



cricket
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basketball
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HH Amir, Sultan Haitham of Oman inaugurate Al-Duqm Refinery

Legacy of prosperity

AL-DUQM, Oman, Feb 7, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tareq of Oman patronized Wednesday the official inauguration of Al-Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries in the State of Al-Duqm, Oman.

The motorcade of His Highness the Amir and Sultan Haitham arrived at the refinery with people of Al-Wusta Governorate welcoming them and performing folkloric arts.

They were received by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil Dr. Imad Al-Atiqi, Oman's Minister of Finance Sultan bin Salem Al-Habshi and senior officials.

A film was displayed about the project, considered the largest investment venture in refinery and petrochemicals sector. The film showed the vital role of Kuwaiti-Oman partnership in the journey of the refinery.

Head of Oman's investment authority Abdulsalam Al-Murshidi said the inauguration of Al-Duqm refinery was a continuation of history between Oman and Kuwait, both working in one place "and continue this historic legacy for the future generations to be a guideline for prosperity and progress."

He said the USD-nine-billion refinery was the largest investment project between two Arab Gulf countries in refineries and petrochemical sector.

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His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tareq of Oman patronized Wednesday the official inauguration of Al-Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries in the State of Al-Duqm, Oman.

Amiri Diwan photo

Visit deepens ties

MUSCAT, Feb 7, (KUNA): Oman's daily newspapers highlighted the ongoing visit by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the Sultanate of Oman and his meeting with Sultan Haitham bin Tareq.

This visit would mark a critical moment for the bilateral relations, as His Highness the Amir and the Sultan attended on Wednesday the opening of the Al-Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries, one of the biggest investment projects between the two Gulf countries.

Oman's Al-Watan newspaper said that the visit will launch a new phase of the Kuwaiti-Omani relationships, given the shared interests and perspectives the two countries share.

It added that the Kuwaiti-Omani relationship, which is a regional and national model to follow, have been strengthened due to the commonality between them, like the diplomatic sense that is built on wisdom, good neighbourliness and respect for States' sovereignty as well as the aspiration of both countries to achieve greater prosperity and development.

Oman's Al-Masrar newspaper reported that the official and traditional reception ceremony given to His Highness the Amir reflected the deeply rooted historical relationship.

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Kuwait seizes 'liquor' haul valued at KD 1m

— Details Page 3 —

Tensions rise

Assembly OKs KD 50m budget for State head

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: The National Assembly unanimously approved the report of the Budgets and Final Accounts Committee about Decree No. 10/2024 on allocating an additional budget of KD50 million to cover the expenses of the head of State, with 52 votes in favor in the first and second readings during the continuation of its ordinary session on Wednesday.

The Assembly then referred the bill to the government.

The Assembly also approved the proposed formation of a new parliamentary committee for protecting families from drugs whose members include MPs Muhammad Al-Hewaila, Hamad Al-Matar, Hamad Al-Obaid and Hassan Jawhar.

Al-Matar confirmed that the formation of the committee is necessary, citing statistics showing that 60 percent of cases are drug-related and almost 70 percent of the students could become drug addicts.

In line with the commitment of the previous government, State Minister for National Assembly and Youth Affairs Dawoud Maarefi confirmed that the new government would not take part in the election of parliamentary committees.

MP Jarrah Al-Fawzan was elected member of the Financial and Economic Affairs Committee, while MPs Ahmed Lari and Abdullah Al-Anbali were elected members of the Public Facilities Committee.

The Assembly then proceeded with the MPs' response to the Amiri speech.

MP Abdulkareem Al-Kandari disclosed that the Amiri speech copies distributed to the MPs were that of the speech delivered by HH the former Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on behalf of HH the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, which was a contrast to the context of the Amiri speech that HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah delivered on behalf of HH the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah when he was the Crown Prince. He said the first speech praised the Assembly and its cooperation with the government, which led to important legislative achievements; while the latter was too tough on the legislature. He was quick to confirm his full commitment to the constitutional oath, especially in terms of loyalty to HH the Amir.

He added the second Amiri speech accused the Assembly of damaging the national identity through the ratification of the Rehabilitation Law and filling up senior positions. He pointed out that the appointment of senior positions was suspended three years ago and granting Kuwaiti citizenship has been suspended since 2018, adding that granting and withdrawing the nationality are sovereign concerns. He said he raised questions about those who were granted citizenship. He clarified that if such a move damages national identity, then the concerned family is accountable. He cited Article 57 of the Constitution, stating that granting special amnesty is the absolute right of HH the Amir while the Assembly is concerned about general amnesty.

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Kuwait sets family visas at 1 month, tourist visas at three

Expats swarm Residency Affairs as 'visit' resumes

By Munaif Naif
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: The Residency Affairs departments in all six governorates witnessed an influx of expatriates seeking to apply for either family, commercial or tourist visit visas following the announcement made by the ministry about the resumption of issuance

of these visas under new conditions based on instructions from the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef.

These conditions stipulate the following:-

1. The applicant's monthly salary should not be less than KD 400 in order to apply for visas for parents, wife, and children, and not less than KD 800 for relatives.
2. The specified duration of the visit should be adhered to

3. A round-trip flight ticket must be booked on national airlines.

4. Requests to convert the visit visas into residence permits will not be accepted.

Wednesday morning, Al-Seyassah toured a number of Residence Affairs departments, and discovered that the number of applicants in Jahra Governorate was less compared to Farwaniya and Hawally governorates.

The Hawally Residence Affairs Department witnessed large numbers of expatriates, some of whom came without a prior appointment and were sent back. The "Mata" app has nearly 150 visitors daily in each department.

Also, Farwaniya Governorate witnessed a large number of expatriates, but those who did not have a prior appointment were sent back. They were asked to visit the Mata application, as the process for applying through the application requires printing the form, attaching the required papers and documents, and then submitting to the department.

According to security sources, the Residency Affairs departments received an estimated 900 transactions yesterday morning in all the Residence Affairs departments. The applicant's data are extracted, and reviewed to verify their compliance with the set conditions.

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NewsWatch

KUWAIT CITY: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday denounced a shooting that took place in the Turkish city of Istanbul on Tuesday and claimed the lives of several people, including policemen.

The ministry reiterated Kuwait's categorical rejection of violence and terrorism, while offering condolence to Türkiye and victims' families and wishing a swift recovery of those injured in the attack. (KUNA)

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CAIRO: The Arab Doctor Award Committee announced Tuesday that 13 member states chose Kuwait as the committee's rapporteur during a meeting held at the Arab League's Secretariat.

Speaking to KUNA in a statement, Rehab al-Wotyan, head of public relations' department at Kuwait's Ministry of Health, choosing Kuwait as the committee's rapporteur comes in appreciation to the country's fruitful role in backing the Arab doctor. (KUNA)



Expats queue outside the Residency Affairs Department as Kuwait resumes the issuance of visit visas for family, commercial and tourism purposes under new conditions on Wednesday.

Photo by Mahmoud Jaded

'Palestinian state for Israel ties'

Saudi cabinet acknowledges strong relations with Kuwait

RIYADH, Feb 7, (KUNA): Saudi Arabia cabinet affirmed Tuesday on the strength of relations between the two countries and the common desire to deepen cooperation between them in all fields.

Saudi Information Minister Salman Al-Dosari said in a statement carried by the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) that the cabinet affirmed, in its session chaired by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz, on continuing coordination and consultation on issues of mutual interest, after the recent visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, to Al-Qadisiyah last Tuesday.

Al-Dosari added that the cabinet also reviewed the issues on its agenda, including the Council's approval of the Kingdom's accession to the Agreement on the Privileges and Immunities of the International Atomic Energy Agency and the authorization of the Minister of Foreign Affairs to complete the necessary legal proce-

dures for the Kingdom's accession to the aforementioned agreement.

The minister noted that the Council also approved authorizing the Minister of Industry and Mineral Resources to discuss with the Algerian side a draft memorandum of understanding for cooperation in the industrial field between the Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources in the Kingdom and the Ministry of Industry and Pharmaceutical Production in Algeria.

In other news, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia said on Tuesday there will be no diplomatic relations with the Israeli occupation entity unless an independent Palestinian state is recognized on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement: "Regarding the discussions between the Kingdom and the US on the Arab-Israeli peace process, and in light of what has been attributed to the U.S. National Security Spokesperson, the ministry affirmed

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Kuwait bolsters diplomatic role in human trafficking prevention

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Human Rights Ambassador Sheikh Jawaher Ibrahim Al-Duaij Al-Sabah affirmed on Wednesday that the Ministry is keen on developing the skills of its staff to combat human trafficking.

This came in a statement after the end of a training program conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with Saud Al-Nasser Diplomatic Institute and the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime for the GCC, on diplomats' roles in identifying, protecting and assisting human trafficking victims.

Shaikha Jawaher said that this comes as a protocol to prevent, suppress and punish human trafficking, especially women and children, according to the 2000 UN Convention

against Transnational Organized Crime and national law.

She said that the training program aims to support and develop the capabilities of the Ministry's staff in the field of identifying, protecting and assisting victims of human trafficking, especially women, taking into account the gender perspective in protection and assistance procedures.

The Kuwaiti diplomat added that this cooperation between the ministry and the UN office is considered the first of its kind, and comes as part of a series of training programs and courses reflecting Kuwait's beliefs in boosting and reinforcing human rights on a national scale, especially in preserving the rights of migrant workers.

She noted that Kuwait is one of the countries that attract expatriate workers because of the job opportunities it provides in many fields, and it has been keen to harmonize its national legislation in line with the changes and developments taking place in the labor market and international efforts in combating organized crimes such as human trafficking.

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Sheikha Jawaher

Prayer Timings			
Fajr	05:13	Asr	15:08
Sunrise ..	06:34	Maghrib ..	17:31
Zohr	12:02	Isha	18:49

Local

BIOMETRIC/FINGERPRINT APPOINTMENT: <https://meta.e.gov.kw/En/>

Weather			
Expected weather for next 24 hrs:			
By Day: Mild with light variable wind to light to moderate northwesterly wind, with speeds of 08-30 km/h.			
By Night: Cold with light to			
Station	Max Exp	Min Rec	
Kuwait City	24	14	
Kuwait Airport			
Abdaly	23	09	07
Jahra	23	11	
Salmiyah	21	15	
Nuwaisib	24	09	
Wafra	24	08	

Great demand from Kuwaitis for e-visa to UK: ambassador

‘Kuwaiti tourists to Russia witnesses rise; 7,000 visited in 2023’

By Fares Al-Abdan
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: The Russian Ambassador to Kuwait Vladimir Zheltov says the number of Kuwaiti tourists to his country last year reached 7,000, which is large compared to the previous year.

In a press statement issued on the sidelines of the opening of the “Travel to Moscow” conference the day before yesterday evening at the Jumeirah Hotel, Amb. Zheltov said, “This number has increased six times.”

He explained that Kuwaiti citizens are currently benefiting from the electronic visa system, as the application process can be done on the website and there is no need to visit the embassy. Kuwaiti citizens can obtain an electronic visa for a period of 16 days by applying online through the website designated for that purpose.

He said, “Distinguished representatives of the travel industry from both Russia and Kuwait gathered at the conference with a common goal, which is to strengthen tourism relations between the two friendly countries.

The Russian-Kuwaiti relations continue to develop in various fields with tourism being considered the fastest growing in terms of the increase in the number of tourists visiting Russia, as Kuwait outperforms all other Gulf countries.

In the past year, the number of Kuwaiti tourists visiting our country increased more than six-fold. Also, the launch of direct flights by Jazeera Airways from Kuwait City to Moscow one year ago contributed to achieving these wonderful results.

Now with the introduction of e-visas for Kuwaiti citizens, traveling to Russia has become much easier.

Moscow has a lot to offer, as our capital is among the most visited tourist destinations. Last year, it received 24.5 million visitors, including 2.3 million international tourists. There are a vari-

ety of museums in Moscow that contain collections of antiques and masterpieces of classical and contemporary art. It is also one of the greenest capitals, as it includes more than 120 parks. Moscow also has a large group of tourist attractions, as well as a variety of restaurants serving national and international cuisine.”

High demand for e-visa

The British Ambassador to Kuwait, HE Belinda Lewis, revealed a high demand from Kuwaitis for the electronic visa, announcing that the number of Kuwaitis who have applied for the new electronic travel permit since the start of receiving applications until now has reached about 1,382, reports Al-Qabas daily.

In a statement to the daily, the UK envoy indicated that 1,378 applications from citizens who met the conditions had been approved.

The British Ambassador announced the launch of the Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) for Kuwaiti citizens wishing to travel to the United Kingdom, starting last Thursday, at a cost of 10 British pounds, “the equivalent of 4 Kuwaiti dinars,” to be used for travel starting February 22, 2024, for several short trips on the road over the course of two years.

Good news for Egyptians

The Consulate of the Arab Republic of Egypt in Kuwait has announced good news to the members of the Egyptian community, affirming that the concerned authorities in the Arab Republic of Egypt have agreed to issue a passport for a period of one year and three months for those who do not hold a valid national identification card, but this will be done only once, reports Al-Anba daily.

In a press statement, the consulate disclosed that the citizen must obtain renewal of a national identification card during the one year and three months period in order to obtain a passport valid for a full period (seven years).

The consulate advised all those whose passports have expired and do not hold a valid national identification card to apply for a passport valid for one year and three months, so that they can legalize their status in the State of Kuwait.



The Russian Ambassador to Kuwait Vladimir Zheltov and senior officials.



Photos by Mahmoud Jadeed
Guests, visitors briefed on the tourism opportunities in Moscow.

24 Kuwaiti women object law on polls

3 lawyers file appeal

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Lawyers Areej Hamadeh, Bashayer Al-Ghanem, and Afrah Al-Sharad, on behalf of 24 Kuwaiti women, filed an appeal with the Constitutional Court against the unconstitutionality of the second paragraph of the article 16 of the decree law No. 120/2023 regarding the law on elections for members of the National Assembly, demanding the invalidation of the law.

The appellants explained that the second paragraph of the article 16 of the decree law No. 120/2023 on the law on elections for members of the National Assembly is marred by a constitutional flaw due to a formal defect in the legal wording. This does not affect the National Assembly's approval of this paragraph by law, as it does not go beyond removing the constitutional defect that required its issuance.

The facts of the appeal are that on August 27, 2023, Kuwait Al-Yaum newspaper (official gazette) published law No. 120/2023 regarding the elections of members of the National Assembly. There is a formal defect in the wording that led to a suspicion of violating the constitution. It is in the second paragraph of article 16, which stipulates that exercising the right to elections and nominations requires adherence to the provisions of the Constitution, the law, and the Islamic law.

The application of the second paragraph of article 16 contradicts the principle of progression of legal rules in violation of articles 2 and 6 of the Constitution. It also included discrimination between citizens on the basis of religion in

violation of article 29 of the Constitution, and included restrictions on personal freedoms in violation of article 30 of the Constitution, since Islamic Sharia is a main source of the Constitution - that is, one of the sources of the Constitution and not the only source of the Constitution - and since the rank of the law is lower than the rank of the Constitution.

The appellants believe that the wording of the second paragraph of article 16 of law No. 120/2023 regarding elections for members of the National Assembly includes a formal defect in the legal wording that conflicts with a number of constitutional texts. They hence addressed the direct appeal to the competent authority, which is the Constitutional Court, as it is the body that decides on disputes related to the constitutionality of laws, as stated in the text of article 173 of the Constitution, which stipulates that “The law designates the judicial body responsible for adjudicating disputes related to the constitutionality of laws and regulations and its powers and the procedures it follows. The law complements the right of both the government and concerned parties to appeal to that body the constitutionality of laws and regulations. In the event that the aforementioned authority decides that a law or regulation is unconstitutional, it shall be considered as if it did not exist) and also as stated in Law Establishing the Constitutional Court No. 14 of 1973.”

It is worth highlighting that the appeal was submitted by Areej Hamada, Adila Al-Sayer, Laila Al-Ghanim, Lulu Al-Khaled, Noura Al-Arfaj, Mona AlGhanim, Moudi Al-Saghir, Ghada Al-Ghanim, Maha Al-Mojil, Fatima Al-Aqrouqa, Nawal Al-Rasheed, Ashwaq Al-Mudhaf, Zainab Boushahri, Diaa Al-Ghanim, Shifa Abdullah, Khadija Al-Qallaf, Hanan Al-Zayed, Sarah Al-Dalali, Fatima Al-Ali, Nadia Al-Othman, Reem Al-Aidan and Nabila Al-Kharafi.



KUNA photo
Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah receives the US Ambassador to the State of Kuwait, Karen Hideko Sasahara.



KUNA photo
Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah receives the Pakistani Ambassador to Kuwait Malik Mohammad Farooq.

Deputy FM receives envoys

Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received on Wednesday US Ambassador to Kuwait Karen Hideko Sasahara. During the meeting, both sides discussed ways of strengthening bilateral relations between the two friendly countries and issues of mutual concerns.

Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah also received on Wednesday Pakistani Ambassador to the State of Kuwait Malik Mohammad Farooq. During the meeting, both sides discussed bilateral relations between the two countries and ways of strengthening them in all fields. (KUNA)

Kingpin based outside

Jail, deportation for 7 in money laundry

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: In a recent development, seven expatriates, including two women residing within the country and five others living in Europe, have been sentenced by the Criminal Court. The verdict includes a seven-year imprisonment with labor, enforceable deportation, and deportation orders, reports Al-Anba daily.

The case unfolded when a concerned citizen alerted security services, alleging that he had fallen victim to a deceitful scheme resulting in the loss of 157 thousand dinars. The perpetrators, two women, enticed him into trading on purportedly reliable foreign platforms, promising lucrative returns. Subsequently, they resorted to blackmail, threatening to link his name to terrorist watchlists unless he transferred a significant sum of money abroad. Demanding payments for purported assistance in removing his name from these lists, they exploited the victim's fear and coerced him into compliance.

