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## Amir honors Modi with top medal

Amir: You have earned it • Modi: This is an honor for 1.4 billion Indians



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah decorates Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the prestigious Mubarak Al-Kabeer Order during a reception at Bayan Palace on Dec 22, 2024. — Amiri Diwan/KUNA photos

HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Indian Prime Minister Modi.



HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets Indian Prime Minister Modi.

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Sunday decorated visiting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the prestigious Mubarak Al-Kabeer Order in appreciation for his role in bolstering further the good ties between the Republic of India and the State of Kuwait. The honoring ceremony was held at Bayan Palace.

HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal exchanged pleasantries with Prime Minister Modi during the honoring ceremony, stating: "This is our highest medal and you have earned it. We have maintained bonds with the Republic of India for hundreds of years." The Indian premier replied: "Your Highness, this is an honoring for 1.4 billion Indians and I dedicate this great medal to the old friendship between the two countries. This is assuring as we will usher a new phase and I will be committed to elevating the level of our relations."

HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah also received Prime Minister Modi at Bayan Palace. An official reception was held for Modi, who greeted senior officials. On behalf of HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah held a luncheon at Bayan Palace, honoring Prime Minister Modi and his official delegation.

HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad later held official talks with Modi, where distinguished and deep-rooted bilateral ties, in addition to avenues of cooperation to serve both friendly countries' best interests, were discussed. Both sides renewed commitment to develop cooperation in information technology, energy technology, healthcare, AI and space. Four bilateral agreements were also signed. Modi and his accompanying delegation then departed the country. He was seen off at Kuwait International Airport by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad and senior officials. — KUNA



Kuwaiti historian Fahad Ghazi Alabduljaleel shows Prime Minister Modi Kuwait Times' first edition.

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### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### 'Friendly fire' downs 2 US pilots

WASHINGTON: Two US Navy pilots were shot down over the Red Sea early Sunday in "an apparent case of friendly fire", the US military said. Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels said later on Sunday they had "targeted" the aircraft carrier USS Harry S Truman a day earlier in an operation that led to "shooting down an F-18 aircraft" and thwarting "American-British aggression" against Yemen. United States Central Command said late on Saturday that both US pilots were recovered alive but "initial assessments indicate that one of the crewmembers sustained minor injuries". —AFP

#### Women-only flight to Mashhad

TEHRAN: An Iranian airline conducted a rare women-only flight on Sunday, landing for the first time in the holy city of Mashhad in the northeast. The Aseman Airlines flight by Shahrzad Shams — one of Iran's pioneering women pilots — carried 110 passengers on board. Dubbed the "Iran Banoo" (Iran Lady) flight, the plane touched down at Hasheminejad International Airport in Mashhad, Iran's second-largest city and home to the revered shrine of Imam Reza. "This is the first time a women-only flight, with both female passengers and crew, lands in Mashhad," the official IRNA news agency said. — AFP



DAMASCUS: Syrian leader Ahmed Al-Sharaa meets Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan (left) and Druze former leader of Lebanon's Progressive Socialist Party Walid Jumblatt (right) on Dec 22, 2024. — AFP photos

## Syria to control all weapons, will not meddle in Lebanon

DAMASCUS: Syria's new leader Ahmed Al-Sharaa said Sunday all weapons would come under state control during a press conference with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, who urged the lifting of sanctions on Syria. Sharaa said that after upcoming consultations with defense and military officials on a new structure for the military, armed "factions will begin to announce their dissolution and enter" the army.

"We will absolutely not allow there to be weapons in the country outside state control, whether from the revolutionary factions or the factions present in the SDF area," he added, referring to the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces. Turkey views the main



component of the US-backed force, which controls swathes of north and northeast Syria, as being linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), its outlawed domestic foe. "We are working on protecting sects and minorities from any attacks that occur between them" and from "external" actors trying to exploit the situation "to cause sectarian discord", Sharaa added. "Syria is a country for all and we can coexist together," he added. Fidan told the press conference that US president-elect Donald Trump knew better than to continue Washington's backing for the Kurdish-led fighters over supporting the security needs of its NATO ally Turkey.

"When we look at it from America's interests, as a mathematical calculation — whether Turkey or a terrorist organization like the PKK is more important — Mr Trump sees the mathematics immediately," Fidan said. The Turkish diplomat said that "the sanctions imposed on the previous (Syrian) regime need to be lifted as soon as possible". "The international community

## Zionist carnage in Gaza as hospital forced to close

GAZA: Gaza's civil defense agency said on Sunday Zionist strikes killed at least 28 Palestinians, as the director of one of two hospitals still operating in the territory's north reported bombardment nearby as the Zionist entity ordered the closure and evacuation of the facility. More than 14 months into the fighting war, there was no let-up in the violence in the Gaza Strip even as Palestinian groups involved in the fighting said a ceasefire deal was "closer than ever".

The Zionist entity has faced growing criticism of its actions during the war, including from rights groups accusing it of acts of genocide. Pope Francis denounced on Sunday the "cruelty" of the Zionist entity's bombardment, highlighting the deaths of children and attacks on schools and hospitals in Gaza for the second time in as many days, while the Zionist entity accused the pontiff of "double standards".

On the ground in Gaza, civil agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal said that at least 13 people were killed in an air strike on a house in central Gaza's Deir el-Balah belonging to the Abu Samra family. An AFP photographer saw residents searching through the debris for survivors, while others looked for belongings they could salvage. In a nearby compound, bodies covered in blankets were laid on the ground.

"We are... losing loved ones every day," said Deir el-Balah resident Naim Al-Ramlawi. "I pray to God that a truce will be reached soon" and would allow Gazans to finally "live a decent life, instead of this miserable life", he said. The Zionist military confirmed a separate strike further north, on a school in Gaza City.

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# Kuwaiti, Saudi Interior Ministers discuss security cooperation

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef briefed on Riyadh Metro project during tour



RIYADH: Kuwait's Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah meets Saudi Minister of Interior Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Nayef bin Abdulaziz in Riyadh on December 22, 2024. — KUNA photos



Officials, including the Kuwaiti and Saudi Interior Ministers tour the Riyadh Metro Station.



Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef and Prince Abdulaziz take the Riyadh Metro during a tour held to acquaint the Kuwaiti official with the Saudi transportation project.

RIYADH: Kuwait's Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah held an official meeting with Saudi Arabia's Minister of Interior Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Nayef bin Abdulaziz, in the Saudi capital, Riyadh.

According to the Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior, the two sides discussed several security matters of mutual interest and reviewed the bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the security sector. They also explored ways to strengthen and enhance this cooperation and the mechanisms for coordinating efforts to address regional and

international challenges, aiming to ensure security and stability in both nations.

The two ministers reiterated the deep ties between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, emphasizing their commitment to reinforcing security integration and continuing joint coordination on various issues of shared concern.

During the visit, Sheikh Fahad, who is also First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, toured the Riyadh Metro Station and the city's modern transport network. He received a detailed briefing on the technologies used in

the metro project, which is considered one of the key achievements in Saudi Arabia's public transportation sector. The tour highlighted the metro's essential role in facilitating movement for citizens and residents, supporting urban development, and enhancing overall quality of life. Sheikh Fahad was welcomed at King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh earlier today by Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud, Kuwait's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and a number of senior security officials. — KUNA

## Kuwait to review all disability certificates to prevent fraud

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Disability Affairs in Kuwait will begin a comprehensive review of all disability certificates to ensure that beneficiaries meet the eligibility criteria outlined in the law. A disability certificate is an official document issued by the authority that certifies an individual as having a recognized disability. This certificate serves as proof of the person's disability status and qualifies them for various rights, benefits, and services designed to support individuals with disabilities.

Acting Director General Wafa Al-Muhanna confirmed that this initiative follows the discovery of numerous cases where individuals received disability certificates and the associated benefits without justifiable grounds. These benefits include financial assistance, healthcare services, and exemptions from certain government fees. Anyone found to have obtained a disability certificate through false information or fraudulent documents will face legal consequences, including the recovery of wrongfully obtained benefits.

The review will be carried out in collaboration with relevant authorities using an accurate, modern electronic database to ensure transparency and precision in identifying eligible cases. Al-Muhanna emphasized the Authority's commitment to upholding the law with transparency and rigor, aiming to create



KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Disability Affairs building is seen in this photo. — KUNA

a just and equal society while ensuring full support for those truly entitled to assistance.

People with disabilities in Kuwait are entitled to a range of free or subsidized services that enhance their quality of life. These include free or reduced-cost healthcare, assistive devices such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, and prosthetics, as well as exemptions from certain government fees. People with disabilities may receive assistance with transportation costs. Additionally, subsidized housing options are available to help ensure that individuals with disabilities have suitable living arrangements. These services are part of Kuwait's efforts to provide equitable opportunities and reduce financial burdens for people with disabilities. — Agencies

## Art, education unite to strengthen Gulf identity at exhibition

KUWAIT: An exhibition celebrating the vital role of teachers in instilling Gulf identity in students opened on Sunday, drawing the attendance of senior officials, diplomats, and cultural figures. Minister of Education Jalal Al-Tabtabaei said that the "Biqalmi Arsim Khaleejna" (Sketching Our Gulf) exhibition serves not only as a creative showcase but also as a powerful tool to revive the Gulf spirit, connecting the region's rich history with its contemporary developments. His comments were made during the exhibition's opening ceremony, organized by the Arab Center for Educational Research for the Gulf States in collaboration with the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education. The event was also attended by ambassadors, diplomats, and prominent figures, including Sheikh Mubarak Fahad Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Director General of the GCC Joint Program Production Institution.

The exhibition features 175 art works by teachers from various educational regions in Kuwait, each capturing elements of Gulf heritage, life, professions, and key landmarks of the region. Dr Mohammed Al-Sharika, Director of the Arab Center for Educational Research for the Gulf States, reiterated the center's ongoing commitment to supporting the educational efforts of GCC countries through policy development, technical consultations, and events that foster cultural



KUWAIT: Minister Jalal Al-Tabtabaei opens the "Biqalmi Arsim Khaleejna" exhibition accompanied by Sheikh Mubarak Fahad Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (left) and Dr Mohammed Al-Sharika (right). — KUNA

exchange. The exhibition will remain open until Monday, offering a unique insight into the cultural richness and unity of the Gulf.

Al-Tabtabaei stressed that art education plays a crucial role in fostering national pride and a sense of belonging. He explained that through art, teachers creatively cultivate Gulf identities in students, encouraging them to express themselves in ways that celebrate the unity and shared values of the region. The minister further emphasized the importance of art and education working together to shape a collective future for the Gulf. Dr Al-Sharika highlighted the power of art in expressing cultural identity and bridging different communities and cultures. He noted that the exhibition not only showcases the beauty of Gulf heritage but also serves an educational purpose, helping to build identity and raise awareness among future generations. — KUNA

## KU launches first of its kind AI, data science program

KUWAIT: The College of Life Sciences at Kuwait University announced on Sunday the launch of the "Data Science and Artificial Intelligence" program, which will begin in the 2025-2026 academic year. This will be the university's only specialized program in artificial intelligence. In a press statement, Acting Dean of the College of Life Sciences, Dr Nawaf Al-Hajeri, explained that the launch of this program aligns with the goals of Kuwait Vision 2035, which aims to develop key sectors and foster technological innovation, particularly in areas like big data and artificial intelligence, in response to the global digital revolution.

Al-Hajeri emphasized that the program aims to equip national cadres with the skills needed to address future challenges in this field and to meet the demands of the job market amidst rapid digital transformation. He noted that the university's support for this program reflects its commitment to global and local trends toward digital transformation in modern technologies.

The program will play a crucial role in building a knowledge-based economy and will be a cornerstone for developing various vital sectors in the country. Al-Hajeri also confirmed that this program represents a significant step in enhancing Kuwait University's position as a leading educational institution offering outstanding academic programs that meet the needs of local, regional, and international job markets. The program has been designed according to the latest global academic standards and in line with recommendations from academic organizations specializing in computer science and artificial intelligence. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Diplomats, including (from left) Chinese Ambassador Zhang Jianwei, Indonesian Ambassador Lena Maryana, British Ambassador Belinda Lewis, and US Ambassador Karen Sasahara watch a performance at the Indonesia Winter Market. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Members of the Indonesian community pose for a photo at the event.

## Envoy hopes more Indonesians join Kuwait's workforce

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Embassy of Indonesia in Kuwait hosted the "Indonesia Winter Market" on Saturday, featuring traditional dance performances, live music, and a variety of authentic Indonesian cuisine. On the sidelines of the event, Ambassador of Indonesia to Kuwait Lena Maryana said in a statement that this is an annual event for the Indonesian community in Kuwait taking advantage of the weather to bring their community together. "It serves as a small showcase of Indonesia's rich culture and culinary heritage, offering everyone a chance to enjoy the diversity of our traditions," she said.

The event, which took place on Saturday, was filled with a variety of activities that extended into the afternoon and evening, offering attendees a chance to experience and enjoy the vibrant culture of Indonesia. Although the busy schedule limited the



Performers give the traditional Indonesia dance performances at the event.

number of performances, there was still much to explore and appreciate throughout the day.

The ambassador also highlighted other important celebrations held this month, noting that the Indonesian Christian community in Kuwait had just celebrated Christmas. Additionally, the Indonesian nursing community gathered on December 22 to celebrate Mother's Day, as observed in Indonesia.

On the growing relationship between Indonesia and Kuwait, the Indonesian Ambassador shared that trade between the two nations continues to thrive,

with an increasing number of skilled workers contributing to Kuwait's vital sectors. She added that the Indonesian community in Kuwait has grown to around 7,000 people. Ambassador Maryana said she was optimistic even more Indonesians will play a crucial role in Kuwait's workforce in the future.

The ambassador concluded by saying that the event reflected the spirit of unity and celebration, highlighting Indonesia's rich culture, cuisine, and talent, while further strengthening the bonds between the Indonesian community and the host country, Kuwait.



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Bayan Palace.



HH the Amir Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah decorates Prime Minister Modi with the prestigious Mubarak Al-Kabeer Order.

# Kuwaiti leadership fetes Indian PM

Modi's historic visit strengthens ties • Four bilateral agreements signed



HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Indian Prime Minister Modi.



HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets Indian Prime Minister Modi.

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace on Sunday HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, along with his accompanying delegation, paying an official visit to the country.

The Kuwaiti and Indian sides discussed bilateral relations between the two friendly countries and peoples, means of boosting these ties in various spheres, expanding cooperation, key issues of common concern and latest developments on the regional and international arenas. HH the Amir then decorated Modi with the prestigious Mubarak Al-Kabeer Order.

HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also received at Bayan Palace on Sunday HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Indian Prime Minister Modi. The Kuwaiti and Indian sides discussed the relations between Kuwait and India, means of promoting these ties and key issues on the regional and international arenas.

HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad also received Modi and his accompanying delegation. Distinguished and deep-rooted bilateral ties, in addition to avenues of cooperation to serve both friendly countries' best interests, were discussed. Both sides renewed commitment to develop cooperation in information technology, energy technology, healthcare, AI and space. An MoU on defense cooperation was signed after the talks, along with an executive program between the country's Public Authority for Sport and the Indian

Ministry for Youth Affairs and Sports for 2025-2028.

Both sides also inked a cultural exchange program for 2025-2029 and a framework agreement to form an alliance for solar power. All documents were signed by Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya and his Indian counterpart Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar. The talks were attended by a host of Kuwaiti Cabinet members and senior officials, in addition to the Indian delegation accompanying Modi.

An official reception was held for Modi, who greeted senior officials, namely First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sharida Al-Maousherji, Head of the Prime Minister's Diwan Abdulaziz Dekheel Al-Dekheel and adviser at the prime minister's diwan and the head of the honorary mission Sheikh Dr Basel Humoud Al-Sabah.

Additionally, the Indian prime minister exchanged pleasantries with the undersecretary of financial and administrative affairs at the prime minister's diwan Sheikh Khaled Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, assistant foreign minister for Asia affairs Ambassador Samih Johar Hayat, Kuwait's Ambassador to India Meshal Mustafa Al-Shemali, senior commanders of the army, the police, the national guards and the fire forces, as well as other ranking state officials. Modi and his accompanying delegation departed the country later on Sunday. He was seen off at Kuwait International Airport by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad and senior officials. — KUNA



HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad and Indian Prime Minister Modi and senior officials from both sides hold talks.



HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad sees off Modi at the airport.



Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya and his Indian counterpart Dr S Jaishankar exchange documents.

## Indian PM's visit to Kuwait marks new era of cooperation

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: At a press conference, Arun Kumar Chatterjee, Secretary of Consular, Passport and Visa Division & Overseas Indian Affairs at the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, said this historic visit by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will open a new chapter in the relationship between India and Kuwait, where both sides have identified several significant areas of cooperation, and the respective governments will work towards fulfilling the plans discussed during this visit.

