





3

Recap of Crown Prince's major events of the year




5

US, Ukraine 'a lot closer' on deal, 'thorny issues' remain




9

Oil's next 3 years: Oversupply risks, flattening demand curve



14

Boxer Joshua injured in Nigeria highway crash



# GCC leads in social protection

## Amir receives report on Kuwait's GCC Supreme Council presidency



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a report on Kuwait's presidency of the 45th session of the GCC Supreme Council from GCC Secretary General Jasem Al-Budaiwi at Bayan Palace on Dec 29, 2025. — Amiri Diwan

KUWAIT/MUSCAT: HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Monday Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jasem Al-Budaiwi at Bayan Palace. Al-Budaiwi presented HH the Amir with a report on Kuwait's presidency of the 45th session of the GCC Supreme Council.

Meanwhile, data released by the GCC Statistical Center on Monday showed that the experience of GCC countries in social protection represents an advanced model regionally and internationally, combining social justice with economic efficiency. In its report titled "The Reality and Policies of Social Protection in GCC Countries", the center said that investing in people is the most reliable path to achieving stability, prosperity and sustainable development, and to building a more inclusive and cohesive Gulf society now and in the future.

The report stated that GCC countries outperform others in various international indicators related to social protection, with

all GCC states classified as having very high human development according to the Human Development Index 2025. This reflects progress in key areas such as health, education and quality of life. GCC countries also exceed the global average in the Social Progress Index 2025, highlighting their leadership in enhancing human well-being and comprehensive development.

The report noted that average per capita GDP in GCC countries in 2024 was nearly three times the global average, while all GCC states ranked among the top six regionally in West Asia and Africa in the Global Competitiveness Index. This demonstrates the strength of their economies and their ability to finance extensive social protection networks with relatively high spending levels.

It added that 100 percent of GCC populations have access to education, healthcare, clean water and electricity, and that the region is free of slums or inadequate housing, compared with 24.7 percent

globally. This achievement underscores the inclusiveness of social policies and the effectiveness of service infrastructure, reinforcing the GCC's status as an advanced model in urban planning and equitable access to adequate housing.

According to the report, government spending on social protection in GCC countries ranged between 19.2 percent and 22.9 percent of total government expenditure in 2022, reflecting the priority given to investing in people as a key driver of economic growth and social stability.

The center explained that GCC social protection systems cover all stages of the life cycle, starting with childhood — where 100 percent of children under five are registered in civil registries, compared to 77.2 percent globally — through working age via programs covering unemployment, work injuries, maternity and paternity benefits, and into old age through generous mandatory pension systems, with

Continued on Page 6

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Fliers urged to enter details

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Civil Aviation urged travelers to accurately enter their own phone numbers and email addresses when booking flights, whether through travel agencies or airlines. Agencies and airlines are not allowed to use their own contact details instead of the passenger's. The measure aims to ensure passengers receive flight updates such as delays, cancellations and security alerts directly. Travelers who find their contact details missing or incorrect can file a complaint through the Sahel platform. — KUNA

#### Bahrain raises fuel prices

DUBAI: Bahrain has launched major fiscal reform measures that included raising fuel prices, electricity and water tariffs, and dividends from state-owned companies, a government statement said on Monday. The Gulf country is also raising natural gas prices for businesses and cutting administrative government expenditure by 20 percent. — Reuters

#### Saudi ups Binladin Group stake

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's finance ministry has increased its stake in the country's biggest construction firm Binladin International Holding Group to 86.38 percent, state television reported on Monday, describing it as a debt-conversion deal. It did not disclose financial details or say by how much the stake was being raised. Previous media reports have said the state owned 36 percent. — Reuters

#### Halbousi elected Iraq speaker

BAGHDAD: Iraq's parliament elected Sunni Muslim lawmaker Haibat Al-Halbousi as speaker at its opening session on Monday following November's national election, launching a process to form a new government that often takes months. A parliamentary statement said Halbousi secured 208 out of a total of 283 votes. The speaker plays a key role in maintaining legislative order, mediating disputes and building consensus in Iraq's sectarian-oriented and often fragmented political system. — Reuters

## Two more heart transplants raise Kuwait total to 13

KUWAIT: The health ministry announced on Monday the successful performance of two heart transplant surgeries by medical teams at the Salman Al-Dabbous Cardiac Center, bringing the total number of heart transplants in Kuwait to 13 since the launch of the national heart transplant program. The ministry said the achievement reflects the solid capacity of the national health system to handle highly complex and delicate medical interventions.