Upon their arrest, it became evident that the two women were part of a larger network operating from a European country, masterminded by the remaining five expatriates. The Public Prosecution leveled charges of money laundering, embezzlement, and misuse of telecommunications against the defendants.

Speaking on behalf of the victim, lawyer Alaa Al-Saeedi emphasized that initially, the victim was hesitant to lodge a complaint, assuming the perpetrators were beyond legal reach. She urged others facing similar crimes not to lose hope and to promptly notify authorities of such fraudulent activities.



Al-Saeedi



KUNA photo
Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Dr. Fatma Al-Salem receives the Indonesian Ambassador to Kuwait Lena Maryana.

Talk on means to boost media ties

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7, (KUNA): Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Dr. Fatma Al-Salem received on Wednesday Indonesian Ambassador to Kuwait Lena Maryana, discussing means to boost media cooperation between the two friendly countries.

Dr. Al-Salem emphasized, during the meeting, the significance of cooperation, especially on the level of official media institutions, including both sides' news agencies.

She highlighted KUNA's interest in enhancing and developing media cooperation with other nations, as this would contribute to delivering its media goal and serve Kuwait's foreign policy.

On her part, Ambassador Maryana underscored the importance of a culture of openness

and coexistence among nations in order to welcome and appreciate differences and human connections.

Furthermore, Maryana said bilateral relations between the two friendly nations are longstanding and close, looking forward to promoting cooperation between the two countries' official news agencies. She stressed that both countries have a long history of significant diplomatic and cultural relations.

Additionally, Maryana praised Kuwaiti media and Kuwaiti society for its inclusivity of women working in a myriad of fields. She explained her own journey in politics championing women's rights, accentuating the role women could offer as active members of society.

Around 90% students ‘bunk’ school on Feb 8 holiday news

By Abdul Rahman Al-Shammari
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Three days after the start of the second semester, the winds of mass absenteeism blew through the Ministry of Education's schools at various educational levels, following the announcement by the Civil Service Commission to declare February 8 as an official holiday on the oc-

casation of the “Isra and Mi'raj” (Night Journey and Ascension).

In this regard, educational sources explained that the rate of absenteeism varied from one school to another, but was not less than 80 percent. It increased to 90 percent after school administrations contacted the students' parents to take their children home.

Despite the solutions and measures imposed by the ministry every year in order to eliminate or re-

duce this phenomenon such as linking absences to grades and deducting a percentage from the students who are absent without an excuse in accordance with the provisions of the absence list, some officials confirmed that implementing the list regarding absences is not a solution. They called for making parents aware of the need to force their children to attend, especially in light of the existence of a study plan and curriculum that requires completion.

Other Voices

Complex nature of a human

By Ahmad alsarraf

In general, our peoples are considered the most hostile to the Western system, represented by America in particular. It spread on social media as a result of an imaginary, but close to reality, questionnaire that included two questions asked to students at Arab universities. The first was: Do you like Russia or America? The answer was 90% decisive in favor of Russia!

The second was: If you were offered two residence visas for Russia or America, which country would you choose? The answer was 100% America!

However, if we offered a sick person an American-produced medicine and a Russian-produced medicine, he would choose the American one, even if it was for an amount he couldn't afford!

This conflict in the Middle East, or Arab character in particular, has caused confusion for many, and we have previously seen something similar to it during the battle to occupy and liberate Kuwait, where the majority of the Arab peoples stood against Kuwait, a small and peaceful country that has a benevolent hand over many, and chose to stand with a tyrant aggressor, from whom they have never received a red penny!!

There are also similar situations and indicators that contain sharp contradictions, but they often do not arouse anyone's attention, despite their seriousness. In a glaring example, MP Muhammad Haif asked the Ministry of Education to prepare for the return of schools, and to prepare places for prayer in schools!

Neither he nor the ministry concerned paid attention to the fact that implementing the request means having to clean the place where prayer is held, equip it with the necessary furniture, and then lift it, after the end of prayer, and place it in the designated place and cleaning the bathrooms as a result of hundreds of students performing ablution.

But neither the MP nor the concerned authority cared about who

would carry out these tasks. Rather, they only cared about the students' performance of prayer, and left the above tasks, which are the most important and most dangerous to the upbringing of young people, to the workers.

They did not assign the student a role in preparing the prayer places or taking care of their cleanliness, but rather all what is required of them is to earn the wage, and leave the rest of the matters to the workers, perpetuating the fact that we are a people who believe in performing rituals, but do not believe in performing duties, even if they are necessary for performing rituals!!

There is also the issue that we have previously written about repeatedly, which is the lack of respect by a large percentage of mourners and worshippers for road etiquette and the principles of parking the car. We find that they do not hesitate to park in the wrong places, or to park behind other people's vehicles, so that they are prevented from moving until they return!! How do these people accept to go to perform a religious duty and deliberately disturb the comfort of others, perhaps intentionally?

There is no doubt that the Kuwaiti people are religious, and they attend all religious occasions, and mosques spread everywhere they want, even in government departments and others.

However, this religiosity did not prevent a large percentage of them from manipulating the reward lists for the front rows, for example, and from contributing to the vacation selling scandal which cost the state 422 million dinars, an increase of 122 million dinars.

All of this was done by Kuwaiti officials, and the amounts were collected without the right of citizens like them! How can this contradiction in religiosity and prohibition be explained? The reason lies in the fact that we did not care about the quality of education, especially the moral aspect of it. Good education, and teaching morals within it, is the solution to all our problems, but teaching morals, in particular, is not even at the bottom of the government's list of priorities, and it is not among them... originally.

□ □ □

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



Vladimir Zheltov

diwaniya

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

All sing praises of constitution, but actions, practices diverge

"HAS the constitution been subjected to murder or assassination attempts ?!... The answer is yes! The next question then: When and who were the ones who attempted to assassinate the constitution?." **Dr Abdulmohsen Muhammad Al-Maqatei**, wrote for **Al-Jarida** daily.

"In the general political and parliamentary context, we find that everyone sings praises about the constitution and its preservation, but practices and actions go otherwise. The parties that tried to assassinate the constitution were not always the same. Sometimes the authorities were the ones who tried and did it! Other times it was the presidency of the National Assembly!



Dr Al-Maqatei

"And sometimes, by agreement between parties in the executive and legislative branches and our research and monitoring of this is not mere statements, we will present here most of the main cases of the various circumstances in which attempts to assassinate the constitution were carried out, and there are other cases that the article did not allow to be presented.

"The first attempt to circumvent the constitution occurred in 1967, in what is known as the year of fraud, when the authorities attempted, according to a statement by some members, to change the election results!

"The second attempt was in 1976 in what was called the "review period." It was for four years during which the provisions of the constitution were suspended, and no significant reforms were carried out!

"The "third" was in 1982 in proposals to amend the constitution submitted by the government and were withdrawn because the majority of the Council did not approve of them.

"The "fourth" was in 1982, from the Speaker of the National Assembly at the time, when he voted to approve the principle of revision in an incorrect procedural manner.

"The "fifth" was in 1986 from a parliamentary group that rushed to present a torrent of interrogations in violation of its constitutional controls, and should have been directed to the Prime Minister.

"The "sixth" was in 1986, when the Council was dissolved by an Amiri order, and along with it, the provisions of the Constitution were suspended for years.

"The "seventh" was in 1990, when a National Council was established outside the Constitution, as an alternative to the National Assembly.

"The "eighth" was in the 1992 parliamentary group, when the law on the retirement of representatives was introduced and made effective for the same members and not for the future, as the constitution stipulates!

"The "ninth" was in 1993, when the Speaker of the Council decided to re-vote on the Difficult Debts Law again, in violation of the Constitution, even though it had been voted on and had ended.

"The "tenth" was when the National Assembly approved -- by an overwhelming majority -- Law 44 of 1994, despite its clear violation of Articles 82 and 180 of the Constitution.

"The "eleventh" was in the 2008 Council, when the Speaker of the Council allowed the Council's sessions to be suspended for periods extending for more than two months under the pretext of forming a government!

"The "twelfth" in the 2009 Council, when the Council and its president agreed that the interrogation of the Prime Minister would be discussed in a secret session, contrary to the Constitution, its explanatory memorandum, and the objectives of the interrogation and there are several others.

"Today, we are faced with an entitlement in the face of the statesman, the current Prime Minister, to put things in perspective, refuse the legislative authority to encroach on the government's powers, and prevent the waste of the provisions of the Constitution by infringing on the government's inherent right in Article 98 of it, which is the last attempt made by 30 members of the current Council.

"By their refusal to give the government a period to study and discuss their proposals, which must be compatible with its program, especially since most of them violate the constitution, because they do not need a law, but are within the government's jurisdiction according to Article 72, and with his skill, wisdom, and frankness, he will be able to do that, especially protecting the national identity from the tampering that Nationality has been subjected to fraud, alteration and duplication, and its files have been sifted in accordance with the established provisions of the Constitution."

Also:

"Your Highness the President, every Kuwaiti has the right to realize his/her dream with you, when our reality has been disappointed and our hopes have been disappointed for many years," columnist **Iqbal Al-Ahmad** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"We are not accustomed to a prime minister who speaks fluently, confidently, and cultured, with an academic political sense of transparency and a sincere desire for sincere work, as we heard in the meeting between our new Prime Minister, His Highness Sheikh Muhammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, and the Kuwaiti print and electronic media.

"To be more precise, His Highness the former Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Sabah had a similar meeting,

except that the last meeting was the focus of more attention, since the conditions we live in, in Kuwait today make us grasp at any straw that will save us from drowning that was almost imminent.

"We have missed the meeting between the government leadership and the Kuwaiti media for years, with press and media leaders who speak on behalf of the street and exchange viewpoints with political leaders.

"Al-Qabas' question, represented by its editor-in-chief, Mr. Walid Al-Nisf, about the impact of what he called "family conflict" on the realization of His Highness the President's dreams for the present and future of Kuwait, and Abu Sabah's mitigation of this term as "difference of opinions," which is a normal disagreement as in any normal Kuwaiti family, I had to stop by him.

"Let His Highness the President allow me to say that his morals and spirit have distanced him a little from the reality that we lived in previous periods, and I have a simple comment here.

"Any disagreement in any Kuwaiti family, Your Highness, will certainly not affect the future of the nation, but if it affects the ruling family, that will certainly have a direct impact on the course of political life and thus on the future of the country, and we have seen this clearly during previous periods.

"Therefore, the word "conflict" carries within it more than a disagreement in point of view, but rather looks to a greater point of view.

"This dispute, as you like to call it, Your Highness, is what most people of Kuwait fear and it is their first and last concern, after painful and unfortunate experiences that affected what any leader or prime minister aspired to advance our development wheel, which has been in place for many years.

"A bright spot in this aspect, I believe that we are experiencing some transparency between the people and the leadership, regardless of the level of this transparency, and that it is allowed to talk about the disputes of the ruling family between the symbols of the family and members of the people such as journalists or media professionals, as we witnessed in this press conference, in front of television screens, without any frills or editing, and in public. This, thank God, is what distinguishes us and we are very proud of it.

"However, that is not all. Democracy and openness between the government and the people are no substitute for development and moving towards a broad development horizon.

"I liked the point raised by Mr. Sami Al-Nisf, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Al-Nahar, about the importance and necessity of opening up the country to achieve all our dream projects, and the necessity of "separating the security concern from economic openness," as evidenced by the fact that all the Gulf countries did not rise until they opened up.

"In the kind of closure we are experiencing in Kuwait today through laws and legislation, this certainly negatively affects the acceptance or desire of any individual to visit or invest in Kuwait, because its laws and procedures repel him and his dreams and aspirations in Kuwait.

"It remains to say that you, Your Highness the President, have a great responsibility, not to achieve all the dreams that Your Highness spoke about, but to lift this country and this people out of a state of frustration and loss of hope, because the people today consider that this may be the last opportunity.

May God grant success to you, Your Highness, and we are all helping you, assisting you and supporting you. Do you know why Your Highness? because your capabilities and specifications are preceded by the firm leadership of His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, our last hope."

□ □ □

"We and Britain ... former British Prime Minister David Cameron who, by the way, is the incumbent Foreign Affairs Minister said in 2013: 'When it comes to British national security, no one talks to me about human rights!' This is Great Britain, the maker of modern democracy in the modern world, the proverb of freedom, but when it comes to its national security, it rises up and goes beyond all slogans, so that its only slogan is national security!" columnist **Talal Al-Saeed** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"This is Great Britain, so what about us, when we are more in need of the United Kingdom to strengthen our national security and protect our national identity, so what prevents us from crossing the red lines to protect our red lines, after the torrent reached its peak?

"New tribal flags, which we have not been seen or known before, began to be raised during occasions, and even without an occasion. People gathered around them as a way of affirming their loyalty to those flags, away from the national flag -- the symbol of the homeland. They should not raise any other flag. People should only rally around the national flag.

"Likewise, those who claim to be sheikhs have appeared before us. We had not heard of them before. They are neither from the ruling family nor the officially recognized tribal sheikhs. They have given themselves names for which Allah has not revealed any authority. So, where did those names that undermine unity come from? Their main concern has become exchanging visits, photographing and publishing, so what do these people want from our country, while raising partisan and sectarian slogans in public?"

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes

Farwaniya 'power' cut traps students in lifts

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: The residents of Farwaniya experienced a sudden power outage lasting approximately thirty minutes, Tuesday morning. The outage, occurring between 6:30 and 7:00 a.m., resulted in some children becoming stuck in elevators, prompting their families to seek assistance. Eyewitnesses reported the incident, noting the inconvenience caused, especially during the morning rush hour as students were on their way to school. The exact cause of the outage remains unknown, reports Al-Anba daily.

While some buildings had guards who efficiently handled the situation by assisting those trapped in elevators, others had to reach out to the Ministry of Interior for support. The Ministry, in turn, coordinated with the General Fire Force centers to address reports and ensure the safe release of individuals affected by the power disruption.

□ □ □

Hand stuck in machine: The Jahra Crafts Center's fire brigade and the Search and Rescue Center sprang into action to resolve a distressing incident involving a worker's hand becoming trapped in a candy production machine in the Jahra Industrial Area. Swift intervention led to the successful extraction of the worker's hand, and he was promptly transferred to the appropriate authorities, reports Al-Anba daily.



Senior Mol officials and security personnel during the liquor bust at the port.

Al-Rai photo

Massive haul of liquor worth KD1m seized by sleuths at Shuwaikh Port

Detectives win leadership praise; 3 suspects in custody

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: In a significant crackdown, Kuwait's security apparatus intercepted a sizable haul of imported liquor, marking the largest seizure of its kind this year.



Sheikh Fahad

The operation, spearheaded by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, Sheikh Fahd Al-Yousef, under the purview of the Acting Minister of the Interior, culminated in the confiscation of approximately 13,422 bottles of whisky, valued at over one million Kuwaiti dinars.

This feat underscores the government's unwavering commitment to combat illicit activities and uphold societal integrity, reports Al-Rai daily.

The operation unfolded following actionable intelligence indicating an attempt to smuggle a substantial quantity of liquor disguised within a shipment of furniture originating from an Asian country through the Shuwaikh Port. Swift coordination ensued between the General Administration of Customs' ports sector and law enforcement agencies to intercept the suspect container.

A collaborative task force comprising personnel from the General Administration for Narcot-



An abandoned car is carried away by the Municipality truck.

Municipality removes 15 abandoned cars & boats

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: During a recent municipal campaign in Mubarak Al-Kabeer, efforts led by the Department of Public Cleanliness and Road Works resulted in the removal of 15 abandoned vehicles, including cars, boats, groceries, and commercial containers. Additionally, 54 stickers were placed on abandoned cars and boats, signaling their impending removal once the designated time period has elapsed. Moreover, 36 old containers were replaced with new ones over the course of the past week, reports Al-Rai daily.

The Public Relations Department of the municipality emphasized the ongoing field inspections conducted by the supervisory team at the Public Cleanliness and Road Occupations Department. They underscored the team's unwavering commitment to enforcing regulations, emphasizing that legal actions will be taken against individuals found violating public cleanliness and road works regulations.

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Syrian staying illegally for 12 years deported

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Residency Affairs Investigation officers have arrested a Syrian who was staying in the country illegally for the past 12 years. The man was arrested during a security check in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh.

He has been handed over to the concerned authorities for deportation from the country.

□ □ □

Peddler in tears: The Criminal Court, headed by Judge Nayef Al-Dahoum, has deferred the announcement of its ruling on the case of two female citizens accused of drug trafficking after hearing the arguments of the defense team, reports Al-Rai daily. The lawyer of the two defendants said the informant of the investigation officers -- an Iraqi woman -- is addicted to drugs and she implicated

the two defendants in this drug case.

During the session, one of the accused almost collapsed as she cried profusely in front of the court. She said: "By God, it is forbidden ... 94 days I have not seen my minor children and I do not know anything about them."

□ □ □

Judicial rulings: The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) said it obtained judicial rulings from the Court of Cassation after it submitted appeals proving the ineligibility to open a housing application or pay rent allowance for those who owned a property, even if it is a vacant land, reports Al-Anba daily.

In a statement, PAHW clarified that it is forbidden to open a housing application or pay a rent allowance to anyone who has obtained real estate, which is a built property (house or apartment) as well as vacant land, as long as the conditions stipulated in the housing welfare regulations are met.

ies Control and the ports sector of the General Administration of Customs meticulously investigated the matter. Upon inspection, the concealed cache of imported liquor was unearthed within the ostensibly innocuous commercial consignment. Subsequent inquiries revealed the involvement of three individuals in the smuggling operation.