He said that the two sides discussed cooperation between India and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), with Kuwait now serving as the chair. "In September, India and the GCC held a strategic dialogue led by the minister of external affairs. The

prime minister congratulated Kuwait on assuming the GCC chairmanship and expressed optimism for strengthened collaboration between India and the GCC under Kuwait's leadership."

Chatterjee said four bilateral agreements were signed, saying that the defense agreement will institutionalize bilateral collaboration in defense. Key areas of cooperation include training, exchange of personnel and experts, joint exercises, cooperation in the defense industry, supply of defense equipment and collaboration in research and development.

"Additionally, one of the MOUs was on a cultural exchange program from 2025- 2029 that aims to foster greater collaboration in art, music, dance, literature and theater; preserve cultural heritage; promote research and development in cultural areas; and organize festivals. The executive program for sports cooperation will strengthen bilateral ties by encouraging the exchange of sports leaders for experience sharing, and collaboration in sports medicine, management, media and science," he added.

Chatterjee stressed Kuwait's membership in the International Solar Alliance will address the deployment and scaling of solar energy while tackling shared challenges, pointing out that this

collaboration will help member states transition to low-carbon growth trajectories. He said that during his visit, Modi also visited a labor camp in Mina Abdullah of a company that employs approximately 1,500 Indian workers, interacting with the workers and highlighting his government's commitment to the welfare of Indian citizens abroad.

Regarding the health and education sectors, Chatterjee said the prime minister expressed gratitude to Kuwait's leadership for supporting the Indian diaspora, which is approximately one million strong today, and the Kuwaiti side also recognized the critical role the Indian community plays in Kuwait's development.

"Pharmaceuticals is a crucial area of focus. Both sides have identified health and pharmaceuticals as key sectors for cooperation. This could involve investments from Kuwait in India or an expansion of the trade basket to boost pharmaceutical exports from India," he added. He revealed that to address sector-specific issues, separate working groups have been established, where leaders of both countries agreed that these groups would meet frequently to explore new areas of cooperation.

"On manpower issues, a joint working group fo-



KUWAIT: Senior Indian officials hold a press conference on the visit by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Kuwait.

uses on resolving key challenges faced by Indian workers in Kuwait. These efforts reflect the shared commitment to improving the welfare of the Indian community," Chatterjee concluded.



**KUWAIT:** Lebanese Charge d'Affaires Ahmad Arafa and Kuwaiti officials from the defense and foreign ministries pose for a photo in front of the relief plane.



**BEIRUT:** Lebanese Minister of Environment Dr Nasser Yassin, Acting Charge d'Affaires of the Kuwaiti Embassy in Lebanon Yassin Al-Majed and other senior officials are seen after the arrival of a Kuwait Air Force plane carrying medical aid collected by the Lebanese Embassy. — KUNA photos

# Lebanon extends heartfelt thanks to Kuwait for ongoing relief efforts

## Medical aid collected by Lebanese Embassy's donation drive arrives in Beirut

**BEIRUT:** Lebanese Minister of Environment Dr Nasser Yassin expressed gratitude to Kuwait on Sunday for its continued humanitarian assistance to Lebanon amid the ongoing crisis caused by the Zionist entity's assault on the country. He acknowledged that Kuwait—its leadership, government, and people—has consistently supported Lebanon in these difficult circumstances. Yassin made this statement during the reception of a Kuwait Air Force plane at Beirut's Rafic Hariri International Airport, which was carrying medical aid collected by the Lebanese Embassy in Kuwait as part of a donation campaign to provide medicines to Lebanon.

In his remarks to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Yassin praised Kuwait's humanitarian efforts, particularly its support during the recent Zionist aggression, which has led to the displacement of thousands of Lebanese citizens. He highlighted the importance of the aid, which includes medical supplies and humanitarian relief, with a focus on children, women, and pregnant women.

On behalf of the Lebanese government, Prime Minister Najib Mikati, and Health Minister Firass Abiad, Yassin extended his thanks to the Lebanese Embassy in Kuwait and the Lebanese community there for facilitating the donation. He emphasized that the support provided by Kuwait comes with the full



Boxes of medical supplies labelled with a sign that reads 'Kuwait Seeks your Well-being' are loaded onto the seventh relief plane as part of the air bridge launched by Kuwait to provide aid to Lebanon.

backing and solidarity of the Kuwaiti government. He also noted that, while there are still 25 refugee centers in operation, over 110,000 homes have been destroyed or damaged as a result of the Zionist occupation's attacks. Approximately 600,000 displaced people are in need of continued assistance.

Acting Charge d'Affaires of the Kuwaiti Embassy in Lebanon, Yassin

Al-Majed, informed KUNA that the plane carrying this shipment marks the seventh mission of the Kuwaiti Air Force, which has been transporting medical supplies from the Lebanese Embassy in Kuwait. Al-Majed explained that this shipment is part of the "Kuwait Seeks Your Well-being" campaign, a donation initiative organized by the Lebanese Embassy in Kuwait from December 6

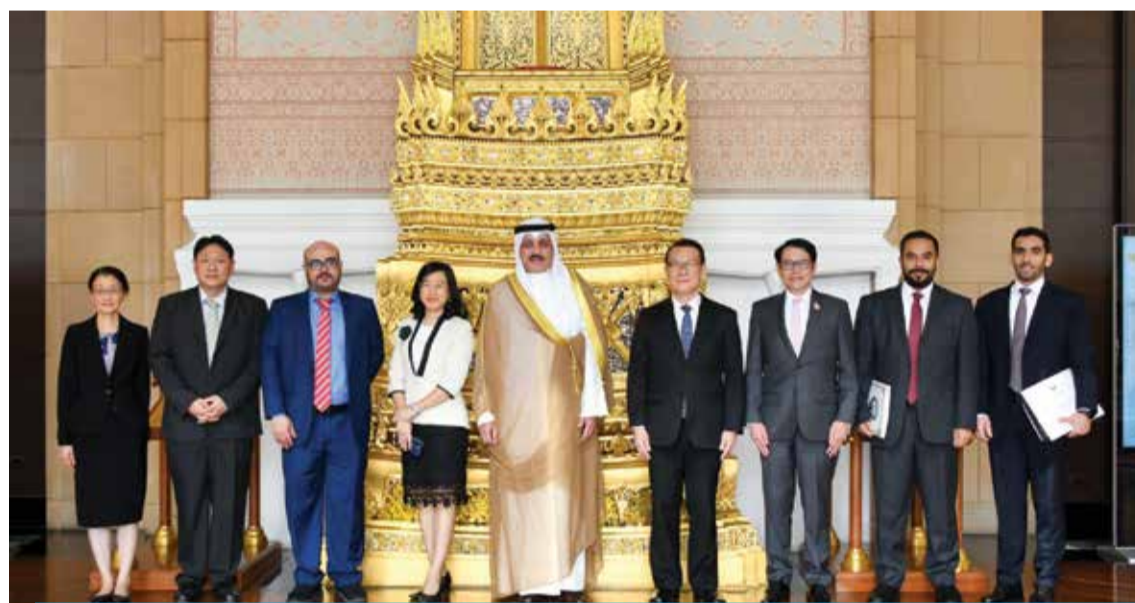


Workers unload the medical aid sent to Lebanon from the Kuwait Air Force plane after its arrival at Beirut's Rafic Hariri International Airport.

to 8. The supplies will be handed over to Lebanon's Higher Relief Commission for distribution.

Kuwait has been providing ongoing support to Lebanon through an airlift program, facilitating the delivery of aid to address the needs resulting from the escalating conflict. Lebanon began implementing a ceasefire agreement with the Zionist entity on November

27, following military operations that began since October 2023 in the south and along the border with the occupied Palestinian territories. The conflict further expanded in September, when the Zionist entity launched extensive airstrikes on several Lebanese areas, resulting in significant loss of life and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. — KUNA



Kuwaiti and Thai officials pose for a photo during their meeting in Bangkok. — KUNA photos

## Kuwait, Thailand hold first round of political consultations

**BANGKOK:** Kuwait and Thailand held their first round of political consultations in the Thai capital, Bangkok. Both sides agreed to enhance their comprehensive strategic partnership across all areas. The Kuwaiti side was led by the Assistant Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs Ambassador Sameeh Johar Hayat, while the Thai side was headed by Deputy Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Thailand Paisan Rupanichkij.

Hayat, in a phone call with Kuwait News Agency

(KUNA), said the meetings were held in a friendly atmosphere, reflecting the historical significance of the distinguished bilateral relations between the two countries, which have lasted for 61 years. He noted that the views exchanged during the discussions were largely aligned with the Thai side.

The meeting addressed the strong and growing strategic relations between the two nations and explored ways to enhance and develop cooperation in various fields. Additionally, both sides exchanged views on a number of regional and international issues of mutual interest. During the first round of consultations, both sides also discussed bilateral issues and ways to activate economic, investment, trade, and technological links. They agreed to expand cooperation and coordination across all areas, pushing the bilateral relationship to new heights.

Both sides also exchanged views on developments in the Middle East and Northeast Asia, especially in terms of coordination and cooperation in international forums, particularly the United Nations.

The two sides emphasized the importance of maintaining regular consultations between their foreign ministries. They also agreed to explore the details of establishing a comprehensive strategic partnership in various sectors, including economic, trade, investment, health, cultural, scientific, artistic, academic, renewable energy, oil, and petrochemicals. This step is seen as crucial for enhancing energy security and stabilizing its cost.

Both countries also expressed their joint ambitions to continue expanding their distinguished economic partnership, focusing on areas of mutual interest and shared capabilities. They highlighted the importance of the health sector as a priority for development and cooperation, particularly in exchanging expertise to foster growth, sustainability, and global competitiveness. — KUNA



**BANGKOK:** Kuwaiti Assistant Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs Ambassador Sameeh Hayat poses for a photo with Deputy Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Thailand Paisan Rupanichkij.

## Polio lab achieves 100% efficiency rating in 2024 WHO test

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Health announced that the Polio Reference Laboratory, part of the Public Health Department, has achieved a 100 percent efficiency rating in molecular PCR tests for 2024, as part of the World Health Organization's (WHO) proficiency testing program.

Dr Sarah Al-Qabandi, Head of the Public Health Laboratories Department, stated that this achievement underscores Kuwait's ongoing participation in global efforts to combat polio and reflects the country's commitment to maintaining high standards in public health. She noted that the rating is an indication of the laboratory's adherence to international diagnostic standards, ensuring the accuracy and reliability of test results in the fight against polio. Dr Al-Qabandi added that this result highlights the laboratory's ability to stay current with scientific developments and apply them effectively, supporting global efforts to eradicate polio.

She also acknowledged the support from Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi and Undersecretary Dr Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi in facilitating the necessary resources to maintain high standards in the laboratory. This support, she noted, is part of Kuwait's broader commitment to achieving global health goals. The Polio Reference Laboratory plays a key role in confirming polio cases and monitoring the spread of the virus through environmental and human samples. It also provides valuable data on virus strains, which inform vaccination and eradication strategies at the global level. Dr Al-Qabandi concluded by thanking all those



**KUWAIT:** Technicians prepare samples for tests and take notes at the Ministry of Health's Polio Reference Laboratory. — KUNA photos

involved in the laboratory and the Public Health Department for their continued efforts to support the global fight against polio. — KUNA

## Kuwait inflation up by 2.36%: KCSB

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's consumer price index (inflation), on an annual basis, grew by 2.36 percent in November 2023, according to the Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau (KCSB). In a statement to KUNA on Sunday, KCSB said that the inflation rate rose by 0.15 percent in November compared to October 2023. The annual inflation increase was attributed to higher prices in key sectors, including clothing, food, education, and furnishings, while transportation costs saw a decline. The report also shows a 4.66 percent increase in the "food and beverages" group in November compared to the same month in 2023, the "Cig-

arette and Tobacco" group saw marginal annual increase of 0.15 percent. Prices of the "clothing" group rose by 5.54 percent, while the "Housing Services" group saw 0.57 percent increase, as well as "Household Furnishings" group recorded a 4.05 percent rise. The "Health" group saw a 4.20 percent increase, while the "Transportation" showed 1.89 percent decrease. Meanwhile, the "Communication" group recorded a 0.88 percent annual increase, and "Recreation and Culture" group rose by 2.42 percent. The "Education" group saw a 0.79 percent rise, with the "Restaurants and Hotels" group recording a 2.05 percent increase. The "Miscellaneous Goods and Services" group recorded a 5.54 percent annual rise. Excluding the "Food and Beverages" group, Kuwait's inflation rate rose by 1.87 percent in November 2023 on a yearly basis. — KUNA



In ruined homes, Palestinians recall Assad regime's torture

## Minorities fear targeted attacks in post-revolution Bangladesh

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Nuns hold up Nativity Scene figurines of baby Jesus during the traditional blessing of figurines as part of the pope's Sunday Angelus prayer before Christmas in Saint Peter's square at the Vatican on December 22, 2024. — AFP

# Pope again condemns 'cruelty' of Zionist entity's strikes on Gaza

## Pontiff laments children being machine-gunned, bombings of hospitals and schools

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis doubled down Sunday on his condemnation of Zionist entity's strikes on the Gaza Strip, denouncing their "cruelty" for the second time in as many days despite Zionist entity accusing him of "double standards".

"And with pain I think of Gaza, of so much cruelty, of the children being machine-gunned, of the bombings of schools and hospitals. What cruelty," the pope said after his weekly Angelus prayer.

It comes a day after the 88-year-old Argentine lamented a Zionist entity airstrike that killed seven children from one family on Friday, according to Gaza's rescue agency. "Yesterday children were bombed. This is cruelty, this is not war," the pope told members of the government of the Holy See.

His remarks on Saturday prompted a sharp response from Zionist entity. A Zionist entity foreign

ministry spokesman described Francis's intervention as "particularly disappointing as they are disconnected from the true and factual context of Zionist entity's fight against jihadist terrorism—a multi-front war that was forced upon it starting on October 7." "Enough with the double standards and the singling out of the Jewish state and its people," he added.

"Cruelty is terrorists hiding behind children while trying to murder Zionist entity children; cruelty is holding 100 hostages for 442 days, including a baby and children, by terrorists and abusing them," the Zionist entity statement said. This was a reference to the Hamas Palestinian militants who attacked Zionist entity, killed many civilians and took hostages on October 7, 2023, triggering the Gaza war.

Gaza's civil defense rescue agency reported that

a Zionist entity air strike had killed 10 members of a family on Friday in the northern part of the territory, including seven children. The Zionist entity military told AFP it had struck "several terrorists who were operating in a military structure belonging to the Hamas organization and posed a threat to IDF (army) troops operating in the area".

It added that "the reported number of casualties resulting from the strike does not align with the information" the army held.

The mounting criticisms of Zionist entity appear to mark a change in the pope's tone in recent weeks. He has consistently called for peace since the beginning of the Zionist entity-Hamas war more than 14 months ago. But at the end of November, Francis denounced "the invader's arrogance" in Ukraine as in "Palestine", a contrast with the Holy See's mod-

ern tradition of neutrality. He has recently published a book in which the pope calls for scrutiny over whether the situation in Gaza "corresponds to the technical definition" of genocide, an accusation firmly rejected by Zionist entity.

At the end of September the Argentine Jesuit also criticized Zionist entity's "immoral" use of force in Gaza and in Lebanon, where Zionist entity launched an offensive against Hamas' fellow Iran-backed ally Hezbollah. Since 2013 the Vatican has recognized the State of Palestine, with which it maintains diplomatic relations, and it supports the two-state solution. At least 45,259 Palestinians have been killed in Zionist entity's military campaign in the Palestinian territory, the majority of them civilians, according to data from the health ministry in Gaza. Those figures are taken as reliable by the United Nations. — AFP

## US strikes Houthi targets in Yemen

SANAA: The United States on Saturday said it struck targets in Yemen's rebel-held capital, hours after a Houthi rebel missile wounded people in Zionist commercial hub Tel Aviv. The missile, which wounded 16 people, was the second such attack in two days.

Among the targets of US forces was a rebel missile storage center and a "command-and-control facility," the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a statement. American forces also shot down multiple Houthi drones and an anti-ship cruise missile over the Red Sea, it said, shortly after the rebels' Al-Masirah TV channel reported that an "aggression" had targeted the Attan district of Sanaa, blaming Western forces. American and British forces have repeatedly struck rebel targets in Yemen this year in response to Houthi attacks on shipping in Red Sea-area waters vital to global trade.

