increase of 54.21% from KD 22.40 million. Earnings per share also increased by 55.01%, rising from 90.55 fils in 2024 to 140.36 fils for the year ended 31 December 2025.

Boursa Kuwait's total assets reached approximately KD 142.90 million for the fiscal year ended 31 December 2025, an increase of 13.28% compared to total assets of KD 126.15 million in 2024. Meanwhile, shareholders' equity attributable to Boursa Kuwait's shareholders also rose by 17.35%, increasing from KD 67.55 million to KD 79.27 million for the fiscal year ended 31 December 2025.

As a result, the Board of Directors recommended the distribution of 127 fils per share as cash dividends for the year 2025, representing a total payout of 90.49% of net profits. The proposed distribution remains subject to the approval of the Ordinary General Assembly and the relevant regulatory authorities.

"The results of 2025 reaffirm the strength of Boursa Kuwait's business model and its ability to deliver sustainable growth despite global geopolitical and economic challenges, as the Company achieved notable growth in its financial performance with net profit increasing by 55.01% to reach KD 28.18 million. This exceptional performance was the outcome of a clear strategic vision, strong institutional discipline, and sustained investment in advancing technological infrastructure and enhancing the efficiency and integration of the capital market apparatus," said Boursa Kuwait Chairman Mr. Bader Nasser AlKharafi.

"The year 2025 marked one of the most outstanding years for Kuwait's capital market in terms of performance, as Boursa Kuwait's three main indices recorded exceptional gains and reached unprecedented levels, with the "Premier" Market Index rising by 21% and the All-Share and "Main Market" indices increasing by 20%. Market capitalization also surpassed KD 53.18 billion during the year, providing clear evidence of the market's resilience and the sustained momentum of investor confidence," he added.

"These results reflect the depth of the market and the confidence of investors, underscoring its structural strength and the sustainability of its investment momentum. They further demonstrate that Boursa Kuwait is increasingly well-positioned to absorb capital inflows with efficiency and sustainability," said AlKharafi.

The Boursa Kuwait Chairman further noted that the Company remains focused on enhancing the market's readiness while strengthening its stability and efficiency, ensuring a transparent and secure trading environment for all participants.

"This will further reinforce Boursa Kuwait's position as a leading financial market that actively contributes to economic diversification in line with Kuwait Vision 2035 to transform the country into a regional financial and commercial hub that attracts investment," he said.

Concluding his remarks, AlKharafi stated, "I would like to extend my highest expression of gratitude to His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, for their continued support of Kuwait's economic development, and for their sustained commitment to fostering a stable and growth-oriented investment environment."

He also extended his appreciation to the Board of Directors and Executive Management for their professionalism and integrated efforts in executing the Company strategy and enhancing the market's readiness, efficiency, and transparency.

AlKharafi also expressed his gratitude to the Capital Markets Authority, Kuwait Clearing Company, Kuwait Central Securities Depository Company and all regulatory and supervisory entities, market participants, investors, and stakeholders, for their constructive cooperation and valuable contributions in supporting the continued growth and development of Kuwait's capital market.



Bader AlKharafi



Mohammad AIOsaimi



Kuwait's capital market delivered exceptional performance in 2025, with trading value rising by 79.26% to approximately KD 26.58 billion, up from KD 14.83 billion in 2024. The market also saw the trading of around 117.4 billion shares, representing a growth of 71.48% compared to 68.48 billion shares traded in 2024, a clear indication of strengthening market momentum and heightened trading activity.

Additionally, the number of transactions increased by 54.57% to sur-

pass six million trades, marking the highest annual growth rate since the company was established, while market makers maintained their upward trajectory, with total market maker trading reaching approximately KD 5.38 billion in 2025, representing an 88.63% increase compared to the previous year.

The "Premier" Market continued to account for the largest share of market capitalization, reaching approximately KD 43.85 billion, representing an increase of 24.12% compared to KD 35.33 billion in 2024. It also recorded the trading of 43.08 billion shares, with a total value of KD 14.97 billion across around 2.42 million transactions, representing 56.32% of the total trading value.

Meanwhile, the "Main" Market emerged as a key driver of trading volumes, with active trading exceeding 73.70 billion shares, up 88.33% from the 39.13 billion shares traded in 2024, while traded value was recorded at approximately KD 11.6 billion, up 129.87% from the 2024 value of KD 5.05 billion, with more than 3.61 million transactions accounting for 62.76% of total trading volume.

"The Kuwait capital market demonstrated exceptional resilience, continuing to perform efficiently and steadily throughout 2025, supported by a robust regulatory framework, advanced operational infrastructure, and sufficient liquidity depth that enabled it to absorb external shocks without compromising pricing efficiency or the orderly functioning of trading activities," said Boursa Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Mohammad Saud AIOsaimi.

The year 2025 marked a significant milestone in the development of Kuwait's capital market infrastructure and operating environment through the implementation of the second phase of the third stage of the Market Development Program (MD 3.2), one of the key pillars of the market's structural transformation.

This phase included the launch of the Central Counterparty (CCP) framework, the activation of cash settlement through the Central Bank of Kuwait's KASSIP system, and the upgrade of brokerage firms to the "Qualified Broker" model.

Boursa Kuwait also continued to enhance its technological capabilities by upgrading the electronic trading system and preparing the necessary infrastructure for the introduction of new financial instruments, including exchange-traded funds (ETFs) and fixed-income products such as bonds and sukuk. These initiatives aim to broaden the range of investment products while further deepening market liquidity and activity.

In addition, the Exchange continued to enhance a flexible listing framework that accommodates companies of varying sizes and financing needs, to expand the issuer base and strengthen market attractiveness.

Listing requirements in the "Main Market" were updated, including a reduction in the minimum free float market capitalization threshold, widening the pool of eligible companies without compromising operational efficiency.

The Exchange also launched the Emerging Companies Market (ECM) as a strategic initiative targeting small and medium enterprises (SMEs), implemented in coordination with the Capital Markets Authority.

The listing of Action Energy Company on the Premier Market marked the culmination of these efforts, underscoring the readiness of the market's regulatory and operational infrastructure to accommodate operating companies across diverse sizes and sectors, and reinforcing its ability to attract high-quality listings that contribute to greater market depth and sector diversification.

Additionally, technical testing was conducted on clearing and settlement systems as part of the capital market apparatus's efforts to enhance operational efficiency, in preparation for enabling US dollar trading of securities denominated in that currency, including foreign ETFs, bonds, and sukuk.

"The achievements of 2025 reflect the outcome of the strategic initiatives and high-impact projects implemented by Boursa Kuwait in close coordination with the broader capital market apparatus, marking an advanced step toward strengthening a more efficient, fair, and competitive financial market," added AIOsaimi.

"They demonstrate the Exchange's ability to translate its strategic vision into tangible operational achievements that enhanced market readiness, reinforced the sustainability of its performance and solidified its position as a modern financial platform capable of meeting the requirements of local and international investors," he said.

AIOsaimi reaffirmed Boursa Kuwait's commitment to further developing its product offerings, advancing innovation, and investing in technological infrastructure and national talent. "Through these efforts, we will continue to strengthen Kuwait's position as a leading regional financial hub for capital flows and support the State's long-term aspirations for sustainable economic development," he concluded.

### Residential dips 17.9%

## Real estate rises 45.6% in early February 2026

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: Local real estate transactions in the first three weeks of February witnessed an outstanding performance compared to the entire February 2025, recording a remarkable increase of 45.6 percent.

This surge is attributed to the rise in commercial real estate transactions, reflecting anticipated growth in the real estate market during the first quarter of 2026.

The newspaper obtained a copy of the weekly statistical report on real estate transactions issued by the Real Estate Registration and Documentation Departments at the Ministry of Justice for the period Feb 1-19, revealing the registration of 474 real estate deals with a total value of KD561.27 million. It is compared to 479 deals valued at KD362.97 million in the whole month of February last year -- an increase in traded liquidity of about KD198.3 million.

This indicates acceleration in the pace of real estate activity since the beginning of the year and positive expectations for market performance in the first quarter of 2026.

Regarding real estate transactions in the residential sector, the total number of transactions in the first three weeks of February reached 274, valued at KD133.48 million, compared to 334 transactions valued at KD138 million in February 2025 -- a decrease of 17.9 percent in the number of transactions and 3.27 percent in value.

Despite this decline, the exclusion of transactions from the last week of February suggests the possibility of

narrowing the gap once all transactions are recorded until the end of the month.

On investment real estate, performance has been more resilient. The total number of transactions recorded during the first three weeks of February exceeded the total number of transactions in February 2025 by 17 transactions -- a growth rate of 13.7 percent.

The value of investment transactions also increased by about KD2.63 million or 1.8 percent. The total number of investment transactions reached 141, valued at KD148.18 million, compared to 124 transactions valued at KD145.55 million in February 2025. It implies gradual improvement in investor appetite and further increase in the number and value of transactions as the month draws to a close.

The commercial real estate sector recorded a remarkable performance during this period, with 30 transactions totaling KD183.4 million, compared to only nine transactions worth KD56.7 million in February last year -- 233 percent increase in the number of transactions and 223 percent increase in value.

In the third week of February, Feb 15-19, the total number of transactions reached 162, with a total value of KD148.45 million as follows: 105 residential transactions (64.8 percent) worth KD43.46 million, 51 investment transactions (31.4 percent) worth KD73.46 million, four commercial transactions worth KD27.58 million, one transaction for the warehouse sector worth KD2.8 million and one transaction for the shops sector worth KD 1.5 million.

Presented by Global Finance Magazine

## NBK Wealth wins Best Private Bank in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: NBK Wealth Group, a subsidiary of the National Bank of Kuwait, achieved a new milestone that reinforces its leading position in the wealth management field, after winning the award for Best Private Bank in Kuwait 2026, as part of the prestigious annual awards presented by Global Finance Magazine to the most prominent financial institutions around the world.

This award is a clear testament to the high level of professionalism of NBK Group and its ability to provide comprehensive financial solutions that meet the needs of wealthy clients in an extremely competitive market.

Before announcing the winner of this award, the judging committee relied on detailed criteria, including strong financial performance during the evaluation period that extended from July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025, growth in assets under management, quality of advisory services provided, in addition to the provision of innovative financial and investment solutions and an advanced digital experience that ensures the highest levels of privacy and security.

The power of NBK Wealth stems from its highly central and strategic role within the NBK Group, the largest financial institution in Kuwait and one of the most prominent banking entities in the Middle East. It has a geographical footprint that includes 9 cities in 5 different countries, which further enhances its ability to serve a diverse base of high-net-worth clients across a wide geographical area and gives it a solid base and extensive experience in local, regional and global



Fadi Choueiry, Head of Private Banking Kuwait, NBK Wealth, receives Kuwait's Best Private Bank award.

### Choueiry:

- The award is a testament of the Group's high professionalism and exceptional ability to provide innovative solutions in an extremely competitive market.
- NBK Wealth strives to be the most trusted and number one choice in the field of wealth management.
- The Group is keen to seek to build multi-generational legacies for its clients.
- This award reflects the trust international institutions place in the Group's performance and its support for seeking to achieve of its clients' long-term financial goals.

markets.

It is worth noting that NBK Wealth does not solely seek to enhance its clients' wealth, but also aims to be the number one and most trusted choice in wealth management, as it strives to build a multi-generational legacies for its clients through customized solutions that suit the individual needs of each client and help achieve the goals of high-net-worth individual and corporate clients. The Group offers a comprehensive suite of private banking services to meet the needs of high-net-worth clients.

The approach on which NBK Wealth relies focuses on building strategies tailored to each client in line with their individual financial goals, while seeking to ensure the best possible returns through effective risk management, with the objective of supporting the sustainability and enhancement of wealth across generations.

Therefore, this global recogni-

tion reaffirms NBK Wealth's ability to keep pace with the rapid developments in the world of wealth management, and to provide a high-quality banking experience that reflects its commitment to serving its clients with care and professionalism. This achievement also embodies the trust that international institutions place in the Group's performance and reinforces its position as a reliable partner capable of formulating innovative, forward-looking solutions that support their clients in seeking to achieve long-term financial goals.

Global Finance magazine, which was founded in New York in 1987, is one of the most influential specialized magazines in the fields of economics and finance, reaching more than 50,000 senior executives and decision-makers in 188 countries around the world.

The magazine is distinguished by its comprehensive annual surveys that measure levels of innovation and profitability in banks and



financial institutions, to identify the best regionally and globally based on a precise methodology recognized in the financial sector.

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

## BUSINESS

## Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait announces official closure days on the occasion of National & Liberation Day

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) extends its greetings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, as well as the government, people, and residents of Kuwait on the occasion of Kuwait's National and Liberation Day.

ABK disclosed that its branches will be closed 25 and 26 February 2026 to resume operations on March 1, 2025.m During this

time, ABK's digital branch in Al Khiran Mall will be functional to service customers from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m and from 9 p.m. to 12 a.m.

The Bank has also confirmed its full operational readiness to serve customers 24/7 via its various digital platforms. This includes Online Banking via eahli.com, the ABK mobile app, as well as the Bank's call center Ahlan Ahli 1 899 899 and its ATM network.



In cooperation with Kiswa charity

## Gulf Bank launches nationwide clothes drive Feb 25

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: Gulf Bank has announced the launch of a nationwide clothes collection campaign on 25 February, in celebration of Kuwait's National and Liberation Days and the Holy Month of Ramadan. With these national and spiritual occasions coinciding this year, the Bank considered this a meaningful opportunity to introduce a large-scale community initiative that reflects the shared values of unity, generosity, compassion, and social responsibility deeply rooted in Kuwaiti society.

The campaign will be launched at the Bank's headquarters in cooperation with Kiswa Charity Association and will commence at 12:00 midnight on 25 February. It forms part of Gulf Bank's Ramadan program under the theme "Our Traditions Always Bring Us Together" and extends the humanitarian message of its Ramadan campaign "A Piece of Me," reinforcing the Bank's commitment to translating its values into meaningful community action.

The initiative aims to mobilize individuals, families, institutions, and corporate partners across the country to participate in a collective act of giving. It focuses on collecting clothes, blankets, bed sheets, towels, and other essential household textile items, as part of Gulf Bank's integrated approach to social development, environmental stewardship, and sustainable impact.

Through this initiative, donated items will be distributed to underprivileged families and individuals in need, while recyclable materials will be processed and repurposed in a responsible manner to benefit the same communities. In collaboration with specialized third-party service providers, all collected items will be professionally cleaned, sorted, categorized, and organized according to the highest quality and safety standards. This structured process ensures that every contribution is handled with care, transparency, and respect, preserving the dignity of beneficiaries and maximizing the social value of each donation.

The campaign aims to achieve both humanitarian and environmental impact. New and usable items will be distributed directly to families in need, while recyclable materials will be converted into financial returns that will be donated to charitable organizations, ensuring that every contribution generates meaningful and sustainable benefit.

In addition, Gulf Bank is seeking, through this initiative, to register a Guinness World Record for the largest clothes collection campaign in the world. This ambitious objective reflects the Bank's commitment to institutionalizing the culture of giving and motivating society to actively engage in volunteer and charitable initiatives with long-term impact.