The apprehended suspects, along with the seized contraband, were promptly handed over to the ap-

propriate authorities for legal proceedings. Sheikh Fahd Al-Yousef and Lieutenant General Sheikh Salem Al-Nawaf commended the diligent efforts of the security personnel involved in thwarting the smuggling attempt. They reiterated the imperative of maintaining vigilance and decisively confronting perpetrators of such illicit activities, underscoring the resolve of Kuwait's security apparatus to safeguard societal well-being.

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Kuwait FM receives congratulation call from Saudi counterpart

Amir and Deputy Amir send heartfelt wishes to Grenada on national day

National conference echoes sincerity and nation-building legacy of immortal figures

‘From Kuwait we start, and to Kuwait we end’

By Abdul Nasser Al-Aslami
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: The Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defense Sheikh Dr. Abdullah Al-Mishaal says the national conference titled “From Kuwait we start, and to Kuwait we end” is a message of remembrance of the immortal national figures who contributed to building the nation, and worked with all sincerity and loyalty to raise its position among nations in every arena.

He stressed that honoring such figures is aimed to appreciate what they gave to the country and to introduce the current generation to their virtues and achievements.

Sheikh Dr. Abdullah Al-Mishaal said this in a speech during the opening of the 22nd edition of the conference at the Al-Babtain Library Theater the day before yesterday, under the slogan of the quote by the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad - “I call upon you all stand for or Kuwait, and that your loyalty be to it first and foremost.”

He explained that, “Those immortal figures of fathers and grandfathers left us a legacy full of achievements, virtues and deeds.

The conference continues to fulfill its important message over successive years, so that we can remember together the biographies of pioneering figures who contributed to building the renaissance of Kuwait.

Among them is the late Sheikh Mubarak Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad, who worked sincerely and was one of the pioneers in making modern Kuwaiti history. He lived his life filled with love for Kuwait and wanted it to develop and progress.”

In a similar speech, Chairman of the Supreme Supervisory Committee of the conference Yousef Al-Yasin affirmed that the conference’s message calls for patriotism and the magnanimity of forefathers.

He explained that the 22nd edition of the conference raises the value of its national and value-based goals that it



KUNA photo

Honoring the participants in the presence of the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defense.

has called for since its inception when it was announced that it enhances the values of loyalty and fidelity to Kuwait, spreads the meanings of moderation and patriotism, and revives the lives of immortal Kuwaiti figures and recognizes their virtues and exploits.

The conference sought, from the first moment of its launch, to spread and consolidate the established national values, in addition to supporting and encouraging youth projects.

Over the years and conferences, it contributed to achieving the vision and goals of the state in promoting and spreading the meanings and values of patriotism, citizenship, moderation, and good morals.

Al-Yasin said, “We must all be careful and adhere to national unity, as it is the weapon and stronghold against every lurker who harbors bad intentions for this country. We must overcome our differences and overcome our wounds

for the sake of this dear country.”

He called for caution against malicious accounts on social media sites that spread rumors, target the homeland’s home front, and target the cohesive society especially the nation’s security and stability.

Meanwhile, the late personalities among those who will be awarded this year are:

- Mubarak Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah
- Lulwa Abdel Mohsen Ahmed Al-Sagr
- Ahmed Abdul Wahab Al-Mufleh
- Abdul-Rasul Yusuf Yaqoub Abbas Abu Al-Hassan
- Redha Abdullah Muhammad Hussein Marafi
- Muhammad Wasmi Nasser Al-Wasmi
- Issa Abdul Latif Issa Abdul Jalil
- Abdulaziz Shaheen Youssef Al-Shahin Al-Rabie
- Muneera Abdul Qader Al-Jassim Al-Qenaei
- Abdullah Abdullatif Othman Al-Othman

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulations on Wednesday to Governor-General of Grenada Cecile La Grenade on the occasion of her country’s national day.

His Highness the Amir wished her good health and wellbeing, and Grenada further progress and prosperity.

His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulations on Wednesday to Governor-General of Grenada Cecile La Grenade on the occasion of her country’s national day.

Meanwhile, Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya received on Wednesday a phone call from his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud, congratulating him on his new post.

During the phone conversation, Al-Saud expressed his best wishes and success for the minister and looked forward to closely working with him in a way that contributes to strengthening and enhancing relations between the two countries and joint Gulf action.

Regulations overhaul

Municipal Cmte addresses lawyers society’s concerns

By Inaas Awadh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: The joint committee between the Municipal Council’s Technical Committee and the Legal and Financial Committee, during a meeting yesterday headed by Dr. Hassan Kamal, referred to the executive branch a letter sent by the Kuwait Lawyers Society regarding stopping licenses for law firms located in residential areas.

In a statement issued after the meeting, Dr. Kamal explained that the committee completed discussions on the provisions for amending the regulations organizing construction works and the schedules, and the final version of the proposal for amendment to schedule No. 1 regarding the requirements and specifications for private and typical residential buildings.

It also referred two letters received from the Kuwait Lawyers Society and the residents of Abu Al-Hassaniya regarding the suspension of licenses for law offices, and the rate of residential construction in the area respectively, to the executive body for study. A report will be sent to the committee to discuss in future meetings.

Dr. Kamal stated that the residents of Abu Al-Hassaniya demanded that the building rate be increased and that they be treated as private housing, as the area is considered one of the coastal areas where the construction rate does not exceed a maximum of 150 percent.

More than just books

School libraries are fundamental for students’ educational development

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7, (KUNA): School libraries are fundamental for providing supplementary education for students, especially elementary school students, to help develop their reading and writing skills.

Not only do school libraries reinforce the student’s reading and writing capabilities, but also provide them with research skills, and adjust their behavior accordingly.

Director of School Libraries Administration at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education (MoE) Ahmad Al-Majdi, in a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), said that “a school library has an essential role in education.”

School libraries are not only for lending of books, but they also organize informative lectures to benefit the student body, as well as organize educational workshops.

Libraries contribute to student skill acquisition of helpful information through qualified and recognized sources throughout all school levels, added Al-Majdi.

He noted that school libraries in elementary schools total 283 libraries, and play a massive part in aiding teachers with the right informative tools and resources to benefit both the curriculum being taught and the student receiving the lesson.

Furthermore, Al-Majdi said the Library Administration launched “A writer in my Library” initiative that aims to



KUNA photo

The library helps students love reading.

provide informative methodologies in the fields of both arts and sciences. He explained this initiative calls on students and teachers to develop rapport within school libraries, where storytelling, writing, and learning about history are under-scored topics.

Additionally, Al-Majdi added that another project titled “School Library Criteria Classification,” aims to create an educationally charged and competitive environment for students, as seen in the annual MoE’s Arabic reading competitions.

150 kilos of food items destroyed

PAFN cracks down on Qurain Market

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: The Public Authority for Food and Nutrition (PAFN) issued four reports on violations related to food items that are unfit for human consumption, and six pledges to amend conditions. It also closed a facility, and destroyed 150 kilos of food items in Qurain Markets area due to violation of PAFN’s regulations and for not meeting health requirements.

In a press statement issued on the sidelines of an inspection tour carried out by PAFN in the shops and restaurants in Qurain Markets area, the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governor Mahmoud Boushahri confirmed that the governorate always supports the efforts of those in charge of PAFN, and takes into account the extent of their concern for the interests of citizens and residents, as their interest in their well-being.

He revealed that this is his first tour and is based on his keenness to respond to the call of the PAFN employees to support them.

Boushahri stressed the keenness of the governorate to follow up on everything especially education, health and agriculture.

He indicated that many observations related to cleanliness and other matters were recorded, about which the Kuwait Municipality will be addressed.

Meanwhile, Director of the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate Inspection De-

partment Dr. Saud Al-Jalal affirmed the adherence to the rules and regulations in force in the presence of Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governor Mahmoud Boushahri.

He revealed that the goal of the ongoing tours is to inspect the situation, encourage inspectors and follow up on the work.

Dr. Al-Jalal highlighted the coordination between the relevant government agencies to identify challenges and avoid observations in various parties.

He indicated that PAFN, after all the tours, will submit its recommendations to the concerned authority, each according to its specialty.

Dr. Al-Jalal pointed out the existence of irreparable violations related to food, where the materials are not suitable for human use, in which case, the violation is referred to the prosecution and the facility is closed in order to ensure the safety of everyone.

With regard to violations of health and the general hygiene requirements and the absence of health certificates of workers, he said citations will be issued and will remain subject to reconciliation for a period of 60 days during which the facility owner has the right to improve conditions.

Dr. Al-Jalal revealed that the most prominent types of violations that were monitored were the lack of health certificates for workers in the facility to prove that they are free of any infectious diseases, affirming the continued efforts of PAFN to secure safe food for citizens and residents.



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LOCAL

Communications Ministry pushes for digital services

Ministry set to go paperless

By Mohammed Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Informed sources at the Ministry of Communications revealed the procedures that the ministry is following to prepare for digital transformation, to provide its services through the digital portal, and to carry out electronic correspondence between all sectors.

This includes the draft contracts for the use of specialized companies and coordination with the authorities concerned with information technology. It is expected that these works will be completed during the current year, so that all transactions within the ministry become electronic and paperless.

The sources explained that the Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs, the Minister of State for Youth Affairs, and the Minister of State for Communication Affairs Daoud Marafie, in his first meeting with the ministry's leaders after assuming the ministerial portfolio, stressed the necessity of accelerating the work and procedures for complete digital transformation within the ministry, and removing all obstacles that prevent achieving this goal, in order to develop work mechanisms and keep pace with the modern developments and the government's approach to digitize all government services.

Cybersecurity

In a related context, the sources said the ministry intends to launch consulting services to support cybersecurity including risk Assessment, incident reporting, and incident recovery from companies specialized in cybersecurity.

They explained that this is aimed to evaluate the extent of security and safety of the electronic systems used in the ministry, in accordance with the international standards followed in this regard, prior to the end of the current fiscal year. The ministry is one of the important service ministries that owns customer data. Through the aforementioned practice, it seeks to protect the data from the hacking that the networks of government agencies and ministries are exposed to.

Meanwhile, a draft budget report has set KD 139 million as the total budget of the Ministry of Communications for the fiscal year of 2024/2025. The employee payments is the largest item in the budget with a total amount of KD 88.160 million to cover the salaries, bonuses and allowances of employees. The budget also included an amount of KD 9.6 million to cover the ministry's projects.

Kuwait sets

Continued from Page 1

They stressed the need for obtaining an appointment via the Mata app to carry out the transaction so as to organize the reception of expatriates with ease and avoid crowding, as well as the need for providing a round-trip flight ticket within a month along with all the documents required to submit the application.

The sources indicated that a decision has not yet been made regarding receiving the transactions of expatriates with banned nationalities.

They revealed that a family visit visa is valid for one month and a tourist visit visa is valid for three months, adding that applications are submitted through the website of the Ministry of Interior.

It is worth highlighting that the Ministry of Interior had earlier announced in a press statement the conditions to be met for applying for visit visas. They are:-

1. The applicant's salary must not be less than KD 400 in order to bring in first-degree relatives (wife, children, and parents), and not be less than KD 800 to apply for a visit visa for the rest of the relatives.

2. It is required to provide a round-trip flight ticket of the national airlines (the national carrier) and submit a written pledge not to request for conversion of visit visa to residence permit in the country.

3. The visitors must adhere to the duration of the visit visa.

4. Medical treatments for visitors will be provided in hospitals and private health centers but they will not receive medical treatment in government hospitals if they violate the period of stay. In such cases, both the visitor and the sponsor will be included in the security control system by the Directorate General of Residency Affairs Investigations. The violator will be followed up by the Directorate General of Residency Affairs Investigations and the legal procedures followed for violators of the foreigners' residency law will be applied against him.

5. Commercial entry visa will be issued upon a request submitted by Kuwaiti companies or institutions, and granted to those holding university or technical qualifications and in a manner commensurating with the company's activity and the nature of its work.

6. Tourist visas will be issued to people belonging to 53 countries, either directly from the port of entry upon arrival in the country or through an electronic visa by visiting the Ministry of Interior's website - www.moi.gov.kw, and for residents of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

7. Tourist visas will be issued to people with professions specified in ministerial Resolution No. 2030/2008 and its amendments, and in accordance with



His Highness the Amir and the Sultan of Oman, under their patronage and attendance, at the opening ceremony of Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries in the Omani state of Duqm.

Amiri Diwan photo

Turning point in Kuwait's global oil dominance

Al-Duqm refinery reflects Gulf's pioneering role in oil industry

AL-DUQM, Oman, Feb 7, (KUNA): Al-Duqm refinery reflects the Arab Gulf area's pioneering role in the oil and gas industry, said Kuwait's oil minister Dr. Imad Al-Atiqi Wednesday.

A "success story" is the best to describe inauguration of the refinery, Al-Atiqi; Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation's Board of Directors, told KUNA. His remarks came on the sidelines of refinery's inauguration ceremony, held under auspices and attendance of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Sultan Haitham bin Tariq of Oman.

The Oil Minister extended appreciation to diligent efforts exerted over the past few years to accomplish the venture.

CEO of Kuwait Petroleum International, also known as Q8, Shafi Al-Ajmi labeled the event a turning point contributing to strength of the "ideal partnership" between the two nations.

He told KUNA that the refinery carves a prestigious place for both nations in the global oil scene.

Due to its geographic location, the refinery facilitates the flow of trade between Gulf area and international markets, namely in Asia and Africa. The refinery, an enormous USD-nine-billion industrial edifice is co-owned by the two Gulf States.

Around 65 percent of the 230,000 barrels refined in Al-Duqm are of Kuwaiti crude oil, and 35 percent is of the Omani crude oil. The refinery is designed to operate and import all it requires from

Kuwaiti crude oil if necessary.

On his part, Deputy CEO of Q8 Imad Al-Hadlaq said the refinery employs the use of latest technologies to keep pace with international standards, especially relating to environmental aspects.

It produces ecofriendly oil byproducts, including liquefied gas, naphtha, kerosene and diesel, noted Al-Hadlaq, pointing out that since operation, it successfully lowered greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent.

Al-Duqm is a joint venture between OQ and KPC, situated in southern Oman. Its strategic location serves international markets especially as it aims to achieve excellence in refining oil, and producing high quality byproducts.

Kuwait bolsters

Continued from Page 1

Sheikha Jawaher pointed out that Kuwait had also adopted a national strategy to combat human trafficking and smuggling of migrants, which included three strategic axes: prevention, protection, and building partnerships in internal, regional and international cooperation.

She indicated that a permanent national committee concerned with implementing a strategy to prevent trafficking and smuggling was established in accordance with Cabinet Resolution No. 261 of 2018.

In cooperation with the International Organization for Migration, it adopted the national referral system to prevent human trafficking as a roadmap to be followed in dealing with cases of trafficking from all concerned parties.

HH Amir,

Continued from Page 1

Al-Murshidi said Al-Duqm refinery was projected to increase Oman's refining capacity to 500,000 bpd from 230,000 bpd.

He said the project was completed despite economic and political challenges. "The determination overcame all obstacles ... and challenges ..."

He said the refinery and petrochemical industries were located in Al-Duqm economic zone which has a unique location and thus lucrative for investments.

Al-Murshidi pointed out the establishment of facilities that would support the refinery and petrochemical industries, and thanked KPC, Kuwait Petroleum International (KPI) and Oman's OQ for their endless efforts that saw the completion of this mega project.

Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) CEO Sheikh Nawaf Suad Al-Sabah said the inauguration of Al-Duqm Refinery and petrochemical industries reflected the history between Kuwait and Oman.

"The story with you my brothers did not start with Al-Duqm but with diving ships when our grandfathers" went in rough journeys looking for pearls, he said, and Allah the Almighty rewarded them following decades of struggle.

Al-Duqm refinery, he said, will be processing crude oil from Kuwait and Oman thus honoring strategic objectives of KPC, according to which the corporation engage in investment opportunities with international partners to boost "our refining capacity in promising markets."

The aim, said Sheikh Nawaf, is to reach a capacity of 425,000 barrels per day by 2025. Thanks to "cooperation of our brothers in Oman, we achieved this goal ahead of schedule."

He expressed gratitude for all workers who contributed to this success.

He said challenges facing the oil and gas industry "are not easy," foremost

transform of energy which required safe and profitable operation of the refinery to make it an icon of innovation and excellence in international refining industry.

Visit deepens

Continued from Page 1

It noted that the official talks between the two countries highlighted the close bond of kinship between Oman and Kuwait and reinforced the bilateral cooperation.

Al-Roya newspaper affirmed the importance of His Highness the Amirs official visit to Sultanate of Oman, with Sultan Haitham bin Tareq having been at the airport to warmly welcome His Highness the Amir.

It highlighted the exchange of medals between both leaders as evidence of appreciation for the distinguished achievements and efforts that bond the two countries.

The inauguration of Al-Duqm Refinery, under auspices and in the presence of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Sultan Haitham bin Tareq, of Oman, will be a landmark event in the progress of the energy sector, said David Bird, CEO of Al-Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Company (OQ8).

This ambitious project testifies to the robust strategic vision for fueling economic growth, and efficacy of the cooperation between the State of Kuwait and the Sultanate of Oman, he said in statement to KUNA on Tuesday.

Al-Duqm Refinery, based on commitment to excellence and sustainability, will advance socio-economic development and act as inspiring leader in the energy sector, he pointed out.

The Refinery, one of the state-of-the-art refineries in the Middle East and North Africa, will a significant contributor to the national economies of both countries and a major player in the global oil sector, Bird affirmed.

Saudi cabinet

Continued from Page 1

that the position of Saudi Arabia has always been steadfast on the Palestinian issue and the necessity that the brotherly Palestinian people obtain their legitimate rights."