Zionist entity has also previously struck back, including against ports and energy facilities, after rebel attacks against its territory. The Iran-backed Houthi rebels had claimed responsibility for the Saturday strike on Zionist entity, saying they directed a ballistic missile at "a military target of the Zionist entity enemy". The Zionist military said it failed to intercept the missile, forcing many residents to leave



Officials from the Sanaa-based Houthi-led government and members of a delegation of the UNMHA (UN Mission to support the Hodeida Agreement) inspect a damaged vessel at a site hit by Zionist forces in the port of Hodeida on the Red Sea on December 21, 2024. — AFP

their homes in the early hours. Houthis have repeatedly launched missiles against Zionist entity in solidarity with the Palestinians since the war in Gaza began more than a year ago. Most of them have been intercepted. "One projectile launched from Yemen was identified and unsuccessful interception attempts were made," after alert sirens sounded, the Zionist entity military said on its Telegram channel. In a later statement, the military said Zionist civilians

had been "deliberately targeted". It stressed the country's "aerial defense is not hermetic" so Zionist entity should follow security instructions. "I was at home and heard a loud explosion. I immediately went to the scene and saw significant blast damage to nearby buildings," medic Yosel Kourdi was quoted as saying in a statement released by Zionist entity's emergency medical service, Magen David Adom (MDA). — AFP

## Syrian Kurdish groups on the back foot as power balance shifts

QAMISHLI, SYRIA/BEIRUT/ANKARA: With hostile Turkish-backed groups mobilizing against them in Syria's north, and Damascus ruled by a group friendly to Ankara, Syria's main Kurdish factions are on the back foot as they seek to preserve political gains carved out during 13 years of war. Part of a stateless ethnic group straddling Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Armenia and Syria, Kurds have so far been among the few winners of the Syrian conflict, controlling nearly a quarter of the country and leading a powerful armed group that is a key US ally in countering Islamic State. But the power balance has tilted against them since the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) swept into Damascus this month, toppling President Bashar al-Assad, two analysts and a senior Western diplomat told Reuters.

The seismic change in Syria is expected to yield deeper Turkish sway just as a change of US administration is raising questions over how long Wash-

ington will keep backing the country's Kurdish-led forces. For Turkey, the Kurdish factions represent a national security threat. Ankara views them as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has been waging an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984 and is deemed a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and other powers. The Syrian Kurdish groups "are in deep, deep trouble", said Aron Lund, a fellow at Century International, a US-based think tank.

"The balance has shifted fundamentally in Syria to the advantage of Turkey-backed or Turkey-aligned factions, and Turkey seems determined to exploit this to the fullest." The shift has been reflected in renewed fighting for control of the north, where Turkey-backed armed groups known as the Syrian National Army (SNA) have made military advances against the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Fanar Al-Kait, a senior official in the Kurdish-led regional administration, told Reuters that the ouster of Assad, whose Arab nationalist Baath Party oppressed Kurds for decades, presented a chance to stitch the fragmented country back together. He said the administration is ready for dialogue with Turkey, but the conflict in the north showed Ankara had "very bad intentions". "This will certainly push the region towards ... a new conflict," he added. — Reuters



Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei greets visitors as he makes a speech in Tehran on December 22, 2024. — AFP

## Khamenei: Iran does not have or need regional proxy forces

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader denied Sunday that militant groups around the region functioned as Tehran's proxies, warning that if his country chose to "take action", it would not need them anyway. The remarks came after a year in which Iran-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza suffered heavy losses in wars with Zionist entity, and two weeks after the fall of Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad, who had been a key link in Tehran's so-called axis of resistance.

Another spoke of that axis, Yemen's Houthi rebels, have been repeatedly targeted by the United States and Britain over their attacks on Red Sea shipping lanes, launched in solidarity with Palestinians. "The Islamic Republic does not have a proxy force. Yemen fights because it has faith. Hezbollah fights because the power of faith draws it into the field. Hamas and (the Islamic) Jihad fight because their beliefs compel them to do so. They do not act as our proxy," supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei told a group of visitors in Tehran. "They (the Americans) keep saying that the Islamic Republic has lost its proxy forces in the region! This is another mistake," he said, adding: "If one day we want to take action, we do not need a proxy force."

Earlier this month, Syrian rebels' lightning push to Damascus from their strongholds in the northwest ended the decades-long rule of Assad's family, which had been an ally of Tehran. Khamenei predicted "the emergence of a strong, honorable group" in Syria, saying the country's young men had "nothing to lose." — AFP

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MONDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2024

# Boursa Kuwait's Sustainability Report crowned the best in the Middle East

## New accolade affirms bourse's leading role in corporate sustainability, ESG

**KUWAIT:** Reaffirming its position as a leading institution in corporate sustainability, Boursa Kuwait's 2023 Sustainability Report has been recognized as the Best Sustainability and ESG Report at the Middle East Investor Relations Association (MEIRA) Awards. Held annually to celebrate excellence in investor relations across the Middle East, this year's awards ceremony, which was organized in Abu Dhabi on December 11-12 in collaboration with the Abu Dhabi Stock Exchange, gathered over 800 capital market professionals, including representatives from 150 issuers in the GCC and wider region, 33 stock exchanges and regulators, and more than 150 buy and sell-side participants from local and international capital markets.

This prestigious accolade highlights Boursa Kuwait's commitment to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles, showcasing its leadership in promoting sustainability within the Kuwaiti capital market. The 2023 Sustainability Report reflects the company's dedication and continued efforts to improve transparency and accountability as well as create long-term value for stakeholders. As a model issuer, Boursa Kuwait continues to drive the sustainable growth and economic development of Kuwait following the best-in-class standards and practices worldwide.

Previously, the company's 2021 Annual Report was awarded with a second-place finish for Best Annual Report - Print Category - Middle East while its 2023 Annual Report placed third in the Best Annual Report - Print Category - Middle East categories.

Boursa Kuwait's 2023 Sustainability Report, its third, shed light on the Kuwaiti stock exchange's



Boursa Kuwait's 2023 Sustainability Report has been recognized as the Best Sustainability and ESG Report at the MEIRA Awards.



corporate sustainability strategy and initiatives in 2023 and assessed the company's non-financial performance and progress from January 1 to December 31, 2023. Developed in-house, the report is aligned with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Standards: Core Option, the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) Security and Commodity Exchanges guidelines, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as Boursa Kuwait's ESG Reporting Guide to ensure transparency and adherence to interna-

tionally recognized standards.

Some of the milestones outlined in the report include the company's corporate social responsibility initiatives and partnerships with esteemed and established local and international organizations like the United Nations, the Middle East Investor Relations Association, the CFA Institute and CFA Society as well as the Kuwait Red Crescent Society and the Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospital (KACCH). The report also showcased the company's internal efforts to become a more socially

responsible institution, including its enhanced governance practices and initiatives to reduce its environmental footprint. Boursa Kuwait and the Middle East Investor Relations Association (MEIRA) and its Kuwait branch have a close strategic partnership. Since 2017, the exchange has supported the association's initiatives to develop the investor relations sector as part of its Corporate Sustainability strategy, which seeks to raise financial awareness and enhance the role of investor relations among issuers in the Kuwaiti capital market.

## 'Finally, we made it!': Ho Chi Minh City celebrates first metro

**HO CHI MINH CITY:** Thousands of selfie-taking Ho Chi Minh City residents crammed into train carriages Sunday as the traffic-clogged business hub celebrated the opening of its first-ever metro line after years of delays. Huge queues spilled out of every station along the \$1.7 billion line that runs almost 20 kilometers (12 miles) from the city centre—with women in traditional "ao dai" dress, soldiers in uniform and couples clutching young children waiting excitedly to board.

"I know it (the project) is late, but I still feel so very honored and proud to be among the first on this metro," said office worker Nguyen Nhu Huyen after snapping a selfie in her jam-packed train car.

"Our city is now on par with the other big cities of the world," she said. It took 17 years for Vietnam's commercial capital to reach this point. The project, funded largely by Japanese government loans, was first approved in 2007 and slated to cost just \$668 million.

When construction began in 2012, authorities promised the line would be up and running in just five years. But as delays mounted, cars and motorbikes multiplied in the city of nine million people, making the metropolis hugely congested, increasingly polluted and time-consuming to navigate.

The metro "meets the growing travel needs of residents and contributes to reducing traffic congestion and environmental pollution", the city's deputy mayor Bui Xuan Cuong said. Cuong admitted authorities had to overcome "countless hurdles" to get



Soldiers take a selfie on the platform at a metro station in Ho Chi Minh City on December 22, 2024. — AFP

the project over the line.

According to state media reports, the metro was late because of "slow capital disbursement, unexpected technical problems, personnel difficulties and the COVID-19 pandemic". "The delays and cost overruns have been frustrating," said professor Vu Minh Hoang at Fulbright University Vietnam, who warned that with just 14 station stops, the line's "impact in alleviating traffic will be limited in the short run".

However, it is still a "historic achievement for the city's urban development", he added. With lessons learnt, "the construction of future lines will be increasingly easier, faster, and more cost-efficient",

Hoang told AFP. Back on the train, 84-year-old war veteran Vu Thanh told AFP he was happy to experience below ground in a more positive way after spending three years fighting American troops in the city's famous Cu Chi tunnels, an enormous underground network.

"It feels so different from the underground experience I had years ago during the war. It's so bright and nice here," he said. Reflecting on the delays, he added: "We built the tunnels to hide from our enemies in the past, so building a tunnel for a train should not be that hard," he added.

"Finally, we made it!" — AFP

## India court rejects petition against contract to Adani

**MUMBAI:** An Indian court on Friday dismissed a petition challenging the award of a contract to Adani Group to revamp one of Asia's largest slums in Mumbai, clearing one of the main legal challenges to the ambitious project. The group led by billionaire Gautam Adani won a \$619 million bid in 2023 to convert the Dharavi slum into a modern city hub, but Dubai-based SecLink Technologies Corporation, winner of a previous tender for the slum revamp, challenged the award of the contract to Adani in a petition in the Bombay High Court in July 2023.

The 240 hectare (594 acre) slum, known as Asia's densest and featured in Danny Boyle's Oscar-winning 2008 movie "Slumdog Millionaire", stands in contrast to India's development boom with its open sewers and shared toilets, close to Mumbai's international airport and business district. "The grounds urged in support of the petition lack force and accordingly, the challenge ... fails," the Bombay High Court concluded in the order.

SecLink will appeal against the ruling in the Supreme Court. Suraj Iyer, a lawyer from Ganesh and Co representing SecLink, told Reuters. SecLink had alleged in its petition that Maharashtra state improperly cancelled an original 2018 tender for the Dharavi redevelopment, for which SecLink had bid highest, and restarted the process with new terms in 2022 so that Adani could win. SecLink had also received a Mumbai court's permission to add Adani Group to its lawsuit last year in an ongoing petition against the Maharashtra government. — Reuters

## EU deal and Trump tariff threats boost Mercosur trade talks

**BRASILIA:** Brazil expects the South American trade bloc Mercosur to speed up more free trade negotiations after clinching a deal with the European Union, as the threat of US tariffs when Donald Trump takes office as president forces countries to diversify their options for exports, diplomats say.

Topping the list of Mercosur's most likely new trade pacts next year are deals with the European Free Trade Association of four non-EU nations and with the United Arab Emirates, the diplomats said on condition of anonymity. Singapore also reached an agreement with Mercosur this year that is being translated so it can be sent to the country's president and lawmakers for ratification, a diplomat said.

"This is undoubtedly a good time for the Mercosur bloc to move forward with other negotiations. Some countries have already approached us interested in expanding negotiations," a Brazilian official said. If the pacts materialize, they would mark a revival for the trade bloc. Mercosur includes South America's two largest economies, Brazil and Argentina, but has long suffered from internal divisions and skepticism about its effectiveness. Uruguay and Paraguay are also founding members of Mercosur, which Bolivia joined this year. Norway, one of the non-EU members that is part of the EFTA group, confirmed it is keen to sign an EFTA-Mercosur deal in the first half of 2025. "A Free Trade Agreement between Mercosur and the EFTA states is a high priority for Norway. I hope to see the negotiations concluded as soon as



CALIFORNIA: In an aerial view, shipping containers are stacked on a dock at the Port of Oakland in Oakland, California. — AFP

possible," Norwegian Minister of Trade and Industry, Cecilie Myrseth, said in a message to Reuters.

"With the trade talks between EU and Mercosur now concluded, it should be possible for EFTA and Mercosur to shortly come to an agreement on the very few outstanding issues," she added. For its part, UAE hopes to deepen commerce with the Mercosur bloc "within the next year" with an agreement that would open opportunities for businesses across the Middle East and Latin America, its Trade Minister Thani Al Zeyoudi said in a statement to Reuters.

Threats of fresh tariffs from Trump, who takes office in a month's time, have also forced the biggest US trade partners to consider their alternatives, even as their priority is defending the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement on trade. Although Mexico expects a successful review of the USMCA in 2026, it has also begun to explore other options, which include deepening its trade agreement with Mercosur, according to two Mexican government sources. — Reuters

## Natural gas demand from US LNG export plants set to decline

**NEW YORK/HOUSTON:** Demand for US natural gas to produce liquefied natural gas (LNG) for export this year is headed for its first decline since the country started exporting the super-chilled fuel from the lower 48 states eight years ago. The US is the world's largest exporter of the super-chilled gas and a key provider of gas to Europe in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Natural gas prices have remained relatively high in Europe as the expected US growth in output in 2024 has not materialized and the continent is bracing for a new gas price shock as colder winter weather depletes stocks.

Natural gas drillers have profited from robust demand from LNG export plants especially since sanctions on Russian gas boosted European demand for US LNG. Producers have indexed some output to global LNG prices, so slowing flows of gas to LNG export plants means they have less incentive to grow output. Since 2016, when Cheniere Energy's Sabine Pass export plant in Louisiana shipped its first cargo, feedgas to the plants increased every year, even in 2020 when lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic slashed demand for energy. LNG plant outages and delays in construction of new plants have reduced demand so far this year, LSEG data showed.

With just 11 days left in 2024, the amount of gas flowing to the eight big US LNG export plants eased to an average of 13.0 billion cubic feet per day (bcfd) from an average of 13.1 bcfd in 2023, LSEG data showed. One billion cubic feet of gas can supply about 5 million US homes for a day.

The annual decline in demand is projected even though the first new LNG export facility since 2022, Venture Global LNG's 2.6-bcfd Plaquemines export plant in Louisiana, started producing LNG over the past week or so. But the industry expects this year's decline to be just a blip, with US LNG capacity seen more than doubling over the next four years. New plants coming online should lift capacity from around 13.8 bcfd now to 17.8 bcfd next year, 20.3 bcfd in 2026, 22.0 bcfd in 2027 and 24.2 bcfd in 2028.

### Plant outages

Among the biggest factors in this year's fall in LNG feedgas demand were numerous outages at Freeport LNG's 2.1-bcfd plant in Texas. At least one of the plant's three liquefaction trains shut every month in 2024, except October, with some of those outages lasting several weeks, according to LSEG data. Freeport LNG is the second largest US LNG producer, but Venture Global's Plaquemines will probably move into second place once it is fully operating.

Several large LNG projects under construction on the US Gulf Coast have faced cost overruns due to labor shortages and supply chain challenges. Venture Global's Plaquemines is over budget by \$2.3 billion even though it has remained on schedule. The 2.4-bcfd Golden Pass plant in Texas, owned by Exxon Mobil and QatarEnergy, is more than \$2 billion over budget and behind schedule. Golden Pass was expected to begin producing its first LNG in 2024 but that was pushed back to late 2025 after its main contractor, Zachry Holdings, filed for bankruptcy. Forecasts call for feedgas supplies to US export facilities to rise by an average of around 2 bcfd next year, a significant step up, said Alex Munton, director of global gas and LNG research at consulting firm Rapidan Energy Group. "We see only limited downside given tight global market conditions, with performance issues at Freeport the main risk," Munton said. — Reuters



Business

NBK MONEY MARKETS REPORT

# Global markets digest mixed signals on growth and policy

## US economy records 3.1% growth in Q3 • UK manufacturing falters

**KUWAIT:** In the week ending on the 22nd of December, global markets witnessed major developments, as economic data continues to shape the economic outlook. In the US, inflation, as measured by core PCE, increased by 0.1 percent month-over-month and 2.8 percent year-over-year in November, maintaining stable inflation expectations. Personal spending rose 0.4 percent, while disposable income grew 0.3 percent. The US dollar showed resilience, reaching near 108.54 on the DXY, supported by a hawkish cut by the Federal Reserve and strong economic growth as GDP rose 3.1 percent. Treasury yields rose, with the 10Y yield climbing past 4.5 percent. Equities sold off, as the S&P 500 fell 3.0 percent, the Nasdaq dropped 3.6 percent. In Europe, the ECB confirmed a 0.25 percent rate cut as inflation fears abated, with the euro reaching a low of \$1.034.