Gulf Bank emphasized that the campaign reflects the principles of solidarity, empathy, and shared responsibility that define Kuwaiti culture, particularly during Ramadan and national celebrations. By aligning this initiative with these significant occasions, the Bank seeks to reinforce a culture of giving that extends beyond seasonal initiatives and becomes an integral part of everyday community life. The Bank is therefore calling on individuals, families, institutions, and corporate partners to actively participate and support this nationwide movement of generosity.

In this context, Gulf Bank is also donating all items used in its Ramadan TV commercial "A Piece of Me" to support this drive, further strengthening the connection between its communication message and tangible community action. This integration reflects the Bank's commitment to ensuring that its marketing and corporate communications efforts translate into measurable social impact.

This campaign forms part of Gulf Bank's comprehensive strategy to embed social responsibility, sustainability, and environmental awareness across its operations and stakeholder engagement frameworks. Over the years, the Bank has consistently launched and supported humanitarian initiatives, charitable programs, and volunteer activities throughout Ramadan and across the year. It has also actively encouraged employee participation in community service, recognizing that social responsibility is a shared institutional value rather than a standalone activity.

Furthermore, the drive supports broader national objectives related to waste reduction, recycling, and responsible consumption. By promoting the reuse and repurposing of textile materials, the campaign contributes to minimizing environmental impact while simultaneously addressing social needs. This dual focus underscores Gulf Bank's belief that sustainable development requires an integrated approach that balances economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection.

Gulf Bank expects strong engagement from all segments of society, reflecting the growing public awareness of sustainability practices and community solidarity in Kuwait. The Bank views this campaign as an opportunity to strengthen partnerships with charitable organizations, service providers, and community stakeholders, while reinforcing trust and long-term relationships with customers and the wider public.

Through this nationwide initiative, Gulf Bank continues to strengthen its position as a leading financial institution that plays an active role in national development and social progress. By bringing together individuals and organizations around a shared purpose, the Bank aims to create a lasting positive impact that extends well beyond the campaign period.

Members of the public are invited to join Gulf Bank on 25 February, starting from 12:00 midnight, and take part in this collective act of giving, contributing to a meaningful initiative that celebrates Kuwait's national spirit, reinforces the values of Ramadan, and reflects the true essence of community partnership and shared responsibility.

## Global growth remains resilient amid uncertainty

By KAMCO Invest

In its latest World Economic Outlook (WEO) report, the IMF forecasted global real GDP growth at 3.3% for 2026 and 3.2% for 2027, marking an upward revision of 20 bps for the 2026 projection. The forecast for 2027 was kept unchanged vs. the expectation in Oct-2025. According to the IMF, Global growth is expected to remain steady, as slowing momentum in high-tech sectors continues to partially offset weakness elsewhere. Tariffs and uncertainty are likely to weigh on activity, but their impact is expected to ease through 2026 and 2027.

The IMF indicates that global economic growth remains notably resilient despite significant US led trade disruptions and heightened uncertainty, with most of the improvement driven by the United States and China. This steady outlook is expected to balance trade policy headwinds with strong AI-driven investment mainly in North America and Asia alongside fiscal and monetary support, accommodative financial conditions, and a highly adaptable private sector. In terms of downside risks, IMF highlighted the reassessment of AI-driven productivity could dampen investment, trigger financial market corrections, and reduce household wealth, while renewed trade tensions or geopolitical conflicts could disrupt markets, supply chains, and commodity prices.

According to the IMF, aggregate global growth in Q3-2025 slowed to an annualized 2.4%, above expectations, with gains in some countries offset by weaker outcomes in others. France grew 2.2% on stronger aerospace exports, while Germany's GDP remained flat due to falling exports. Japan contracted 2.3%, partly offset by consumption, amid weak residential investment and exports. China slowed to 2.4%, as weak domestic demand was partly offset by resilient exports. In the US, growth accelerated to 4.3%, supported by technology investment, which added 0.3 percentage points to GDP in the first nine months and offset Q4 drag from the government shutdown. Technology investment also lifted activity in Spain and the UK, though less than in the US.

### Advanced Economies and Emerging Market and Developing Economies

Real GDP growth for Advanced Economies was revised up by 20 bps for 2026 to 1.8% compared with the October 2025 forecast, while the projection for 2027 remained unchanged at 1.7%. The United States' GDP growth is projected at 2.4% in 2026 and 2.0% in 2027. Compared with the October 2025 WEO Update, this reflects an upward revision of 30 bps for 2026, while the 2027 projection was revised downward by 10 bps. The outlook for 2026 has been revised upward, reflecting stronger-than expected GDP growth in Q3 2025 and a rebound in activity in early 2026 following the end of the federal government shutdown. Growth is expected to remain solid in 2027, supported in the near term by corporate investment incentives under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025. While technology-driven momentum is projected to moderate, it will continue to partially offset the effects of slower consumer spending and lower immigration.

Growth in the Euro Area, was revised upward by 10 bps to 1.3% in 2026 and remained unchanged at 1.4% for 2027, respectively. Growth in 2027 is expected to be slightly stronger, supported by higher public spending especially in Germany and continued robust performance in Ireland and Spain. The forecast is broadly unchanged from October-2025, with moderate growth reflecting ongoing structural challenges. The planned rise in defense spending is likely to have a noticeable impact only in later years, as targets are gradually phased in by 2035. Unlike other regions, the Euro area benefits less from recent technology-driven investment. Manufacturing will continue to face headwinds from persistently high energy prices after Russia-Ukraine conflict, further compounded by the Euro's real appreciation against currencies of similar exporters.

Growth forecast for United Kingdom was retained at 1.3% for 2026 and 1.5% 2027 consistent with the October-2025 forecast. In the United Kingdom, inflation, which rose last year partly due to one-off regulated price changes, is projected to return to target by the end of 2026,

Country/Regions	Jan-2026 Updated Forecasts				Rev. from Oct-2025	
	2024	2025	2026e	2027e	2026e	2027e
<b>Real GDP Growth</b>						
<b>World Output</b>	3.3%	3.3%	3.3%	3.2%	0.2%	0.0%
<b>Advanced Economies</b>	1.8%	1.7%	1.8%	1.7%	0.2%	0.0%
United States	2.8%	2.1%	2.4%	2.0%	0.3%	-0.1%
Euro Area	0.9%	1.4%	1.3%	1.4%	0.1%	0.0%
<b>EM and Developing Economies</b>	4.3%	4.4%	4.2%	4.1%	0.2%	-0.1%
China	5.0%	5.0%	4.5%	4.0%	0.3%	-0.2%
India	6.5%	7.3%	6.4%	6.4%	0.2%	0.0%
MENA	2.2%	3.4%	3.9%	4.0%	0.2%	0.3%
Saudi Arabia	2.6%	4.3%	4.5%	3.6%	0.5%	0.4%
Sub-Saharan Africa	4.1%	4.4%	4.6%	4.6%	0.2%	0.1%
<b>Trade Volume Growth</b>						
<b>World Trade Volume</b>	3.6%	4.1%	2.6%	3.1%	0.3%	0.0%
Advanced Economies	2.0%	3.0%	1.9%	2.4%	0.4%	0.2%
EM and Developing Economies	6.3%	5.7%	3.6%	4.4%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Consumer Prices Change</b>						
Advanced Economies	2.6%	2.5%	2.2%	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%
EM and Developing Economies	7.9%	5.2%	4.8%	4.3%	0.1%	0.1%

supported by slower wage growth amid a weakening labor market. The IMF raised the growth forecast for Emerging Markets and Developing Economies by 20 bps to a growth of 4.2% in 2026 followed by 10 bps downward revision to growth in 2027 that is expected to come in at 4.1%.

For the Asia region, the IMF upgraded China's forecast by 30 bps to 4.5% in 2026 after 5.0% growth in 2025, driven by lower US tariffs on Chinese goods following the year long trade truce agreed in November-2025, alongside two years of planned stimulus measures. For 2027, growth is expected to slow to 4.0%, as structural headwinds take hold. The Growth forecast for India for 2026 was revised upward by 20 bps to 6.4% vs. the expectations in October-2025 reflecting a stronger than expected Q3-2025 performance and robust momentum in the Q4-2025. The growth rate for 2027 was kept unchanged from the previous forecast as cyclical and temporary factors fade.

### MENA Region

Growth in MENA region was revised upward by 20 bps for 2026 and by 30 bps for 2027, reaching 3.9% and 4.0%, respectively. In the Middle East and Central Asia, growth is expected to pick up from 3.7% in 2025 to 3.9% in 2026 and 4.0% in 2027, driven by higher oil output, strong domestic demand, and ongoing reforms. According to the IMF, growth in Saudi Arabia is projected to rise to 4.5% in 2026, witnessing an upward revision of 50 bps. Saudi Arabia's Growth in 2027 is expected to reach 3.6%, reflecting 40 bps upward revision. Based on futures market data as of November 20, 2025, the anticipated average price of oil is expected to be USD 62.13/b for 2026 and USD 62.17/b for 2027.

### Global Trade Volumes

World trade volume growth is expected to fall from 4.1% in 2025 to 2.6% in 2026 before rising to a growth of 3.1% in 2027. These movements reflect front-loading behavior and adjustments in trade flows in response to new policies. According to the IMF, over the medium term, expansionary fiscal measures in economies with current account surpluses are expected to help reduce global imbalances, partly offsetting this effect, the technology-driven investment boom is likely to continue attracting capital flows to the

United States, even as it gradually eases. Trade growth in Emerging Market and Developing economies was retained at 3.6% for 2026 and 4.4% for 2027 consistent with the October-2025 forecast, whereas the growth for the Advanced Economies was revised up by 40 bps to 1.9% for 2026. Next year, Advanced Economies also saw an upward revision of 20 bps to 2.4%.

### Inflation

According to the IMF, Global inflation is expected to decline from 3.8% in 2026 to 2.4% in 2027. This outlook is broadly unchanged from the October-2025 WEO, reflecting continued softening demand and lower energy prices. At the same time, inflation dynamics remain uneven, with divergence persisting between the United States and most other economies. With the impact of higher tariffs gradually passing through, US core inflation is projected to return to its 2% target in 2027, while Australia and Norway are expected to see a more prolonged period of inflation above target.

In the United Kingdom, inflation which increased last year partly due to one-off regulated price changes, is expected to return to target by the end of 2026 as slower wage growth from a weakening labor market takes effect. In Japan, inflation is projected to ease in 2026 and align with the country's target in 2027 as food and commodity prices decline.

In the Euro area, headline inflation is expected to remain around 2%, with core inflation declining to that level by 2027. In China, inflation is projected to rise from low levels, while in India, it is expected to return close to target following a significant drop in 2025 due to subdued food prices.

According to the IMF, Global risks continue to lean to the downside. Economic resilience is concentrated in a few sectors and underpinned by policy support, leaving it exposed to potential shocks. If AI-driven productivity gains fall short, investment could weaken, stock markets could correct, consumption could slow, and spillovers could ripple through trade and financial markets. Trade tensions, including tariffs or restrictions on key inputs, could disrupt supply chains and heighten inflationary pressures, while rising protectionism could further compress profit margins.

## Warba renews partnership with NASM to promote health awareness

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: As part of its social responsibility and ongoing commitment to creating a positive and sustainable impact in the community, Warba Bank announced the signing of a strategic cooperation agreement with Eccentric Sports Consultancy, the official operator of the National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM) in Kuwait, to launch a comprehensive health and fitness awareness campaign during the Holy Month of Ramadan for the second consecutive year.

The partnership falls within Warba Bank's broader strategy to promote healthy lifestyles and encourage community members to adopt sound nutritional and fitness habits, particularly during Ramadan, a period that requires special attention to physical wellbeing. The initiative aims to deliver educational content grounded in modern scientific principles, contributing to enhanced public awareness and the prevention of lifestyle-related diseases.

On this occasion, Ayman Salem Al-Mutairi, Director of Corporate Communications and Public Relations at Warba Bank, stated: "We are proud to renew our partnership with NASM for the second consecutive year, driven by our belief that investing in community health is fundamental to building a sustainable and prosperous future. At Warba Bank, we see our role as extending beyond innovative banking services to include meaningful contributions to improving the quality of life for citizens and residents alike. Through this initiative, we aim to empower individuals with access to the best sports and medical guidance to help them observe Ramadan in good health and vitality, in line with our vision of 'Let's Own Tomorrow.'"

He added that throughout the Holy Month, the Bank will publish three weekly health awareness tips across its official social media platforms. These tips, delivered by sports and health specialists in Kuwait, will focus on maintaining physical wellbeing during Ramadan and adopting balanced lifestyle practices.



Warba Bank renews NASM health campaign for Ramadan.

Al-Mutairi emphasized that this initiative is part of a broader series of community programs and initiatives undertaken by Warba Bank, reaffirming its role as a responsible Islamic financial institution that supports public health, promotes awareness, and contributes to building a more active and balanced society.

For his part, Salem Al-Dosari, Founder of Eccentric Sports Consultancy, expressed his appreciation for the continued collaboration, stating: "We are very proud to renew this partnership with Warba Bank, a leading institution that places community health at the heart of its strategic priorities. This collabora-

tion clearly reflects the private sector's growing commitment in Kuwait to integrating health and sports into its social agenda. It is a particularly important step given the noticeable rise in obesity and diabetes rates. Through NASM, our goal is to provide scientifically grounded sports education that helps drive positive and sustainable changes in health behaviors."

The National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM) extends over 37 years and is recognized globally as a leading institution in sports education. Its programs are based on rigorous scientific foundations and the latest international research in sports medicine and fitness, ensuring the delivery of credible and impactful knowledge.

This initiative reflects Warba Bank's continued commitment to supporting programs that serve the Kuwaiti community and underscores its role as an active national partner dedicated to promoting social and health stability, contributing to a more aware and dynamic society.

Through this partnership, Warba Bank further demonstrates its strong support for health and wellbeing initiatives in Kuwait, building on a track record of sponsoring major sporting events and community marathons, as well as launching internal employee wellness programs that encourage active lifestyles. The Bank also leverages its digital platforms to disseminate educational content on nutrition and physical wellbeing, reinforcing its investment in health as a key pillar of sustainable development.

Warba Bank is among the banks that have achieved significant success in a relatively short period, securing a leading position in Islamic digital banking. With one of the largest shareholder bases among local banks, the Bank remains close to all segments of society. This sponsorship further reinforces Warba Bank's position as a trusted banking partner that combines innovation with social responsibility in delivering high-quality financial services and products.

# 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!

Indian, Arabic, international & Kerala Malabar specials

## LuLu Hypermarket presents a flavorful Iftar snack collection for the holy month

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: In celebration of the holy month, LuLu Hypermarket has introduced an extensive range of freshly prepared Iftar snacks across all stores, offering customers a perfect combination of taste, tradition, and quality.

The specially prepared menu features more than 100 varieties of snacks, bringing together a delightful mix of Indian, Arabic, and international Iftar favorites. Carefully curated to suit the diverse tastes of customers, the selection includes a variety of crispy bites, savory classics, and traditional Ramadan delicacies that make every Iftar table more enjoyable.

Adding a distinctive touch to the menu, customers can also



Freshly prepared by chefs for Ramadan Iftar.

find authentic Kerala Malabar rich flavors and traditional recipes. These specialties bring a

taste of home for many and offer something unique for everyone to enjoy during the holy month.