"The Kingdom has communicated its firm position to the U.S. administration that there will be no diplomatic relations with Israel occupation entity unless an independent Palestinian state is recognized on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, and that the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip stops and all Israeli occupation forces withdraw from the Gaza Strip," the statement added.



Photo by Rezk Tawfik

MP Abdulkareem Al-Kandari (left) questions Amiri speech discrepancies during the parliament session on Wednesday.

ruption, and that the Kuwait Army Fund issue is nothing compared to the corruption in these offices. He called on HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah to take the right decision, adding that the premier can change the ministers.

MP Hamad Al-Medlej affirmed that the Assembly is committed to efficiently playing its legislative and monitoring roles in cooperation with the government. He stressed that the MPs are not divided on the legislative agenda, pointing out that all those who approved and rejected the request of the government to postpone the discussion of bills for one month are committed to the legislative agenda. He revealed some of the MPs want to give the new government a chance and prevent the return of bills to the Assembly after ratification. He criticized Sheikh Fahd Yusuf Al-Sabah for harshly dealing with the officers and threatening to dismiss them. "If you can dismiss them, we in the Assembly can dismiss you as well," he asserted; while emphasizing that the dignity of the citizens including the officers is a red line that nobody should cross.

MP Muhammad Hayef stressed the need to cancel the decision to suspend the appointment, promotion and delegation of employees in the public sector; as it has paralyzed the State. He holds the "army of consultants and advisors" accountable for this decision. He said the courts are now dealing with huge pile of cases, because no public prosecutor has been appointed and there has been no promotion of judges. He added the decision has negatively affected all sectors, including education and health, because of the shortage of employees.

MP Hassan Jawhar said the influential parties have been trying for decades to instigate crises and disputes among social classes, but the people of Kuwait have always been aware of the importance of maintaining national unity. He confirmed this unity was reflected in the results of the three successive parliamentary elections since 2020, ending with the current Assembly that includes one solid bloc of 48 MPs.

World News Roundup

Europe

Russia attacks targets across Ukraine: Russia fired cruise and ballistic missiles and Shahed-type drones at six regions across Ukraine on Wednesday morning, authorities reported, killing at least five civilians and injuring 25 others, including a pregnant woman.

The attacks targeted at least three major cities, including the capital Kyiv, where the European Union’s top diplomat, **Josep Borrell**, was discussing military aid and financial support for Ukraine. He said he started his day in an air raid shelter, calling it part of Ukraine’s “daily reality” after almost two years of war.

The West’s help is desperately needed by Ukraine, which is struggling with ammunition and personnel shortages. Some long-term foreign funding is also in doubt as the latest effort to clinch a deal on Ukraine aid in the US Senate collapsed Tuesday.

Though the roughly 1,500-kilometer (900-mile) front line has barely budged in recent months, the Kremlin’s forces have the upper hand in stocks of missiles and artillery ammunition used for long-range strikes. Russia has repeatedly used missiles to blast civilian targets during the conflict.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said last month that air defense and electronic warfare systems that can stop drones are Kyiv’s top priorities.

Ukraine’s Armed Forces said they intercepted 44 drones and missiles out of 64 that were launched in the morning attack.

The barrage killed four people in Kyiv, the State Emergency Service said. (AP)

Russian upper house approves bill: After a brief discussion, the upper house of Russia’s parliament on Wednesday endorsed a bill that would allow authorities to confiscate money, valuables and other assets from people convicted of spreading “deliberately false information” about the country’s military.

The bill, which was approved equally quickly by the lower house last week, is expected to receive Russian President Vladimir Putin’s signature and become law soon.

The lower house speaker, Vyacheslav Volodin, has said the measure would strengthen the punishment for the “traitors who sling mud at our country and our troops” and “strip those scoundrels of honorary titles, confiscate their assets, money and other valuables.”

Russian officials have used the existing law against “discrediting” the military that covers offenses such as “justifying terrorism” and spreading “fake news” about the armed forces to silence Putin’s critics. Multiple activists, bloggers and ordinary Russians have received long prison terms.

The new confiscation law would apply to people who are convicted of publicly inciting “extremist activities” and calling for actions that would hurt the security of the state or “discrediting” the armed forces. Discrediting the Russian military became a criminal offense under a law adopted as part of a sweeping government crackdown on dissent after Moscow sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022. (AP)

Prince Harry arrives in London: King Charles III’s cancer was caught early and the monarch will “crack on” with his constitutional duties, Britain’s prime minister said Tuesday, as Prince Harry flew in from California for a rare visit with his father.

Royal officials announced Monday that the 75-year-old king has been diagnosed with an undisclosed form of cancer and is receiving treatment as an outpatient.

Less than 18 months into the reign that he’d famously waited decades to begin, Charles suspended public engagements but will continue with state business - including weekly meetings with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak - and won’t be handing over his constitutional roles as head of state.

On Tuesday afternoon, Harry could be seen arriving at the king’s Clarence House residence in a black SUV after an overnight flight.

The two have a troubled relationship, and Harry has seen his father infrequently since the prince quit royal duties in 2020 and moved to Los Angeles with his wife, Meghan, citing what they said was the unbearable intrusions and racist attitudes of the British media. (AP)

Sweden officials close investigation: Swedish officials said Wednesday that they have decided to close their investigation into the September 2022 explosions on the underwater Nord Stream gas pipelines which were built to carry Russian natural gas to Germany, saying they don’t have jurisdiction.

Sweden’s investigation was only one of three into the explosions. Denmark and Germany are also examining the blasts.

The attack, which happened as Europe attempted to wean itself off Russian energy sources following the Kremlin’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, contributed to tensions that followed the start of the war. The source of the sabotage has been a major international mystery.

Public prosecutor Mats Ljungqvist from the Swedish Prosecution Authority said in a statement that its investigation “has been systematic and thorough.”

“Against the background of the situation we now have, we can state that Swedish jurisdiction does not apply.” (AP)

Dutch coalition talks falter: Weeks of negotiations to form a new ruling majority coalition in the Netherlands led by anti-Islam firebrand Geert Wilders appeared to end fruitlessly Tuesday as one of the four party leaders involved in the talks walked out without an agreement.

“Incredibly disappointing. The Netherlands wants this cabinet and now Pieter Omtzigt is throwing in the towel while we were still in discussions until today. I don’t understand it at all,” Wilders said on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Omtzigt later tweeted a statement explaining position the position of his party New Social Contract, or NSC, saying that it was “very shocked” at the state of government finances after reading reports this week provided by ministries. (AP)

Former Irish PM Bruton dies: Former Irish Prime Minister John Bruton, who played a key role in bringing peace to Northern Ireland, has died at the age of 76. Bruton’s family said he died Tuesday in a Dublin hospital after a long illness.

“He was a good husband, a good father and a true patriot,” said a family statement released by Bruton’s Fine Gael party.

First elected to Ireland’s parliament, the Dail, aged 22, Bruton led the centrist Fine Gael party between 1990 and 2001.

Bruton was taoiseach, or prime minister, from 1994 to 1997, a period in which Northern Ireland’s rival militant groups were coaxed into peace talks. The often fraught negotiations culminated in the Good Friday peace accord in 1998, by which time Bruton had lost Ireland’s 1997 election to rival party Fianna Fail, led by Bertie Ahern. (AP)

Italian teen stabbed: A 16-year-old boy was stabbed by another teen at a high school near Milan on Tuesday, the second school stabbing in as many days in the northern Lombard region after a teacher was knifed by a student.

Authorities were questioning the suspected aggressor, a 17-year-old boy, the news agency LaPresse reported. The motive for the stabbing at a vocational high school south of the city was unclear. The victim was rushed to a hospital for treatment of a stab wound to the thigh.

Police on Monday arrested a 17-year-old student in the city of Varese, north of Milan, for investigation of attempted murder after stabbing a 57-year-old teacher multiple times in the back as she entered another vocational school. The school said that the student had behavioral issues and was being given special attention “to improve his psychological and attitudinal abilities.” (AP)

Man granted temporary residence in Norway: A Russian man who reportedly defected from a high-ranking position in the Wagner Group has been given permission to stay in Norway but was refused permanent asylum, a Norwegian newspaper reported Tuesday.

The lawyer for Andrey Medvedev, Brynjulf Risnes, told Dagbladet that his client was granted temporary residence “due to the security risk involved in sending him back to Russia,” but wasn’t given permanent residence or citizenship.

The Associated Press was unable to contact Risnes on Tuesday. Medvedev sought asylum in January 2023 after having defected from Wagner and fled to Norway, crossing illegally over the country’s 198-kilometer (123-mile) border with Russia, saying he feared for his life if he were sent back. (AP)



US Republican presidential candidate former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley addresses a gathering during a campaign rally, Jan 19 in Manchester, NH. Haley was swamped on Feb 6 in Nevada’s symbolic Republican presidential primary as GOP voters resoundingly picked the ‘none of these candidates’ option on the ballot in a repudiation of the former UN ambassador who is the last remaining major rival to front-runner Donald Trump. (AP)

Politics

Biden easily wins contest

Haley loses Nevada Republican primary

LAS VEGAS, Feb 7, (AP): Nikki Haley was swamped Tuesday in Nevada’s symbolic Republican presidential primary as GOP voters resoundingly picked the “none of these candidates” option on the ballot in a repudiation of the former UN ambassador who is the last remaining major rival to front-runner Donald Trump.

Trump didn’t compete in the primary, which doesn’t award any delegates needed to win the GOP nomination. The former president is instead focused on caucuses that will be held Thursday and will help him move closer to becoming the Republican standard-bearer.

That leaves the results Tuesday as technically meaningless in the Republican race. But they still amount to an embarrassment for Haley, who has sought to position herself as a candidate who can genuinely compete against Trump. Instead, she became the first presidential candidate from either party to lose a race to “none of these candidates” since that option was introduced in Nevada in 1975.

Haley had said beforehand she was going to “focus on the states that are fair” and did not campaign in the western state in the weeks leading up to the caucuses, spending time instead in her home state, South Carolina, before its Feb. 24 primary. Her campaign wrote off the results with a reference to Nevada’s famous casino industry.

“Even Donald Trump knows that when you play penny slots the house wins,” spokeswoman Olivia Perez-Cubas said. “We didn’t bother to play a game rigged for Trump. We’re full steam ahead in South Carolina and beyond.”

Claim

Trump joked on his social media network. “Watch, she’ll soon claim Victory!”

Nevada Gov. Joe Lombardo, a Republican, had announced beforehand that he would vote for “none of these candidates” on Tuesday. Several Republicans interviewed heading to the polls said they intended to do the same.

Washoe County Republican Party Chair Bruce Parks, who pushed for the GOP to hold caucuses, said that he

told voters who called his office - and Trump supporters - to participate in the primary by voting for “none of these candidates” over Haley.

“They basically told us they don’t care about us,” Parks said in an interview after the race was called. “By marking ‘none of these candidates,’ we respond in kind - we don’t care about you either.”

Nevada GOP Chairman Michael McDonald, a Trump ally who faces state charges for serving as a so-called “fake elector” on the former president’s behalf, said he left it to each county GOP chairman to decide if they wanted to promote “none of these candidates.” He said Haley’s seeming disrespect of Nevada voters was “reciprocated” with the results.

The Associated Press declared “none of these candidates” the winner at 12:01 a.m. on Wednesday based on initial vote results that showed it with a significant lead over Haley in seven counties across the state, including in the two most populous counties.

There was also a Democratic primary on Tuesday that President Joe Biden easily won against author Marianne Williamson and a handful of less-known challengers. Rep. Dean Phillips of Minnesota was not on the ballot.

Support

Biden issued a statement thanking Nevada voters for their support and, with an eye toward an expected matchup in November, warned that Trump is trying to divide America.

“I want to thank the voters of Nevada for sending me and Kamala Harris to the White House four years ago, and for setting us one step further on that same path again tonight. We must organize, mobilize, and vote. Because one day, when we look back, we’ll be able to say, when American democracy was a risk, we saved it - together,” Biden said.

Nevada lawmakers added “none of these candidates” as an option in all statewide races as a way post-Watergate for voters to participate but express dissatisfaction with their choices. “None” can’t win an elected office but it came in first in primary congressional contests in 1976 and 1978. It also finished ahead of both George Bush

and Edward Kennedy in Nevada’s 1980 presidential primaries.

The caucuses on Thursday are the only Nevada contest that count toward the GOP’s presidential nomination. But they were seen as especially skewed in favor of Trump because of the intense grassroots support they require from candidates and new state party rules that benefitted him further.

Trump is expected to handily win the caucuses, which should deliver him all 26 of the state’s delegates. Delegates are party members, activists and elected officials who vote at the national party conventions to formally select the party’s nominee.

“If your goal is to win the Republican nomination for president, you go where the delegates are. And it baffles me that Nikki Haley chose not to participate,” Trump’s senior campaign adviser Chris LaCivita said in an interview before the primary.

Changed

Nevada, the third state in the field after Iowa and New Hampshire, was set to hold a state-run primary election instead of party-run caucuses after Democrats controlling the Legislature changed the law to try to boost participation.

Caucuses typically require voters to show up for an in-person meeting at a certain day or time, while elections can offer more flexibility to participate, with polls open for most of the day on Election Day, along with absentee or early voting.

But Nevada Republicans chose to hold party-run caucuses instead, saying they wanted certain rules in place, like a requirement that participants show a government-issued ID.

The caucuses require a candidate to intensely organize supporters around the state in order to be competitive, a feat that Trump, the former president and prohibitive front-runner, was easily positioned to do.

The Nevada GOP also restricted the involvement of super PACs like the one Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis was relying on to boost his now-suspended campaign. And the party barred candidates from appearing both on the primary ballot and in the caucuses.

Tuesday afternoon. Officials deployed a robodog, the SWAT team, electronic surveillance and drones.

As deputies entered the bank, dozens of people ran out, Marceno said. A man armed with a knife, later identified as 36-year-old Sterling Ramon Alavache, still had two hostages and claimed to have a bomb, the sheriff said. (AP)

‘Killer pressured employee’: The estranged husband of Connecticut mother-of-five Jennifer Dulos pressured an employee to get rid of pickup truck seats that would later become evidence in the investigation of her 2019 killing, the worker testified Tuesday as he described getting tangled up in the case unwittingly.

Pavel Gumienny, 43, is a key witness in the trial of Michelle Troconis, who is accused of helping her boyfriend, Dulos’ husband, cover up the killing afterward. Troconis denies charges of conspiracy to commit murder, evidence tampering and hindering prosecution.

Gumienny was an employee of Fotis Dulos, who was going through a bitter divorce and child custody battle with Jennifer Dulos when she vanished from her home in New Canaan, Connecticut, on May 24, 2019. Fotis Dulos died by suicide in January 2020 shortly after being charged with murdering her - which he denied. (AP)



Vehicles drive on California State Route 163 over a flooded street on Feb 6, in San Diego. The National Weather Service issued a brief tornado warning for parts of East San Diego county. The warning was cancelled shortly after it was issued, with forecasters explaining that the storm no longer appeared capable of producing a twister even if it briefly turned some San Diego streets into rivers. (AP)



Marceno



Meade

America

Ex-sheriff’s deputy testifies: A former Ohio sheriff’s deputy testified in a murder trial Tuesday that the man he killed lifted a gun to shoot him, despite prosecutors saying the man’s gun was found on his kitchen floor with the safety mechanism engaged.

Jason Meade took to the stand to describe the events of the fatal 2020 shooting of Casey Goodson Jr, which was not captured by body camera as Meade was not wearing one at the time. He said that he feared for his life and the lives of those around him when Meade shot the 23-year-old Goodson a total of six times - five times in the back.

Meade, who is white, has pleaded not guilty to murder and reckless homicide in the death of Goodson, who was Black. The sheriff’s deputy, who is a pastor at a Baptist church, shot Goodson as he entered his grandmother’s house, police have said. Goodson fell into the house’s kitchen, where his gun was found, according to prosecutors. (AP)

Woman sues poultry factory: The mother of a 16-year-old who died in a workplace accident at a Mississippi poultry factory is suing the companies that hired and employed him, accusing them of failing to follow safety standards that could have prevented his death.

In court papers filed at the Forest County Circuit Court last week, attorneys for Edilma Perez Ramirez said Mar-Jac Poultry skirted safety protections, leading to the death of her son Duvan Perez. The lawsuit follows a January report by the US Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration that declared numerous safety violations related to the death of the teenager, who immigrated to Mississippi from Guatemala years ago. (AP)



Professor Charles Mackworth-Young, prime warden of the Goldsmith’s Company, inspects new coins bearing the image of King Charles III, at Goldsmiths’ Hall in London, on Feb 6 during the Trial of the Pyx, a judicial ceremony to ensure that newly minted coins from the Royal Mint conform to their required specifications. (AP)

Lat/Am

Cease-fire extended

Ex-Chile prez Piñera dies in copter crash

VIÑA DEL MAR, Chile, Feb 7, (AP): **Sebastián Piñera**, the two-time former president of Chile who faced social upheaval followed by a pandemic in his second term, died Tuesday in a helicopter crash. He was 74.

Chile Interior Minister Carolina Tohá confirmed the death of the former president. No further details were immediately released about the cause of the accident.

Serving as president from 2010 to 2014 and again from 2018 to 2022, Piñera led the South American nation during moments of crisis, including the aftermath of an 8.8 magnitude earthquake and tsunami.

He gained a spotlight for his administration’s rescue of trapped Chilean miners in 2010, and his governance during the coronavirus pandemic, when Chile was placed among the top five countries for vaccination rates for the illness.

His legacy is marred by violent police repression in October 2019 against protesters who were demonstrating against the country’s education, health and pension systems dating to the country’s 1973-1990 military dictatorship. A United Nations investigation alleged that police used force “improperly and indiscriminately” injuring protesters, and that government mistreatment of detainees amounted to torture.