The ministry added that this milestone strengthens Kuwait's position among countries capable of providing advanced heart transplant services, improving quality of life for patients with end-stage heart failure and highlighting investment in medical expertise and advanced healthcare infrastructure.

It noted that the progress is a clear indicator of the rapid development of the local heart transplant program, providing a vital treatment option for patients with advanced heart failure and reinforcing medical self-sufficiency. The success also confirms the readiness

of national teams to perform high-risk, precision surgeries as part of building a robust national organ transplant system.

Consultant cardiac surgeon at the Salman Al-Dabbous Center, Dr Riyadh Tarazi, praised the achievement, noting that 2025 alone witnessed eight successful heart transplants, compared to one case in 2019, one in 2021, one in 2023 and two in 2024, in coordination with the organ procurement program — reflecting continuous growth in the center's clinical and technical expertise.

Dr Tarazi added that the center has successfully implanted left ventricular assist devices (LVADs) in 84 cases. These devices support patients with severe heart failure unresponsive to conventional treatment, either as a bridge until a donor heart becomes available or as long-term therapy for some patients. He also noted that medical teams have successfully implanted IMPELLA 5.5 heart support devices in 20 cases. This precise mechanical device provides temporary cardiac support in cases of acute circulatory collapse or during complex interventions to stabilize blood circulation until heart function improves.

The statement emphasized the health ministry's continued commitment to strengthening Kuwait's national medical footprint in heart and organ transplantation, affirming steady progress toward delivering high-quality healthcare services led by specialized national cadres and strategic investments in human capital and medical infrastructure. — KUNA



KUWAIT: The health ministry announced the successful completion of two more heart transplant surgeries at Salman Al-Dabbous Cardiac Center. — KUNA

## Hamas confirms Abu Obeida, top leaders martyred

GAZA: Hamas' armed wing confirmed on Monday the death of its spokesperson, Abu Obeida, months after the Zionist entity announced he had been killed in an air strike in Gaza. The Ezzedine Al-Qassam Brigades released a video statement on its Telegram channel, saying: "We pause in reverence before... the masked man loved by millions... the great martyred commander and spokesperson of the Qassam Brigades, Abu Obeida."

The statement also announced the deaths of four other Hamas commanders in Zionist attacks during the war, including then Gaza chief Mohammed Sinwar, the younger brother of former Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar. Gaza on Aug 30. The Zionist military said in May that it had killed Sinwar. Three months later, it said it had also killed Abu Obeida.

During the war, Abu Obeida, whose real name was Hudhayfa Samir Al-Kahlout, emerged as a central figure eagerly awaited by Gazans, as well as by Arab and international media, for official statements from Hamas' military wing, particularly those related to prisoner-exchange operations.

Continued on Page 6



GAZA: Displaced Palestinians follow the press conference of a new spokesperson of the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades in Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza on Dec 29, 2025. — AFP

## Protests in Tehran over plunging rial, economic malaise

TEHRAN: Some shopkeepers in Tehran shut their stores for the second day in a row Monday in protest against economic hardships and sharp swings in Iran's embattled currency, media reports said. The

rial has hit new lows on the unofficial market, with the US dollar trading at around 1.42 million rials on Sunday — compared to 820,000 rials a year ago — and the euro nearing 1.7 million rials, according to price monitoring websites. The rates eased somewhat on Monday, with the dollar at around 1.39 million rials, and the euro at about 1.64 million rials.

A journalist from the pro-labor news agency ILNA reported "demonstrations" at several bazaars in the center of the capital on Monday, the agency said. It said protesters "are demanding immediate government intervention to rein in exchange-rate

fluctuations and set out a clear economic strategy".

Price fluctuations are paralyzing the sales of some imported goods, with both sellers and buyers preferring to postpone transactions until the outlook becomes clearer, AFP correspondents noted. "Continuing to do business under these conditions has become impossible," ILNA quoted protesters as saying. State news agency IRNA reported: "Many shopkeepers preferred to suspend sales in order to prevent potential losses." It added that some protesters on Monday "chanted slogans".

Continued on Page 6



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