All snacks are freshly prepared by LuLu's experienced chefs, who focus on authentic taste, consistent quality, and high standards of hygiene. Every item is crafted with care to ensure customers receive delicious and freshly made snacks perfect for breaking the fast.

With its commitment to quality, variety, and value, LuLu Hypermarket continues to be a preferred destination for Ramadan shopping and Iftar preparations.

Customers are invited to visit their nearest selected LuLu store and explore the wide range of Iftar specials available this season.



Photos during the event.

### KSUM CEO Anoop Ambika inaugurates

## PPF Kuwait holds AGM, elects new 2026-2028 office bearers

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Progressive Professional Forum (PPF) Kuwait was held on 6 February 2026 at Hotel Park Inn by Radisson, Mahboula. The meeting reflected the democratic ethos of the organization and witnessed active participation from members.

The President, Mr. Prasanth Warriar, presided over the meeting. The General Secretary, Mr. Shaji Madathil, presented the working report for the period 2024-26, highlighting the forum's professional development initiatives, community outreach programs, and institutional engagements. The Treasurer, Mr. Sreejith S. Nair, presented the financial report. The election proceedings were overseen by Mr. BijuJanardhanan.

The AGM was formally inaugurated by the Chief Guest, Mr. Anoop Ambika, Chief Executive Officer of Kerala Startup Mission (KSUM), who appreciated PPF Kuwait's efforts in fostering knowledge exchange and professional networking within the diaspora community.

During the session, Mr. Naveen K. R. introduced a resolution seeking the Government of India's intervention to strengthen efforts toward aligning Indian professional certifications and qualifications with internationally recognized standards and accreditation frameworks. The resolution was discussed and adopted by the General Body.

The General Body unanimously elected the new office bearers for the 2026-2028 term as follows:

President – Mr. Anilkumar P N

General Secretary – Mr. Bipin Punathil

Treasurer – Mr. Sreejith S Nair

Vice President – Dr. Anila Albert

Joint Secretary – Mr. Kiran K B

The following members were elected to the 25-member Central Executive Committee for the term 2026-28:

Mr. Prasanth Warriar

Mr. Shaji Madathil  
Mr. Smitha Manoj Kumar  
Mr. Sooraj Sukumaran  
Mr. Aseem Muhammed Salim  
Mr. Gopikrishnan A G  
Mr. Naveen K R  
Mr. Ramesh Kappadan  
Mr. Sanjay S Viswanathan  
Mr. Sherly Sasi Rajan  
Mrs. Lekha Madhu  
Mrs. Hanan Shaan  
Mr. Suresh P B  
Adv. Tis Thomas  
Mr. Mridul Karat Palliyath  
Mr. George Thymannil  
Mr. Sarath P V  
Mr. Rejeesh Kumar  
Mr. Vinod K  
Mr. Ajil Joy

The General Secretary elect, Mr. Bipin Punathil, delivered the vote of thanks.

Following the AGM, the public meeting TRANSCEND 26 was conducted, with participation from representatives of KEF, Institution of Engineers, and KALA Kuwait. The session was inaugurated by Mr. Anoop Ambika, and Loka Kerala Sabha member Mr. T V Hikmath offered felicitation. A key highlight was an interactive talk session featuring Mr. Anoop Ambika and Mr. Kashif Sayed, representing IBPC Kuwait, moderated by former PPF President Mr. Prasanth Warriar.

During the presentation ceremony, representatives from PPF's Gold Sponsor SPETCO, and event sponsors INTREX, Royal Technic, SGS, and Safety Plus were honored. The event was anchored by Ms. Baimey Rajesh and concluded with a vote of thanks by General Convener Mr. Gopikrishnan.

Through its AGM and TRANSCEND 26, PPF Kuwait reaffirmed its commitment to professional excellence, institutional dialogue, and strengthening engagement between the Indian diaspora and Kerala's evolving development ecosystem.

Third consecutive year for hotel and spa excellence

## Waldorf Astoria Kuwait reinforces its global standing by retaining Forbes Five Star rating



Waldorf Astoria Kuwait retains Forbes 5-Star rating.



KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: Waldorf Astoria Kuwait and its spa have reinforced their standing among the world's foremost luxury hospitality destinations by retaining the prestigious Five Star rating in the 2026 Forbes Travel Guide Star Awards for the third consecutive year, reflecting consistent operational excellence and an unwavering commitment to the highest international standards of luxury service.

This renewed global acknowledgment reflects the maturity of the hotel's operating model, built on refined personalized service, meticulous attention to detail, and continuous investment in elevating guest experiences in line with evolving regional and international expectations. The achievement further strengthens the property's role as a key contributor to Kuwait's growing luxury tourism landscape and its appeal as a refined destination for business and leisure travelers alike.

Strategically connected to The Avenues, Kuwait's largest retail and entertainment destination, the hotel offers guests a seamless lifestyle experience that blends elevated accommodation, worldclass shopping, and vibrant dining within one of the country's most dynamic urban hubs. Architecturally inspired by the legacy of the Waldorf Astoria brand, the property harmonizes timeless elegance with contemporary sophistication, delivering an environment designed for comfort, privacy, and modern luxury.

Distinctive excellence is reflected in the hotel's integrated portfolio of experiences, ranging from refined global dining options and thoughtfully designed indoor and outdoor facilities, to the health club and spacious accommodations that promote comfort and tranquil-

ity, culminating in Waldorf Astoria Spa, a comprehensive wellness sanctuary that brings together advanced therapeutic rituals and serene relaxation. Together, these elements reinforce a holistic concept of luxury within the guest journey.

Forbes Travel Guide's rigorous inspection process, conducted by expert inspectors across hundreds of objective service and facility criteria, positions the FiveStar designation among the most trusted global indicators of authentic excellence and sustained quality in luxury hospitality.

Commenting on the achievement, General Manager Saleh Al Bataineh said: "Achieving the Forbes FiveStar recognition for the third consecutive year is both a testament to our team's pursuit of excellence and a reflection of our longterm vision to elevate luxury hospitality standards in Kuwait. Above all, it is inspired by the trust of our guests, whose expectations drive us to create meaningful, personalized experiences that endure well beyond their stay".

He concluded: "As we look ahead, we remain committed to advancing innovation, nurturing talent, and deepening the emotional connection between travelers and Kuwait, delivering lasting value for our guests while contributing to the destination's growing presence on the global luxury tourism map".

As Kuwait continues to advance its vision for economic diversification and highvalue tourism, Waldorf Astoria Kuwait remains committed to delivering exceptional hospitality that invites travelers to experience the city through a lens of elegance, comfort, and worldclass service.

### Bishop Aldo Berardi officiates 3-year mission milestone

## Holy Family Co-Cathedral organizes Catholic Mission event



Catholic Mission marks 3 years at Holy Family Co-Cathedral.

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The ceremony held at the Holy Family Co-Cathedral, Kuwait City was officiated by Northern Arabia Apostolic Vicar H.E. Bishop Aldo Berardi O.S.S.T.

The Catholic Mission, which started in 2023 with the blessings of Bishop Aldo, now has a presence in countries such as Kuwait, India, New Zealand, USA,

Oman, UAE, and Ireland with families.

The Catholic mission functioning with the goal of leading people to Jesus Christ through the Blessed Virgin Mary.

As part of this, the faithful engage in the rosary and prayers for the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary, along with missionary acts of charity in



India. Families belonging to the Mission Group from various countries participate in charitable activities such as distributing free food, providing medical aid to patients, giving free study kits to children, and housing project for the homeless.

At the event, Mission Founder Coordinator Babu Francis, Secretary Prince Kollappillil, Core Commit-

tee members Maria Lawrence, Joshy Kurian, Sheeba Joby, Princy Prince, Suma Lawrence, Reeja Joshy, Simi Jiju, Gretty Jinso, as well as Rajeev John, Bittu Abraham, Shery Varghese participated.

The Bishop congratulated the mission on its three years of activities and extended his prayers and best wishes.

'Psycho Killer' opens outside top 10

## 'GOAT' edges 'Wuthering Heights' in quiet box office weekend

LOS ANGELES, Feb 23, (AP): It was a battle of the holdovers at the North American box office this weekend, with the family friendly film "GOAT" edging out the R-rated "Wuthering Heights."

Sony Pictures Animation's "GOAT" took in \$17 million, while Warner Bros.' "Wuthering Heights" earned \$14.2 million, according to studio estimates Sunday. Both films are in their second weekend.

Overall, it was a quiet weekend at movie theaters around the country, with new offerings all opening under \$10 million. Those results applied to the faith-based sequel "I Can Only Imagine 2," the Glen Powell black comedy "How to Make a Killing" and the horror film "Psycho Killer," which currently has a 0% rating on Rotten Tomatoes. One bright spot in theaters was Baz Luhrmann's immersive documentary "EPIC: Elvis Presley in Concert," which earned \$3.3 million from only 325 locations in its limited IMAX release. That film expands to nationwide distribution on Feb. 27.

"These somewhat slower weekends can be a land of opportunity," said Paul Dergarabedian, the head of marketplace trends for Comscore. "GOAT" dropped a slim 38% in its second weekend in theaters, which the studio attributed to positive word-of-mouth. The Stephen Curry-produced movie, about a small goat with big sports dreams (voiced by "Stranger Things" Caleb McLaughlin) has made over \$58.3 million. Globally, its running total is at \$102.3 million.

"Wuthering Heights" meanwhile fell 57% from its opening last weekend, bringing its domestic total to \$60 million. Internationally it added another \$26.3 million, pushing its global total to \$151.7 million against an \$80 million production budget. The movie's top international market continues to be the UK, where it has made \$22.5 million alone.

Third place for the weekend went to Lionsgate and Kingdom Story's "I Can



This image released by Sony Pictures shows characters, (from left) Modo, voiced by Nick Kroll, Lenny, voiced by Stephen Curry, Will, voiced by Caleb McLaughlin, Olivia, voiced by Nicola Coughlan, Jett, voiced by Gabrielle Union, and Archie, voiced by David Harbour, in a scene from the animated film 'GOAT.' (AP)

Only Imagine 2," a follow-up to the 2018 Dennis Quaid movie that made \$86 million against a \$7 million budget. The sequel opened with \$8 million, a far cry from the first film's \$17 million launch, though that was in line with expectations. It did score a rare A+ CinemaScore.

Amazon and MGM's "Crime 101" fell 59% in its second weekend, bringing in

\$5.8 million to take fourth place. The Chris Hemsworth and Mark Ruffalo heist thriller has now made \$24.7 million against a reported \$90 million budget. "Send Help" rounded out the top five with \$4.5 million.

"How to Make a Killing" landed in sixth place with \$3.6 million. A24 released the StudioCanal movie in 1,600 North American theaters. The film, loosely inspired by "Kind Hearts and Coronets," stars Powell as a man who, in a quest to acquire a \$28 billion inheritance, decides to kill off his family members. Directed by John Patton Ford ("Emily the Criminal"), "How to Make a Killing" was not well-received by critics: it's sitting at a "rotten" 47% on Rotten Tomatoes.

"Psycho Killer," released by 20th Century Studios, fared much worse and opened outside of the top 10. The horror-thriller written by Andrew Kevin Walker ("Seven") and directed by Gavin Polone (a notable television and film producer in his directorial debut) tanked in its first weekend in theaters with \$1.6 million in ticket sales from 1,110 theaters. Audiences were not any happier with it than critics: According to Post-Trak, only 31% of ticket buyers would "definitely recommend" it.

The year's box office is running about 5% ahead of last year and Dergarabedian expects things will start to pick up when "Scream 7" opens next weekend.

"It's been a kind of rollercoaster ride at the box office," he said. With final domestic figures being released Monday, this list factors in the estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at US and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore:

1. "GOAT," \$17 million, 2. "Wuthering Heights," \$14.2 million, 3. "I Can Only Imagine 2," \$8 million, 4. "Crime 101," \$5.8 million, 5. "Send Help," \$4.5 million, 6. "How to Make a Killing," \$3.6 million, 7. "EPIC: Elvis Presley in Concert," \$3.3 million, 8. "Solo Mio," \$2.6 million, 9. "Zootopia 2," \$2.3 million and 10. "Avatar: Fire and Ash," \$1.8 million.

### Awards



Andy Jurgensen, (from left), Leonardo DiCaprio, Teyana Taylor, Paul Thomas Anderson, Sara Murphy, Chase Inffiniti, Benicio Del Toro, Cassandra Kulukundis, and Michael Bauman pose with the awards for best director, cinematography, and adapted screenplay for 'One Battle After Another' at the 79th British Academy Film Awards, BAFTA's, in London, Sunday, Feb. 22. (AP)



Britain's Prince William and Kate, Princess of Wales arrive with Jane Millichip, CEO of the British Academy of Film and Television Arts and Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London Ken Ollis at the 79th British Academy Film Awards, in London, Sunday Feb. 22. (AP)

'Sinners,' 'Frankenstein' score multiple wins

## 'One Battle After Another' wins big with 6 BAFTAs



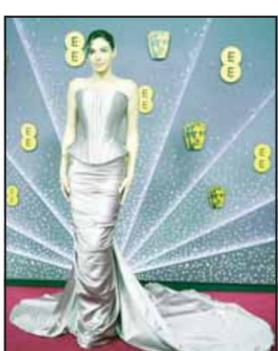
Gracie Abrams poses for photographers at the BAFTAs. (AP)



Sadie Sink arrives at the 79th British Academy Film Awards. (AP)



Rose Byrne poses for photographers upon arrival at BAFTAs. (AP)



Razane Jammal poses for photographers at the BAFTAs. (AP)

LONDON, Feb 23, (AP): Politically charged thriller "One Battle After Another" won six prizes, including best picture, at the British Academy Film Awards on Sunday, building momentum ahead of Hollywood's Academy Awards next month.

Blues-stepped vampire epic "Sinners" and gothic horror story "Frankenstein" won three awards each, while Shakespearean family tragedy "Hamnet" won two including best British film.

"One Battle After Another," Paul Thomas Anderson's explosive film about a group of revolutionaries in chaotic conflict with the state, won awards for directing, adapted screenplay, cinematography and editing, as well as for Sean Penn's supporting performance as an obsessed military officer.

"This is very overwhelming and wonderful," Anderson said as he accepted the directing prize. He paid tribute to his longstanding assistant director, Adam Somner, who died of cancer in November 2024 a few weeks into production.

"We have a line from Nina Simone that we used in our film, 'I know what freedom is: It's no fear,'" the director said. "Let's keep making things without fear. It's a good idea."

Bookies' favorite Jessie Buckley won the best actress prize for playing grieving mother Agnes Hathaway, wife of William Shakespeare, in "Hamnet." Buckley, 36, is the first Irish performer to win a best actress prize at the awards, known as BAFTAs.

She dedicated her award "to the women past, present and future who taught me and continue to teach me how to do it differently."

In a major upset, Robert Aramayo won the best actor category for his performance in "I Swear," a fact-based British indie drama about a campaigner for people with Tourette syndrome.

The 33-year-old British actor looked stunned and called the victory over Ethan Hawke, Michael B. Jordan, Leonardo DiCaprio and Timothée Chalamet "absolutely mad."

"I absolutely can't believe this," he said. "Everyone in this category blows me away."

"Sinners" took home trophies for director Ryan Coogler's original screenplay, the film's musical score and for Wunmi Mosaku's supporting actress performance as herbalist and healer Annie.