The social unrest ultimately led to two attempts to update the constitution that was inherited from the military government, but both have failed. Piñera’s death came as Chile already was recovering from massive deadly wildfires in the country’s central region.

Chilean President Gabriel Boric honored Piñera in a speech Tuesday afternoon as a leader “seeking the best for his country,” highlighting his management of the pandemic and other emergencies. “He was a democrat from the very first moment,” Boric said.

The death also drew an outpouring of condolences from leaders and former leaders across Latin America from both the left and right.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva wrote on X, formerly Twitter, that it was sad that Piñera had died so “abruptly.”

“We worked to strengthen the relationship between our countries and we always had a good dialogue when we were both presidents, and also when we weren’t,” he said.

Argentinian President Javier Milei sent condolences, as did his predecessor, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.

Respect

“As everyone knows, we did not have the same ideas, but we were always united by a relationship of great respect: he was a right-wing man but deeply democratic,” Fernández said. “I remember with affection his sense of humor and the warmth of his family, whom I met in Chile.”

Piñera was the owner of the fifth-largest fortune in Chile, estimated at some \$3 billion. He worked as an academic in several universities for almost 20 years and as a consultant for the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank. When he closed his time in office, he had created an estimated 1 million jobs.

As a businessman in the 1970s through the 1990s, he worked in a variety of industries, including real estate. He held shares in major airlines, telecommunication, real estate and electricity companies. He also created one of the largest credit card companies in the country. In 2009, he handed over the management of his businesses to others.

He entered politics representing the center-right, which was the civilian support of the military regime. However, when he served as an independent senator, he voted against the extension of dictator Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990).

He ran three times for president of Chile. In 2006, he lost to socialist Michelle Bachelet; then in 2010 he defeated former President Eduardo Frei and was elected in 2010. Four years later, in 2018, he won a second four-year term after defeating a leftist independent.

Twelve days before the beginning of his first term, an 8.8 magnitude earthquake and a tsunami claimed the lives of 525 people and devastated the infrastructure of central-southern Chile.

Also:

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti: A former rebel leader made a surprise appearance in Haiti’s capital on Tuesday amid large protests across the country for the second consecutive day, demanding the ouster of Prime Minister **Ariel Henry**.

Guy Philippe - who played a key role in the 2004 rebellion against former President **Jean-Bertrand Aristide** - was briefly spotted in the upscale community of Pétionville in Port-au-Prince, where he shook hands with Haitians at a park in front of a police station before he left. It wasn’t immediately clear where Philippe was going, but dozens of motorcycle drivers, clearly his supporters, tried to track him down across streets blocked by burning tires.

His appearance caused a great commotion because of a video he released Monday, calling for a rebellion to oust the prime minister on Wednesday, or Feb. 7, the date Haitian leaders are traditionally sworn into office.

A growing number of Haitians accuse the prime minister of holding on to power and failing to organize general elections. Henry assumed the leadership of Haiti, with the backing of the international community, shortly after President **Jovenel Moïse** was killed in July 2021. Since then, he has pledged to hold elections but has noted, as has the international community, that it is currently too unsafe to do so.

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BOGOTA, Colombia: Colombia’s government and the nation’s largest remaining guerrilla group have extended by six months a ceasefire that began last year, with the National Liberation Army rebels also promising to stop kidnapping civilians for ransom.

The truce was set to expire on Tuesday. But in a brief statement issued just minutes before midnight, both sides said that they have extended the cease-fire for 180 days.

The statement says the National Liberation Army, known by its Spanish acronym ELN, will “temporarily and unilaterally suspend economic detentions” in order to contribute to the cease-fire.

Later on Tuesday, both sides published a more detailed statement about the ceasefire extension. In it they said they had agreed to create a website about the peace talks and that children under 15 would not be used to conduct intelligence operations or other kinds



In this photo released by the government spokesman office, Thailand’s Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, (center left), and Cambodia’s Prime Minister Hun Manet, (center right), review an honor guard during a welcoming ceremony at the Government House in Bangkok, Thailand on Feb 7. (AP)

Asia

Cambodia’s PM Hun Manet visits Thailand

Philippine landslide kills 7 & 48 missing

MANILA, Philippines, Feb 7, (AP): A landslide left at least seven villagers dead and 48 others missing, including miners waiting in two buses for a ride home, in a gold-mining village in the southern Philippines, officials said Wednesday.

Army troops, police and volunteers rescued 31 villagers who were injured when the landslide hit the mountain village of Masara in the remote town of Maco in Davao de Oro province Tuesday night. They resumed the search on Wednesday morning after suspending it the night before due to fears of more landslides, officials said.

More than 750 families have been moved to evacuation centers since the landslide struck, disaster response officials said.

Among the missing were 27 miners who were waiting to be driven home in two parked buses when the landslide hit in clear weather, Davao de Oro provincial spokesperson Edward Macapili said.

Eight miners who were among those waiting jumped out of the bus windows or dashed away and survived. A third bus had already left, Macapili said.

Torrential rains that have swamped the region on and off in recent weeks have eased and the weather was clear in the previous three days, he said.

“It happened so fast,” Macapili said by telephone. “They suddenly saw the landslide cascading directly toward them.”

Three seriously injured victims will be evacuated by helicopter, regional military spokesperson Col. Rosa Rosete-Manuel said by telephone.

Earthquakes in recent months had damaged buildings in the southeastern region, and more than a dozen villagers have died in recent weeks from flooding and landslides, according to disaster response officials.

A landslide buried a house and killed 10 people last month in Monkayo town, also in Davao de Oro province, officials said.

Also:

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia: Malaysia’s ex-Prime Minister **Najib Razak** is disappointed he wasn’t given a full royal pardon of his 12-year prison sentence for graft, and may file a new appeal to the new monarch, his lawyer said Wednesday.

The decision last week by the Pardons Board to cut in half Najib’s jail term sparked outrage among many Malaysians, who slammed it as a mockery of the justice system and a

Thailand and separatist rebels agree on roadmap to peace, says Malaysia

of torturing suspects and other abuses.

Southern Thai Muslims - whose ethnicity, culture and language differ from the Buddhist majority - believe they are treated as second-class citizens and have the sympathy of many Malaysians, about 60% of whom are Muslim.

Anas Abdulrahman, the head of the Barisan Revolusi Nasional -- the largest of the insurgents groups in southern Thai - told reporters that he has high hopes for a lasting solution under the new Thai government led by Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin. The Thai government last year appointed Chatchai Bangchud, the first civilian to head the talks.

Also:

JAKARTA, Indonesia: Separatist rebels in Indonesia’s restive Papua region expressed their readiness Wednesday to release a New Zealand pilot who was taken hostage a year ago.

Independence fighters led by **Egianus Kogoya**, a regional commander in the Free Papua Movement, stormed a single-engine plane on a small runway in Paro and abducted **Philip Mark Mehrtens** on Feb. 7, 2023. The pilot from Christchurch was working for Indonesian aviation company Susi Air.

blow to Prime Minister **Anwar Ibrahim**’s anti-corruption campaign. While the board isn’t required to explain its decision, it triggered calls for transparency in such high profile cases.

Najib, 70, has been serving less than two years of his sentence linked to the theft of billions of dollars from the IMDB state fund that has sparked investigations in the U.S. and other countries. He is Malaysia’s first leader to be imprisoned after leaving office and still faces a major trial linked to IMDB.

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BANGKOK: Cambodia’s Prime Minister **Hun Manet** on Wednesday made his first official visit to neighboring **Thailand** since becoming his country’s leader last year, seeking to renew the close ties the two countries have

maintained in recent times.

In addition to meeting with his Thai counterpart, **Srettha Thavisin**, Hun Manet presided over the signing of several documents on bilateral cooperation and was scheduled to have a royal audience with **King Maha Vajiralongkorn** and address a Thailand-Cambodia business forum.

Hun Manet’s scheduled one-day visit “is an important opportunity for both countries to further strengthen the bilateral cooperation, especially in the economic development of border areas, promotion of two-way trade and investment, closer transportation connectivity, tourism cooperation as well as fostering closer ties between the peoples of the two kingdoms,” the Thai Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

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‘Reverse election delay’: Authorities in Senegal should hold the presidential election this month as scheduled instead of delaying it by 10 months, West Africa’s regional bloc said Tuesday, as the United Nations human rights office expressed concern about the unprecedented decision in one of Africa’s most stable democracies.

President **Macky Sall** postponed the Feb 25 vote, citing an electoral dispute between the parliament and the judiciary regarding some candidacies. Opposition leaders and candidates rejected the decision, calling it a “coup.”

Several opposition lawmakers were blocked from voting on Monday as parliament rescheduled the election for December, prompting outrage and condemnation. Sall’s time in office had been set to end on April 2.

“We are disappointed in my country,” said Moustapha Kane, a teacher in the capital, Dakar, as the unrest of past days appeared to calm. “We used to be a great democracy. Now we are in danger of being the laughingstock of other countries.”

The vote has been surrounded by months of controversies, from deadly clashes that resulted in Sall announcing that he would not seek a third term to the disqualification of two opposition leaders by the highest election authority. (AP)



In this photo provided by the Philippine Army 60th Infantry (Mediator) Battalion, soldiers carry a landslide victim as they arrive at Tagum City, Davao del Norte province, southern Philippines on Feb 7. (AP)



Nikoi



Sall

Africa

Bid to deliver aid to 3m Ethiopians:

The UN’s World Food Program says it aims to reach up to 3 million Ethiopians affected by climate change and conflict in the coming weeks, half the number it supported in the East African country before the agency introduced a lengthy aid suspension last year.

WFP said it “is now working at pace to deliver food assistance to up to 3 million” in Ethiopia’s Tigray, Afar, Amhara and Somali regions. The agency “is extremely concerned about the deteriorating food security in Northern Ethiopia - where many are already facing severe hunger,” **Chris Nikoi**, its Ethiopia head, said in a statement issued Tuesday.

The United Nations and the United States halted food aid for the Tigray region in March 2023 because of a massive scheme by Ethiopian officials to steal humanitarian grain. The pause was extended to the rest of the country in June after the diversions were found to have occurred nationwide.

The US and the UN later resumed food deliveries but on a small scale.

Before the suspension, the WFP helped feed 6 million Ethiopians. It now plans to reach 40% of the 7.2 million people who face acute food insecurity and only “if resources are available.” The rest will be reached by the government and other aid agencies, the agency said.

The WFP is grappling with a worldwide funding shortage at a time when needs are soaring. The agency said it has “limited food stocks” in Ethiopia and urgently needs \$142 million for its operations. Without those funds the agency will be forced to stop food distributions for nearly 1 million foreign refugees in April, it said. (AP)

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Tensions rising in South Africa: Nigeria’s authorities on Tuesday called for caution over what they described as “veiled threats” against their citizens living in South Africa before both countries meet in an Africa Cup of Nations semifinal - a soccer match that is renewing frictions.

Both countries already have endured a yearslong rivalry, more so because they have Africa’s biggest entertainment industries rather than the continent’s largest economies.

But now tensions are rising in the context of soccer as Nigeria and South Africa get ready to play in their semifinal match in the Ivory Coast on Wednesday.

The Nigerian High Commission in South

Africa said in a statement that some South Africans were making “inflammatory online comments” that mostly “consist of veiled threats” against Nigerians.

The commission urged Nigerian citizens

in South Africa to “be watchful of their utterances, be mindful of where they choose to watch the match ... and refrain from engaging in loud, riotous or provocative celebrations should the Super Eagles (the Ni-



Colombian government representative Vera Grabe, (left), and Colombian commander of the National Liberation Army guerrilla group (ELN) Pablo Beltran exchange their signed ceasefire extension agreement in Havana, Cuba on Feb 6. Behind are Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez, (left), and an unidentified Cuban official. (AP)

KFH continues to serve customers during holiday

Kuwait Finance House (KFH) continues to provide its banking services around the clock through a group of various technological and digital tools during the holiday.


Most of the banking services are available in several channels around the clock, whether through the bank's website, KFH.com, or via the KFHOnline mobile application, or through the KFHGo electronic branches that are spread in many important locations, in addition to the KFH accounts on social media and many E-service channels and KFH branch at Kuwait international airport.

KFH Go branch is considered a new electronic

channel that helps transfer normal customer transactions to an innovative automated branch, that provides capabilities that allow customers to benefit from highly efficient banking services. It includes more than 80% of the services and business provided by the branches in their traditional sense, which makes KFH Go branches the preferred choice to many segments of customers, especially the youth.

KFH GO branches include the XTM device that allows direct video call with service personnel, as well as automatic teller machines and cash deposit machines. The cash deposit machines receive 300 notes per transaction.

Moreover, Customers can perform a variety of interactive banking services through KFH Go's 10 branches located in various places in Kuwait, including Kuwait International Airport, such as: establishing "Murabaha" financing transactions, requesting credit and prepaid cards, updating data and phone numbers, activating bank cards, opening deposits and accounts, instant cheque printing, receiving gold biscuits (10 grams), opening (gold, savings, Al-Rabeh, electron) accounts, online gold purchase and sell, cardless withdrawals using QR code through mobile, orby using Civil ID or phone number, in addition to many other financing and banking services conducted quickly, easily and safely.



تواصل مع بيتك على مدار الساعة 24/7

KFH round the clock services.

Market Movements

07-02-2024

SAUDI	-	Tadawul	Change	Closing pts	JAPAN	-	Nikkei	Change	Closing pts
UAE	-	DFM	+94.52	12,165.83				-40.74	36,119.92
EGYPT	-	EGX 30	+635.32	27,905.95					
PHILIPPINES	-	PSEI	+74.78	6,830.04					
PAKISTAN	-	KSE 100	+345.34	64,196.62					

Business

Kuwait's consumer price index records 3.4% YoY increase in Dec 2023

GCC countries experience lower inflation amid global trends

Kuwait real estate contracts surge by 37% in January '24

January sees 411 real estate transactions

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: The total value of real estate contracts registered with the Ministry of Justice during January 2024 was about 268.16 million dinars, rising by about 37.02% from its level in the previous month of 195.71 million dinars, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Statistics issued by the Real Estate Registration and Documentation Department at the Ministry of Justice indicated that contracts for 411 properties were traded during the past month.

Trades were distributed among the six governorates, led by private real estate. This is 309 properties worth 141.38 million dinars, investment real estate with about 91 properties worth 76.91 million dinars, then commercial real estate with 8 properties worth 43.2 million dinars, two properties in the craft sector worth 4.55 million dinars, and a property in the warehouse sector worth 2.11 million dinars.

The Al-Ahmadi Governorate had the largest number of real estate deals, with about 148 properties, while a smaller number of deals were executed in Al-Jahra Governorate, with only 15 deals. Kuwait did not witness the registration of any agency contracts for this month.

Oil flow continues in Saudi, Kuwait, UAE

India maintains strategy amid Red Sea crisis for oil imports

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: An Indian official confirmed that it is unlikely that his country will witness a major interruption in oil flows from Gulf countries, despite the escalating crisis in the Red Sea region, explaining that India has a strategy of increasing oil purchases from Middle Eastern countries while keeping Russian crude imports unchanged, which will help the country in trying to overcome the turbulent conditions in the global oil markets, reports Al-Qabas daily.

He pointed out that India's imports of crude oil shipped from Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE were not affected by the recent Red Sea attacks. As for Russian crude, India's demand for it remains flexible despite the threats in the region.

Standard & Poor's quoted Gurmeet Singh, head of the Indian Petroleum Association, as

saying: The global oil market fears the diversion of supplies through alternative routes and the rise in shipping costs, but the New Delhi government is monitoring developments and has confidence in dealing with this issue to ensure that crude is not interrupted from flowing to Indian refineries.

He added: Despite the escalation of fears of the Red Sea crisis regarding the diversion of supplies and the rise in shipping costs, it is unlikely that the delivery of oil shipments to India will be disrupted.

Singh expected the demand for oil in India to reach 5.59 million barrels per day in 2024, compared to 5.37 million barrels per day in 2023, pointing out that the potential increase in demand is due to strong economic growth, as well as increased traffic and transportation and continued demand for crude in sectors.

By KAMCO Invest
GCC inflation witnessed broad-based decline in 2023

Inflation in the GCC countries trended lower during 2023 as compared to most other regions in the world where high inflation persists. According to the OECD, global headline inflation is estimated to decline to 7% in 2023 and 5.2% in 2024 as compared to an average of 9.5% in 2022. The persistently high global inflation for the last two years was underpinned by a combination of high energy prices and elevated commodity prices which were mainly driven by geopolitical tensions such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict. To combat the effects of high inflation, central banks around the world moved to raise their benchmark rates in union, creating a higher for longer interest rate environment in the process. According to the IMF, central banks have raised rates by approximately 400 bps in advanced economies and around 650 bps in emerging market economies during the period between late 2021 and October-2023. This astronomical growth of global borrowing rates had an expected negative effect on the global economy. Currently there is a sentiment that the period of continuous interest rate hikes has come to an end as most of the global central banks kept their benchmark rates unchanged.

However, there are new geopolitical challenges facing the global economy especially the MENA economies such as the ongoing war on Gaza and the disruption of global shipping lines in the Red Sea. According to the BMI, Middle East consumers are the most exposed to the Red Sea crisis as 81.6% of the region's imports travel along Red Sea routes that are exposed to the disruption. In 2022, USD 229 Bn of imported goods which were mainly from Europe and Asia reached the MENA region through these Red Sea routes. There are fears that the ongoing disruption in the Red Sea trade routes might heighten costs of goods and therefore put an upward pressure on the GCC as well as the MENA inflation.