While in the UK, the Bank of England has decided to keep policy rates unchanged at 4.75 percent as inflation is proving to be persistent at 2.6 percent y/y. Meanwhile, Japan's yen depreciated to 157.9 against the US dollar after dovish central bank commentary. Commodities saw contrasting moves, with gold reaching around \$2,600 per ounce, while Brent crude slipped to \$72 per barrel, weighed by demand concerns. Global markets continue to react to central bank recalibrations, reflecting cautious optimism tempered by persistent economic challenges.

**US private sector expands**

The S&P Global Flash US Composite PMI rose to 56.6 in December 2024, up from 54.9 in November, marking the strongest private sector growth since March 2022. The services sector surged to 58.5 (highest since October 2021), while manufacturing fell further to 48.3 (a three-month low). The increase was driven by strengthening demand, with new orders rising at their fastest pace since April 2022 and employment growing for the first time in five months. Inflationary pressures eased overall, despite rising input costs in manufacturing. Business optimism reached a two-and-a-half year high, supported by positive expectations under the incoming Trump administration.

US retail sales rose by 0.7 percent month-on-month, surpassing the forecasted 0.6 percent. October's figure was also revised upward to 0.5 percent. However, core sales, excluding automotive and gas, grew only 0.2 percent, consistent with October but below predictions. Industrial production fell by 0.1 percent, marking a third consecutive decline but improving on the previous month's 0.4 percent drop. Manufacturing showed a modest recovery, rising 0.2 percent after a 0.7 percent contraction in October.

The Federal Reserve reduced its benchmark interest rate by 25 bps to a range of 4.25-4.5 percent, marking the third consecutive cut in its current cycle. However, the FOMC signaled a slower pace of easing next year, with policymakers projecting only two quarter-point rate cuts for 2025 instead of the three previously expected by some economists. Inflation estimates were revised higher, reflecting increased concerns about price stability, whilst Fed officials' neutral rate estimate rose to 3 percent. Chair Jerome Powell highlighted that the policy stance is now "significantly less restrictive", allowing for cautious adjustments as inflation trends remain "sideways" and labor market risks had "diminished".

**US economy grows 3.1% in Q3**

The US economy grew at an annualized rate of 3.1 percent in Q3 2024, up from the second estimate of 2.8 percent and exceeding Q2's 3 percent growth, marking the strongest expansion this year. Personal spending rose 3.7 percent, the fastest since Q1 2023, driven by a 5.6 percent increase in goods consumption and strong service spending (2.8 percent). Fixed investment grew 2.1 percent, with equipment investment surging 10.8 percent, while structures (-5 percent) and residential investment (-4.3 percent) declined. Government spending increased 5.1 percent, and net trade contributed less negatively, with exports and imports revised higher at 9.6 percent and 10.7 percent respectively.

**Consumer spending**

Personal consumption expenditures (PCE) rose by 0.4 percent in November 2024, supported by a 0.7 percent increase in goods spending, driven by robust demand for motor vehicles and recreational products. Services spending grew modestly by 0.1 percent, with healthcare and recreation services leading the gains. The PCE price index increased by 0.1 percent month-over-month, maintaining a steady

annual rate of 2.4 percent. Core PCE, excluding food and energy, also rose by 0.1 percent month-over-month and 2.8 percent year-over-year. Personal income and disposable income both increased by 0.3 percent, signaling resilience in consumer activity amid stable inflationary pressures. The US dollar index closed the week at 107.82.

**Canada CPI eases**

Canada's inflation eased to 1.9 percent year-over-year in November, less than the expected 2 percent. Core inflation remained flat at 0.0 percent month-on-month, down from 0.4 percent previously. This marks further progress toward the central bank's target rate, supporting its current stance on monetary easing. Where markets are currently pricing 52 percent probability of a cut in their upcoming meeting in January. The USD/CAD pair closed the week at 1.4368

**Eurozone mixed**

The HCOB Flash Eurozone PMI for December 2024 reported a composite output index of 49.5, below the neutral 50 mark but slightly higher than November's 48.3. Manufacturing PMI fell to 44.5, marking a 32-month low, driven by sharp declines in Germany and France. In contrast, the services PMI rose to 51.4, a two-month high, indicating modest growth in services activity, particularly in parts of Southern Europe. Persistent drops in new orders and export demand remain key challenges, with Germany and France's weakness overshadowing stronger performances from other eurozone countries.

In a speech delivered in Vilnius, ECB President Christine Lagarde reaffirmed the bank's commitment to further rate cuts, provided economic data continues to align with projections. Lagarde emphasized that inflation, which stood at around 2.3 percent in November, is steadily converging toward the ECB's 2 percent target. Recent monetary policy adjustments have already included four rate cuts this year, with the ECB's deposit rate currently at 3 percent. The ECB's deliberate shift in language, removing the term "sufficiently restrictive," has signaled a pivot to a more accommodative stance. As the ECB aims to lower rates gradually to a neutral level of 1.75 percent-2.5 percent to support the eurozone economy while addressing structural challenges and ensuring

price stability. The EUR/USD currency pair closed the week at 1.0429.

**UK manufacturing falters**

The S&P Global Flash UK Manufacturing PMI fell to 47.3 in December 2024, down from 48 in November, marking the sharpest contraction in 11 months. Production declined for the second consecutive month, and new orders saw a steep drop due to customer destocking and weaker demand from European clients, leading to the fastest fall in export sales since October 2023. Backlogs decreased, while purchasing prices rose at the fastest pace since January 2023.

**UK employment sees mixed trends**


The UK's payroll data for November 2024 showed a decline of 35,000 employees, a 0.1 percent drop from the previous month, while rising 76,000 (0.3 percent) compared to the same period last year. Total payrolled employees stood at 30.4 million. Employment rates for those aged 16 to 64 remained steady at 74.9 percent for August to October, while unemployment climbed slightly to 4.3 percent. Job vacancies continued their downward trend, decreasing by 31,000 to 818,000, marking the 29th consecutive quarterly drop. Earnings growth held strong, with total pay rising 5.2 percent annually, translating to a 2.2 percent increase in real terms after inflation adjustments.

**China holds rates steady**

China's one-year loan prime rate (LPR) remained unchanged at 3.1 percent in December 2024, while the five-year LPR, used for mortgage pricing, held at 3.6 percent. Despite the unchanged rates this month, the LPR has seen cuts totaling 35 and 60 basis points for the one-year and five-year rates, respectively, over the year. Analysts believe the current reduced rates will ease financial burdens on businesses and households, stimulating investment, boosting purchasing power, and supporting economic recovery. The USD/CNY currency pair closed the week at 7.2961.

**Kuwait**

Kuwaiti dinar USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30805.



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## KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 19 DECEMBER 2024

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Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	35,664	7,799.50	-0.8%	0.4%	4.3%	577,445,889	187,200,238	33,519	16.1	1.4	80.9%
Main Market	8,416	6,639.87	-0.5%	0.5%	19.2%	1,228,720,074	147,188,295	52,072	13.7	1.0	19.1%
All Share	44,080	7,278.70	-0.7%	0.5%	6.8%	1,806,165,963	334,388,533	85,591	14.9	1.1	100%

Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Banking	26,741	1,784.92	-0.6%	0.6%	8.3%	162,365,917	79,623,999	10,733	17.9	1.5	60.66%
Basic Materials	510	904.01	-3.3%	-4.0%	21.2%	3,906,811	2,735,225	541	10.9	2.2	1.16%
Consumer Discretionary	1,370	1,998.96	-0.9%	-5.0%	24.6%	29,048,486	12,345,352	4,123	23.5	1.5	3.11%
Consumer Staples	310	1,021.31	0.4%	5.0%	55.1%	2,806,176	2,073,334	516	46.3	1.6	0.70%
Energy	241	1,188.04	1.3%	-0.9%	25.2%	23,634,436	2,915,717	1,357	9.9	1.4	0.55%
Financial Services	5,240	1,498.38	-0.2%	2.4%	23.6%	910,941,777	136,953,029	36,910	14.5	1.1	11.89%
Health Care	224	468.16	0.0%	0.0%	-2.9%	4,655	2,001,650	1	18.4	1.5	0.51%
Industrials	2,376	700.93	-1.8%	-0.9%	-22.8%	105,568,394	24,202,825	9,417	12.5	1.0	5.39%
Insurance	818	1,991.70	-0.4%	0.4%	-13.1%	79,032,164	4,070,819	2,307	9.7	1.2	1.85%
Real Estate	2,921	1,376.21	-1.4%	-1.0%	13.5%	463,620,055	60,662,853	16,595	15.3	0.9	6.63%
Technology	15	1,054.87	-0.7%	-3.3%	82.4%	264,163	37,437.86	110	NM	1.2	0.03%
Telecommunications	3,146	1,029.65	-1.1%	2.2%	-6.8%	16,628,398	7,477,217	2,534	15.7	1.4	7.14%
Utilities	168	402.63	-3.8%	-6.7%	-11.6%	8,344,531	1,288,725	447	17.3	1.4	0.38%

**Top Gainers**

Stock	Last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
ARABREC	89.9	35.19%	97,901,375	7,681,164,438	2,479
KMEFIC	240	28.34%	61,755,627	12,941,145	3,412
MARKAZ	153	15.04%	50,179,402	7,180,373	1,235
WETHAQ	47.5	14.73%	77,614,380	3,652,046	2,062
EMIRATES	56.7	12.28%	947,990	51,789	51

**Top Losers**

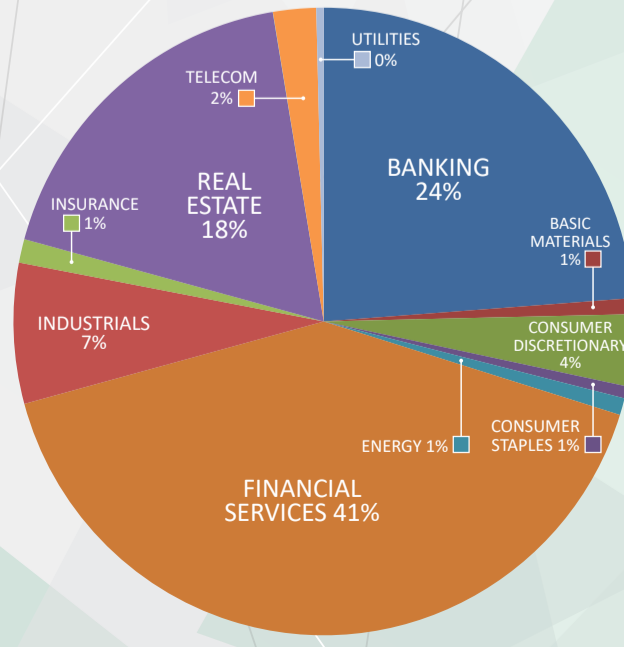
Stock	Last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
OSOUL	140	-18.60%	26,733,835	4,236,840	2,380
ALKOUT	975	-11.36%	67,383	66,661	47
INVEST	118	-9.23%	90,274,832	10,737,480	3,242
GIH	643	-8.79%	131,293	86,703	60
MARAKEZ	63.3	-8.39%	13,322,378	892,368	960

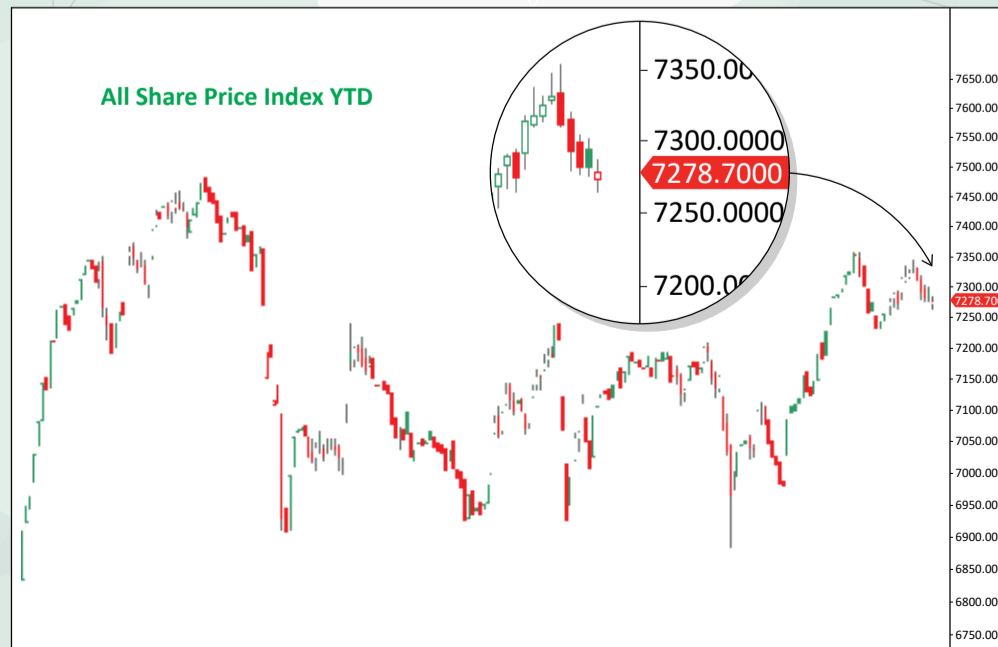
**Top Volume**

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
ALSAFAT	120	7.14%	112,272,301	13,423,315	2,702
ARABREC	89.9	35.19%	97,901,375	7,681,164	2,479
INVEST	118	-9.23%	90,274,832	10,737,480	3,242
KBT	103	-2.83%	82,493,104	8,951,634	1,972
WETHAQ	47.5	14.73%	77,614,380	3,652,046	2,062

**Top Value**

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KFH	744	0.40%	43,928,974	32,521,745	3,773
KRE	254	3.25%	76,851,486	19,333,464	1,413
ARZAN	254	4.96%	72,952,329	18,135,502	1,823
NBK	870	-1.14%	18,657,177	16,285,937	1,950
IFA	381	0.79%	38,223,674	14,641,842	1,884





**All Share Price Index YTD**

**Market Summary:**

- Premier and Main market volumes and values rose by 9%, 5%, and 2%, 2%, respectively.
- The Premier Index failed to overcome the resistance level and retreated, while the Main Index is still attempting to do so.
- Technically, the All Share Index closed at 7,278, with support levels at 7,248, 7,233, and 7,214, and resistance at 7,286. The Premier Index closed at 7,799, with support levels at 7,767, 7,737, and 7,716, and resistance at 7,811. The Main Index closed at 6,639, with support levels at 6,625, 6,603, and 6,585, and resistance at 6,657.

## Business

# The Family Office expands its legacy in wealth management to Kuwait

Firm to bring its expertise and innovation closer to Kuwaiti investors

**KUWAIT:** The Family Office, a leading wealth management company in the GCC, is proud to announce the expansion of its operations to Kuwait. Licensed and regulated by the Kuwaiti Capital Market Authority (CMA), the firm is bringing its legacy of expertise and innovation closer to Kuwaiti investors. With its local office set to open soon, The Family Office is committed to delivering tailored wealth management solutions and exclusive private market opportunities to meet the unique needs of the Kuwaiti market.

Over the past two decades, The Family Office has earned the trust of more than 800 clients globally, including families, professionals, and CEOs of publicly traded companies, managing \$2.1 billion in assets. Operating from six strategic offices in Bah-

rain, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Switzerland, the US, and Hong Kong, the company is dedicated to helping investors preserve and grow their wealth through unparalleled expertise and innovative solutions.

Transforming Wealth Management for Kuwaiti Investors

As a pioneer in private market investments, The Family Office offers Kuwaiti investors opportunities that were traditionally reserved for institutional investors. With a suite of cutting-edge tools and services, the firm simplifies and enhances the investment experience.

With its proven track record of innovation, expertise, and a client-centric approach, The Family Office is poised to redefine wealth management in Kuwait. By offering tailored solutions, cutting-edge

tools, and access to exclusive private market opportunities, the firm will work toward helping Kuwaiti investors achieve their financial aspirations with confidence and ease.

For more information about The Family Office and its private market solutions, please visit our website.

The Family Office in Bahrain, Dubai and its Riyadh-based wealth manager, The Family Office International Investment Company, are regulated by the Central Bank of Bahrain, the Dubai Financial Services Authority, and the Capital Market Authority of Saudi Arabia, serving hundreds of families and individuals. The firm helps clients achieve their wealth goals through custom-made investment strategies that cater to their unique needs.



## Argentina's dollar craze cools under greenback-loving Milei

**Buenos Aires:** "Dollars, selling dollars!" a money changer shouts to people streaming past in Buenos Aires' financial district. But there are no takers as Argentina's decades-long dollar craze finally shows signs of cooling.

Over years of high inflation and currency controls, Argentines lined up to trade their increasingly worthless pesos for dollars, propelling the US currency to a record 1,500 pesos on the black market on July 12. But as the inflation rate slows under cost-cutting President Javier Milei — from 25.5 percent in December 2023 to 2.4 percent in November 2024 — the clamor for dollars has quieted, even after Milei pledged on the campaign trail last year to swap the peso for the greenback.