The British-Nigerian actor said that in the role she found "a part of my hopes, my ancestral power and my connection, parts I thought I had lost or tried to dim as an immigrant trying to fit in."

Hollywood stars and British celeb-



Ryan Coogler poses with award for original screenplay for 'Sinners.' (AP)



Andrea Berentzen Ottmar, (from left), Joachim Trier, Maria Ekerhovd, and Renate Reinsve pose with the award for film not in the English language for 'Sentimental Value.' (AP)



Joe Alwyn, (from left), Maggie O'Farrell, Liza Marshall, Pippa Harris, Chloe Zhao, Jacobi Jupe, Jessie Buckley, Olivia Lynes, Bodhi Rae Breathnach, Emily Watson, Nicolas Gonda pose with the award for outstanding British film for 'Hamnet.' (AP)



Robert Aramayo poses with the EE rising star award and the award for leading actor for 'I Swear.' (AP)



Jessie Buckley poses with the award for leading actress for 'Hamnet.' (AP)



Wunmi Mosaku poses with the award for supporting actress for 'Sinners.' (AP)

rities, from Paddington Bear to the Prince and Princess of Wales, gathered at London's Royal Festival Hall for the awards. DiCaprio, Chalamet, Emma Stone, Cillian Murphy, Glenn Close and Ethan Hawke were among the stars walking the red carpet before a black-tie ceremony hosted by Scottish actor Alan

Cumming. Prince William and Catherine, Princess of Wales also attended, three days after William's uncle Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor was arrested by police and held for 11 hours over allegations he sent sensitive government information to the late financier and sex offender

Jeffrey Epstein. The scandal has rocked the royal family led by King Charles III, though William and Kate remain popular standard-bearers for the monarchy. William presented an award in his role as president of the British Academy of Film and Television Arts.



Alan McAlex, (from left), Farhan Akhtar, Paddington Bear, Lakshmi Priya Devi, and Ritesh Sidhwani pose with the award for children's & family film for 'Boong.' (AP)



Alzbeta Karasková, (from left), Pavel Talankin, Radovan Sibrt, David Borenstein, and Helle Faber pose with the award for documentary for 'Mr. Nobody Against Putin.' (AP)

Among the biggest receptions from gathered fans was for Paddington, the puppet bear who stars in a musical stage adaptation of the beloved children's classic.

The British prizes, officially called the EE BAFTA Film Awards, often provide hints about who will win at Hollywood's Academy Awards, held this year on March 15. "Sinners" has a record 16 Oscar nominations, followed by "One Battle After Another" with 13.

"One Battle" went into the BAFTAs ceremony with 14 nominations. "Sinners" was just behind with 13, while "Hamnet" had 11.

Ping-pong odyssey "Marty Supreme" also had 11 nominations but went home empty-handed.

Guillermo del Toro's reimagining of "Frankenstein" and Norwegian family drama "Sentimental Value" each got eight nominations.

"Frankenstein" took awards for production design, costume design and for the hair and makeup artists who spent 10 hours a day transforming Jacob Elordi into the movie's monstrous creature.

"Sentimental Value" won the prize for the best film not in English.

Cumming told the audience that it had been a strong year for cinema, if not a cheerful one, with nominated films tackling themes including child death, racism and political violence:

"Watching the films this year was like taking part in a collective nervous breakdown," he said. "It's almost as though there are events going on in the real world that are influencing filmmakers."

The ceremony was more glitz than gloom, though, including a performance by Ejae, Audrey Nuna and Rei Ami - the voices of animated band HUNTR/X in box office juggernaut "KPop Demon Hunters" - singing the movie hit "Golden."

The best-documentary prize went to "Mr. Nobody Against Putin," about a Russian teacher who documented the propaganda imposed on Russian schools after the invasion of Ukraine.

The film's American director David Borenstein said that teacher Pavel Talankin had shown that "whether it's in Russia or the streets of Minneapolis, we always face a moral choice," referring to the protests against U.S. immigration enforcement in Minnesota.

"We need more Mr. Nobodies," he said.

It beat documentaries including Mstyslav Chernov's harrowing Ukraine war portrait "2000 Meters to Andriivka," co-produced by The Associated Press and Frontline PBS.



(common caption) Ancient rock-cut tombs uncovered in Egypt, containing pottery vessels, bead necklaces, and alabaster kohl containers.



KUNA photos

## Egypt discovers rock-cut tombs from Old Kingdom era

Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities announced the discovery of a group of rock-cut tombs dating back to the Old Kingdom, containing burial shafts and chambers, during the current excavation season by a mission at Qubbet Al-Hawa in Aswan, southern Egypt.

In a statement on Sunday, Egypt's Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Sherif Fathy commended the work of archaeological missions, especially Egyptian teams, whose recent finds have enriched the field and boosted the appeal of cultural tourism among fans of ancient Egyptian civilization worldwide.

He underlined continued technical and logistical support to help un-

cover more secrets of Egypt's heritage and strengthen its position on the global cultural tourism map.

Meanwhile, Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) Secretary General Dr. Hisham Al-Leithy said the discovery adds to the importance of Qubbet Al-Hawa (Dome of the Wind) and understanding of the site, noting the tombs date to the Old Kingdom and were later reused during the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom of Egypt, reflecting the site's significance across eras.

In addition, Mohammad Abdel-Badi, head of the Egyptian Antiquities Sector, said the mission also uncovered two burial chambers contain-

ing about 160 pottery vessels of various sizes and shapes from the Old Kingdom, most in good condition and bearing Hieratic inscriptions.

Initial studies suggest they were used for storing liquids and grains, he added.

Artifacts from the Middle Kingdom was also found in the outer courtyard, including bronze mirrors, alabaster kohl containers, bead necklaces in different colors and shapes, and various amulets, he mentioned.

The mission continues work at the site to reveal more tombs and artifacts, he pointed out. Qubbet Al-Hawa contains tombs spanning multiple eras, from the Old Kingdom through the Greco-Roman period. (KUNA)

## Television

Artists hope to unite Syria through human stories

# Syrian TV tests Ramadan series' boundaries

ALEPPO, Syria, Feb 23, (AP): Ramadan in the Arab world is a time of fasting and prayer, but it brings another beloved tradition: the much-anticipated TV drama series shot each year to be aired during the holy month.

After breaking their daily fast, families gather to watch their picks from the year's crop of soap operas and political and historical dramas, snacking on sweets and nuts and drinking tea and coffee until late in the evening.

The most anticipated productions are often Syrian. While Egypt is known for its movies and Lebanon for its pop singers and composers, Syria's TV series for decades have been seen as the gold standard in the region.

As the country emerges from 14 years of civil war, more than a year after Islamist-led insurgents brought the authoritarian Assad dynasty to an end, Syria's TV industry is seeking its footing in the new order.

In the Assad years, when political expression was strictly curtailed, "television became the main sort of platform for freedom of expression and also for employment for artists and intellectuals," an area where they could subtly push boundaries, said Christa Salamandra, a professor of anthropology at Lehman College and the City University of New York who has researched Syrian drama.

In 2011, mass anti-government protests were met by a brutal crackdown and spiraled into civil war.

After that, "the industry fractured," Salamandra said. "Creatives went into exile - or they stayed, but it split."

### Political

Since Assad's fall, actors and directors formerly divided along political lines are working together again. Series about once-taboo topics, like torture in Assad's notorious prisons, are being shot inside Syria.

But like everything in the new Syria, the postwar trajectory of TV drama has been complicated.

On a chilly day the week before Ramadan, a television crew had transformed a street in central Aleppo into something magical.

In the background, collapsed buildings were a reminder that the city had been a central battleground in Syria's civil war, but the cameras had transported the street back to a more innocent age. Classic 1970s cars and a horse-drawn cart lined it as a vendor wearing a turban sold sahleb, a sweet drink of hot thickened milk and spices.

The series, "Al-Souriyoun al-Aada" ("The Syrian Enemies"), is based on a novel of the same name that was banned during Assad's time because of its focus on dark moments in Syria's history, including the "Hama massacre" of 1982. When then-President Hafez Assad ordered an attack on the city of Hama to quell a rebellion by the Muslim Brotherhood, 10,000 to 40,000 people were killed or disappeared in the month-long assault and siege that left the city in ruins.

In the small-screen version, Yara



A television crew films an episode of the TV series 'Al-Souriyoun al-Aada' ('The Syrian Enemies'), based on a novel of the same name that was banned under Bashar Assad, in central Aleppo, Syria, Friday, Feb. 13. (AP)

Sabri, a prominent actor who left the country for years due to her opposition to Assad, appears as the mother of a troubled young man from an Alawite village who will become a major player in the country's oppressive security apparatus.

Wissam Rida, who plays her son, said that as a young actor starting out in Damascus, performing alongside exiled stars like Sabri once seemed an impossible dream.

"I used to watch them when I was younger and wish that I could work with them," he said. After Assad's fall, Rida said, "They came back with such beautiful energy you can't imagine, and you can't imagine how much we were in need of them."

Still, production has not been without difficulties.

"Al-Souriyoun al-Aada" director Allaith Hajjo is known for shows like "Dayaa Dayaa" ("A Lost Village"), a comedy about life in a small mountain community, and "Intizar" ("Waiting"), a social drama about an impoverished Damascus suburb. He never left Syria.

"In the days of the (Assad) regime's existence, we were always trying to put forward material that would go over the heads of the censors," he said.

Back then, "I dealt with actors who were a red line in the eyes of the regime," Hajjo said. "At the same time, now I am dealing with people who may be rejected" by the current authorities.

The production has been attacked on social media because of the presence of some actors seen as close to Assad. Hajjo said politics should have no role in casting.

He added that the new authorities have little experience in dealing with artistic productions and that the work had run into "some problems" with censors.

"It's their right to need some time to gain experience, but I hope this time won't affect the quality and the level" of the output, he said.

The National Drama Committee, the government body responsible for reviewing scripts, did not respond to questions.

The series, originally set to air during Ramadan, has been delayed in production and likely will air after the holy month.

### Authorities

Director Rasha Sharbatji, who shot the Ramadan series "Matbakh al Medina" ("The City's Kitchen"), said she had found the new authorities accommodating.

She added that she had met interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa "and he is personally interested in drama and appreciates how important it is."

But it remains to be seen if his government will permit TV dramas to talk openly about problems that have occurred post-Assad, including outbreaks of sectarian violence in which government forces were implicated.

Salamandra said creators likely will "make serials about the old atrocities with subtle references to the recent ones. Because that's what they've always done."

Jihad Abdo is among the exiled stars who have returned. A top actor in the 1990s and early 2000s, he fled Syria in 2011 after voicing criticism of Assad. He started over in the United States,

where he begged for entry-level jobs and had to change his name from Jihad - a common name among both Muslim and Christian Arabs that means "striving" - to Jay to work in Hollywood, where many associated "jihad" with extremism.

Eventually he landed roles in some major productions, including with Nicole Kidman in the 2015 film "Queen of the Desert." But he longed for home.

Now back in Damascus, he appears in the web series "Al-Meqaad al-Akheer" ("The Last Seat"), a social drama airing during Ramadan, as a man struggling with Alzheimer's. And he now leads Syria's General Organization for Cinema, where he faces the daunting prospect of rebuilding the Syrian film industry with no budget.

Abdo said that "the margin of the freedom is bigger" than in Assad's time and the government has not told him that any subject is off limits.

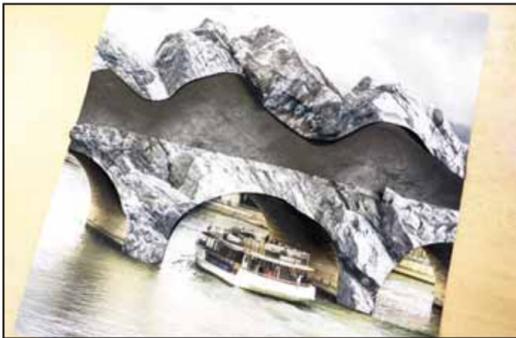
"We're not sure yet about how this margin of freedom will be shaped," he said. "We are trying to make it as big as possible, because we need to address the problems in order to solve them."

Abdo believes the TV industry has a role to play in Syria's postwar reconciliation by telling human stories and by showing that those with different political views can work together.

"The wound is big, it's bleeding, it is still open," he said. "But it's our responsibility, the people in entertainment, the intellectuals, prominent names, to bring everybody together again and to keep talking, no matter how different we are."



French artist JR gestures during an interview with the Associated Press next to the Pont Neuf bridge about his project called Pont Neuf Cavern, in Paris, France, Wednesday, Feb. 18. (AP)



A photomontage shows the project by French artist JR called Pont Neuf Cavern in his studio, in Paris, France, Feb. 17. (AP)

## 'Largest immersive art'

# JR to turn Paris' oldest bridge into a huge cave

PARIS, Feb 23, (AP): He is known as the French Banksy - or simply JR. Now the artist popular across France for large-scale projects, from photographs to graffiti and street art, wants Parisians to do something unusual on the city's arguably most famous bridge: stop.

In June, he plans to transform the bustling Pont Neuf that dates back to the 17th century into a walk-through "cave" - a temporary, monumental public artwork that will cover the stone arches with a rocky illusion and invite visitors to cross the River Seine through a tunnel, complete with sound and digitally augmented reality.

He says it's possibly the "largest immersive installation ever made" and one that will be accessible around the clock and offer a "totally different approach" to the bridge.

"We're about to leave something pretty incredible in the middle of Paris," JR told The Associated Press at his studio in eastern Paris, wearing his trademark hat and shades.

His project, the Pont Neuf Cavern is to run June 6-28, spanning 120 meters (yards) in length and over 17 meters in height.

The installation is a nod to a Paris legend: the late artistic duo Christo and Jeanne-Claude who in 1985 wrapped Pont Neuf - and its streetlamps - in a pale golden fabric. The project, which took years of negotiations with the authorities, helped define the genre of monumental public art in modern cities across the world.

To JR, the homage is both aesthetic and personal. "I had the chance to meet Christo along the years," he said. "We had big respect for each other's work."

While walking recently on the street with an AP crew, an older woman stopped JR - now, a household name in his country - to share her memories of the Christo and Jeanne-Claude wrapping. She told him she was excited to see the bridge transformed again.

### Nature

Still, JR - a pseudonym stemming from first name, Jean-René - acknowledges the weight of following in the iconic pair's footsteps. "It's pretty hard to go after them," he said, "but I'm doing it in a very different style, in my own way."

His idea is about "bringing back mineral and nature" to the heart of Paris. From the outside, his installation will make Pont Neuf look "as if it has been overtaken by a prehistoric outcrop," a structure visible along the banks of the Seine - a rocky mass that is "literally going to break the landscape," he said.

JR said there will be two main ways for people to experience his installation. From the outside, those heading to Pont Neuf will see the giant installation hundreds of meters away.

And from the inside, once visitors enter the "cave" on Pont Neuf, they will be able to walk through a long tunnel-like structure, having a feeling of "total immersion," he said.

The cave will allow no daylight in and once inside, visitors "will lose track of time," JR said.

A key collaborator on the project is Thomas Bangalter, a former member of French rock band Daft Punk who is creating the sound to accompany the installation - "something you'll only hear from the inside," JR said.