Among the six GCC countries, only Dubai reported an increase in its average annual inflation rate which increased from 2.9% in 2022 to 3.3% in 2023. On the other hand, the rest of the GCC countries reported a decline in their annual average inflation rate from 2022 to 2023. Average annual inflation rate for Kuwait declined from 4.0% in 2022 to 3.6% in 2023. Similarly, average annual inflation rate for Saudi Arabia dipped from 2.5% in 2022 to 2.3% in 2023. According to the IMF, the primary factors that allowed the GCC regional countries to control their inflation so well are among other things, the combination of subsidies in energy sector, the prevalence of administered prices on basic food items and food security strategies, and the wider continuing economic diversification efforts.

Global Food Prices

Global food prices have fallen by 13.7% in 2023, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The decline in global food prices was attributed to 15.4% decline in the Cereals Index, recovering from price increases that took place after the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. World cereal production in 2023 is expected to reach an all-time high of 1,523 million tons in 2023 witnessing 1.2% growth from 2022 according to FAO. Another key contributor to the overall fall

Kuwait oil price surges to USD 78.25 per barrel

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7, (KUNA): On Tuesday, the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) reported a notable uptick in the price of Kuwaiti crude oil, climbing by 59 cents to USD 78.25 per barrel, as compared to the previous day's rate of USD 77.66.

This increase in price mirrors the broader trend seen in the oil market,

with Brent crude oil futures also rising by 60 cents to reach 78.59 per barrel, while West Texas Intermediate experienced a similar upward trajectory, climbing by 53 cents to reach USD 73.51 per barrel. These developments underscore ongoing fluctuations in global oil prices and reflect the dynamic nature of the energy market.

CBK promotes governance of Shari'ah supervision

Kuwait launches Certified Shari'ah Auditor Program

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Under the patronage of His Excellency Mr. Basil Ahmad Al-Haroun, Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Institute of Banking Studies (KIBS), Ms. Rana Al-Nibari, Director General of KIBS, the "Certified Shari'ah Auditor Certificate" Program was launched in which employees working in the area of Shari'ah auditing at the Central Bank of Kuwait and a number of local banks participated. The local Kuwaiti banks include Kuwait Finance House (KFH), Kuwait International Bank (KIB), Ahli United Bank (AUB) and Boubyan Bank in addition to talents working in various entities. Developing employees in the area of Shari'ah auditing has become one of the most important topics in the Islamic banking and finance sector.

Mr. Basil Ahmed Al-Haroun stressed the importance of the program which aims to strengthen and secure compliance by Islamic banks with the rules of Islamic Shari'ah and its objectives. On December 20, 2016, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) issued instructions regarding "Governance of Shari'ah Supervision in Kuwaiti Islamic Banks" that covered a set of elements regulating governance of Shari'ah oversight and other relevant topics.

Ms. Rana Al Nibari stated the

following,"Shari'ah auditing is an essential component of Shari'ah supervision and governance. Studies have shown that the Kuwaiti market requires well-qualified talents with professional certifications in the field. It is necessary to make more efforts that contribute to upgrading the capabilities of Shari'ah audit staff in Kuwait."

Owing to the significance of this sector, the Central Bank of Kuwait, in cooperation with the Kuwait Institute of Banking Studies, created the "Certified Sharia Auditor" certification. This certificate has been designed to cover the field of auditing in banks and other financial institutions including investment and insurance to achieve inclusion in the Islamic financial industry.

The program, which falls within the Kafa'a initiative led by the Central Bank of Kuwait with participation from local banks and managed by KIBS, is an opportunity to hone employees' skills in the field of Shari'ah auditing. This certificate has been prepared based on best practices and the latest scientific materials in this regard. The Shari'ah Auditor Certificate is also accredited by the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Capital Markets Authority (CMA), the London Institute of Banking and Finance and the Kuwait Center for Islamic Economics.



Group picture of the event.



Dhaman & Emirates Islamic sign a Shariah-compliant agreement to foster trade and attract foreign investment in the Arab world.

Trade soars with Shariah-compliant deal

Dhaman & Emirates Islamic join forces to boost trade activities in Arab world

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: The Arab Investment and Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (Dhaman), a pioneer multilateral credit and political risk insurance provider, has formalized a strategic collaboration with Emirates Islamic, a prominent Islamic financial institution in the UAE. This landmark partnership establishes Dhaman & Emirates Islamic as the pioneering financial institutions to endorse a Shariah-compliant agreement to facilitate trade and foster foreign investment inflows within the Arab world.

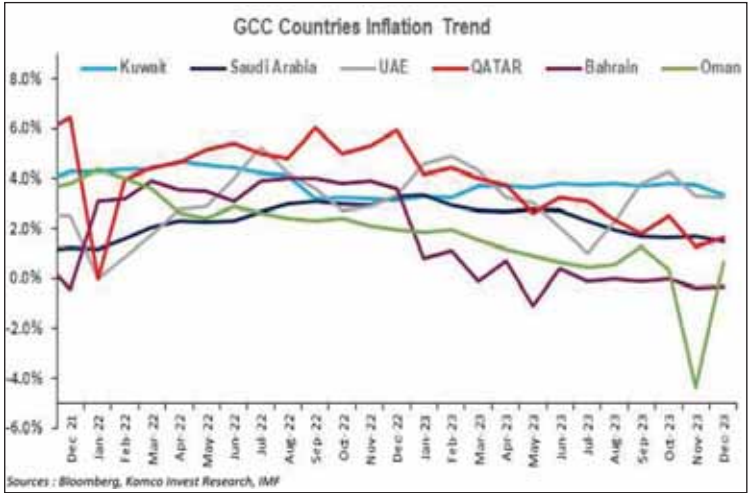
The agreement, grounded in Shariah principles, is poised to enhance trade activities, and attract foreign investments across Arab nations. In line with this, Dhaman and Emirates Islamic will introduce a comprehensive credit and political insurance scheme. This initiative is designed to facilitate business expansion into new markets within Dhaman's member countries, creating a conducive trade and investment growth environment.

The signing of this Shariah-compliant agreement marks a significant

milestone in the evolving landscape of inter-Arab trade. Notably, according to Dhaman's second quarterly review for 2023, inter-Arab trade in goods and services experienced a robust growth of 32.4 percent, reaching USD 3.5 trillion in 2022.

The Global Trade Risks Report for 2023 by the UAE Ministry of Economy highlights the pivotal role of expansion into new markets and geographies as a key driver of trade growth, a sentiment echoed by most businesses surveyed.

Abdullah A. Al Sabeeh, Director General at Dhaman, expressed enthusiasm about the partnership, stating, "We are delighted to sign the partnership agreement with Emirates Islamic, which aligns with our commitment to support the economic and social development of the region. This collaboration aims to provide the necessary risk mitigation tools to facilitate relevant investments and trade activities, anticipating regional trade to thrive and benefit from a Shariah-compliant standpoint."



Germany's Lufthansa cancels hundreds of flights

Ground staff for Lufthansa walked off the job at five major German airports on Wednesday, causing the airline to cancel hundreds of flights.

The Ver.di union called on ground staff at Frankfurt and Munich, Lufthansa's two main hubs, as well as Berlin, Duesseldorf and Hamburg, to strike for 27 hours starting at 4 a.m. Wednesday.

Lufthansa said ahead of the strike that it expected to be able to operate around 10-20% of all planned flights. It said tickets could be rebooked free of charge,

and tickets for German domestic flights could be converted to rail vouchers.

In Frankfurt, the company canceled 80-90% of the planned 600 departures and arrivals by Lufthansa itself and subsidiary Air Dolomiti ahead of the strike, German news agency dpa reported. More than 400 departures and arrivals at Munich Airport also were canceled.

All Lufthansa departures from Berlin and Hamburg were canceled, as were most domestic flights from Duesseldorf.

Lufthansa anticipated that, in all, more than 100,000 people would have to change their travel plans.

Lufthansa unit Eurowings said it wasn't affected.

The union is seeking a 12.5% pay raise, or at least 500 euros (\$539) more per month, in negotiations for nearly 25,000 employees, including check-in, aircraft handling, maintenance and freight staff. Hourslong or one-day "warning strikes" are a common tactic in German contract negotiations. (AP)



Lufthansa aircraft are parked at the airport in Frankfurt, Germany, Wednesday, Feb. 7, 2024. The ground staff of German Lufthansa airline went for a one-day warning strike on Wednesday causing the cancellation of hundreds of flights. (AP)

How big is the risk?

Conflict in the ME affecting a key energy lifeline for Europe

FRANKFURT, Germany, Feb 7, (AP): Missiles and drones are flying in the Red Sea, disrupting one of the world's key trade arteries and a choke-point for energy shipments headed for Europe.

Attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels over Israel's war with Hamas are posing a new threat to the future of energy supplies to the 27-country European Union, which relies on imported natural gas to power factories, generate electricity and heat homes.

Tankers carrying liquefied natural gas - which is supercooled to travel by ship instead of pipeline - routinely pass through the Red Sea, and several shipments to Italy already have been canceled.

It's causing anxiety, especially as Europe still is grappling with the fallout from an energy crisis after Russia largely cut off natural gas to the continent over the invasion of Ukraine.

Here are key things to know about the threat to Europe's energy supplies from conflict in the Middle East:

The Iranian-backed Houthis have been firing drones and missiles at ships that pass by territory they control near the narrow Bab al-Mandab Strait at the southern end of the Red Sea.

The Houthis say they are striking Israel-bound ships to support the Hamas militant group in its war with Israel, although other ships have been targeted as well. In response, the U.S. and the U.K. have been attacking Houthi launch sites in Yemen since mid-January.

Security concerns have led shipping and some energy companies to re-route vessels around the southern tip of Africa instead of through the Suez Canal at the northern end of the Red Sea. That is lengthening the journey to Europe from suppliers in the Middle East, like Qatar, by a week or more and raising costs.

Around 70% of LNG shipments from Qatar that were headed for Italy's major terminal on the Adriatic Sea were canceled in January. Last year, Qatar supplied 40% of Italy's LNG.

Cooling natural gas to minus 162° C (minus 260° F) changes it into a liquid and reduces its volume by 600 times so it can be stored and shipped aboard specially designed vessels.

Upon arrival, it's reheated into gas and transported by pipeline to distri-

bution companies, industrial consumers and power plants.

Europe relied for decades on gas transported through pipelines from Russia. That came to an abrupt end after Russia invaded Ukraine and cut off most of its supply. LNG became a lifeline, with the German government, for example, hastily lining up floating import terminals on its northern coast.

Last year, 12.9% of Europe's LNG went through the Red Sea from suppliers in the Middle East, mainly Qatar. That means "an extended shut-in of the Red Sea route from the Middle East poses a supply risk to Europe," said Kaushal Ramesh, vice president at Rystad Energy.

So far, there's been little to no impact on natural gas prices. In fact, spot prices for natural gas have fallen since the Houthi attacks began, from around 45 euros (\$48.38) per megawatt hour before the start of the Israel-Hamas war to 28.37 euros Tuesday.

Europe is getting a break because demand for natural gas is weak amid a sluggish economy. Slow growth in China also has reduced competition. And LNG shipments from the U.S. don't have to go through the Red Sea.

Meanwhile, pipeline gas is still flowing from Norway and Azerbaijan, and Europe is buying some LNG from Russia despite sanctions.

A key factor has been Europe's efforts to fill underground storage with gas ahead of winter: Storage is over 70% full with most of the heating season over.

That means "the price impact will be delayed until Europe's gas storage has been drawn down sufficiently," Rystad's Ramesh said.

Things were different in 2022 when the war in Ukraine began. Russia's cutoff sent gas prices rising sharply, surging inflation to record highs and helping drive a cost-of-living crisis. European governments and companies raced to secure alternatives.

But now, Europe's gas market is "well supplied," said Simone Tagliapietra, an energy analyst at the Bruegel think tank in Brussels. Abundant storage means "a very good buffer" against any interruptions or delays in gas shipments.

There are fears the Israel-Hamas war could spread to other countries in the region, particularly Iran, and lead to disruption of shipping through the

Strait of Hormuz at the end of the Persian Gulf.

That's a key route not just for LNG but for oil, too. So far, Iran and the U.S., Israel's key ally, have indicated they want to avoid a wider war. But the invasion of Ukraine has shown that in the unsettled state of the world, unexpected things can happen.

"There is always a 'but,'" Tagliapietra said. "The risk is an escalation that affects the Strait of Hormuz."

U.S. gas exports rose sharply after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, and the Biden administration has celebrated deliveries to Europe and Asia as a key geopolitical weapon against Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Since then, President Joe Biden has paused approving new proposals for LNG export terminals.

The pause would allow officials to study the impact of LNG projects on climate change, the U.S. economy and national security, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said. The action would not affect five terminals that are already approved and under construction, she said.

Industry association Eurogas called Biden's action "alarming" and said U.S. gas imports are "set to play a crucial role for European energy security in case of possible shortfalls."

Analyst Tagliapietra said, however, that with plenty of new export capacity already approved, Biden's decision would have "no short-term or even medium-term impact on Europe."

U.S. LNG capacity has doubled since exports began in earnest less than a decade ago, and it's set to double again under already-approved projects.

The wisdom of investing more money in fossil fuel infrastructure is also being debated in Europe, which aims to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 55% compared to 1990 levels by 2030.

Europe's gas demand is expected to fall 8% over 2022-2026 as renewable energy like solar and wind power is scaled up.

"Expanding LNG infrastructure in the USA and in the EU is a high economic risk that will very likely end up as stranded assets," said Claudia Kemfert, an economic expert at the German Institute of Economic Research and professor at Leuphana University.

India's clean energy boom 'slows down'

BENGALURU, India, Feb 7, (AP): For years, renewable projects in India have been growing steadily, from small-town rooftop solar installations to large-scale projects across the desert and long stretches of wind turbines and solar panels on farmland all contributing to the country's climate goal of transitioning to clean energy.

But a mix of policy decisions, politics and supply chain issues meant solar projects in 2023 have been marred in delays and uncertainty, making the country fall short of its annual clean energy installation target in a year that saw heat records topple and devastating floods batter the country. Experts say this is a significant dent in the country's ambitions, but some are confident that the shortfall can be made up this year.

A report by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis found that the country only installed 13.7 gigawatts of clean energy last year, like wind, solar and nuclear, compared to 16.3 gigawatts in 2022. India needs to install 40 gigawatts a year to meet its goal of installing 500 gigawatts of clean energy - enough to power 51 million homes in the country - by the end of the decade.

The shortfall "means that meeting the 2030 target for clean energy is highly challenging," said Charith Konda, part of the team that put together the IEEFA's analysis.

Solar module prices have dropped substantially worldwide in recent years, but in India, they have been subject to conflicting import tax policies, with the government first ordering high import taxes and then backtracking within the space of a year. This created a "wait and watch" attitude among solar project developers, said Vinay Pabba, chief operating officer of Hyderabad-based renewables company Vibrant Energy.

It takes up to two years for solar projects to come online after all agreements and paperwork are finalized, he said, so "changing policies in timeframes lesser than that creates a lot of uncertainty."

Numerous projects, both big and small and across different states, have been hit with monthslong delays because of solar project developers holding off making new orders, said Gurpreet Singh Walia, a consultant for renewable energy projects in India.

Konda said that incentives to encourage domestic manufacturing of solar modules, rather than importing them from abroad, conflicted with the country's goal of installing renewable energy at speed.

And since what was being domestically produced in India was preferred by countries like the United States for their own energy transition over Chinese manufacturers, a huge increase in exports of solar power parts from India meant there was less supply available for local projects, analysts say.

Experts also say fossil fuel lobbying in the country meant policies to encourage renewable growth have fallen short.

Between 2008 and 2022, India added the third-most solar power capacity of any country - behind only China and the United States - and the sixth-most wind power, according to the Global Energy Monitor. But in those 15 years, the amount of coal capacity added in the country was well over double that of wind and solar, the Global Energy Monitor's data shows.

China and the US hold talks as trade issues heat up on the campaign trail

'Talks send a positive signal'

BP earns \$3b at the end of last year but saw its annual profit fall by half from '22

LONDON, Feb 7, (AP): Oil and natural gas giant BP beat expectations on Tuesday with earnings of \$3 billion in the last three months of 2023, bringing last year's total to half its record 2022 profit as energy prices have fallen since spiking after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

London-based BP reported its underlying replacement cost profit, which excludes one-time items and fluctuations in the value of inventories, down from \$3.3 billion in the previous quarter.

It brought in \$13.8 billion for all of last year, a huge drop from the \$27.7 billion it earned in 2022, when Russia's war in Ukraine sent oil and natural gas prices surging. Those prices drove inflation and contributed to a cost-of-living crisis, drawing outrage from consumers facing higher utility bills while energy companies recorded explosive growth in their bottom lines.

Energy prices have since fallen as a weak global economy holds back demand for fossil fuels to power cars, planes, factories and more. That, along with lower industry refining margins, has helped send earnings tumbling for other oil majors like Shell and Exxon Mobil.

Despite the drop in annual earnings, BP kept its dividend steady and said it would buy back \$1.75 billion



The logo of British Petroleum, BP, adorns a BP petrol station in west London, Tuesday, Aug. 4, 2020. Oil and natural gas giant BP beat expectations on Tuesday, Feb. 6, 2024, with earnings of \$3 billion in the last three months of 2023, bringing last year's total to half its record 2022 profit as energy prices have fallen since spiking after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. (AP)

in shares as well as commit to \$3.5 billion in additional share buybacks for first half of this year. The company's stock rose 5.75% in morning trading.

"Looking back, 2023 was a year of strong operational performance with real momentum in delivery right across the business," CEO Murray Auchincloss said in a prepared state-

ment. "We are confident in our strategy, on delivering as a simpler, more focused and higher-value company."