Experts cite several reasons for the fall in demand for dollars. Milei's biting austerity measures have cratered Argentines' purchasing power, shattering their ability to save in hard American cash—the preferred way to create a nest egg. The experts also point to a tax amnesty launched by the government in July to encourage Argentines to deposit dollars that have been stashed under mattresses and floorboards, or tucked in safety-deposit boxes and offshore accounts.

The scheme has brought in \$20 billion in deposits so far, helping ease a dollar shortage.

Meanwhile, the central bank has taken advantage of a stronger peso to build up its dollar reserves from \$21 billion when Milei took power a year ago to \$32 billion. In a sign of how times have changed, the black market dollar rate, which at one point was double the official rate, is now nearly aligned with the official rate, at a little over 1,000 pesos to the greenback.

Oscar, one of Buenos Aires' many black-market money changers—they are dubbed "arbolitos," or little trees, because they plant themselves in the street offering green notes—told AFP that business has slowed dramatically. "Up to a year ago I was conducting around 40 transactions in a six-hour period; now I have four, at most, in 10 hours," said Oscar, who works openly near the presidential palace but declined to give his full name due to the illegal nature of his work.

These days, his only customers for dollars are Bolivian and Peruvian migrant workers, who change small amounts to send home. In scenes unthinkable just months ago, most of his Argentine customers are now offloading dollars—because they need more pesos to pay bills that have soared since Milei took office and slashed energy and transport subsidies. Retirees "walk the whole city center looking for the best deal" for pesos, Oscar said.

In the back room of her estate agency in the middle-class Caballito neighborhood, where she trades dollars on the black market, Fabiana is also struggling. To compete, she offers home delivery service for well-off Argentines buying dollars to go on holiday abroad or for people cashing in savings in dollars, some of them "stained from having been kept under the mattress."

Money-changing is merely a source of "petty cash" these days, Fabiana said. Most of her business comes from property sales, which are booming thanks to the amnesty, which also covers investments in real estate projects and certain property purchases. — AFP

## US consumer spending remains solid

**WASHINGTON:** US consumer spending increased in November amid strong demand for a range of goods and services, underscoring the economy's resilience, which saw the Federal Reserve this week projecting fewer interest rate cuts in 2025 than it had in September. There was also good news on inflation last month after a series of warmer readings. The report from the Commerce Department on Friday showed moderate monthly rises in prices, with a measure of underlying inflation posting its smallest gain in six months. Nonetheless, the annual increase in core inflation, excluding food and energy, remained stubbornly well above the US central bank's 2 percent target.

There are also worries that plans by President-elect Donald Trump's incoming administration to cut taxes, impose or raise tariffs on imports and deport millions of undocumented immigrants would stoke inflation. "The

### Wall St Week Ahead

## Investors hope for 'Santa Claus' rally as stocks lose steam

**NEW YORK:** With December so far delivering Scrooge-like returns in an otherwise stellar year for US stocks, investors hope the tail end of 2024 offers some holiday cheer, but warn of potential headwinds.

The benchmark S&P 500 is up more than 23 percent for 2024, even after a major stumble this week, and Wall Street has historically often enjoyed a strong annual close. Since 1969, the last five trading days of the year combined with the first two of the following year have yielded an average S&P 500 gain of 1.3 percent, a period known as the "Santa Claus Rally," according to the Stock Trader's Almanac. But this year, there are signs Santa Claus may disappoint.

The S&P 500 on Wednesday suffered its biggest one-day drop since August after the Federal Reserve caught investors off guard by signaling fewer-than-expected interest rate cuts in 2025.

The market also looks less healthy beneath the surface: Eight of the 11 S&P 500 sectors are in negative territory for December, while the equal-weight S&P 500, a proxy for the average index stock, is down 7 percent. Congress also dealt the markets a year-end curveball on Thursday evening, rejecting a package that would have averted a partial government shutdown that could affect a range of services. "I think investors are somewhat concerned about the potential for a government shutdown, particularly if one were to linger through the weekend," said Anthony Saglimbene, Chief Market Strategist at Ameriprise Financial.

Another worry for stocks as the year winds down is rising Treasury yields, said Matt Maley, chief market strategist at asset manager Miller Tabak. Benchmark 10-year yields hit 4.55 percent on Thursday following the Fed meeting, their highest level in over six months. With the S&P 500 trading at 21.6 times forward earnings estimates, well above its 15.8 historical average, according to LSEG Datastream, that jump in yields will put more pressure on equity valuations. "We're ending the year with people finally facing the reality that the stock market is extremely expensive and the Fed is not going to be as accom-

## Russia central bank holds off rate hike after criticism

**MOSCOW:** Russia's central bank kept interest rates at 21 percent on Friday despite surging inflation, a surprise decision that follows criticism from the country's political and business elite over the effects of higher borrowing costs on the economy. Moscow has struggled to rein in inflation, which has soared during the Kremlin's almost three-year offensive in Ukraine.

Prices are rising fast across the Russian economy, pushed up by massive government spending on the military campaign and deep labor shortages. Most economists had expected a rate hike to be announced Friday, but the bank appeared to have heeded harsh criticism by Russia's business and political establishment, most of which does not want to see them rise further.

The "unexpected" decision could show the

economy continues to grow from strong consumer demand as income growth and the wealth effect from higher portfolio values give consumers capacity to spend," said Jeffrey Roach, chief economist at LPL Financial. "Inflation was more benign than expected but the stickiness of some categories supports the Fed's hesitancy to materially lower rates next year."

Consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of US economic activity, rose 0.4 percent last month after a downwardly revised 0.3 percent gain in October, the Commerce Department's Bureau of Economic Analysis said. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast consumer spending advancing 0.5 percent after a previously reported 0.4 percent rise in October.

The nearly broad-based increase in spending was led by new motor vehicles, likely in part as households replaced vehicles damaged during Hurricanes Helene and Milton. That accounted for the bulk of the 0.8 percent rebound in goods outlays. Spending on recreational goods and vehicles also rose as did outlays on financial services and insurance, mostly charges, fees and commissions. There was also increased spending on recreation services, healthcare, clothing and footwear, furniture as well as housing and utilities. Spending at restaurants and bars as well



NEW YORK: Traders work on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) floor in New York City. — AFP

modative as they had been thinking," Maley said. Still, this week's pullback could be positive because it eliminated some of the frothy sentiment in equities, "setting up the market for a rebound," said Chuck Carlson, chief executive officer at Horizon Investment Services. "If there is further follow through on the downside, that could be a little bit more dangerous to the bullish trend."

The Santa Claus period, when combined with the following first five trading days of January and the performance of January overall, is a harbinger for the year: when those three indicators are positive, the year has ended higher more than 90 percent of the time in the past 50 years, according to the Almanac. But that seasonal strength may have come early this year, given the S&P 500 posted a blockbuster 5.7 percent return in November driven by Donald Trump's Nov 5 presidential election victory, Carlson said.

"It's been a strong year for the market, and you can make an argument that we kind of got the year-end rally in November instead of December," Carlson said. Signs that the market rally is increasingly

central bank is "putting on a brave face amid unsustainable political pressure", said Alexander Kolyandr, a researcher at the US-based Center for European Policy Analysis. "The test for the regulator's independence—so far preserved by the Kremlin—will come at the next rate meeting," he told AFP.

This is set to be held on February 14, days before the third anniversary of Moscow's Ukraine offensive. At his year-end press conference on Thursday, President Vladimir Putin had said he hoped the central bank would make a "balanced" decision that would "meet the demands of today". He also said prices rises were "unpleasant and bad" but the sanctions-hit economy was stable. Over the last 18 months, the central bank has hiked rates aggressively in the face of a slumping currency and stubborn price rises.

Central bank chief Elvira Nabiullina said at a press conference on Friday that the economy was already seeing "harsh monetary and credit conditions that should ensure the slowing of inflation in the coming quarters". Lending growth rates fell sharply in November and the central bank needs time to see if this trend becomes long-lasting, Nabiullina said.

as on hotel and motel stays also increased. Spending on services rose 0.2 percent.

When adjusted for inflation, consumer spending rose 0.3 percent after edging up 0.1 percent in October. The so-called real consumer spending is running at an annualized rate of 3.1 percent in the first two months of the fourth quarter. "That will lay the foundation for another very solid GDP number for the fourth quarter," said Lou Crandall, chief economist at Wrightson ICAP.

Consumer spending surged at a 3.7 percent pace in the third quarter, the fastest in 1-1/2 years, helping to propel the economy to a 3.1 percent growth rate following a 3.0 percent pace of expansion in the April-June quarter. The Atlanta Fed is forecasting gross domestic product increasing at a 3.1 percent rate in the fourth quarter. Fed Chair Jerome Powell on Wednesday described the economy as having "just been remarkable," adding "I feel very good about ... the performance of the economy and we want to keep that going." The central bank on Wednesday cut its benchmark overnight interest rate by 25 basis points to the 4.25 percent-4.50 percent range. It forecast only two rate reductions in 2025, in a nod to the economy's continued resilience and still-high inflation.

narrow could also spoil any holiday cheer.

A number of megacap stocks have performed well in December, including Tesla and Alphabet, which are up 26 percent and more than 12 percent respectively so far this month. Broadcom shares are up 35 percent for December after the company this month predicted booming demand for its custom artificial intelligence chips, pushing its market value over \$1 trillion.

But such gains are increasingly sparse. The number of S&P 500 components that declined outpaced those that advanced for 13 straight sessions as of Wednesday, the longest such losing streak in LSEG data that stretches back to 2012. In another worrisome sign, the percentage of S&P 500 stocks trading above their 200-day moving averages declined to 56 percent as of Wednesday, a low for the year, according to Adam Turnquist, chief technical strategist for LPL Financial.

"We recommend waiting for support to be established and for momentum to improve before stepping up to buy the dip," Turnquist said in a note following Wednesday's selloff. — Reuters

"Therefore we paused raising the interest rate" and at the next meeting "will assess the expediency of raising it further", she said. Annual inflation is estimated to have increased to 9.5 percent as of December 16, more than twice the government's four-percent target.

The Russian economy is facing a cocktail of headwinds as its offensive on Ukraine nears the three-year mark. The central bank has predicted a sharp slowdown in growth next year—to below 1.5 percent, from over 3.5 percent this year. Alongside high inflation and labor shortages, Western sanctions have sent the value of the ruble plunging and growth is set to slow next year. That has raised concerns about the possibility Russia could see a period of stagflation—low growth and high interest rates—something economists see as tricky for policy makers to deal with.

High interest rates have so far had only limited impact in bringing down prices, but have triggered a backlash among borrowers and businesses. "The economy can't survive like this for long," German Gref, CEO of Russia's largest lender, state-run Sberbank, said this month. Even Putin's closest allies have complained. — AFP



NOVATO: Customers shop for groceries at a Costco store in Novato, California. — AFP

In September, Fed officials had forecast four quarter-point rate cuts next year. The shallower rate cut path in the latest projections also reflected uncertainty over policies from the incoming Trump administration. Stocks on Wall Street traded higher. The dollar slipped against a basket of currencies. US Treasury yields fell. — Reuters

MONDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2024



A croissant dough mince pie is pictured at Pophams bakery in London.



A croissant dough mince pie is pictured at Pophams bakery.



Pastries, including a croissant dough mince pie, are pictured displayed for sale at Pophams bakery.

## 'Don't mess with our mince pies,' some Brits plead

Every Christmas, Brits devour about 800 million mince pies, but moves to jazz up the festive sweet treats made of dried fruit and pastry are stirring anger among purists. It is the source of some puzzlement to the outside world that British mince pies have not in fact been filled with minced meat for centuries. Instead, the mincemeat encased in an individual shortcrust pastry pie is a mixture of different dried fruits, chopped apples and spices soaked in beverages.

In recent years, however, home cooks and big supermarket chains have begun to experiment, putting their own twist on the pies by adding less traditional ingredients to try to tempt more adventurous palates. Variations include topping the individual oven-baked pies with glaze icing or frangipane, adding chocolate, salted caramel or even custard to the filling—to the dismay of food writer Felicity Cloake.

"Monstrosities" is how Cloake describes such adaptations, telling AFP mince pies "are not broke and do not need fixing". It seems palates have become "so jaded these days that we need to ring the changes and have whatever



A croissant dough mince pie is pictured at Pophams bakery in London.—AFP photos

fashionable flavor is currently dominating TikTok in the pies," she said. She said she wasn't against tweaking recipes, but that the fruit and traditional flavors should always be the star attraction.

### 'Contemporary twist'

Cloake said her main objections to new recipes were they added overpowering flavors and too much sweetness.

Some of her least favorite inventions included adding chocolate or Speculoos biscuits, or worst of all—bacon. Cloake concedes, however, that some innovations can be tasty such as the mince pies produced by London bakery Pophams. Although she said the Pophams' version "tests" her traditionalist stance it was still "really rather good".

The bakery uses its signature croissant dough for a mince pie filled with classic mincemeat and citrus and ginger-flavored cream. It describes it as a blend of "nostalgic flavor with a fresh, contemporary twist". "We have great respect for the classic shortcrust mince pie, but we believe in the power of innovation—especially when it creates something so delicious," said creative director Lucy McWhirter. But some mince pie traditionalists said even careful adaptations were probably "too much".

North London florist Marti Warren, 56, said additions such as chocolate or salted caramel were "my nightmare". "Mince pies should be traditional. I don't like messing with them because they are great as they are", she said, adding that there was also a "nostalgic" element that



A person is pictured eating a croissant dough mince pie at Pophams bakery.

brought back memories of "Christmases of the past". According to Britain's National Archive, a newly discovered 17th century recipe for "minst pyes" included minced meat—often lamb, but sometimes even beef.

### Deep fat fried

Retired American lawyer Andrea Lass agreed that introducing new in-

gredients turned "something simple and pure into something overdone and contrived". Having developed a love of mince pies over 40 years living in Britain, she said her key criteria was that there should be a thin crust and a traditional and plentiful filling. "Don't try to sell me on all crust and no filling because that is like all hat and no cattle as they say in Texas," she said.

With the range of "adapted" mince pies on supermarket shelves seemingly growing every year, Cloake said she was happy to be the person who puts "herself out there" to try to change people's minds. But she had a word of warning for anyone tempted to try deep fat frying them. Having experimented with this in the past, she said the result was "quite delicious" but not something she'd repeat. The filling of shop-bought mince pies becomes so hot when immersed in boiling oil that it is practically "incendiary", she warned. "Don't attempt this after a glass of sherry!" she joked. —AFP



Pedestrians walk past the Eros Cinema, a UNESCO-designated Art Deco cinema theatre in the Cambata Building at Churchgate in Mumbai. — AFP photos



A pedestrian looks at a signboard mapping the UNESCO-designated Art Deco buildings along the Marine Drive promenade in Mumbai.



A security guard walks inside the forecourt of the Seksaria building, a UNESCO-designated Art Deco apartment building along the Marine Drive seafront in Mumbai.

## India's architecture fans guard Mumbai's Art Deco past

A towering cinema with a roofline like an ocean liner stands out in India's financial capital Mumbai, part of a remarkable Art Deco architectural heritage that campaigners say needs protection. A short walk away is a state-run insurance office with giant Egyptian-style carvings, and a palm-lined seafront promenade with pastel-colored apartments with porthole windows, curved balconies and exotic motifs. Architecture aficionados may go crazy over Miami's South Beach, but the coastal Indian megacity is home to what experts believe is one of the world's largest collections of Art Deco buildings.

Decades of neglect, however, have led to buildings being demolished or compromised through slapdash modern renovation. Lovers of the dramatic architecture fear that will only increase as Mumbai undergoes a rapid \$30 billion infrastructure makeover including major road, rail and bridge projects. A sweep of some Art Deco buildings—including offices, colleges and residential complexes—was listed on UNESCO's World Heritage list in 2018, alongside the city's Victorian Gothic architecture for its "unique style" described as "Indo-Deco".

Today, the city's breakneck pace of development has left a small but dedicated group of building owners, architects and heritage lovers trying to conserve the city's Art Deco character. The job requires "constant vigilance", said Nayana Kathpalia, who lives in an Art Deco building that was recently restored—but crucially in a manner that maintained its



A man crosses the street in front of St James Court, a UNESCO-designated Art Deco apartment building along the Marine Drive seafront in Mumbai.

original character.

### 'Modern, open, friendly'

Many apartment building owners are eager to cash in and redevelop their old dwellings, making them part of a cookie-cutter modern skyline. "If too many buildings get done in a totally different style, the World Heritage Site committee will say 'what the hell is happening?'," Kathpalia said. "We are very, very clear that we have to protect that." Losing it could strip the city of its history and character, campaigners say. Art Deco took the West by storm after emerging as a new wave of design in France before the First World War.