Snap's AR studio in Paris is developing the augmented reality technology. Visitors will be able to use their smartphones to "experience and see things that you can't see with your eyes," JR said.

He is intentionally mysterious about what that is - keeping it a surprise until closer to the opening.

JR's team conducted extensive engineering studies, including tests in a hangar at Paris' Orly airport, to understand how the structure behaves, especially in an emergency when the electricity that fuels the cave's air supply cuts off. Tests show the structure stays the same. There is also the security question - the bridge is a busy zone, especially during Paris' tourist-packed early summer.

JR said visitor numbers will be limited at any given time, and that his team is consulting with authorities on that. During the three weeks of the exhibition, the installation will be continuously monitored.

JR is best known for his large-scale art - enormous portraits pasted on buildings, border walls and rooftops. Because of his origins in graffiti and street art he has inevitably drawn comparison with Banksy, the elusive U.K.-based artist famous for his huge murals and activism.

# Rajanish Kakade, known for capturing Mumbai life, dies at 55

NEW DELHI, Feb 23, (AP): Rajanish Kakade, an Associated Press photographer whose images documented India's politics, culture and everyday hustle and bustle of the city of Mumbai for nearly two decades, has died. He was 55.

Kakade died at his home in Mumbai on Monday following an illness, his family said.

He joined the AP in 2008 and was based in Mumbai, from where he helped shape the visual record of India's financial capital. Before joining the AP, he worked with the Sakal Group media conglomerate and the Hindustan Times newspaper.

"Through his work, he captured defining moments with integrity and sensitivity. Through his mentorship, he shaped countless careers, always encouraging young photographers to pursue the truth with courage and compassion," the Mumbai Press Club said in a statement.

A third-generation photographer, Kakade followed his grandfather and father, both of whom were photojournalists.

At the AP, Kakade covered a wide range of assignments across India - from major political events, elections and sports to the deadly 2008 Mumbai militant



Associated Press photographer Rajanish Kakade works, watched by children in Mumbai, India, Aug. 23, 2023. (AP)

attacks and the coronavirus pandemic. His images of ordinary life in Mumbai captured the rhythm of a rapidly evolving city, conveying both its vast scale and quiet intimacy.

AP colleagues described Kakade as a soft-spoken

professional who was deeply committed to his craft. Manish Swarup, AP's chief photographer for South Asia, said Kakade "possessed that rare, quiet grace of a true observer."

"He didn't just take pictures; he earned the trust of those in his frame. That is why his photographs always stand out - they carry an intimacy and a truth that only a person of his character could capture," Swarup said.

Swarup, who worked closely with Kakade for many years, said he was "more than a talented eye for The Associated Press," describing him as "a steadfast friend and a cherished colleague."

"We haven't just lost a great photojournalist; we have lost a beautiful soul, whose kindness was as luminous as his work," he said.

Yirmiyan Arthur, who oversees photos and storytelling for the AP in the Asia Pacific region, said Kakade "helped us understand everyday Mumbai, a city of contradictions, with utter honesty," by chronicling its wealth and poverty, the joys and the heartbreaks of annual monsoons, and life inside its always hustling local trains.

"He was a son of Mumbai and made sure he told its story the right way," said Arthur.

Kakade is survived by family members.

## Regulatory uncertainty to impact vaccine innovation

## FDA's flip-flop on mRNA flu shot highlights risks to drug-makers

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

By Ana Santos Rutschman  
Villanova University

The Food and Drug Administration's decision, made public on Feb. 10, 2026, to not review an application to approve Moderna's proposed mRNA-based flu vaccine set off a firestorm of criticism from public health experts.

But just a week later, on Feb. 18, the FDA backedtracked on its decision, saying that it will indeed review the vaccine, potentially in time for its approval for the 2025-26 flu season. The decision sent Moderna's stocks soaring in a rebound from the earlier decision.

Even before the FDA's decision to reject the application, Moderna and other drugmakers were beginning to pare back

investments in vaccines due to concerns about the approval process. As a law professor who studies vaccine policy, I believe the FDA's abrupt shift is unlikely to assuage those concerns.

The FDA said it will review the vaccine for use by people age 50 to 64 under the standard review pathway, which is how it evaluates most drugs.

In declining the application originally, the FDA claimed that Moderna did not conduct an "adequate and well-controlled" study because it had not compared patients receiving its vaccine with patients receiving what the agency claimed to be "the best-available standard of care." The agency's decision to review it now is effectively a reversal of that position, which was not based on any legal standard.

For people age 65 and older, the FDA said it will now review the vaccine through a long-standing program called "accelerated approval," which is used to more quickly review drugs that "treat serious conditions" and "fill an unmet

medical need," and that show promise.

Under this faster process, the law allows the FDA to consider different data than under a standard approval. Instead of looking at final results, a company can submit results that use a proxy measurement to reflect that a drug is likely to achieve its clinical goal.

This means that if the FDA approves Moderna's vaccine for this older age group, the company will have to conduct additional studies on it afterward. What's unusual, though, is that the agency typically suggests the use of the accelerated approval pathway much earlier in the process, not after a company submits its application.

Federal health officials under Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., including at the FDA, have taken many steps over the past year that disrupt long-standing public health practices relating to vaccine access and approval. They have expressed particular skepticism toward mRNA-based vaccines, which were developed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kennedy and other health officials have raised concerns about safety while providing no credible data on health risks, and have defunded research on their development.

With so many areas in vaccine law and policy in turmoil, incentives for vaccine manufacturers to bring vaccines to market are shrinking. Recent changes in the FDA's approach, including proposals on new standards for testing vaccines that many vaccine experts have called impossible to achieve, have raised major concerns.

Already, multiple vaccine manufacturers, including Moderna, have announced plans to scale back their investment in vaccine research and cut jobs.

By agreeing to review Moderna's application for people age 50 to 64, the FDA is seemingly softening its stance on vaccines. But the agency's unpredictable decisions - including the highly unusual way it invoked accelerated approval for Moderna's vaccine - might not be enough to assuage manufacturers' worries about the current state of regulatory uncertainty. (AP)

## Measles alert

## Childhood BMI genes raise adult heart, diabetes risks

SYDNEY, Feb 23, (Xinhua): Researchers in Australia have modeled how genes can influence a child's body mass index (BMI) over time, potentially shaping the risk of heart disease or type 2 diabetes later in life.

Researchers used data from the long-running "Children of the 90s" study, based at the University of Bristol in Britain, to understand the genetic contribution to the BMI patterns of 6,291 children between the ages of one and 18 years, said a statement from Australia's University of Queensland (UQ) on Friday.

By analyzing children's growth over time, rather than at a single age, researchers were able to see how a child's genetics influences the rate at which they grow, said Wang Geng from UQ's Institute for Molecular Bioscience.

"Parents often worry when a child gains weight early or grows differently from others, but our findings suggest that genetic variation can influence these changes," said Wang, lead author of the study published in Nature Communications.

Wang said genetics appear to affect growth differently across life stages, with distinct sets of genes influencing BMI in infancy and adolescence.

"When using these results to consider health, our results suggested body size differences in younger children don't necessarily reflect lifelong obesity risk," he said.

However, researchers found that BMI levels around age 10, and the overall growth rate from one to 18 years, were more strongly linked to later risks of diabetes, high cholesterol

and heart disease.

UQ Senior Research Fellow Nicole Warrington said genetics accounted for roughly a quarter of differences in children's body weight changes, underscoring the need for age-specific approaches to preventing obesity or monitoring healthy growth.

**Measles:** Health authorities in the Australian state of Victoria have issued a warning over an increased risk of measles.

A health alert issued on Sunday night by the Victorian Department of Health said that there is an increased risk of measles in the state, especially in metropolitan Melbourne.

It said that local transmission of measles has occurred in Melbourne among people with no recent overseas travel or known public exposure to the highly infectious disease.

Victoria's Acting Chief Health Officer, Christian McGrath, has urged anyone who attended a known measles exposure site to monitor for symptoms for 18 days and seek medical care if symptoms develop.

The Department of Health's list of known exposure sites includes the Melbourne Airport, recent flights from Sydney, Dubai and Ho Chi Minh City to Melbourne and several hospitals and medical centers.

According to the most recent data from the Australian Center for Disease Control, there have been 12 confirmed cases of measles in Victoria so far in 2026, compared to 36 cases through the entirety of 2025 and 17 cases in 2024.



This image provided by NASA shows NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman, (left), walking at the Kennedy Space Center launch pad in Cape Canaveral, Fla., Saturday, Feb. 21. (AP)

## NASA sends moon rocket back to hangar for repairs

Grounded until at least April, NASA's giant moon rocket is headed back to the hangar this week for more repairs before astronauts climb aboard.

The space agency said Sunday it's targeting Tuesday for the slow, four-mile (6.4-kilometer) trek across Kennedy Space Center, weather permitting.

NASA had barely finished a repeat fueling test Thursday, to ensure dangerous hydrogen fuel leaks were plugged, when another problem cropped up.

This time, the rocket's helium system malfunctioned, further delaying astronauts' first trip to the moon in more than half a century.

Engineers had just tamed the hydrogen leaks and settled on a March 6 launch date - already a month late - when the helium issue arose. The helium flow to the

rocket's upper stage was disrupted; helium is needed to purge the engines and pressurize the fuel tanks.

"Returning to the Vehicle Assembly Building at Kennedy is required to determine the cause of the issue and fix it," NASA said in a statement.

NASA said the quick rollback preps preserve an April launch attempt, but stressed that will depend on how the repairs go. The space agency has only a handful of days any given month to launch the crew of four around the moon and back.

The three Americans and one Canadian assigned to the Artemis II mission remain on standby in Houston. They will become the first people to fly to the moon since NASA's Apollo program that sent 24 astronauts there from 1968 through 1972. (AP)

## Malaria cases

## S. Africa targets FMD with shots

JOHANNESBURG, Feb 23, (Xinhua): South Africa on Saturday received one million doses of high-potency foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) vaccines as part of efforts to curb recurring outbreaks, the Department of Agriculture said.

The vaccines, sourced from Argentine pharmaceutical company Biogenesis Bago, mark the first batch of a phased national rollout, with an additional five million doses expected to arrive in March, according to the department.

"This small vial will be the beginning of us getting the red meat into markets around the world," Minister of Agriculture John Steenhuisen said while officially receiving the shipment of vaccine doses.

He noted that the vaccination drive would enable authorities to shift from reactive outbreak responses to proactive disease management and expressed confidence that the vaccination program would help contain the current outbreak.

**Malaria:** Cambodia has reported an 84 percent decrease in malaria cases in 2025, marking significant progress in the fight against the disease, a health official said on Monday.

Huy Rekol, director of the National Center for Parasitology, Entomology and Malaria Control, said local malaria cases in Cambodia plummeted by 84 percent, from 322 in 2024 to 52 in 2025.

"It's wonderful to hear about the remarkable progress Cambodia has made in reducing malaria cases in 2025. It is truly impressive," he told Xinhua, adding that Cambodia has reported zero fatalities since 2018 and no local Plasmodium Falciparum cases since January 2024. Rekol said this achievement could be attributed to improvement in surveillance response, increased awareness among citizens, and availability of adequate equipment, such as malaria testing devices, insecticide-treated mosquito nets, and anti-malarial drugs.

## Therapy may help kids as young as 2 with UC

## Clinical trial shows hope for pediatric patients with severe ulcerative colitis

OSAKA, Japan, Feb 23, (AP): Takeda has announced positive data from the pivotal Phase 3 KEPLER trial, which demonstrated that Entyvio (vedolizumab) can offer the possibility of clinical remission for patients ages 2 and older with moderately to severely active ulcerative colitis (UC), a chronic inflammatory disease of the gastrointestinal tract and one of the two most common types of inflammatory bowel disease. The results, presented at the 21st Congress of the European Crohn's and Colitis Organisation (ECCO), show vedolizumab's promising efficacy and safety profile in a patient population where therapy options remain limited. With Kepler, Takeda is continuing to generate deeper scientific insights and identify additional patient populations who may benefit from vedolizumab, a cornerstone therapy for adults with ulcerative colitis. Vedolizumab is marketed under the trade name Entyvio.

"Ulcerative colitis is a life-altering diagnosis for young patients and their families, often leaving them searching for effective options. In the Kepler study, we observed clinically meaningful improvements with vedolizumab in an especially difficult-to-treat patient population - children and adolescents who had failed on the current standard of care, including conventional therapies and/or tumor necrosis factor (TNF) antagonists," said Ramalingam Arumugam, MD, study investigator and pediatric gastroenterologist at MNGI Digestive Health in Minnesota. "Study data showed nearly half of patients were in remission after one year and safety was generally consistent with vedolizumab's profile in adults, suggesting that vedolizumab could become important in addressing pediatric UC in those 2 years of age and older."

The Kepler Phase 3 study included 120 children and adolescents 2 to 17 years-old with moderately to severely active UC who had an inadequate response to conventional treatments (such as steroids and immunomodulators) and/or tu-

mor necrosis factor (TNF) antagonists. Study participants received open-label intravenous (IV) vedolizumab during a 14 week open-label induction period. Ninety-three (93) of 120 patients who achieved a clinical response at Week 14 were then randomized to low dose (n=47) or high dose (n=46) maintenance therapy with vedolizumab every 8 weeks. Of these 93 patients:

- Nearly half (47.3%) of participants achieved the primary endpoint of clinical remission at Week 54;
- More than one-third (34.7%) of patients achieved clinical remission at 14 weeks (secondary endpoint); and
- Greater than 1 in 4 (29%) participants attained the secondary endpoint of sustained clinical remission at both Weeks 14 and 54.

- Additionally, the safety profile of vedolizumab in trial participants was generally consistent with its established safety profile in adults, with no new safety signals identified. The most frequently occurring treatment-emergent adverse events ( $\geq 10\%$ ) reported with vedolizumab in the Kepler study were upper respiratory infection (30%), ulcerative colitis (disease worsening) (17.5%), and pyrexia (12.5%).

"For too long, families and clinicians caring for children and adolescents with ulcerative colitis have had limited therapeutic options," said Awmy Farajallah, MD, chief medical officer of Takeda. "The Phase 3 Kepler results are encouraging and suggest that Entyvio, a therapy with a well-established role in the treatment of ulcerative colitis, may offer a meaningful benefit for patients as young as two years old. These findings build on more than a decade of scientific study demonstrating the safety and efficacy of Entyvio and reflect Takeda's continued leadership in advancing evidence-based care across the full spectrum of inflammatory bowel disease. Importantly, this study underscores our commitment to supporting some of the most vulnerable patient populations in gastroenterology."

## Severe weather speeds up soil erosion

## Mangroves help protect India's Sundarbans

NEW DELHI, Feb. 23, (Xinhua): Extreme weather events are accelerating soil erosion and destroying mangroves, the ecological lifeline of the Sundarbans, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the world's largest mangrove forests.

Spanning more than 10,000 square kilometers across India and Bangladesh, the Sundarbans is home to nearly 350 Royal Bengal Tigers and about 220 saltwater crocodiles.

Conservative estimates indicate that between 1990 and 2020, deforestation on the Indian side alone destroyed roughly 138 square kilometers of forest. This degradation has led to severe soil erosion, widespread habitat loss and mounting threats to wildlife, including the Royal Bengal tiger.