It's the first earnings report since Auchincloss permanently got the top job last month. A former BP chief financial officer, Auchincloss had served as interim chief executive since Bernard Looney resigned in September after it emerged that

Looney had failed to disclose to the board past relationships with company colleagues.

Environmentalists and other groups said energy giants like BP are prioritizing shareholders over fighting climate change.

"It's clear that BP and other fossil-fuel giants can't be trusted to drive the green transition: they will always prioritize their shareholders over the needs of the economy and the planet," said Joseph Evans, researcher at the Institute for Public Policy Research.

It's a pressure that the energy industry is facing, with companies like BP and Shell pledging to reach net zero emissions by 2050.

"With the move to renewables yet to prove consistently profitable or practical across many technologies, there are many challenges to be overcome," Richard Hunter, head of markets for interactive investor, said in an emailed analysis.

BP pointed to an agreement to acquire the rest of solar and battery storage company Lightsource bp and a joint venture to bring more EV chargers to Spain and Portugal in the coming years. However, it also announced late last year the startup of an oil and gas project in the North Sea that it expects to add about 15,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day by 2025.

change but cutting carbon emissions.

The two sides said the talks in Beijing also touched on issues such as debt problems in developing countries, financial cooperation and economic policies.

"U.S. officials reaffirmed that the U.S. is not seeking to decouple the two economies and instead seeks a healthy economic relationship that provides a level playing field for American companies and workers," the Treasury Department said.

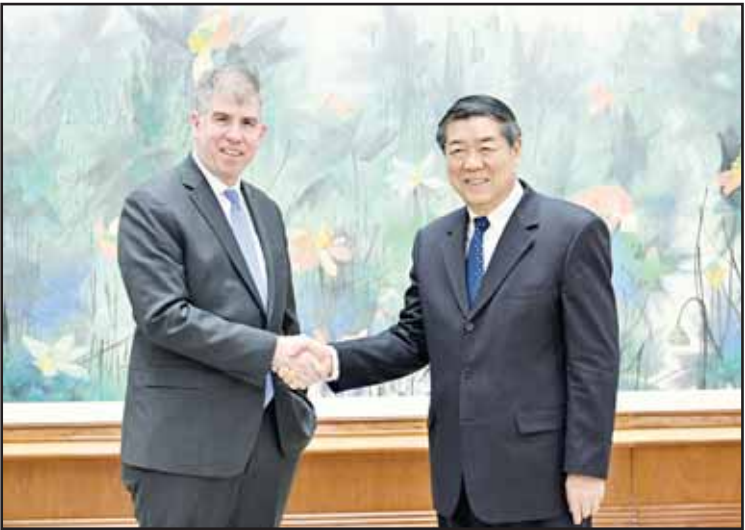
It said both sides agreed to meet again in April.

Exchanges between the two powers picked up last year, gaining momentum after President Joe Biden met with Chinese leader Xi Jinping at a November summit in San Francisco, California.

But despite the slight improvement in relations, ten-

sions remain high, particularly over Taiwan. Biden has kept in

place most of the tariffs on Chinese imports that former Presi-



In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng (right), shakes hands with Jay Shambaugh, the Under Secretary of U.S. Department of Treasury prior to their 3rd China-US Economic Working Group Meeting in Beijing. (AP)

dent Donald Trump imposed when he launched a trade war in 2018.

His administration has also tightened controls on Chinese access to advanced computer chips and the technology to make them, along with other strategically sensitive know-how.

Reports that Trump would raise tariffs even higher if he is elected have shaken fragile investor sentiment in China, where the financial markets are in the midst of a prolonged slump.

The Economic Working Group's meeting was its third since it was established in September and its first in Beijing. A Treasury delegation met with Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng while in Beijing and conveyed a message that Yellen hoped to visit China at an "appropriate time."

Prestigious Bini Antony Memorial Award elevates United Indian School's top achiever

Thanima Kuwait presents Pearl of the School Awards 2023

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Pearl of the School 2023 awards were presented to 25 students from 25 Indian schools in Kuwait who have performed well in arts, cultural and non-curricular subjects and Bini Antony Memorial Award to the top achiever of class 7 of United Indian School organised by Thanima Kuwait.

The program started with a prayer song by Child Thanima members under the leadership of Serafin Freddy, and was presided over by Onathanima Program General Convenor Ashraf Churot, POS Convenor D.K. Dileep welcomed the attendees. After the introductory speech by program convener BabujiBatheri, former Kuwait international volleyball player Khalid Al Muthairi inaugurated the program.

After the March Past of the Pearl of School Students, their individual profiles were presented. Children were rewarded with a specially prepared memento and certificates. Awards were also presented to the children of Thanima members who have performed well in academic and extra-curricular subjects.

Dr. DheerajBharadwaj, Group CEO of City Group Co presented his views on Innovation & Creativity in the key-note address. Canadian international athlete Emma Repel shared the accolades. Renowned motivational speaker Mani Paul delivered the motivation message.

ThanimaConvenorShaijuPallipuram, Malabar Gold Country Head Afzal Khan, Metro Medical Group CEO Hamza Payyannoor, Thanima Joint Convener VijeshVelayudhan offered their greetings. The Ladies wing members co-ordinated the program preparations. UshaDileep, Convener of Ladies Wing of Thanima expressed vote of thanks.



Photos during the Pearl of the School 2023 awards.

Kuwait's 'Ta!k Cultural Center' connects cultures, languages globally

People's World Forum epitomizes 'commitment to cultural exchange, heritage & understanding'

By Paul Francis X. Fernandes
Arab Times/Al-Seyassah Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: The Ta!k Cultural Center, is organizing the People's World Forum -- the first of its kind in collaboration with Dean of Student Affairs, Cultural and Artistic Activities Administration of the Kuwait University, Saturday, Feb 10 from 11:30 am until 10:00 pm, at the Cultural Center of the Sabah Al-Salem University City, the most beautiful academic and architectural edifice.

The aim is to foster dialogue and networking among influential leaders from various sectors. This prestigious event underscores the commitment of Ta!k Cultural Center to unite global communities and driving cultural exchange and innovation.

In the heart of Kuwait City, the 'Ta!k Cultural Center' connects cultures and languages globally uniting diverse heritages and enhancing mutual understanding through cultural events. Aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, the programs deepen cultural insight and linguistic skills with the aim of enriching Kuwait's community, celebrating diversity and fostering a globally harmonious future. This unique cultural hub, in every sense of the word, is the brainchild of Nouf Al-Mashaan.

In an exclusive interview with the Arab Times, AlMashaan said, "Our upcoming event, the People's World Forum, epitomizes our commitment to cultural exchange and understanding. It will feature 150 trained student volunteers from the Kuwait University, organizing a global showcase, highlighting the diversity of cultures through exhibitions, culinary delights, and more. This immersive experience promises to take visitors on a journey around the world, offering a glimpse into the rich tapestry of global cultures."

With over 10,000 participants already registered, the event not only celebrates cultural diversity but also showcases Kuwait's modern infrastructure and progressive spirit. It's poised to be a monumental success, adding significant value to Kuwait's cultural landscape, she says.

"Our cultural windows offer glimpses into the rich heritage of different regions, from Africa's tribal folklore to Asia's vibrant traditions, Europe's cultural diversity, the Americas' historical richness, and Australia's unique cultural tapestry," added AlMashaan.



Nouf AlMashaan

She went on to say, Kuwait's own cultural heritage, she said, is reflected in traditional attire, fragrances, and cuisine, and adds to the diverse array of experiences offered. Our exhibits feature traditional garments, culinary demonstrations, handicrafts, and a celebration of global harvests and aromas.

During the event visitors will have an opportunity to embark on virtual city tours, immerse themselves in folkloric music performances, and explore thrilling global adventures. The 'Global Auto Gala' will showcase automotive wonders, while outdoor food trucks will offer a variety of international cuisines and social opportunities.

The aim is to foster dialogue and networking among influential leaders from various sectors. This prestigious event underscores our commitment to uniting global communities and driving cultural exchange and innovation.

AlMashaan says, "Our events are enlightening, opening minds to different cultures and languages. These experiences

promote dialogue and understanding within our community."

Located in the heart of Kuwait City, Sanam Tower 1, 'Ta!k Cultural Center' serves as a hub for connecting diverse cultures and languages worldwide. "Through our unique cultural events, we strive to unite people of various heritages and enhance mutual understanding," added AlMashaan.

Giving an insight about the cultural hub, AlMashaan says the 'Ta!k Cultural Center' was established in February 2022, with a unique approach to language learning, departing from traditional methods.

"Beginning with Italian and Spanish, we gradually expanded to teach eight languages in a distinctive manner, integrating culture directly into the learning process. Our programs aim to immerse learners not only in language acquisition but also in the traditions, folklore, and customs of the respective cultures.

"Our native trainers go beyond teaching language skills; they delve into the rich tapestry of tradition, culture, and history associated with each language. As a result, we have developed our own curriculum, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures," said AlMashaan.

Driven by a passion for the Italian language since childhood, AlMashaan says, she embarked on a journey to explore different cultures globally. This led to the creation of a space for like-minded individuals eager to understand and connect with other countries.

At our Cultural Hub, we've hosted numerous non-profit events and projects, showcasing the cultural richness of various regions, including Europe (Italy, Spain), Africa (Tanzania), and South America (Mexico). These events encompass everything from culinary delights to traditional attire, tourism, and historical narratives.

Membership at our hub transcends mere participation in programs; it fosters a sense of belonging akin to a club rather than an institute. Members engage in discussions, events, and seminars, creating a familial atmosphere where individuals from diverse backgrounds come together to share experiences and knowledge.

Registration for talk events can be done at: <https://events.talkiclub.com>

Reinforcing commitment to customer

AlMuzaini Exchange Co opens newest branch in Hadiya-Coop

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: The number one money exchange company in Kuwait, Al-Muzaini Exchange Company recently opened its newest branch in Kuwait in Hadiya Co-op on Feb 1, 2024. This opening was extremely significant and the rapid expansion reflects the company's endeavor to always be near its customers. It also reinforces the company's commitment to providing the highest quality of financial services such as money transfers, foreign currency exchange and bill payments with convenience, comfort and safety and at the most competitive prices, seven days a week.

The General Manager of Al Muzaini Exchange Company, Mr. Hugh Fernandes and the company's department managers and various senior personnel inaugurated the new branch in Hadiya Co-op and Mr. Fernandes stated: "We take great pride in strengthening our leading position in the local market and always place focus in ensuring that we provide the best financial services experience to our customers in order to meet all their money transfer needs. We always want to stay true to our mission; to always be near to our customers and to add to their convenience."

In addition to its strong network of branches, Al Muzaini application provides simple and safe financial solutions and offers a variety of features to its customers. Customers can also use Al Muzaini self-service kiosks placed at strategic locations to perform transactions.

Customers can also participate in Al Muzaini's new Transfer and Win Campaign. Transfer your money through Al Muzaini and use any of Al Muzaini Exchange services for a chance to win incredible prizes up to \$30,000. Daily, weekly and monthly prizes are up for grabs with the grand prize being \$10,000. The campaign lasts from December 26, 2023 to February 29, 2024.

Al Muzaini, always near you!



Photo during the inauguration of the new branch in Hadiya Co-op.

Association extends support to 14 families

KPFA leads humanitarian cause

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Since 2004, Kuwait Parivall Friends Association has been operating in Kuwait, with a motive of benefiting its members and helping the poor in the homeland in a big way.

Over the past 19 years, 45 lakhs of Indian Rupees had been donated by extending help to the poor towards medical treatments, educational assistance to the poor students, marriage expenses, assistance to the disabled and for the natural disaster relief. This year the fund distribution ceremony was held in India on Thursday 25-01-2024 at Sami V Landmarks Wedding Hall, Aranthangi, Pudukkottai District of Tamil Nadu, led by Dr.Sami P. Venkat, General Secretary of Kuwait Parivall Friends Association.

The function was honoured by the participation of Kuwait IndianFrontLinersSocial Wing Secretary "Sevai Semmel" K. Venkatamathi, Aranthangi Rotary Club President Mr. VGS Senthil, Mr. RRR Malaikannan, AranthangiTahsildar Mr. Karuppaiya, Mr. Bhupathi Teacher, Port City Rotary Club Secretary Mr. Ibrahimshaand Karaikudi JM Earth Movers Mr. S. Jayamani with the distribution of cheques to 14 families.

The members of Kuwait Parivall Friends Association who are visiting home on vacation have added value to the function with their presence. Mr. T. Ilango, Treasurer of the Association, gave the welcome address and PFA Member Mr. Sridhar delivered the vote of thanks.



Kuwait Parivallal Friends Association operations in Kuwait.



Photo during the Foke 18th anniversary celebration.

Meritorious students and contributors honored

FOKE celebrates its 18th anniversary

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Friends of Kannur Kuwait Ex-pats' Association (FOKE) organized its 18th anniversary celebration at Abbasiya Oxford Pakistani English School with a simple ceremony.

FOKE President Xavier Anthony presided over the program held on January 26, which was inaugurated by Dar Al Saha Polyclinic Marketing Manager - Nitin Menon. The release of "Mudita", an e-souvenir released as part of the 18th anniversary, was carried out by handing over of the Souvenir to Nithin Menon by Sub-Committee Member Akhilashree Shabu.

Gifts were handed over during the ceremony to Bala-vedi children Rithunanda Biju & Anwvaya Balakrishnan,

who suggested the name of the souvenir, Rajeev Devanandam, who designed the cover page of Souvenir and to all Malayalam teachers, who devote their time in teaching mother tongue to kids hailing from all Kerala through-out the year. Also, Meritorious Awards were given to the children of the FOKE members, who excelled in classes 10 and 12 at the annual function. The ceremony was led by Program Convener IV Sunesh and Joint Convener Dilip Kumar.

FOKE Treasurer Sabu Nambiar expressed vote of thanks for the meeting while General Secretary Vijayakumar NK welcomed the audience for the meeting.

People

SAN FRANCISCO, Feb 7, (AP): When it comes to dealing with a Florida college student who uses public data and social media to track the private jets of billionaires, politicians and other celebrities, Taylor Swift apparently can't just shake it off.

In late December, Swift's camp hit Jack Sweeney, a junior studying information technology at the University of Central Florida, with a cease-and-desist letter that blamed his automated tracking of her private jet for tipping off stalkers as to her location. In the letter, attorneys from the law firm Venable accused Sweeney of effectively providing "individuals intent on harming her, or with nefarious or violent intentions, a roadmap to carry out their plans."

Sweeney provided the link to that letter in an email to the Associated Press. In that message, he emphasized that while he has never intended to cause harm, he also believes strongly in the importance of transparency and public information.

"One should reasonably expect that their jet will be tracked, whether or not I'm the one doing it, as it is public information after all," he wrote.

A spokesperson for Swift echoed the legal complaint, saying that "the timing of stalkers" suggests a connection to Sweeney's flight-tracking sites. The spokesperson did not respond to questions seeking elaboration of that charge, such as whether stalkers have been seen waiting for Swift at the airport when her plane arrived or, alternatively, if there is evidence that stalkers have somehow inferred Swift's subsequent location from the arrival time of her flight.

The legal letter likewise accuses Sweeney of "disregarding the personal safety of others"; "willful and repeated harassment of our client"; and "intentional, offensive, and outrageous conduct and consistent vio-

lations of our client's privacy."

Such statements are difficult to square with the fact that Sweeney's automated tracking accounts merely repackage public data provided by the Federal Aviation Administration, a government agency. That fact did not dissuade the Venable attorneys, who demanded that Sweeney "immediately stop providing information about our client's location to the public."

The Swift spokesperson did not reply to a question inquiring whether the attorneys had issued the same demand to the FAA.

At one point Sweeney had more than 30 such accounts on Twitter, now known as X after Elon Musk purchased the site for \$44 billion in 2022. Musk subsequently had his own dustup with Sweeney, tweeting at one point that his commitment to free speech required him not to ban Sweeney's @elonjet account even though he considered it "a direct personal safety risk."

Actor **Gina Carano** on Tuesday sued Lucasfilm and its parent The Walt Disney Co. over her 2021 firing from "The Mandalorian," saying she was let go for expressing right-wing views on social media.

The lawsuit Carano filed with help from X, formerly Twitter, in federal court in California alleges her wrongful termination from the "Star Wars" galaxy Disney+ streaming series after two seasons over a post likening the treatment of American conservatives to the treatment of Jews in Nazi Germany.

"A short time ago in a galaxy not so far away, Defendants made it clear that only one orthodoxy in thought, speech, or action was acceptable in their empire, and that those who dared to question or failed to fully comply would not be tolerated," the lawsuit opens. "Carano was

terminated from her role as swiftly as her character's peaceful home planet of Alderaan had been destroyed by the Death Star."

The lawsuit alleges she was fired because she "dared voice her own opinions" against an "online bully mob who demanded her compliance with their extreme progressive ideology."

Disney and Lucasfilm have not filed a response to the lawsuit, and representatives did not immediately respond to an email requesting comment.

A Lucasfilm statement at the time of her firing said "her social media posts denigrating people based on their cultural and religious identities are abhorrent and unacceptable."

Carano is seeking damages to be determined at trial and a court order that she be recast on the show.

The "Mandalorian," starring **Pedro Pascal**, has aired for three seasons and is now being turned into a feature film. Several interconnected series also air on Disney+.

The lawsuit says Lucasfilm also hurt her future work prospects by making "maliciously false" statements about her.

Carano, a former mixed martial artists who played the recurring character Cara Dune on the bounty hunter tale "The Mandalorian," deleted the post but it was widely shared online and spurred a trending #FireGinaCarano hashtag.

Carano had previously been criticized for social media posts that mocked mask wearing during the pandemic and made false allegations of voter fraud during the 2020 presidential election. She also mocked the use of gender pronouns in profiles, listing "beep/bop/boop" in her social media bio.