Architects used geometric patterns

and streamlined structures to evoke the popular technologies of the time, including airplanes and ocean liners. As a style, Art Deco can appear as an odd hodgepodge, borrowing everything from ancient Mayan to Japanese culture. But the first generation of homegrown Indian architects who visited Europe in the 1920s and 1930s were inspired.

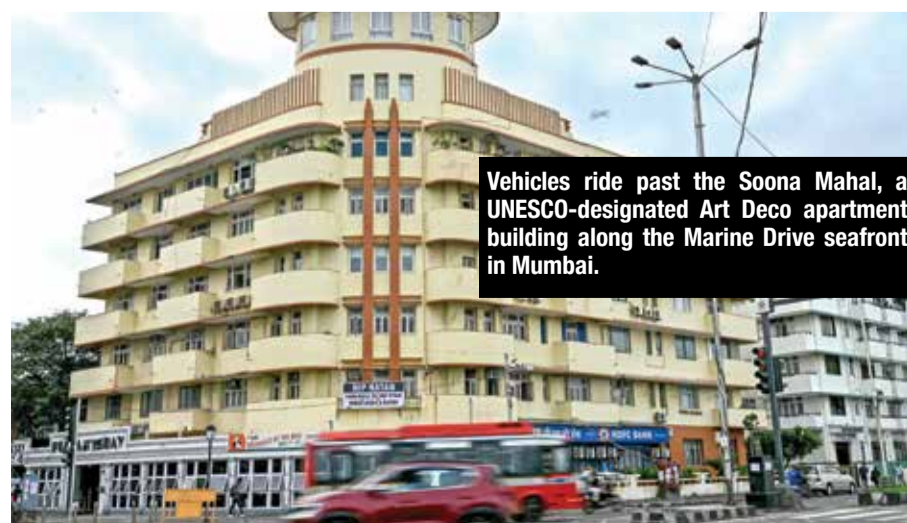
After returning home, they started designing Art Deco style buildings for rich Indian business families that had profited off the economic boom in the port city, said Atul Kumar, founder of a non-profit that seeks to conserve the heritage. Art Deco "enabled a certain cosmopolitanism" and contributed to making Mumbai a "modern, open, friendly" city, Kumar

added.

### 'Bombay style'

While Kumar's Art Deco Mumbai organization has spent years painstakingly documenting buildings, it has also more recently started offering "repair and restoration" help. "We go out, pro bono, and reach out to people," he said, having supported the sensitive restoration of around nine buildings, including a couple in the core World Heritage area. However, there are challenges, including stringent rent control laws which impose financial constraints on landlords. Kumar also admits that residents in newer and northern parts of the city have less of a "desire" to conserve their buildings in their original Art Deco style.

A large part of this is due to a lack of awareness. Many of the city's inhabitants walk past the vivid tropical imagery, elongated turrets and jazzy typography without giving them a second glance. Pranati Mehta, a 46-year-old school teacher, says most Indians only look at "temples as architecture", as they "feel that is special". Some Mumbai residents don't realize they "live amongst art", she said. But Mehta, who was on a weekend walking tour to learn more about the architectural style, quickly adds that Art Deco isn't foreign to Indian sensibilities. "We recognize it as a Bombay style," she said. "We think Art Deco is also an Indian brand". —AFP



Vehicles ride past the Soona Mahal, a UNESCO-designated Art Deco apartment building along the Marine Drive seafront in Mumbai.



A pedestrian walks past the Zaver Mahal, a UNESCO-designated Art Deco apartment building along the Marine Drive seafront in Mumbai.

## Lifestyle



A bare-footed reveler takes a break as people gather to celebrate the pagan festival of 'Winter Solstice' at Stonehenge in Wiltshire in southern England on December 21, 2024. Followers of Druidism, celebrate the pagan solstice festival at the site each year.



Revelers wait for the sun to rise as they take positions to celebrate the pagan festival of 'Winter Solstice' at Stonehenge in Wiltshire in southern England.



Revelers celebrate the pagan festival of 'Winter Solstice' at Stonehenge in Wiltshire in southern England. — AFP photos

## Thousands greet the sun at Stonehenge solstice celebration

**T**housands flocked to Stonehenge on Saturday to greet sunrise at the ancient British monument on the northern hemisphere's shortest day of the year. Spectators cheered and applauded as the sun rose over the neolithic site in southwest England at the winter solstice, a

pagan celebration that is believed to have been observed there for thousands of years. Druids and those wearing folk dress were among the 4,500-strong crowd marking the beginning of the day.

It is one of the few days of the year when visitors are allowed to touch the stones,

which are situated on the alignment of the midsummer sunrise and the midwinter sunset "This is all about renewal, rebirth, we're entering into the new year, and it's also a good time to acknowledge what's taking place in the year that's been," civil servant Chris Smith, 31, told the Press Association.

The Neolithic circle of giant stones has been a source of wonder and mystery for almost 5,000 years -- in the Middle Ages, the wizard Merlin of Arthurian legend was said to have stolen the monument from Ireland. —AFP



A reveler interacts with a stone as people gather to celebrate the pagan festival of 'Winter Solstice' at Stonehenge in Wiltshire in southern England.



Revelers have their faces painted as people gather to celebrate the pagan festival of 'Winter Solstice' at Stonehenge in Wiltshire in southern England.



Druid, Arthur Pendragon look on as people gather to celebrate the pagan festival of 'Winter Solstice' at Stonehenge in Wiltshire in southern England.

## Secretive game developer codes hit 'Balatro' in Canadian prairie province

**T**here are no photos or videos of LocalThunk, an anonymous computer programmer who lives in the vast and desolate prairies of Canada's Saskatchewan province, far from Silicon Valley. His poker-inspired video game "Balatro," however, has proved wildly popular, winning three prizes at the prestigious 2024 Game Awards, taking both the industry and the creator himself by surprise. "When I started making the game I wasn't even thinking of publishing it," he said in an email to AFP.



In this photo illustration taken on December 21, 2024, the mobile game "Balatro" is seen on an iPhone in Washington, DC. — AFP

The game went on to sell more than 3.5 million copies, and was named in several rankings as one of the best games of the year. "Balatro" is a deck-building game that allows players to improve their hand of cards using various strategies, including "cheating." Similar to poker, players can use a variety of "jokers" to rack up points. A community of enthusiasts has quickly turned "Balatro" into a cult hit. It has rave reviews on gaming platforms, and the chat group /balatro on social media platform Reddit has more than 158,000 members.

"The polish in this game is just incredible. I cannot emphasize enough

how tactile the game is and how good it 'feels' while playing. I can almost smell the chips and feel the cards in my hands," user juhiscid enthused. On social media platform X, user @thechowderhead raved: "Balatro is quite possibly one of the greatest roguelikes ever made," referring to a type of video game. Despite all the success, the identity of the game's creator, however, remains a closely guarded secret.

## 'Extra stress'

The Canadian developer, who only responds to media requests by email or on the phone, said he wants to stay in the shadows because "things are simpler that way." While the game's success has led to "extra stress," he said he does not regret making it, as it has allowed him to pursue video game development as a career. In a world dominated by large studios made up of hundreds of staff, "Balatro" was part of a growing wave of hits developed by independent game developers. Other examples of such small-budget big-hitters include "Papers, Please" (2013) and "Stardew Valley" (2016).

It is, however, the exception, more than a trend, according to Emilien Roscanu, spokesperson for the Quebec video game guild. "For every game that's a huge success like this, there are several that are just as good and won't necessarily get the public eye," he said. The industry is difficult to break into as an independent developer, due in part to the volume of games released every day, and the difficulty of competing with the marketing budgets of larger game studios. Solo developers have to wear "multiple hats at once," and therefore "the time dedicated to marketing is especially low," he said.

## 'For fun'

LocalThunk spent three years working solo to develop "Balatro," his first public game. He said he was inspired by a card game from his youth that he wanted to put online so he could continue to play it during the pandemic. Solo development allows him, he said, to "pursue my creative vision without compromise." "I love making games for fun, and working alone is just part of that for me," he added. Despite being nominated for a BAFTA for Best Game 2025, LocalThunk still struggled to explain the success of what he calls his "weird game." "There are so many incredible games launched all the time, I don't know how this happened to me." —AFP

## ARAHMAIANI: THE INDONESIAN ARTIST WITH A THOUSAND LIVES

**I**ndonesian artist Arahmaiani has had many lives -- from an imprisoned then exiled anti-dictatorship activist to a hippie, art teacher and environmentalist -- which have inspired her works that test the limits of freedom. The Southeast Asian artist was a nomad for years because of a crackdown on her paintings, installations and performances, which were viewed as provocative in the conservative Muslim-majority nation. Her works are now on show at Britain's Tate Modern in London for the first time and in November she gave a performance there focusing on violence suffered by Chinese-Indonesians in unrest during the fall of dictator Suharto in the late 1990s.

Her voice and percussion-based performance named "Burning Country" presents a healing process for the community after the trauma from riots still fresh in the memory. Her radical view of that era, questioning of religious tolerance and environmental damage were major themes of her mini-exhibition "The Wrath of Earth" held in the Indonesian capital Jakarta in August and September. "Art should challenge the status quo and provoke thought. It is a means to question our reality and inspire change," she wrote in the exhibition catalogue.

## 'Our Frida Kahlo'

Prominently featured in Jakarta were Lingga and Yoni, masculine and feminine symbols that are Hindu representations of the balance of opposites. Indonesians "wanted to forget these symbols" that were once omnipresent in the archipelago, which was Buddhist, Hindu and animist before becoming the world's most populous Muslim-majority country, she said. "I want to remind myself and others about this forgotten cultural heritage," Arahmaiani, 63, told AFP.

Recognized abroad as one of the region's best artists, she is "less so in Indonesia," said Deborah Iskandar, owner of ASI Gallery in Jakarta that hosted Arahmaiani's exhibition this year. She wanted to host an exhibition for Arahmaiani to "introduce her work to a younger generation of art lovers," she said. Exhibition curator Nasir Tamara calls Arahmaiani "our Frida Kahlo", comparing her to the Mexican feminist and taboo-breaker.

"For young people, Yani (Arahmaiani) is a heroine, she's free. She's been a fighter since university," she said. The



Arahmaiani poses during her solo retrospective exhibition "The Wrath of Earth" at ISA Art Gallery in Jakarta.

black-haired woman with a serene smile from Indonesia's main island of Java now laughs at past controversies. Born in the Javan city of Bandung to a cleric father and a mother of Hindu-Buddhist descent, she studied art at the Bandung Institute of Technology. She was briefly imprisoned there in 1983 following complaints about her works from Islamist parties.

## 'Freedom for everyone'

A 1993 painting "Lingga-Yoni" and 1994 installation "Etalase" caused controversy for combining symbols linked to Islam, Western culture and sexuality. Conservative Muslims called for these works to be censored and Arahmaiani



Arahmaiani (left), the Indonesian visual and performing artist who is internationally known for her works and performances that touch on controversial political or religious issues and her defence of the environment, talks with a visitor during her solo retrospective exhibition "The Wrath of Earth" at ISA Art Gallery in Jakarta. — AFP photos



Items of clothing are pictured inside Charity Super.Mkt at Brent Cross Shopping center in north London.

## Brits kindle Christmas spirit with second-hand gifts



A customer browses Christmas crackers inside an Oxfam charity shop in London.



Items of clothing are pictured hanging on a rail inside Charity Super.Mkt at Brent Cross Shopping center in north London.



A customer browses inside an Oxfam charity shop in London.

**B**ursting with customers one afternoon the week before Christmas, a second-hand charity shop in London's Marylebone High Street looked even busier than the upscale retailers surrounding it. One man grabbed two puzzle sets and a giant plush toy as a present for friends, another picked out a notebook for his wife. "Since the end of September, we've seen a huge uplift in people coming to our shops and shopping pre-loved," said Ollie Mead, who oversees the shop displays -- currently glittering with Christmas decorations -- for Oxfam charity stores around London.

At the chain of second-hand stores run by the British charity, shoppers can find used, or "pre-loved", toys, books, bric-a-brac and clothes for a fraction of the price of new items. Popular in Britain for personal shopping, charity stores and online second-hand retailers are seeing an unlikely surge in interest for Christmas gifts, a time of year often criticized for promoting consumerism and generating waste.

A report last month by second-hand retail platform Vinted and consultants RetailEconomics found UK customers were set to spend £2 billion (\$2.5 billion) on second-hand Christmas gifts this year, around 10 percent of the £20 billion Christmas gift market. In an Oxfam survey last year, 33 percent were going to buy second-hand gifts for Christmas, up from 25 percent in 2021. "This shift is evident on Vinted", Adam Jay, Vinted's marketplace CEO, told AFP.

"We've observed an increase in UK members searching for 'gift' between October and December compared to the same period last year." According to Mead, who has gifted second-hand items for the last three Christmas seasons, sustainability concerns and cost-of-living pressures are "huge factors". Skimming the racks at the central London store, Doctor Ed Burdett found a keychain and notebook for his wife. "We're saving up at the moment, and she likes to give things another life. So it'll be the perfect thing for her," Burdett, 50, told AFP. "It's nice to spend less, and to know that it goes to a good place rather than to a high street shop."

**'Quirky, weird'**  
Wayne Hemingway, designer and co-founder of Charity Super.Mkt, a

brand which aims to put charity shops in empty shopping centers and high street spaces, has himself given second-hand Christmas gifts for "many, many years". "When I first started doing it, it was classed as quirky and weird," he said, adding it was now going more "mainstream". Similarly, when he first

bo was unconvinced. Buying herself a striking orange jacket, she said she "loves vintage".

But for most people, she confessed she would not get a used gift. "Christmas is special, it needs to be something they would cherish, something new," said Odibo. "For Christmas, I'll go and



A customer browses inside an Oxfam charity shop in London.

started selling second-hand clothes over 40 years ago, "at Christmas your sales always nosedive(d) because everybody wanted new".

Now, however, "we are seeing an increase at Christmas sales just like a new shop would", Hemingway told AFP. "Last weekend sales were crazy, the shop was mobbed," he said, adding all his stores had seen a 20-percent higher than expected rise in sales in the weeks before Christmas. "Things are changing for the better... It's gone from second-hand not being what you do at Christmas, to part of what you do."

Young people are driving the trend by making more conscious fashion choices, and with a commitment to a "circular economy" and to "the idea of giving back (in) a society that is being more generous and fair," he said. At the store till, 56-year-old Jennifer Odi-

bo was unconvinced. Buying herself a striking orange jacket, she said she "loves vintage".

"We're on a journey. The world is on a journey, but it's got a long way to go," he added. According to Tetyana Solovey, a sociology researcher at the University of Manchester, "for some people, it could be a bit weird to celebrate it (Christmas) with reusing." "But it could be a shift in consciousness if we might be able to celebrate the new year by giving a second life to something," Solovey told AFP. "That could be a very sustainable approach to Christmas, which I think is quite wonderful." —AFP



Items of clothing are pictured hanging on a rail inside Charity Super.Mkt at Brent Cross Shopping center in north London.



An employee rearranges the Christmas display in the front window of an Oxfam charity shop in London.

## Scientists observe 'negative time' in quantum experiments

**S**cientists have long known that light can sometimes appear to exit a material before entering it -- an effect dismissed as an illusion caused by how waves are distorted by matter. Now, researchers at the University of Toronto, through innovative quantum experiments, say they have demonstrated that "negative time" isn't just a theoretical idea -- it exists in a tangible, physical sense, deserving closer scrutiny.

The findings, yet to be published in a peer-reviewed journal, have attracted both global attention and skepticism. The researchers emphasize that these perplexing results highlight a peculiar quirk of quantum mechanics rather than a radical shift in our understanding of time. "This is tough stuff, even for us to talk about with other physicists. We get misunderstood all the time," said Aephraim Steinberg, a University of Toronto professor specializing in experimental quantum physics. While the term "negative time" might sound like a concept lifted from science fiction, Steinberg defends its use, hoping it will spark deeper discussions about the mysteries of quantum physics.

### Laser experiments

Years ago, the team began exploring interactions between light and matter. When light particles, or photons, pass through atoms, some are absorbed by the atoms and later re-emitted. This interaction changes the atoms, temporarily putting them in a higher-energy or "excited" state before they return to normal. In research led by Daniela Angulo, the team set out to measure how long these atoms stayed in their excited state. "That time turned out to be negative," Steinberg explained -- meaning a duration less than zero.

To visualize this concept, imagine cars entering a tunnel: before the experiment, physicists recognized that while the average entry time for a thousand cars might be, for example, noon, the first cars could exit a little sooner, say 11:59 am. This result was previously dismissed as meaningless. What Angulo and colleagues demonstrated was akin to measuring carbon monoxide levels in the tunnel after the first few cars emerged and finding that the readings had a minus sign in front of them.