In response, both government agencies and non-governmental organizations have intensified afforestation efforts to preserve mangroves as a natural shield for wildlife, biodiversity and the millions of people who depend on the fragile ecosystem.

According to the latest figures from the Indian government, mangrove cover in the eastern state of West Bengal, including the Sundarbans, expanded by approximately 22.16 square kilometers between 2013 and 2023.

Mangroves, highly specialized, salt-tolerant coastal plants, are critical to biodiversity conservation and climate mitigation. They protect coastlines from erosion and storms, absorb up to five times more carbon than terrestrial forests, help purify seawater, and serve as vital nurseries for marine life.

Environmentalists stress their indispensable role. Karunakar Reddy noted that mangroves absorb storm surges, stabilize coastlines, sustain biodiversity and protect local communities living in extremely vulnerable conditions.

Umashankar Mandal, widely known as the "Mangrove Man" for his decades-long dedication to planting mangrove saplings, told Xinhua that restoration efforts have delivered tangible economic benefits.

"Planting mangrove saplings has led to increased fishing and also greater honey-harvest, thus benefiting the locals living in the islands here," he said. "Over the years, higher yields have significantly improved their financial security."

Earlier this week, a large-scale mangrove plantation drive was launched in the Sundarbans under the Hara Hai To Bhara Hai (If It's Green, It's Full) #GreenIndiaChallenge initiative. Led by former federal lawmaker J. Santosh Kumar, the campaign saw nearly 10,000 mangrove saplings planted to promote long-term environmental sustainability.

## Uganda sees 70 pct surge in mental health cases

## Over 2 million receive mental health services over past year in Afghanistan

KABUL, Feb 23, (Xinhua): Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Health reported that more than 2 million people sought mental health support at medical facilities nationwide during the past year, according to local media outlet Tolo news on Friday.

The ministry stated that individuals experiencing anxiety disorders and severe mental health conditions received treatment at health facilities nationwide, and the report highlighted a notable expansion of services during the reporting period, with the number of centers offering mental health support rising from 230 to 430 across the country.

Health authorities estimate that nearly half of the population is affected by anxiety-related issues, emphasizing the growing demand for accessible psychological and emotional care, the report added.

At present, over 200 specialists are engaged in mental health treatment, supported by approximately 1,100 counselors providing psychological services throughout Afghanistan. Among them are around 300 female counselors who play an active role in delivering care to patients.

Meanwhile, a new study published here on Thursday shows that in Uganda, mental health cases reported to health facilities have increased by more than 70 percent over the past four years.

Speaking at the launch of the State of Uganda Population Report 2025, Minister of Health Ruth Aceng said the evidence presented is deeply concerning, with cases rising to 843,295 from 494,326.

Aceng said fewer than one in 10 people who need care receive appropriate support due to infrastructure gaps, workforce shortages, stigma, among other factors.

The report showed that depression, anxiety, trauma-related disorders, substance misuse, and psychosocial distress are affecting millions of Ugandans, including about 23 percent of children and 24 percent of adults, as well as large numbers of adolescents and young people navigating school pressures, unemployment, and social uncertainty.

"These are not abstract statistics; they represent families under strain, classrooms disrupted, workplaces diminished in productivity, and communities carrying silent pain," the minister said while presenting the report.

## Breakthrough cuts pollution from major industries

## Australia turns emissions waste into fertilizer

SYDNEY, Feb 23, (Xinhua): Researchers in Australia have developed a breakthrough process to turn waste products into fertilizer, slashing emissions from one of the world's most polluting industries.

Researchers used renewable electricity to trigger an electrochemical reaction coupling carbon dioxide with nitrogen pollutants such as nitrate and nitrite -- common waterway contaminants from agriculture and industry -- to form urea, bypassing fossil fuel-intensive traditional methods, a statement from Australia's University of New South Wales (UNSW) said Monday.

"Urea is the fertilizer used to feed the crops for more than half of the world's population. But currently, it's made from natural gas or coal. It's a very fossil-fuel intensive, high-temperature, high-pressure technology with huge emissions," said UNSW Associate Professor Rahman Daiyan.

"The vision is zero-carbon urea where we directly couple waste carbon dioxide with nitrogen pollutants using renewable electricity, rather than relying on ammonia as an intermediate," said Daiyan, corresponding author of

the study published in Nature Communications.

The copper-cobalt catalyst, designed at atomic scale, demonstrated a strong synergy for controlled carbon-nitrogen bonding, and improved urea production when compared with existing systems, the study showed.

Australia, a major agricultural exporter, imported 3.8 million tonnes of urea in 2024 due to limited domestic production, statistics showed.

The technology targets unavoidable emissions from cement factories and agricultural waste, the researchers said.

## SPORTS

## Podziemski's late scoring leads Warriors to win over the Nuggets

## Brown drops 32, Celtics complete season sweep of Lakers

LOS ANGELES, Feb. 23, (AP) — Jaylen Brown had 32 points, eight rebounds and seven assists, and the Boston Celtics swept the season series in the NBA's most storied rivalry with a 111-89 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers.

Payton Pritchard scored 30 points with six 3-pointers and eight assists for the Celtics, who have won three straight and eight of nine as they attempt to close the gap on Detroit atop the Eastern Conference standings.

Brown and Pritchard scored 19 points apiece in the second half, and Pritchard wrapped up the win on a step-back 3-pointer with 3:24 to play, prompting the Lakers to empty their bench amid scattered boos.

Luka Doncic had 25 points and LeBron James got the 43,000th point of his career while scoring 20 for the Lakers, who fell short at home against a probable NBA title contender for the third time in two weeks. Los Angeles was held to its second-lowest point total of the season.

The Lakers honored Pat Riley during a halftime ceremony after unveiling a bronze statue of their former coach outside their downtown arena. Riley won six championship rings during his two decades in Los Angeles, including nine seasons and four titles as the head coach of the 1980s Showtime Lakers.

**Warriors 128, Nuggets 117**

In San Francisco, Brandin Podziemski scored 12 of his 18 points in the final five minutes of the fourth quarter and the Golden State Warriors beat the Den-

ver Nuggets.

Podziemski shot 7 of 16 and added 15 rebounds and nine assists. Al Horford hit six 3-pointers and finished with 22 points and seven assists as the Warriors ended a two-game losing streak despite being without Stephen Curry (knee), Kristaps Porzingis (sick) and Jimmy Butler (torn right ACL). Draymond Green (back) was also a late scratch.

Moses Moody had 23 points and seven rebounds for the Warriors. DeAnthony Melton added 20 points.

Nikola Jokic had 25 points, 20 rebounds and 12 assists for Denver. It's Jokic's fifth triple-double in seven games, 19th of the season and the 183rd of his career.

**Magic 111, Clippers 109**

In Inglewood, Desmond Bane scored 36 points and Paolo Banchero added 16 points and eight assists as the Orlando Magic held on for victory over the Los Angeles Clippers.

Wendell Carter Jr. had 15 points and 14 rebounds and Tristan da Silva scored 13 for the Magic, who improved to 5-2 since Feb. 5.

**Knicks 99, Bulls 105**

In Chicago, Karl-Anthony Towns had 28 points and 11 rebounds for his NBA-leading 39th double-double and the New York Knicks outlasted the sliding Chicago Bulls 105-99 on Sunday night for their second straight victory.

Towns scored six straight points - on a 3-pointer, a layup and free throw - after Chicago took a 95-94 lead with 3:52 left in regulation on Matas Buzelis' 3-



Golden State Warriors guard Moses Moody (4) drives against Denver Nuggets forward Christian Braun (0) during the first half of an NBA basketball game in San Francisco. (AP)

Mikal Bridges hit another 3-pointer with 27 seconds left, and Jalen Brunson tied it with two free throws.

**Raptors 122, Bucks 94**

In Milwaukee, mmanuel Quickley scored 32 points and the Toronto Raptors snapped the Milwaukee Bucks'

three-game win streak with a victory.

Toronto's Brandon Ingram had 22 points, and Sandro Mamukelashvili added 19. Quickley was 5 of 11 on 3-point attempts and had nine assists and three rebounds.

Ryan Rollins and Kevin Porter Jr.

led the Bucks with 21 points each. Cam Thomas scored 15 off the bench.

**Trail Blazers 92, Suns 77**

In Phoenix, Donovan Clingan had 23 points, 13 rebounds and four blocked shots to lead the Portland Trail Blazers past the short-handed Phoenix Suns.

Jerami Grant also scored 23 points on 9-of-13 shooting. The Trail Blazers bounced back from an ugly 157-103 loss to the Denver Nuggets on Friday and have won five of their past seven.

**7ers 135, Timberwolves 108**

In Minneapolis, Tyrese Maxey had 39 points and eight assists, VJ Edgecombe made a career-high six 3-pointers and finished with 24 points, and the Philadelphia 76ers beat the Minnesota Timberwolves to snap a four-game losing streak - all by double figures.

**Hornets 129, Wizards 112**

In Washington, LaMelo Ball made a career-high 10 3-pointers and scored 37 points to help the Charlotte Hornets rout the Washington Wizards for a four-game season sweep.

Ball attempted 15 3-pointers. Kon Knueppel added 28 points, and Brandon Miller had 22. The Hornets made 12 of 14 3-pointers in the third quarter to blow open the game, and finished 25 of 46 from long range.

**Mavericks 134, Indiana 130**

In Indianapolis, Khris Middleton scored 25 points and P.J. Washington added 23 to lead the Dallas Mavericks over the Indiana Pacers , snapping a 10-game losing streak.

**Hawks 115, Nets 104**

In Atlanta, Jalen Johnson had 26 points and 12 rebounds and the Hawks rallied from an 11-point fourth-quarter deficit to beat Brooklyn for the Nets fourth straight loss.

## Jarvis wins Kenya Open

## Bridgeman survives late scare to claim maiden PGA Tour title

LOS ANGELES, Feb. 23, (AP) — Jacob Bridgeman heard cheers all day long for everyone but himself Sunday at Riviera until the final ovation. He made a nervy par putt on the 18th hole for a 1-over 72 and a most narrow victory in the Genesis Invitational for his first PGA Tour title.

Bridgeman started with a six-shot lead. He expanded it to seven shots with 12 holes remaining. And it still came down to one clutch swing from the 18th fairway that settled 20 feet below the hole, and a 3-foot par putt with his shadow over the hole.

But he calmly knocked it in for a one-shot victory over Rory McIlroy and Kurt Kitayama, who both had a strong finishing kick to make Bridgeman sweat a lot more than he wanted.

Not since Adam Scott in 2005 has a



Jacob Bridgeman raises the winner's trophy after winning the Genesis Invitational golf tournament at Riviera Country Club in the Pacific Palisades area of Los Angeles. (AP)

## France grinds past Italy to stay on course

LILLE, France, Feb. 23, (AP) — France moved to the brink of back-to-back Six Nations titles after straining to subdue Italy by a flattering 33-8 under the roof in Lille.

The French have maximum points after three rounds and can clinch the championship with a game to spare with another bonus-point win against its nearest challenger, Scotland, in Edinburgh on March 7.

France has not won successive titles since 2006-07.

While France's impressive defense was too good for Italy, the attack labored after racking up 13 tries against Ireland and Wales.

France was 19-0 ahead inside 30 minutes. But two of the three early tries came from Italy errors, including the opener to winger Louis Bielle-Biarrey, who became the first man to score a try in eight consecutive matches in the championship's 143-year history.

Italy cut the lead to 19-8 by half-time and was in the match but after the break France didn't give Italy a sniff. Italy stalemated France, too, until the 71st minute, when winger Louis Lynagh was sin-binned for a deliberate knock-on.

It was bad timing. Fullback Ange Capuozzo was off the field treating a shoulder issue and the Italy staff were too slow to replace him.

Facing only 13 men and an open backfield, France put the result to bed when Thomas Ramos' kick-pass bounced to right winger Gaël Dréan for a walk-in try on debut. Ramos also assisted on the fifth and last try for center Emilien Gailleton.

"It was a tough match as expected, very tight, against an opponent who put us under pressure, especially in the rucks," France coach Fabien Galthié said. "At one point it became a real arm wrestle."

Italy captain Michele Lamaro lamented their failure to be more clinical in the first half, notably in a 10-minute

player competed at Riviera for the first time and left with the trophy. Bridgeman, a 26-year-old from Clemson, played well enough last year to reach the Tour Championship.

Bridgeman finished at 18-under 266 and didn't make a birdie over the final 15 holes. He broke through in a signature event against a strong field, winning \$4 million and having host Tiger Woods waiting to congratulate him atop the steps overlooking the 18th green.

South Africa's Casey Jarvis closed with an 8-under 62 and won the Kenya Open by three shots on Sunday to clinch his first title on the European tour.

Jarvis, who had two titles on the Sunshine Tour, had two eagles in the final round at Karen Country Club and shot 30 on the back nine to pull away. He had shared the lead after each of the first three rounds with different players until he took over down the stretch.

American Davis Bryant, who played his college golf at Colorado State, was runner-up after a 64. Hennie Du Plessis (65) of South Africa was third.

Oliver Bekker of South Africa closed with a 5-under 67 for a two-shot victory in the Jonsson Workwear Durban Open, his ninth career title on the Sunshine Tour. The tournament, co-sanctioned by the Challenge Tour, was reduced to 54 holes when the third round was washed out.

Austen Truslow won for the first time when the 30-year-old Floridian closed with a 3-under 67 for a three-shot victory in the Quinovic NZ PGA Championship on the PGA Tour of Australasia. Cooper Moore, a 17-year-old amateur, finished second.

Jamie Donaldson rallied with an 8-under 64 for a one-shot victory over Stephen Gallacher in the Staysure Marbella Legends in Spain.

spell when they had France reeling but missed four chances in the 22, two of them because of defensive pressure by France captain Antoine Dupont.

"France were unbelievably good at taking their opportunities, especially in the first half," Lamaro said. "We couldn't build pressure in the second half and that took us to 70 minutes when we got the yellow card."

"You are playing one of the best teams in the world, you have to be precise, you have to be concrete and you have to be playing at a high level. There were moments where we had been there but there was a lot of moments where we weren't able to execute enough."

France flyhalf Matthieu Jalibert pulled out on Saturday night with a minor calf injury, causing a backline shuffle. Ramos switched to flyhalf, Théo Attissogbe moved from wing to fullback and Dréan was given a debut at 25. The Toulon flyer was the French league's breakout player last season.



France's Gaël Dréan runs with the ball to score a try during the Six Nations rugby union match between France and Italy in Lille, France. (AP)

## South Africa ends India's 12-game winning run with dominant display



South Africa's David Miller plays a shot during the T20 World Cup cricket match between India and South Africa in Ahmedabad, India. (AP)

## England beats Sri Lanka

## AHMEDABAD, India, Feb 23, (AP): South Africa stunned T20 World Cup defending champion India with a 76-run victory in the Super Eights with the tournament co-host dismissed for 111.

It was a completely dominant performance from the Proteas, which lost to India in the final of the 2024 edition.

India's 12-match winning run since the 2024 tournament came to an end as left-arm pacer Marco Jansen took 4-22 in 3.5 overs.

India was bowled out for 111 runs in 18.5 overs after South Africa chose to bat first and scored 187-7. David Miller hit 63 off 35 balls, with seven fours and three sixes, in the Group 1 match at the Narendra Modi Stadium.