### Relativity intact

The experiments, conducted in a cluttered basement laboratory bristling with wires and aluminum-wrapped devices, took over two years to optimize. The lasers used had to be carefully calibrated to avoid distorting the results. Still, Steinberg and Angulo are quick to clarify: no one is claiming time travel is a possibility. "We don't want to say anything traveled backward in time," Steinberg said. "That's a misinterpretation." The explanation lies in quantum mechanics, where particles like photons behave in fuzzy, probabilistic ways rather than following strict rules.

Instead of adhering to a fixed timeline for absorption and re-emission, these interactions occur across a spectrum of possible durations -- some of which defy everyday intuition. Critically, the researchers say, this doesn't violate Einstein's theory of special relativity, which dictates that nothing can travel faster than light. These photons carried no information, sidestepping any cosmic speed limits.

### A divisive discovery

The concept of "negative time" has drawn both fascination and skepticism, particularly from prominent voices in the scientific community. German theoretical physicist Sabine Hossenfelder, for one, criticized the work in a YouTube video viewed by over 250,000 people, noting, "The negative time in this experiment has nothing to do with the passage of time -- it's just a way to describe how photons travel through a medium and how their phases shift." Angulo and Steinberg pushed back, arguing that their research addresses crucial gaps in understanding why light doesn't always travel at a constant speed.

Steinberg acknowledged the controversy surrounding their paper's provocative headline but pointed out that no serious scientist has challenged the experimental results. "We've made our choice about what we think is a fruitful way to describe the results," he said, adding that while practical applications remain elusive, the findings open new avenues for exploring quantum phenomena. "I'll be honest, I don't currently have a path from what we've been looking at toward applications," he admitted. "We're going to keep thinking about it, but I don't want to get people's hopes up." —AFP

## Sports

## Tatum's 43-point triple-double propels Celtics over Bulls

## Stephen Curry nets 31 as Warriors end skid with win over Wolves

LOS ANGELES: Jayson Tatum exploded for 43 points in his first triple-double of the season Saturday as the NBA champion Boston Celtics beat the Chicago Bulls 123-98 to avenge a defeat just days earlier.

Tatum added 16 rebounds and 10 assists in a dominant performance in Chicago, connecting on 16 of his 24 shot attempts and nine of 15 from three-point range. Tatum joined Larry Bird as the only Celtics player to record a 40-point triple-double.

He joined current Clippers star James Harden as the only players to record at least 40 points, 15 rebounds, 10 assists and nine made three-pointers in a game. "It's all about finding your moments to accommodate the game," Tatum said, adding that coach Joe Mazzulla "tries to get me to dominate and amplify my teammates and make guys better".

Kristaps Porzingis added 22 points and Jaylen Brown chipped in 19 for the Celtics, who were stunned 117-108 on their home floor by the Bulls on Thursday. Nikola Vucetic scored 19 points and grabbed 10 rebounds to lead the Bulls while Zach LaVine, who scored 36 on Thursday, was held to 14 points.

The Celtics improved to 22-6 to stay within sight of the Eastern Conference-leading Cleveland Cavaliers, who pushed their league-best record to 25-4 with a 126-99 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers.

Darius Garland scored 26 points to lead six Cavs players in double figures. Tyrese Maxey scored 27 points to lead the Sixers, whose star center Joel Embiid sat out. The Los Angeles Lakers, fueled by 32 points from LeBron James, beat Sacramento 103-99

-- their second victory in three days at the Kings' Golden 1 Center.

Trailing by 10 with less than three minutes to play, the Kings cut the deficit to two points with just over a minute remaining but the Lakers held on. "These two wins have been about us doing the little things, because we have not been able to shoot the ball into the ocean," James said after the Lakers connected on 48.2 percent of their shots overall—and just nine of 35 from three-point range.

"But we've been able to win these two games in this hostile environment because we've done a lot of the little things, and defensively we've been on point." James added seven rebounds and six assists in an aggressive offensive display and came up with four steals on the defensive end.

## Short-handed Bucks win

In Milwaukee, Giannis Antetokounmpo sat out with back spasms and Damian Lillard was sidelined by a calf strain. But Bobby Portis stepped up to score 34 points and lead the Bucks to a 112-101 victory over the Washington Wizards.

The Golden State Warriors bounced back from a stunning 51-point loss to Memphis on Thursday with a 113-103 victory over the Minnesota Timberwolves in Minneapolis. Warriors star Stephen Curry, who had missed all seven of his shot attempts on Thursday, made seven three-pointers on the way to 31 points and handed out 10 assists.

San Antonio Spurs star Victor Wembanyama scored 30 points and equaled his career high with 10 blocked shots as the Spurs cruised past the



CHICAGO: Jayson Tatum #0 of the Boston Celtics drives to the basket during the game against the Chicago Bulls on December 21, 2024 at United Center in Chicago, Illinois. — AFP

Portland Trail Blazers 114-94. Jalen Brunson delivered an eye-catching 39 points to lead the New York Knicks in a 104-93 victory over the New Orleans Pelicans.

But Kevin Durant's 43 points weren't enough for the Phoenix Suns, who fell 133-125 to the visiting Detroit Pistons. Cade Cunningham scored 28 points

and pulled down 13 rebounds for the Pistons, who had seven players score in double figures.

The Orlando Magic matched the largest comeback in franchise history, erasing a 25-point deficit to beat the Miami Heat 121-114. Cole Anthony scored 35 points off the bench—including 13 in the final period for the Magic. — AFP

## Stokes out of England's Champions Trophy squad

LONDON: England Test captain Ben Stokes has been ruled out of next year's Champions Trophy one-day international tournament in Pakistan and the preceding white-ball tour of India, team management announced Sunday.

The 33-year-old star all-rounder was not considered after damaging a hamstring during England's defeat by New Zealand in the third Test at Hamilton earlier this month. "Durham all-rounder Ben Stokes was not considered for selection as he continues to be assessed following a left hamstring injury sustained," said an England and Wales Cricket Board statement.

Stokes did not bat in the second innings of that match as England slumped to a 423-run defeat—a result that meant his side still won a three-match series 2-1. He previously missed this year's home series against Sri Lanka and the first Test in Pakistan due to hamstring issues.

With England facing a five-match Test series at home to India starting in June before their pinnacle 2025/26 Ashes tour of Australia, team management have decided against risking inspirational red-ball skipper Stokes.

Key batsman Joe Root, who preceded Stokes as Test captain, returns to the ODI side for the first time since the 2023 World Cup in India. Fast bowler Mark Wood, who missed the recent Test tours of both Pakistan and New Zealand, with a bone-stress injury to his right elbow, is in both squads.

The India series and Champions Trophy will mark England's first limited-overs tour and tournament under coach Brendon McCullum, previously just in charge of the Test side.

## Buttler stays as captain

Jos Buttler, who missed the recent ODI series against the West Indies with a calf injury, remains captain of the two white-ball teams despite England surrendering both their 50-over and T20 world titles since November 2023.

But it is possible the dashing batsman, replaced as skipper in the Caribbean by all-rounder Liam Livingstone, may not keep wicket, as he has for much of his limited-overs career. Both the ODI squad for the India tour and the Champions Trophy, as well as the squad for five T20s in India in January, feature two other wicketkeepers in Test gloveman Jamie Smith, who missed the New Zealand series to attend the birth of his first child, and Phil Salt.

Meanwhile, 21-year-old rising star Jacob Bethell, who marked his debut Test series with three fifties in New Zealand, is included in both squads. Leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed joins the T20 squad, while Root is selected only for the ODIs. The tour party leaves for India on January 17, with the first match of a five-game series against T20 world champions India in Kolkata on January 22.

India and England will then play a three-match ODI series, in preparation for the Champions Trophy, starting in Nagpur on February 6. Match dates for the Champions Trophy, which also features Pakistan as well as Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, have yet to be announced, with the tournament due to run from February 19 to March 9.

England ODI squad for India tour and 2025 Champions Trophy in Pakistan:

Jos Buttler (capt/wkt), Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson, Jacob Bethell, Harry Brook, Brydon Carse, Ben Duckett, Jamie Overton, Jamie Smith (wkt), Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Joe Root, Saqib Mahmood, Phil Salt (wkt), Mark Wood. — AFP

## Al-Tomouh celebrates opening ceremony of Khaleeji Zain 26

KUWAIT: Coinciding with the celebration of the opening of the 26th edition of the Arabian Gulf Cup football tournament, Al-Tomouh Sports Club for people with mental disabilities sought on Saturday to share with its members of athletes, their families, administrative and technical staff of the club the joy of the opening and watch the matches through a live screening hall in order to activate the element of integration in the community.

The hall witnessed a distinctive presence of athletes with mental disabilities, who showed remarkable interaction with the proceedings of the impressive opening ceremony, along with the administrative and technical staff of the club, as



Athletes with mental disabilities singing Kuwait's national anthem.

well as workers and those interested in the field of care and rehabilitation of people with disabilities to participate in watching the Kuwait-Oman match and the following matches within the tournament

schedule. The Kuwait Tomouh Club is keen to organize these events to enable athletes to follow sports events and create a distinctive interactive atmosphere for them and their families.

## International shooting championship concludes

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: In the presence of the President of the Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations, Duaij Khalaf Al-Otaibi, the International Sporting Clays Shooting Championship concluded Saturday, which was held at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex under the patronage of the President of the International Sporting Clays Federation, Jean-François Palinkas which was held over three consecutive days during the period from 19 to 21 December 2024 with the participation of Kuwait Shooting Sport Club shooters.

Duaij Khalaf Al-Otaibi, President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations - and Honorary Member of the International Sporting Shooting Federation (FTASC) and Obaid Manahi Al-Osaimi, Secretary General of the Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations, distributed the prizes to the winning shooters.

In his speech, President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations praised the level of the sporting shooters in Kuwait who participated in this tournament and praised the support of the Public Authority for Sport and all the volunteers and referees who managed the tournament, and thanked Jean-François Palinkas - President of the International Sporting Federation, a friend of Kuwait shooting.

Al-Otaibi added that sporting shooting is in continuous development and attracts many shooters and international federations, and Kuwait Shooting Sport



Duaij Khalaf Al-Otaibi with the winning shooters.

Federation is a member of the International Sporting Shooting Federation.

Al-Otaibi thanked His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (may Allah protect him) and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah (may Allah protect him) for their unlimited support for this noble sport, and thanked all the organizations that supported the club in performing its mission to represent the State of Kuwait.

In a statement after the tournament, Obaid Manahi Al-Osaimi, Secretary General of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations, said that it is fortunate that our ceremony coincides with the first anniversary of the assumption of the reins of government of the country by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah "may Allah protect him", praying to the Almighty to bestow upon him the best of health and well-being

to continue the process of goodness and giving for our dear country.

Al-Osaimi explained that the club prepared this tournament to encourage shooters to practice the sport of Sporting Clays in an organized manner according to the laws of the International Shooting Federation, as Kuwait is a member of this federation, and there are ready ranges in the Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex that can host local, regional and international championships. Al-Osaimi appreciated the role played by the organizing committee for the tournament, in which a large number of shooters competed honorably to win this championship.

The results of the International Sporting Shooting Federation Championship were as follows:

First place: Khalid Mohammed Al-Ajmi  
Second place: Hamoud Badr Al-Sinan  
Third place: Fahad Eid Al-Mutairi

## Chiefs beat Texans while Ravens clinch playoff spot

WASHINGTON: Patrick Mahomes threw for one touchdown and ran for another as the Kansas City Chiefs improved to an NFL-best 14-1 on Saturday while the Baltimore Ravens beat Pittsburgh to secure a playoff berth.

The two-time reigning Super Bowl champion Chiefs defeated Houston 27-19 and need only another win or loss by the Buffalo Bills (11-3) to clinch a top seed and home-field edge throughout the AFC playoffs. Mahomes completed 28-of-41 passes for 260 yards and a touchdown and ran five times for 33 yards and a touchdown, quickly serving notice he had recovered from a high left ankle sprain suffered in a victory over Cleveland last weekend.

"To go out there and find a way to win with everybody was a good moment for us," Mahomes said. "Our offensive line did a great job accepting the challenge." Baltimore's Lamar Jackson threw for 207 yards and three touchdowns and Derrick Henry ran



BALTIMORE: Derrick Henry #22 of the Baltimore Ravens is tackled by Minkah Fitzpatrick #39 and Cory Trice Jr. #27 of the Pittsburgh Steelers during the fourth quarter at M&T Bank Stadium. — AFP

for 162 yards as the Ravens ripped the Steelers 34-17 to clinch an NFL playoff berth.

"We knew what type of game this would be," Jackson said. "I feel like we played a better game against those guys and we got it done. It feels good." After four losses in his five prior games with Pittsburgh, Jackson was happy he "got the little monkey

off my back for the time being right now."

The Steelers and Ravens, both 10-5 and sharing the AFC North division lead, are with the Chiefs, Bills and Texans in having clinched AFC playoff berths. Detroit, Minnesota and Philadelphia have secured NFC playoff spots. "We've just got to keep going," Jackson said. "We've got to stay dialed in." All four teams in action Saturday will play again on Christmas with Baltimore at Houston and the Chiefs at Pittsburgh next Wednesday, their third game in 11 days. "I'll get off my feet a little bit and watch some film," Mahomes said.

Singer Taylor Swift, the girlfriend of Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce, was among those watching the team complete a perfect 8-0 home mark for the first time since 2003. The Chiefs won their 11th game this season by eight points or fewer, a stunning success rate in one-score margin contests.

Kansas City safety Jaden Hicks intercepted a CJ Stroud pass to set up an 11-play, 66-yard Chiefs touchdown drive that was capped when Mahomes ran 15 yards to the end zone. Ka'imi Fairbairn's 33-yard field goal and Stroud's 10-yard touchdown pass to Dalton Stroud gave Houston a 10-7 lead but Kareem Hunt's 3-yard touchdown run and Harrison Butker's 44-yard field goal put the Chiefs ahead 17-10 at half-time. — AFP

Sports

Oleksandr Usyk beats Tyson Fury in heavyweight championship rematch

Unbeaten across two divisions and cement his place among the greats

RIYADH: Oleksandr Usyk won his heavyweight championship rematch against Tyson Fury by unanimous decision overnight on Saturday to stay unbeaten across two divisions and cement his place among the greats.

The Ukrainian, who forced the pace and repeatedly tagged Fury with his accurate left hook, was awarded the fight 116-112 by all three judges, handing Fury his second straight loss. Usyk's win takes him to 23-0 with 14 knockouts and extends one of the all-time best careers that includes Olympic gold and undisputed champion at cruiserweight.

"He's a great fighter, it's a great performance," Usyk, 37, said of Fury, who was unbeaten over 35 fights until he lost their four-belt unification bout in May. "Unbelievable 24 rounds for my career." Only the WBA, WBO and WBC belts were on the line this time after Usyk, focused on the lucrative rematch, relinquished his IBF title rather than face challenger Daniel Dubois.

By beating Fury in May, "The Cat" had already joined the likes of Muhammad Ali, Joe Louis and Mike Tyson as undisputed heavyweight, and the first of the four-belt era. "He's my best friend," he said of Fury. "I respect this guy because I think he's a really tough opponent. Tyson Fury makes me strong."

'Crazy man'

But the defeat opens up an uncertain future for the 36-year-old Fury, now 34-2-1, who announced his retirement in 2022 only to return to the ring. "I thought I've won both fights, but then again I've got two losses on my record now, so there's not much I can do about it," said the Briton, who refused to discuss his next steps.

Promoter Frank Warren also called the judges'

decision "nuts". But Usyk dismissed his complaints. "Uncle Frank, I think is blind... crazy man," joked the Ukrainian. Fury, wearing a Santa-style red-and-white robe and bushy beard, appeared to Mariah Carey's "All I Want For Christmas Is You", before a determined-looking Usyk strode out in Cossack gear.

The 6ft 9ins (206cm) Briton's jab held Usyk at bay early on and he landed a jarring right in round two. Usyk caught Fury flush with a left as he raised the pace in round three. They went toe-to-toe in a punishing fifth round, with Fury pummeling body shots while Usyk launched a flurry to the head. In the sixth, he stung Fury with a clean hit to the nose. The supremely fit Usyk, renowned for taking charge in the closing rounds, was the aggressor in the seventh, tagging Fury with a hook as the "Gypsy King" backed away.

Fury regained the initiative in the ninth, wielding his jab and one-two combinations and leaning on the Ukrainian, employing his career-heaviest 281lb (127.4kg) of weight. It was see-saw stuff as they traded blows but Usyk rocked Fury in the 11th with a lightning combination that ended with yet another left hook to the face. An Usyk uppercut to Fury's chin highlighted a furious final round and there seemed little doubt about the winner as the Ukrainian sank to his knees, arms aloft.

Ancient sabre

Usyk, who briefly served as a soldier after the Russian invasion, then celebrated by holding up a sabre that belonged to Ivan Mazepa, a hero of Ukrainian nationalism who fought against Russian control in the early 1700s.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was quick to hail the victory, calling it proof that



RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's General Entertainment Authority Chairman Turki al-Sheikh (2nd-R), Ukraine's Oleksandr Usyk (L), and Britain's Tyson Fury (R) stand up as the Saudi national anthem is sung before the heavy-weight world championship rematch at the Kingdom Arena in Riyadh. — AFP

Ukraine "will not give up what's ours" after nearly three years of war with Russia. "Victory!" Zelensky said in a post on Telegram. "So important and so necessary for all of us now."

Reports put the prize purse at an increased \$190 million with Usyk, as defending champion, expected to receive the bigger share—a reversal of fortunes from May. The fight sits high in the portfolio

of Saudi Arabia's oil-funded push into sports, which has drawn accusations of "sportswashing" its dubious human rights record.

After Formula One, the LIV Golf tour, Newcastle United and a swathe of ageing football stars, the conservative kingdom's strategy confirmed its crowning moment this month when it was awarded football's 2034 World Cup. — AFP

Al-Kharafi crowned winner of Equestrian Federation League

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Club rider Ali Al-Kharafi was crowned winner of the second round of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation League, which was held at the Messila Club track. Al-Kharafi succeeded in achieving the fastest time (36.30) seconds, in the differentiation round at a height of 140 cm, ahead of the riders, Nick Channing, Yara Al-Humaidi, Fawaz Al-Rashed and Abdullah Al-Awadi, as the Federation's Technical Director, Walid Al-Jassim, crowned the champions.

International judge Nadhar Al-Mustafa headed the judging committee, which included riders Raghad Al-Dabous and Ibtisam Al-Aroui, and the course was designed by Michel Esmalon, assisted by Muhammad Al-Saeed, and Dr Yahya Al-Hadban and Badr Al-Heifi, arena referees. It is noteworthy



Ali Al-Kharafi seen with other winners and officials.

that the rider of the Kuwait Equestrian Club did not participate in the first round of the league because he was in Saudi Arabia to participate in the international tournament.

third consecutive game will face fresh scrutiny after United's wretched performance. Amorim surprisingly omitted the 27-year-old England forward from the squad for United's win at Manchester City last weekend, prompting Rashford to hint he was willing to leave the club for a "new challenge".

Rashford was at Old Trafford wearing a United tracksuit amid his extended exile as Amorim made six changes from the line-up beaten 4-3 by Tottenham in the League Cup quarter-finals. Again, United were exposed at set-pieces in the 29th minute when Bournemouth's teenage defender Dean Huijsen punished poor marking at a free-kick to glance a header past goalkeeper Andre Onana.

There was even worse to come for Amorim in the second half as Justin Kluivert doubled fifth-placed Bournemouth's advantage with a 61st minute penalty following Noussair Mazraoui's foul on the forward.

Antoine Semenyo compounded United's misery two minutes later with a cool finish from Dango Ouattara's pass.

'Tough stadium'

With leaders Liverpool playing at Tottenham on Sunday's late game, second-placed Chelsea would have gone top, for at least a few hours, if they had won at Everton. But Enzo Maresca's side had to settle for a goalless stalemate that ended their five-match winning run in the league. Chelsea sit one point behind Liverpool who have two games in hand on the Blues. "That was a real game. Everton are one of the best teams in Europe in terms of clean-sheets. We are very happy because this is a tough stadium, not only for us but also in the Premier League," Maresca said.

It was an encouraging start to a new era for Ever-

Bashar Abdullah said the Equestrian Federation is led by riders who love the sport. He emphasized that equestrian sports have attracted many fans who love equestrian sports in recent years, and every tournament I follow, I notice the attendance and numbers are increasing significantly, in all ages.

Bashar said dealing with the Equestrian Federation is always distinctive, smooth and comfortable, as they are young people who love sports and came to serve the sport and are mainly horsemen, such as Yousef Al-Sabah, Ghazi Al-Jariwi, Raghad Al-Dabous, Ali Al-Kharafi and Abdulrahman Al-Fuzai."

Bashar Abdullah, Director General of the Public Authority for Sport, congratulated the Board of Directors of the Federation on their victory by acclamation and the confidence of the General Assembly in them to lead Kuwait equestrianism for the next four years.

He attended the second round of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation League Championship, and was welcomed by the Secretary General of the Equestrian Federation, Ghazi Faisal Al-Jariwi, Board of Directors member Abdulrahman Al-Fuzai, Abdullah Walid Al-Osaimi, and Technical Director of the Federation, Walid Khalaf Al-Jassim.



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Moroccan defender Noussair Mazraoui fouls Bournemouth's Dutch striker Justin Kluivert for a penalty at Old Trafford on Dec 22, 2024. — AFP

ton—four points clear of the relegation zone—under new owners the Friedkin Group, whose purchase brought an end to Farhad Moshiri's tumultuous tenure. Wolves boss Vitor Pereira enjoyed a dream debut as his side won 3-0 at relegation rivals Leicester.

Replacing the sacked Gary O'Neil, Pereira made an immediate impact after leaving his role at Saudi Pro League side Al-Shabab. Goncalo Guedes started the Pereira era with a flourish as he met Nelson Semedo's cross with an agile finish in the 19th minute. In the 36th minute, Rodrigo Gomes slid in to notch his first goal for Wolves before Matheus Cunha's 44th minute strike ensured third-bottom Wolves would move within two points of fourth-bottom Leicester. — AFP

Atletico snatch late win at Barca to top La Liga

BARCELONA: Atletico Madrid came from behind to snatch a last-gasp 2-1 victory over Barcelona and claim leadership of La Liga on Saturday. Pedri sent the Catalans ahead but second-half goals from Rodrigo De Paul and Alexander Sorloth helped Diego Simeone's side move three points clear at the top of the table, having played one match fewer than Barca.

Hansi Flick's side dominated at the Olympic stadium but Atletico clung on before claiming a 12th consecutive victory across all competitions with Sorloth's stoppage-time strike. Barcelona started the season in superb form but have stumbled in recent weeks and have now won just one of their last seven league games.

This was their third consecutive home league defeat, their worst such run since 1987, while it was also Simeone's first ever away triumph against Barcelona in La Liga. "It's inexplicable... we had the game in our hands and we didn't take advantage," said Barcelona defender Pau Cubarsi. Champions Real Madrid face Sevilla on Sunday and can also move ahead of Barcelona with a victory. "It's truly a tough defeat to take, when you don't finish a game, this is what can happen," Pedri told Movistar.

"We have the break now to reset mentally and physically." Barcelona, missing injured teenage star Lamine Yamal, controlled the first half and suffocated Atletico with their press. "We will fight for everything, we will fight for every point to win this (league)," insisted Flick, who said he was pleased with the performance despite the result.

"This is how we want to play in the future, so we will take this and bring it with us to next year." Barcelona took the lead after 30 minutes with Pedri both the architect and scorer of the goal. The Spain midfielder burst forward with the ball and fed Gavi, who tried to turn and inadvertently nudged the ball back to the surging Pedri, who entered the box and slotted past Oblak.

Barcelona should have doubled their lead early in the second half, with Fermin Lopez denied by Oblak's legs before Raphinha hit the crossbar. Pedri played in the Brazilian winger with a fine pass over the top and Raphinha lofted the ball over the goalkeeper but it struck the woodwork on its way down. Moments later Atletico were level, with Marc Casado's misguided backheel clearance falling to De Paul on the edge of the area. The in-form Argentine midfielder finished with a firm low effort into the bottom corner for his third goal in his last four league games. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

Table with 2 columns: Clinic Name, Contact Number

Table with 2 columns: Hospital Name, Contact Number

Hospitals

Table with 2 columns: Hospital Name, Contact Number

Change of Name

I, Agnelo Saluzinho D'Costa, holder of Passport No. P0775908 do hereby change my name to Angelo Saluzinho Da Costa. I will henceforth be known in the name of Angelo Saluzinho Da Costa and, I also undertaken to carry out this name change in all my documents. #6614, 23/12/2024

Tapiya and I also undertake to carry out this name change in my all documents. #6613, 22/12/2024

I, MUSTAFA, holder of Indian Passport No. P0359918 having permanent address: 11, Bohra Bakhal Ward No.12, Rajgarh Dist. Dhar 454116 Madhya Pradesh, India, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) MUSTAFA and (surname) BOHRA. #6612, 20/12/2024

## Iraq go top as Ayman Hussein's goal earns dramatic 1-0 win over Yemen

Qatar tie with UAE 1-1 in Khaleeji Zain 26 Cup



KUWAIT: Iraqi striker Ayman Hussein scored the only goal of the match. — KUNA

**KUWAIT:** The Iraqi football team achieved a difficult victory over its Yemeni counterpart with a score of (1-0) in the beginning of their journey in the Arabian Gulf Cup (Khaleeji Zain 26), which is hosted by the State of Kuwait until January 3. The match, which was held at the Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah Stadium in the first round of Group II, came amid an ideal and enthusiastic atmosphere from the fans of the two teams.

The defending champions Iraq imposed its control from the first minute of the meeting, as the first corner kick was recorded in its favor in the second minute, after which the first 10 minutes passed without much danger to the goals of both teams.

The Iraqi team continued to dominate the game until the 20th minute, which witnessed a shot that went past the left post of Yemeni goalkeeper Muhammad Aman, followed by another dangerous attack that ended with a shot by striker Ayman Hussein that went past the right side of the Yemeni goalkeeper.

In contrast to the course of the game, the Yemenis threatened the Iraqi goal in the 26th minute with an or-

ganized counterattack after the Iraqi defense left its area unattended, but Yemen's Nasser Al-Ghawashi's shot went into the outer net of the goal. Two minutes later, Yemen launched the most dangerous attack of the match with a clear breakaway for its striker Omar Al-Dahi, who shot over the Iraqi goal amid the heartbreak of the Yemeni fans in the 33rd minute. The Yemeni goalkeeper saved a second consecutive shot from afar, preventing Iraq from scoring its first goal in the tournament, and then the Iraqis continued their absolute control until the end of the first half without shaking the nets of either team until the end of the first half.

With the start of the second half, the Iraqi team returned to control the course of the game with a tight and organized defense from the Yemeni side until the 64th minute from Iraqi striker Ayman Hussein to score the lead goal from a strong header that the Yemeni goalkeeper was unable to save, while Yemen's Nasser Al-Ghawashi did not take advantage of his solitude to shoot a strong kick into the outer net of Iraq's goal. After that the tempo of the game calmed down and

the Iraqi team was able to manage it in its favor calmly until the end to achieve a valuable victory to temporarily lead the group pending the outcome of Saudi and Bahrain meeting scheduled for later.

The Qatar's national football team drew with the Emirati team 1-1 on Saturday in the first match in Group A of the "Khaleeji Zain 26". Qatari player Akram Afif started scoring with a penalty kick in the 17th minute. The UAE team's did not surrender and pressed till player Yahya Al-Ghassani scored the equalizer in the 46th minute.

The UAE team dominated the second half of the match and reached the Qatari goal several times but failed to score thanks to the tight Qatari defense. Both teams earned their first point in the tournament, equaling the Kuwaiti and Omani teams who tied with the same score earlier today. The second round of the group will be played on Tuesday when the Qatari team faces its Omani counterpart at Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah Stadium, while the Kuwaiti team meets its Emirati counterpart at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium. — KUNA

## Khaleeji Zain 26 kicks off with two draws

**KUWAIT:** Khaleeji Zain 26 kicked off with the opening ceremony with dazzling display of fireworks, which relied on many sound and light effects with the latest international technologies, and many charming artistic paragraphs, which won the approval of everyone.

The first round of the "Khaleeji Zain 26" tournament witnessed two draws in the first round of the group, the first was between Kuwait, the host of the tournament with brotherly Oman which ended in 1-1 draw, while Qatar and UAE also drew at the Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadium in Sulabiya.

For his part, President of the Asian Football Confederation and First Vice President of FIFA Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al-Khalifa stressed that the high patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is an honor for the Gulf sports family, and an expression of the care and attention that His Highness gives to the sports movement.

Khaleeji is of great importance because it is a great sporting legacy that has contributed to several qualitative shifts for Gulf football at various regional, continental and international levels, and this has extended to the sports infrastructure of the Gulf countries, which has developed significantly, enabling them to host the most prominent international sports events," he said.



Juan Antonio Pizzi

Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al-Khalifa praised the quality of the organization and dazzling opening ceremony of Khaleeji Zain 26. "Kuwait is capable of achieving the highest levels of organizational success in the 26th Gulf Cup because of its national cadres with world-class technical and administrative expertise," he said, wishing success to all participating teams.

For his part, tournament director Meshal Al-Subaie congratulated everyone on the occasion of the launch of "Khaleeji Zain 26", and said: "We were honored by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad, at the opening of the tournament, and the good efforts made over the past months culminated in a special review ceremony that won the approval of all."

Al-Subaie stated that the participation of the Gulf brothers in this distinctive sports, cultural and social gathering is a milestone in "Khaleeji Zain 26", adding that we will continue to work with the same quality that everyone saw on the first day of the tournament, and we will ensure good organization in its various aspects.

**Pizzi:** Forced substitutions

The national team coach, Juan Antonio Pizzi, emphasized that the strong start of the Kuwaiti players was not enough to win the points against Oman in the opening match of the "Khaleeji Zain 26" tournament, which ended in a 1-1 draw.

Pizzi stated that the draw is not a negative result in the face of the strong Omani team, adding that we made forced substitutions, due to injury, perhaps the first of which was Reda Hani, while Yusuf Nasser was replaced due to his lack of full readiness.

The Kuwait's national team coach praised the great support of the fans in the opening match, and said: "I hope that the support will continue in the coming matches, as we have important matches against the UAE and Qatar in the next two rounds, during which we hope to provide the best results to achieve a positive result."

**Jaber:** We are suffering from starting games

For his part, Oman coach Rasheed Jaber attributed the 1-1 draw with Kuwait to the nature of the opening matches and their difficulty, especially against the home side, and said: "We suffered from a lack of concentration in the first half, and in the second half we were unable to translate the advantage into goals."

The Omani coach stated that his team sought to achieve victory, but the result of the match went to a positive draw, adding that I have confidence in all the players to move forward in the "Khaleeji Zain 26" competitions.

**Garcia:** I wanted to win and we succeeded tactically

Qatari coach Luis Garcia expressed

his satisfaction with the result of his team's match with the UAE, which ended in a 1-1 draw in the first round of Group A of the "Khaleeji Zain 26" tournament, and said: "I wished to get the three points, but we came out with a sufficiently satisfactory draw."

He stated that the Qatari team presented a distinguished first half, adding that we succeeded in imposing our tactical style in the first half of the game; which enabled the team to score the first goal, and we were very close to adding a second goal, but luck was not on our side.

Garcia pointed out that the technical staff will start working to address the negatives that appeared in the first match of Qatar the "Khaleeji Zain 26", to ensure that they are not repeated, and to improve the technical quality of the team through good preparation for meeting the Omani team in the second round.

**Pinto:** We deserved a better result

UAE coach Paulo Pinto said that his team could have come out with a better result than the 1-1 draw with Qatar in their match in the first round of Group A of the "Khaleeji Zain 26" tournament.

"The level of the Qatari team is very different from the last two matches between the two teams in the World Cup qualifiers, as we played against a very good team that has its own philosophy," Pinto said.

Pinto pointed out that his team could have achieved more than a point after controlling most of the match, adding that our start was not as required, but over time we succeeded in holding the reins and controlling the midfield.

## AFC chairman lauds Amir's sponsorship of Khaleeji Zain 26

**KUWAIT:** Chairman of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), the First Deputy of FIFA President Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al-Khalifa on Sunday lauded the gracious sponsorship by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah of the Arabian Gulf Cup tournament (Khaleeji Zain 26).



Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al-Khalifa

His Highness the Amir's sponsorship of the championship is an honoring for "the Gulf sport family and an affirmation of His Highness care for the sports movement in general and football in particular," said Sheikh Salman in a statement on the heels of his attendance of the tournament inauguration at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

The Gulf cup competitions have contributed to boosting skills of the GCC countries' teams and enabling them to compete at the regional and continental levels, he said.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's organization of this important sporting event is a source of great pride for the country's leadership and people, appreciating the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah of the tournament, Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi said in a joint statement to Kuwait TV and Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) after the meeting.

Minister Al-Mutairi stressed that the GCC's General Secretariat, led by Jassem Al-Budaiwi, is playing a major role in strengthening joint Gulf action in various fields and organizing more activities aimed at developing Gulf youth. For his part, Al-Budaiwi in a similar statement praised the distinguished organization of the tournament, the dazzling opening ceremony that expressed a unified Gulf vision towards a bright future. — KUNA