Sunday proved to be a dismal day for both co-hosts at the T20 World Cup as Sri Lanka crashed to a 51-run defeat to England in Pallekele.

South Africa surprised almost everyone by choosing to bat and was at 20-3 in four overs. Jasprit Bumrah (3-15 in four overs) bowled opener Quinton de Kock for 6 and then Ryan Rickelton was out caught for 7.

In-form skipper Aiden Markram made only 4 and was caught off Ar-



England's Will Jaks bowls a delivery during the T20 World Cup cricket match between Sri Lanka and England in Pallekele, Sri Lanka. (AP)

shdeep Singh. But the Proteas rallied hard with its middle order coming good.

Dewald Brevis hit 45 runs off 29 balls, and put on 97 off 50 balls with Miller for the fourth wicket to change the momentum.

Brevis hit three sixes, while Miller raced to 50 off only 26 balls as India

didn't have any answers after the power play. Miller hit three sixes and six fours in his half-century.

Shivam Dube provided the breakthrough in the 13th over, but there was no immediate respite. Miller quickly added another 35 off 20 balls with Tristan Stubbs, who hit 44 not out off 24 balls including three sixes.

Miller fell in the 16th over - caught off Varun Chakravathy - but Stubb's momentum gave plenty for South Africa to defend.

India got off to a disastrous start - Markram trapped Ishan Kishan with his off-spin. The in-form opener was out caught for a four-ball duck.

Jansen had Tilak Verma caught behind for 1, while Abhishek Sharma struggled to put bat on ball as he labored to 15 off 12 balls. He was eventually caught off Jansen.

From 26-3, it became 51-5 in 9.1 overs for India - Corbin Bosch struck twice in successive overs, removing Washington Sundar (11) and then skipper Suryakumar Yadav (18).

Dube scored 42 off 37, with neither Hardik Pandya (18) nor Rinku Singh (0) able to change the game. Left-arm pacer Keshav Maharaj picked up 3-24 in three overs.

It was India's biggest defeat (by runs) in T20 World Cups. Its remaining Super 8 games are against Zimbabwe in Chennai (Thursday) and West Indies in Kolkata (next Sunday).

South Africa plays West Indies on Thursday in Ahmedabad.

Phil Salt anchored England to 146-9 with a resolute 62 off 40 balls and Jaks provided impetus to the total by smashing four boundaries in his 21-run knock in the death overs.

Sri Lanka crumbled to 95 all out as offspinner Jaks picked up three wickets inside the power play and earned England its 12th consecutive win in a T20 against the hosts.

The duo led England to its 12th consecutive win in a T20 against Lanka.

Jofra Archer (2-20) struck with a vital blow in his second over when Pathum Nissanka, who scored a century against Australia at the same venue during a group game, flicked a 150 kph delivery straight to deep mid-wicket.

Sri Lanka batters struggled against Jaks' fuller deliveries and slipped to 34-5 inside the first six overs. Kusal Mendis offered a tame return catch to Jaks and Pavan Rathnayake got dismissed off the first delivery when Jaks got a leading edge.

Captain Dasun Shanaka top-scored with 30 but fell to a brilliant relay catch at the boundary - involving Jaks and Tom Banton. Liam Dawson (2-27) and Adil Rashid (2-13) shared five wickets in helpful conditions.

Earlier, England's top-order crashed against spinner Dunith Wellalage (3-26) as Jos Buttler's (7) disappointing tournament continued.

## Lyon's dominant spell ends in Strasbourg upset

PARIS, Feb. 23, (AP) — Joaquín Panichelli helped Strasbourg end Lyon's 13-game winning streak in all competitions.

Panichelli was a constant thorn for the Lyon defenders, and the Argentine sealed Strasbourg's 3-1 home win in Ligue 1 with a late penalty.

Lyon was seeking to match its club-record 14 straight wins from the 2005-06 season.

Endrick endured a frustrating game for third-place Lyon. The Brazilian's centrally placed shot was easily saved by Mike Penders in the second half.

To make matters worse for Lyon, Pavel Sulc had to go off injured before half an hour was played. The Czech player is the team's top scorer in the league with

10 goals this season.

Strasbourg dominated from the start and Martial Godo got the deserved opener in the 37th after Diego Moreira played him in behind the Lyon defense.

Moreira made it 2-0 early in the second half when his shot from outside the penalty area took a decisive deflection off a Lyon defender.

Tempers flared after Lyon defender Ruben Kluivert pushed Moreira in the back on the sideline. Kluivert was booked.

Corentin Tolisso pulled one back after controlling substitute Roman Yaremchuk's cross with his thigh before flicking the ball inside the left post in the 59th. It was Lyon's first shot on target.

But Panichelli sealed the win from the spot in the 83rd after Samir El Mourabet was fouled in the area. Panichelli ran to celebrate with the Strasbourg fans who didn't seem to mind the rain.

Strasbourg is seventh, while Lyon will look to start another winning run at Marseille in the next round.

Bordeaux and Paris Saint-Germain share the French record with 16 straight wins overall.

Despite the loss, it has been a remarkable turnaround for coach Paulo Fonseca's Lyon side, which avoided relegation to the second tier for financial irregularities after winning an appeal in July.

Franck Haise's first game in charge of Rennes started with a clinical 3-0 win at Auxerre.

## SPORTS

Landmark victory marks third time in recent history that manufacturer has filled all podium places in consecutive rounds of WRC

## TOYOTA GAZOO Racing dominates Rally Sweden with 1-2-3-4 finish

STOCKHOLM, Feb 23: TOYOTA GAZOO Racing World Rally Team (TGR-WRT) has secured a landmark victory at Rally Sweden, displaying pure class and dominance to clinch a stellar 1-2-3-4 finish. The emphatic win marks only the third time in recent history when a manufacturer has filled all podium places at two consecutive rounds of the World Rally Championship. The team had previously secured a 1-2-3 finish at Rallye Monte-Carlo just last month.

The unforgettable triumph at Rally Sweden was spearheaded by the amazing performance of Elfyn Evans and co-driver Scott Martin in the No. 33 Toyota GR YARIS Rally1. This also marks their second consecutive victory at the only pure winter round and their third Swedish success overall. The top podium finisher was closely challenged by Takamoto Katsuta and co-driver Aaron Johnston, Sami Pajari and co-driver Marko Salminen, and Oliver Solberg and co-driver Elliott Edmondson, who finished in second, third, and fourth place in the No. 18, No. 5, and No. 99 Toyota GR YARIS Rally1, respectively.

Commenting the team's incredible performance, Akio Toyoda, TGR-WRT Chairman, commented: "Elfyn, Scott, congratulations on becoming the snow rally champions for two



TOYOTA GAZOO Racing World Rally Team drivers celebrate on top of their car.

years in a row! Elfyn took the victory, with Takamoto in second. Thanks to Sami in third and Oliver in fourth, we achieved the 1-2-3-4 finish. I'm sure Oliver wanted to get onto the podium at his home rally in Sweden as well. For Sami, I think he reset himself after Monte Carlo and came to this rally determined. This podium must have given him a lot of confidence."

Toyoda added: "Even for a team that has its home in Finland, rallying in such severe cold must have been very tough for all. I would like to thank everyone for the hard work. The next event is in Kenya in a month, and that will be an incredible change in temperature. I believe Jari-Matti and Juha will take good care of the team and I hope everybody in the team stays healthy



Drivers in action during the Rally Sweden.

and safe."

The victory of Evans and co-driver Martin came after an exciting battle with team-mate Katsuta that went down to the rally-ending power Stage on the final day. Katsuta put up a tough fight and initially commanded the lead against Evans but then fell short by 14.3 seconds in the last leg to finish second on the podium for the second

consecutive Rally Sweden and for the eighth time in his WRC career.

For young Finnish driver Pajari, a podium finish at Rally Sweden marked a remarkable comeback after a difficult Rallye Monte-Carlo. Sweden's own Solberg delivered a strong performance to finish fourth, contributing to TGR-WRT scripting history in the WRC. With this remarkable win,

Toyota reigns at the top of the manufacturers' table at the 2026 FIA World Rally Championship with a strong total of 117 points after round two. The next round will take the team to the legendary Safari Rally Kenya, taking place from March 12-15. The only African round of the WRC, the race is renowned for its gruelling conditions on rough and rocky roads, as well as high speeds across open plains.

Over the years, Toyota has participated in many different forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World Endurance Championship (WEC), and the Nürburgring 24 Hours endurance race. Toyota's participation in these events was overseen by separate entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established TGR to consolidate all of its motorsports activities under one in-house brand. Representing Toyota's belief that "the roads build the people, and the people build the cars," TGR highlights the role of motorsports as a fundamental pillar of Toyota's commitment to making 'ever-better' cars. Harnessing years of experience gained under the extreme conditions of various motorsports events, TGR aims to forge new technologies and solutions that bring the freedom, adventure, and joy of driving to everyone.

## Eze hurts Tottenham again to reignite Arsenal's title hopes



Tottenham's Joao Palhinha, left, and Arsenal's Leandro Trossard challenge for the ball during the English Premier League soccer match between Tottenham Hotspur and Arsenal in London. (AP)

**LONDON, Feb 23, (AP):** Eberechi Eze reignited Arsenal's title ambitions in the Premier League by being the scourge of Tottenham once again.

Three months after scoring a hat trick against Spurs, the England midfielder netted two more goals against Arsenal's fiercest rival in a 4-1 away win. Viktor Gyokeres also scored twice for the leaders.

Eze came close to joining Tottenham in the summer, only for Arsenal - his boyhood club - to swoop in and sign him instead for a reported 60 million pounds (\$80 million). Spurs are suffering even more now - his only goals since the start of November have come against them.

Arsenal rebounded after two straight draws that have let second-place Manchester City back in the title conversation.

The Gunners regained their five-point lead but City has a game in hand and still has to host Mikel Arteta's team in the league in mid-April. They also meet in the English League Cup final on March 22.

It proved to be a tough start to life as Tottenham manager for Igor Tudor, who has made a habit of picking up good results early in his tenures at previous clubs.

Not this time, though. Tottenham did equalize two minutes after conceding the opener to Eze when Randal Kolo Muani dispossessed Declan Rice and drilled home a finish for 1-1 in the 34th.

Gyokeres made it 2-1 with a shot from the edge of the area in the 47th and Eze stretched the lead in the 61st with a rebound after Bukayo Saka's shot was saved. Gyokeres scored

### Liverpool grabs late winner



Arsenal's Cristhian Mosquera, left, Arsenal's Martin Odegaard and Arsenal's Viktor Gyokeres, center, celebrate scoring their side's fourth goal during the English Premier League soccer match between Tottenham Hotspur and Arsenal in London. (AP)

again in stoppage time.

Arsenal has 10 league games remaining in its bid for a first top-flight title since 2004.

Alexis Mac Allister just didn't give up.

After having an 89th-minute goal disallowed following a VAR check, the Argentina midfielder scored again in the seventh minute of stoppage time - and this time it survived a video review - to earn Liverpool a 1-0 victory at Nottingham Forest.

The dramatic end at the City Ground centered completely on Mac Allister, who thought he'd scored without knowing anything about it after turning his back on a clearance by Nottingham Forest defender Ola Aina.

The ball rebounded off Mac Allister and into the net, but the VAR spotted it had struck his arm and the goal was scrubbed out.

However, he was on hand off virtually the last kick of the game when Virgil van Dijk's header was spilled by Forest goalkeeper Stefan Ortega. Barely six meters out, Mac Allister could hardly miss as he sidefooted the ball into the net.

There was a VAR check to see if Van Dijk was offside but the goal was given.

With doubts swirling around the future of Crystal Palace manager Oliver Glasner, his team dug out a 1-0 win over last-place Wolverhampton thanks to a last-minute goal.

Evann Guessand prodded home a far-post finish after coming on as a substitute.

Ahead of the game, Glasner, who led Palace to FA Cup glory last season, was non-committal about whether he would be staying at the club until the end of the season. He has already said he'll be leaving in the summer.

The Austrian coach also urged Palace's supporter base to "stay humble" and fans made their feelings about those comments known on Sunday, raising a banner that read: "Opportunities missed - board inept. Fans disrespected - Glasner finished."

Wolves stayed 17 points off safety.

It wasn't long ago that Sunderland was the only Premier League team with an unbeaten home record.

Now, the Black Cats have lost two straight at the Stadium of Light.

Sunderland was defeated 3-1 by Fulham, which had two goals from Mexico striker Raul Jimenez - one of which was from the penalty spot.

Ten days ago, Sunderland lost 1-0 to Liverpool for its first home defeat of the season.

## Al-Qadsia's win confirmed as volleyball federation extends player registration

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: Kuwait Volleyball Federation's Competitions Committee has

officially confirmed Al-Qadsia's 3-0 win over Al-Yarmouk, overturning the previous 3-2 result from last Tuesday. The reversal came after Al-Yarmouk violated league rules by fielding professional and youth-born players simultaneously.

With the confirmed win, Al-Qadsia now sits atop the standings with 23 points, tied with Kuwait Club, though Kuwait Club leads on set points. Following it are Al-Qadsia (17), Al-Sulaibikhat 16, Al-Arabi 15, Burgan 11, and Al-Shabab 10. Al-Yarmouk has 5 points, while Al-Nasr and Al-Sahel re-

main at the bottom with zero points.

In other matches from the day before yesterday, Al-Qadsia dominated Al-Nasr 3-0 (25-10, 25-16, 25-20), and Al-Qadsia also defeated Al-Shabab 3-0 (25-23, 25-17, 25-17).

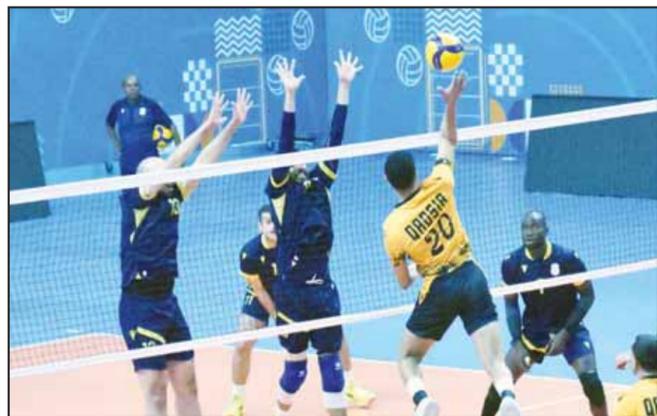
Today's schedule features:

Al-Nasr vs Al-Yarmouk at 8:00 pm

Al-Shabab vs Al-Sulaibikhat at 10:00 pm

The top five clubs Kuwait Club, Al-Qadsia, Al-Sulaibikhat, Al-Arabi, and Al-Qadsia are now in the strongest position to qualify for the Premier League, with the final sixth spot contested between Burgan and Al-Shabab.

The federation has extended the player registration deadline to March 2, giving clubs additional time to register players for the league.



In this file photo, Qadsia player spikes the ball as rivals defend.

## Rothrock sparks Sounders to victory

SEATTLE, Feb 23, (AP): Paul Rothrock had a goal and an assist after replacing an injured Jordan Morris early in the first half and the Seattle Sounders beat the Colorado Rapids 2-0 in a rainy season opener.

Seattle lost Morris to a noncontact injury in the 8th minute and Rothrock had a hand in staking the Sounders to a 1-0 lead seven minutes later when he hustled to keep the ball in play, setting up a header by Albert Rusnak for a long nifty assist.

Hassani Dotson appeared to score three minutes later in his Sounders debut but had it waived off for a foul after a video review. Dotson signed as a free agent after seven seasons with Minnesota United. The Rapids' Noah Cobb had a red card downgraded to yellow after another video review in the 30th minute to

keep the match at even strength.

Dotson took a blow to the head and was replaced by 18-year-old Snyder Brunell in the 15th of 16 minutes of stoppage time as the 1-0 lead held at halftime. Brunell made three starts in six appearances last season, scoring two goals.

Colorado had four players tagged with yellow cards in the first half after new coach Matt Wells said that he wanted the Rapids to be more aggressive. Wells replaced Chris Armas after two seasons when he failed to lead the club to the playoffs last year after a first-round exit in Armas' first season.

Rothrock used assists from Jesus Ferreira and Osaze De Rosario in the 62nd minute to score an insurance goal. It was his 11th goal in 65 career appearances.

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## Stars advance to Kuwait Ice Hockey League final

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23: The Stars have booked their spot in the final of the 2025-2026 Kuwait Men's Ice Hockey League after a dominant 13-7 victory over the Camels at the Winter Sports Club ice arena, clinching the best-of-three semifinal series with two wins and no losses.

The match started as a tightly contested battle. In the first two periods, the Camels pushed hard, seeking to force a decisive third game, but the Stars held a slim one-goal lead heading into the final period.

The third period showcased the Stars' experience and firepower, as they pulled away to secure a six-goal advantage, eliminating the need for a third matchup and confirming their place in the final.

The Stars will now face the winner of the second semifinal between second-placed Warriors and third-placed Ice Stars. The second game of that series is set for Tuesday evening, with the Warriors currently leading the series one win to none.



Fireworks explode during the closing ceremony of the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Verona, Italy. (AP)

# Sports

## US ends 46-year drought as Milan Games conclude

Eileen Gu shines again with halfpipe gold

**MILAN, Feb 23, (AP): The United States is on top of the hockey world for the first time in nearly a half-century. No miracle needed.**

Jack Hughes scored less than 2 minutes into overtime and the U.S. beat Canada 2-1 in the gold medal final at the Milan Cortina Olympics, earning the nation's third men's title at the Games and its first since the "Miracle on Ice" in 1980 - 46 years to the day of the upset over the mighty Soviet Union, too.

Unlike that ragtag group of college kids that pulled off one of the biggest shocks in sports history in Lake Placid, the Americans in Milan were a machine that rode goaltender Connor Hellebuyck and a roster full of NHL players through the tournament unbeaten.

Still, they were underdogs again against the stacked Canadians and came out on top - again.

"This is all about our country right

now," said Hughes, who lost at least one and maybe two of his front teeth taking a high stick during the game. "I love the U.S.A. I love my teammates. It's unbelievable. The USA hockey brotherhood is so strong."

Early in the three-on-three overtime, Zach Werenski took the puck away from Nathan MacKinnon and passed it to Hughes, who was wide open streaking to the net. Hughes fired a shot past Jordan Binnington 1:41 in to send players into a wild celebration as the rival Canadians watched from the bench.

Asked his favorite moment during his Olympic debut, captain Auston Matthews quipped, "I think when Jack scored. ... I'll definitely remember Jack's goal."

Eileen Gu is now six-for-six in Olympic medal events after another halfpipe victory.

The 22-year-old Gu, American-born but competing for her mother's homeland of China, is already the most decorated freeskier in the short history of the sport at the Olympics. She also captured two silver medals at the Milan Cortina Games, to pair with two golds and a silver from the Beijing Games.

Gu won her last event on the strength of her second run, a clean, technically sound pass. She got even better in her final run - pumping her ski poles after landing the final trick - and finished with a score of 94.75. Her teammate, Li Fanghui, took silver and Zoe Atkin of Britain was third.

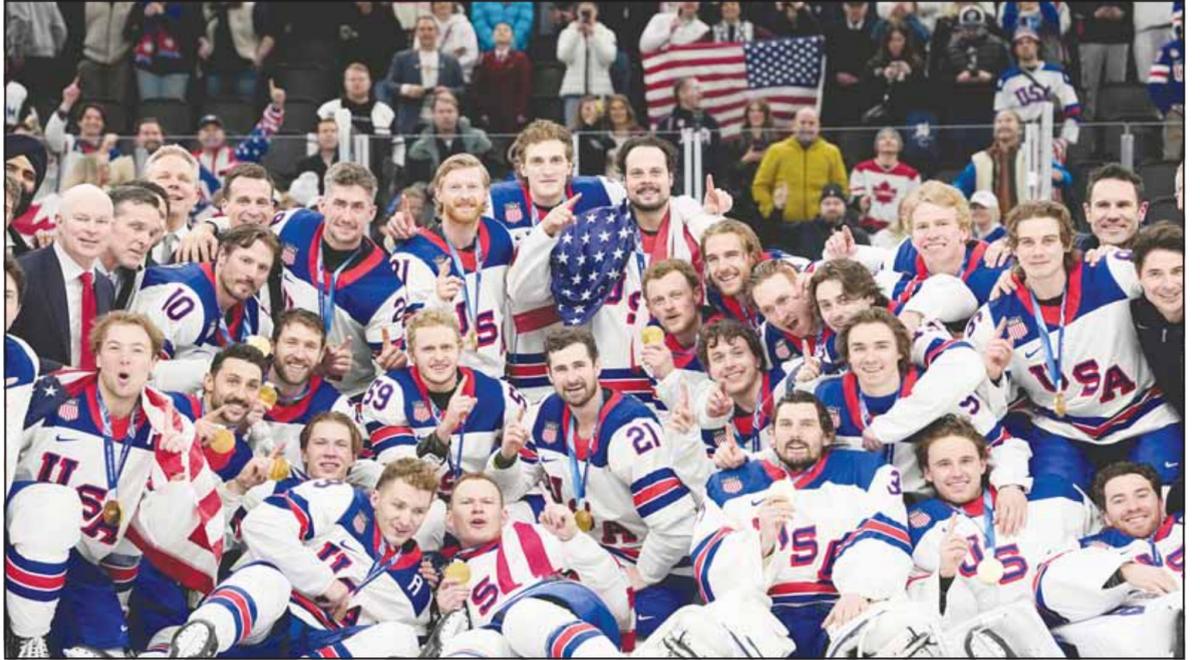
The event was rescheduled to Sunday following a big snowstorm the night before.

First, Ebba Andersson pulled away from the pack to win the 50-kilometer mass start cross-country ski race and earn redemption for her crash that cost Sweden a gold medal in the team relay.

"I've dreamed about this day for a long time now and it's almost unbelievable that everything went as planned," she said.

And then Sweden's curling moms beat Switzerland to give the Scandinavian nation another gold.

Jessie Diggins finished fifth in the



Gold medalists of the United States pose after the men's ice hockey gold medal game between Canada and the United States at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Milan, Italy. (AP)

50-kilometer mass start cross-country ski race. Just a few seconds shy of one more medal.

She's OK with that.

"I can confidently say I could not possibly have tried harder or gotten more out of my body," the 34-year-old Diggins said.

It marked the final Olympic event for an athlete who transformed American cross-country skiing and became a symbol of endurance.

In bobsled, Germany's Johannes Lochner added the four-man gold to his two-man title.

Lochner - who announced his retirement months ago - capped his career with his second gold medal of these Olympics, winning the four-man event over two-time defending Olympic champion Francesco Friedrich by 0.57

seconds.

The Milan Cortina Olympics ended as the twin flames in co-host cities Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo were extinguished during a Closing ceremony inside the ancient Verona Arena, roughly mid-distance between the far-flung mountain, valley and city venues that made these the most spread-out Winter Games ever.

In declaring the 2026 Games over, International Olympic Committee President Kirsty Coventry told local organizers that they "delivered a new kind of winter games and you set a new, very high standard for the future."

The next Winter Games will be held in neighboring France, which received the Olympic flag in the official handover earlier in the ceremony. Following

the same spread-out model, the 2030 Winter Games will stage events in the Alps and Nice, on the Mediterranean Sea, while speedskating will be held either in Italy or the Netherlands.

"Your outstanding performance united Italians everywhere and played a fundamental role in the success of the games," Giovanni Malagò, the president of the Milan Cortina Foundation told the Italian athletes sitting behind him wearing headbands emblazoned with "Italia."

The Closing ceremony paid tribute to Italian dance and music - from lyric opera to Italian pop of the 20th century to the DJ beat of Gabry Ponte, who got the 1,500 athletes on their feet and dancing while color confetti exploded on stage. Italian Achille Lauro delivered the last word with the song "In-

coscienti Giovanni," or reckless young people, just before athletes who so aptly harnessed their youthful energy for these Games filed out.

The 2½-hour ceremony opened with a whimsical tribute to Italian lyric opera, with the stage director rousing not only the Closing ceremony cast, including Achille Lauro, but also long-dormant opera characters tucked away in crates within the amphitheater's tunnels.

On stage, Madama Butterfly in a bright pink and green costume and Aida in golden tiers were unpacked from mirrored crates while 17th century musicians played the joyous "Libiamo ne' lieti calici" from La Traviata, a nod to the Arena's long history as the venue for a summer opera festival.

Al-Nasr overcomes Al-Fahaheel

## Kuwait Club continues march toward Zain Premier League title



Al-Nasr and Al-Fahaheel players jump for the ball during the Zain Premier League match.

By Hasan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23:** Defending champion Kuwait Club continued its march toward the Zain Premier League title with a commanding 5-1 victory over Al-Shabab at Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadium. Meanwhile, Al-Nasr secured a 4-2 win over Al-Fahaheel in another exciting clash.

The win solidified Kuwait Club's hold on first place, bringing its total to 36 points as it pushes steadily toward retaining the league crown. Al-Shabab remained seventh with 15 points.

Kuwait Club dominated from the opening whistle. Taha Al-Khuneisi opened the scoring in

the 16th minute, followed immediately by Amro Abdel-Fattah in the 17th. Ahmed Al-Dhafiri added a third goal in the 29th minute. Al-Shabab's Chukwemeka Ozuokwe pulled one back in the 35th minute, but Kuwait Club's Malik Zola (55') and Reda Hani (87') sealed a decisive victory.

In the other match, Al-Nasr extended its recent good form with a 4-2 triumph over Al-Fahaheel. Talal Jaza (36'), an own goal by Carlos (55'), Haykal Al-Sheikha (penalty, 86'), and Hussam Al-Habbasi (90+2') scored for Al-Nasr, while Lucas Vilella netted both goals for Al-Fahaheel (63' and penalty 95'). With the win, Al-Nasr reached 12 points, climbing to eighth place, while

Al-Fahaheel stayed sixth with 18 points.

The round will conclude Tuesday evening with a crucial match between Al-Tadamon and Al-Jahra at Abdullah Al-Khalifa Stadium (kickoff 9:30 pm).

Both teams are fighting to escape the bottom of the table. Al-Jahra sits last with seven points, while Al-Tadamon is ninth with eight points.

Al-Jahra has struggled recently, failing to earn any points in its last seven matches. Al-Tadamon, however, has regained momentum, winning 1-0 against Al-Qadsia last Tuesday in a postponed Round 11 fixture and eliminating Al-Jahra in the Crown Prince Cup quarterfinals.

## Al-Qadsia halts Al-Salmiya's winning streak

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Feb 23:** Al-Qadsia ended the resurgence of Al-Salmiya, defeating it 28-25 at the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Complex in Round 13 of the Premier Handball League. The round also saw Al-Sulaibikhat edge past Al-Nasr 31-29 in a closely contested match.

Al-Salmiya had won its previous two matches against Al-Nasr and Al-Qadsia, but its momentum was halted. The loss leaves it in sixth place with 12 points. Al-Qadsia moved up to fourth with 14 points, overtaking Al-Arabi and remaining just behind third-



Qadsia player is well defended by opponents as he goes for a goal.

placed Al-Qadsia on goal difference. Al-Sulaibikhat climbed to seventh with nine points, while Al-Nasr remains at the bottom of the table with just two points.

Round 10 of the First Division continues today, with Al-Fahaheel taking on Al-Sahel at 8:00 pm, followed by Khaitan facing Al-Qurain at 10:00 pm.

Current Standings:  
Khaitan - 14 points  
Yarmouk - 11 points  
Al-Qurain - 11 points  
Handball Youth Team - 5 points  
Al-Fahaheel - 5 points  
Al-Sahel - 0 points

Freestyle skiing, snowboarding and speed skating standout moments

## Record-breaking performance mirrors China's growing winter sports landscape

**MILAN, Feb 23, (Xinhua):** After Gu Ailing and Li Fanghui secured a 1-2 finish in the women's freestyle halfpipe on the final competition day, China capped its Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics campaign with its best result at an overseas Games, winning five gold, four silver and six bronze medals to surpass the previous 5-2-4 record in Vancouver 2010.

However, the journey to this historic finish was not plain sailing.

China sent 126 athletes to Milan-Cortina competing across seven sports and 91 events, the largest delegation and most extensive event participation in an overseas Winter Games.

Standout moments came in freestyle skiing, snowboarding and speed skating.

Su Yiming, the flagbearer at Sunday's closing ceremony, won the men's snowboard slopestyle on his 22nd birthday, earning China its first gold of the Games, 12 days after the opening ceremony.

"When the national anthem played, that was the second time I lost control of my emotions," Su said after his win. "After taking bronze in big air, I told myself only gold would allow our anthem to be played. In an international competition like this, letting the world hear China's anthem means everything." Speed

skater Ning Zhongyan upset pre-race favorite Jordan Stolz of the United States to win the men's 1,500m with a new Olympic record of 1:41.98, and added two bronzes in the 1,000m and team pursuit.

"Jordan was like a mountain blocking my road," Ning said. "But today, at the Olympics, I crossed over this big mountain and I saw the view, the skyline, is beautiful." The victory marked the first gold medal in the event won by an Asian skater since the inaugural Winter Olympics in 1924.

"For Asia, I think this medal showed that we are not weak in this



Gold medalist China's Eileen Gu poses with her medals after winning the women's freestyle skiing halfpipe final at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Livigno, Italy. (AP)

event. We can win gold medals too. Also, for everyone on China's speed skating team, including the staff and athletes, it's something to feel very proud of, and it gives us great motivation," Ning said.

China's freestyle skiing aerials team also made history. Five-time Olympian Xu Mengtao defended her women's aerials title, and her husband Wang Xindi won the men's event, making them a rare married couple to each claim individual Olympic titles at the same Games.

"I've come this far because of my love for the sport," Xu said. "But behind that love stands all the people who love me." After being crowned in the women's freestyle halfpipe, Gu became the most decorated freeskier in Olympic history, having captured three golds and three silvers across two Winter Games.

"I have the most number of medals and most golds, which is pretty special. Going six for six is pretty crazy. I'm so tired, but I'm so happy," said Gu.

Apart from podium finishes, China also made strides in sliding and endurance events.

In the men's skeleton, all three athletes qualified and finished in the top eight. The luge team competed in all events for the first time overseas, recording best finishes in men's doubles, women's singles and team relay.