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Variety



This image released by Roadside Attractions shows Harry Einhorn, (from left), Tandin Sonam and Tandin Wangchuk in a scene from 'The Monk and the Gun.' (AP)

Film

A satirical tale of democracy and arms in Bhutan

'Monk and the Gun,' delightful satire

By Jocelyn Noveck

"Why are you teaching us to be so rude?" the elderly village woman asks a Bhutanese election official in "The Monk and the Gun."

It's a question both poignant and biting, because the "teaching" this woman is resisting is something much of the outside world considers a basic human right: the right to vote.

For a piercing refresher lesson on democracy, one wouldn't necessarily think of rural Bhutan as the first place to look. For one thing, democratic elections only came to the tiny, long-isolated Himalayan kingdom in April 2007, when the country held its first mock vote, leading to the real thing late that year and then the first constitution in 2008.

Writer-director Pawo Choyning Dorji, whose debut feature, "Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom," went all the way to an Oscar nomination, centers his delightful, moving and clever new satire on a moment in 2006 when officials first fan out into the countryside to introduce this concept called "election." TV and internet access are less than a decade old.

It does not go smoothly. "Is that a new ... disease?" asks one villager. Others arrive to register, only to discover they need to know their birthdate. Some do not. They're told they need to leave and go find out. But really, many don't see the point. They have a king. They like him. Why go to all this trouble?

But "The Monk and the Gun," as you may have surmised, is not just about democracy. It's also about guns, and their role in society, a particularly fertile theme for Dorji's brand of wry satire and pointed comparisons.

We begin with a young monk, Tashi, attendant to a lama, or spiritual leader, traversing a peaceful field to a mountain village, Ura. He's on his

way to hear an unusual request: The lama needs a gun. Or two. Before the full moon comes in a few days. "Things need to be made right," he says, cryptically.

What could the lama mean? Guns are not a normal part of this society. If there's a gun lying around, it's a big deal. Which leads us to Ron Coleman, an American (Harry Einhorn), and his visit to Bhutan.

"Tell people you're here to see Buddhist temples," Ron's host and fixer Benji (Tandin Sonam) tells him when he arrives. But Ron is there to procure, for a collector, a prized 19th-century American gun that somehow resides with a Bhutanese farmer.

Election

Dorji toggles between these two storylines: politics and guns, with the clock ticking to both the full moon and the mock election. It's a tumultuous time, with news reports suggesting the transition to democracy is unpopular. As one man says, "What's the use? We already have His Majesty." Another wonders why they'd want to be like countries where politicians throw chairs at each other. The chief organizer has to remind people - including a mother whose daughter is being bullied at school - that in some countries, people die fighting for the right to vote.

Back to gun dealer Ron (his name is a little nod to cinema buffs who may recall the actor Ron Colman in the 1937 "Lost Horizon"), who's so eager to acquire the historic weapon, he offers the owner \$75,000. That is not acceptable to the farmer - it's too much! So a deal is struck for much less. But while Ron is off collecting the cash, the monk shows up, seeking a gun for his lama.

Who'll get the gun? The rest of the plot is best left unspoiled, but you can be sure Dorji finds a

way to tie his threads together in a way both comic and biting, both entertaining and provocative.

A perfect example is that scene where election organizers are trying to educate the masses. With villagers gathered, they explain that different colors stand for different parties. But when they try to generate some obligatory back-and-forth - maybe just a little yelling - the effort falls flat. "Show some passion! You're supposed to despise each other!" complains one official.

Also funny but queasy-making, too, is the way Ron is described by his Bhutanese cohort in an effort to gain respect for his knowledge of guns: "Mr. Ron is an expert. In his country there are more guns than people!"

The casting of the film is fascinating in itself. Most of the cast (including Einhorn, an academic) are making acting debuts here. One, Tandin Wangchuk as Tashi, is a Bhutanese alt-rock star. The villagers in Ura are mostly actual villagers of Ura. The lama is indeed the actual (and only) village lama, Kelsang Choejay.

And it is he who keeps us all wondering: What the heck does he want with these guns? Dorji holds the suspense and finds a way to surprise us in a deeply satisfying way.

The director has said he simply hopes his home country - population about 790,000, known for its beauty and its official imperative of Gross National Happiness- has something to teach the rest of the world. "It's not who we are," that elderly woman says about the rudeness. It's clear Dorji is hoping we'll be looking at her, then ourselves, and wondering just who we are and want to be.

"The Monk and the Gun," a Roadside Attractions release, has been rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association "for some nude sculptures and smoking." Running time: 112 minutes. Three and a half stars out of four. (AP)

entertainment industry." (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Red Solo cups - a staple of barbecues and beer pong - are usually synonymous with good times.

But on Tuesday, as word of country singer **Toby Keith**'s death spread, many were raising their red



Bening



Keith

Solos in sad tribute to the singer, who immortalized the humble plastic cups in his 2011 hit "Red Solo Cup." Keith, who had stomach cancer, died Monday at age 62.

"He was a great American and an exceptional storyteller who will be deeply missed in country music," said Sen. **Marsha Blackburn**, a Tennessee Republican, in

a post Tuesday on X. "Raise your 'Red Solo Cup' to Toby for a life well-lived."

Hundreds of fans said they planned to fill their red Solo cups with beer, whiskey and even wine and hoist them in Keith's memory Tuesday. Social media was flooded with photos of Keith, red Solo cup in hand. Bars, like Madison

Social in **Tallahassee, Florida**, and Independent Brewing Co. in **Bel Air, Maryland**, announced drink specials served in red Solo cups.

The Solo brand got its start in 1936, when **Leo Hulseman** - a former employee of Dixie Co. - began making disposable paper drinking cones that were sold to bottled-water companies. (AP)

People & Places

Music

Grammys to Super Bowl

Welcome to the week of peak Taylor Swift

LOS ANGELES, Feb 7, (AP): She’s everywhere, and the world is merely her backup band.

This is **Taylor Swift**’s week. It’s hard to remember a star of Swift ’s stature straddling so many roles, spanning so much of the globe, covering so many corners of the culture and doing so much of it in the spotlight she will have between Sunday’s Grammy Awards and the coming Sunday’s Super Bowl - with four Tokyo concerts in between.

It represents a packed pop-culture moment - a sort of perfect storm of fame, exposure, art and excellence for a woman who has become one of the planet’s most recognizable names. And every moment of it will be dissected - with adulation and criticism alike.

Is this the apogee of modern multimedia stardom? It might actually be more of a throwback, to a time of a less segmented, less subcultured society, when a star could be a household name across continents and generations, taking part in events that people actually follow together as they happen.

“She’s at the center of these moments that we don’t have very often anymore,” said Shilpa Davé, a professor of media studies at the University of Virginia.

You have to look far into the past, and well past music, to find someone with Swift’s cultural power. You might have to look to a time when media wasn’t so fragmented, when the pipelines to people’s eyes and ears were fewer and slower.



Swift

Culture

“She’s Walter Cronkite. She is the most trusted name, the most trusted voice in America,” said John Baick, a history professor at Western New England University who examines the intersection of popular culture with broader society. “I just can’t think of anyone in our politics, in our culture, in our society who we know across more generations. Maybe Oprah, but, I think Oprah had a smaller appeal in some respects.”

For many from young generations, splintered by social media, “Taylor Swift offers a vocabulary - a shared language,” Baick said.

Swift’s whirlwind week began with a record-breaking fourth win for album of the year at the Grammys in Los Angeles, where she may have made even bigger waves with her surprise announcement that her next album is ready to drop in April. Nearly 17 million people watched, a huge and surging number for a modern awards show that no doubt owed much to her.

Then it’s off to Asia for four concerts at the Tokyo Dome in an echo of her seismic stadium shows in North and South America last year.

If all goes as expected, then she’ll turn back the time zones and hustle back to the U.S. to play the role of fan-in-chief to her Kansas City tight end boyfriend Travis Kelce at the Super Bowl in Las Vegas, and will likely be seen in a suite with Kelce’s family and friends during the game by an audience far bigger than the Grammys’.

Followers concerned with the plausibility of her tightly timed itinerary have been assuaged by the Japanese embassy in Washington, which said in a statement that “if she departs Tokyo in the evening after her concert, she should comfortably arrive in Las Vegas before the Super Bowl begins.”

Swift seems to embrace the whole storm, if her album of the year acceptance speech is any indication.

“I would love to tell you this is the best moment of my life. But I feel this happy when I finish a song, or when I crack the code to a bridge that I love, or when I’m shortlisting a music video, or when I’m rehearsing with my dancers, or my band, or getting ready to go to Tokyo to play a show,” she said from the stage. “For me, the award is the work. All I want to do is keep being able to do this.”

While she says little publicly about her relationship with Kelce (he didn’t get thanked during her two Grammy speeches and wasn’t at the ceremony), she’s clearly aware of the visual story she’s telling.

“She obviously didn’t have to go to the games. She could have watched from home,” Baick said. “She didn’t have to go to these boxes where she would be perfectly framed with family members and friends. But her career matters. And this is someone who is unapologetic about that. In that sense, she’s also like Madonna. Everything she does is in the public eye. And why not?”

Kelce played in on the phenomenon Monday from Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas that “she’s re-writing the history books herself” and she’s “definitely brought a lot of new faces to the game.”

Appeal

The secret to her culture-defying appeal that may be reaching its peak this week comes in part from the particular glow of positivity she is able to bring - a positivity that the pandemic, political turmoil and social erosion have created a hunger for.

“We don’t have many very big moments where we’re celebrating just the joy of music and culture,” Davé said. “She brings that with her. ... And I think we need it in this moment as well.”

Baick agrees. “I don’t think we, as a country, have ever needed someone as much. With the sole exception of after John F. Kennedy was killed. I mean, Beatlemania was in part because of that terrible vacuum, a terrible sense of loss and that desire for young people to give themselves up to, to cut loose. And like this, it was female-driven.”

This moment was also made possible by the unmatched connection she is able to make with her followers, and her dedication to serving them and centering them. Part of that connection might be her willingness to be a big fan herself, an essential role at the beginning and end of her big week.

At the Grammys, as she often does at awards shows, she stood un-self-consciously and sang along with everyone from Tracy Chapman to Olivia Rodrigo. And she’ll play the fan at the Super Bowl as she has for much of Kelce’s and the Chiefs’ season, a role she appears comfortable in, with no fear of her own job or identity being eclipsed.

There could never be unanimity around someone so prominent, and those appearances have brought out detractors. Some football fans have griped about the attention she is given during games, though her actual screen time can be counted in seconds. She’s also been slammed for the private jets she should be making liberal use of all week.

And she has been the subject of utterly unfounded rumors spreading from claims she’s part of Pentagon psychological operations to the notion she and Kelce are assets in a plot to help President Joe Biden get re-elected.



Denis Villeneuve, (left), and Christopher Nolan pose for a portrait on Friday, Feb. 2, in Los Angeles. (AP)

Film

A cinematic journey revived

Nolan brings ‘Tenet’ back to theaters

UNIVERSAL CITY, Calif., Feb 7, (AP): Christopher Nolan has, by any account, had a banner year with “Oppenheimer.” But “Tenet” was still on his mind.

The palindromic spy thriller starring John David Washington and Robert Pattinson was released at a tricky time during the pandemic, when many theaters were open internationally but not yet in New York and Los Angeles. And all those IMAX 70mm and 70mm film prints, which proved so immensely popular with audiences for “Oppenheimer,” were just sitting around.

“It’s a film that was designed, almost more than any I’ve made, to be enjoyed in this form,” Nolan told The Associated Press. “When I heard they were going to be making film prints on ‘Dune: Part Two,’ I jumped at that and thought what if we opened up the week before? We can dust off the projectors.”

Nolan showed one to Warner Bros. film chiefs Pam Abdy and Michael De Luca, and “they got it.”

Beginning Feb. 23, “Tenet” will be back in theaters, in Nolan’s favorite format, at locations like AMC Lincoln Square, in New York, and Universal CityWalk and the TCL Chinese in the Los Angeles area, as well as venues in London, Melbourne and Nashville, Tennessee, and Tempe, Arizona.

Longtime friends, Nolan and Denis Villeneuve spoke to the AP last week, outside of a sold out showing of the re-release, about “Tenet.” “Dune: Part Two,” and the sense that, a decade after Kodak almost stopped making film altogether, movie audiences are embracing and rallying around film too.

Below are excerpts from the conversation, which has been edited for clarity and brevity.

AP: I spoke to people who held off on seeing “Tenet” entirely, holding on to the hope that it would get a proper re-release.

Nolan: For me, living in Los Angeles, I never got to see it with an audience. It came to streaming first here, so this is a really fun opportunity to get it in front of people the way it was intended. The thing with “Tenet” is, I think of all the films I have made, it’s the one that’s very much about the experience of watching films. It’s about watching spy movies in a way. It tries to build on that experience and take it to this very magnified, slightly crazy place. A lot of that is about sound and music and this huge image.

Most people see our films in the home, numerically speaking, but the identity of those films is really defined by their initial theatrical presentation. And that excitement carries through. More than any film I’ve made, “Tenet” was designed to have this very theatrical, IMAX, larger than life identity.

AP: “Dune: Part Two” was shot on IMAX digital but will be shown in film. Can you explain how this works?

Villeneuve: It was not planned that I would get an IMAX film release. It was a bit like a gift from life, the movie being delayed because of the strikes. Someone came with the idea to try it.

They mentioned this once and then I was like a dog not letting it go. We did some tests and I thought it looked absolutely amazing. The idea to experiment, and, frankly, Chris will say “cheat” because...

Nolan: I wasn’t going to say that!

Villeneuve: But still, I left film a long time ago. Or, I didn’t leave film, film left me and my heart was broken.

Nolan: Film wants you back.

Villeneuve: I’m flirting with the idea, Chris Nolan.

AP: Many of your films have grown to mean more to people through the years. “Interstellar” seems to come up a lot frequently, people are revisiting “Blade Runner 2049.” It’s like they need breathing room to find their place in the culture.

Nolan: I know for myself the life of the movie is a much longer proposition in that, you look at other people’s films and indeed your own films in decades, not in weekends. I think the science fiction genre is the one where the long view is everything. People revisit. They value science fiction in a very long-term way. The original “Blade Runner,” nobody paid any attention to it on release, it was famously a flop. Then over time, people like myself (found it). I think I was 13 when I first saw a VHS tape.

Villeneuve: You discovered “Blade Runner” on VHS?

Nolan: Pirate VHS.

Villeneuve: Me too!

Nolan: The first time I saw it on film was in college.

Villeneuve: For me, it was frankly the same for “2001.” I discovered the movie as a kid on TV.

Nolan: I got to see it in a theater. I was 7 years old when the first “Star Wars” came out, and it was such a massive hit, they re-released “2001” in 70mm and my dad took me to see it.

AP: You’ve both been very supportive of each other’s works over the years. People so value the filmmaker-to-filmmaker conversations but it’s a rare dialogue.

Nolan: We don’t get to do things of that sort often.

Villeneuve: Lonely wolf.

Nolan: I think I first started to connect with other directors when film was under massive threat. When we were finishing “Interstellar,” Emma (Thomas) and I got the call from Kodak that they were going to stop making film. We started calling filmmakers ... and got tremendous support.

Villeneuve: I cannot give numbers, but I know that many of the pre-sales for “Dune: Part Two” are in 70mm.

Nolan: People are loving the format and getting it.

Villeneuve: There’s the notion of an event and that is something people are starving for, they are craving it.

Nolan: As filmmakers we’re competing with incredible home technology. 4K, UHD, beautiful television sets. Compared to our pirate VHS days, it’s come forward enormously. We have to raise our game, but it’s great to see a new generation seeing what the difference is. There’s an emotional response to it that I think is very hard to quantify. It’s hard to justify to the studio sometimes. So it’s wonderful when they look at the numbers and they see that they sell more tickets that way, because audiences get something.

Villeneuve: The idea to put “Dune” on film didn’t come from me, to be honest. I was still in the process of finishing it. It came from Warners.

Nolan: I’m admitting nothing, but we might have pointed out to them some of the numbers that we made.

We’ve been banging the drum for years. And for us, “Oppenheimer” was really the first time when we saw a younger generation of film goers really connect with it and be interested in it. And that lifts everything. It gets everybody excited about it, even the studios, because they see that there’s a way to get people out of the house.

Villeneuve: It always ends up being about the money.

Nolan: I just like hearing the guy who made “Dune Two” be like “it’s all about money.” I’ve seen that film. That’s not a cheap film, my friend. Millions of dollars on that screen.

Villeneuve: I have a question for you Chris. You must have strong shoulders because you were able to keep film alive by yourself. You’re pretty stubborn, my friend, but was there a moment where you felt a bit alone?

Nolan: Emma was always on the exact same page. I think it would have been very hard if my producing partner hadn’t understood it the same way I understood it, emotionally. She’s very connected with film. I’ve never felt on my own because it was always at least the two of us together. There was a strange feeling of, hang on, how can it come down to this? We’ve achieved this incredible goal to be able to make films on a large scale, surely they won’t take the tools away at the last minute. On every film I’ve ever done, including “Oppenheimer,” I first showed it to the studio on cut and copy, taped together, splices and everything.

Villeneuve: You’re not using (editing software) Avid?

Nolan: No, no we use Avid. I may be stubborn, but I’m not crazy.

You know when I first got the 70mm/5perf print, I showed it to Steven Spielberg. He had called me about something else and I had just got the print as well and I hadn’t shown it to anyone. I mean, the studio had seen it. But we screened it for him on his own. I sat behind him and watched him watch the film. It was an extraordinary experience.

Villeneuve: He told me he absolutely adored it.

Nolan: He said some very kind things, but really just to watch him watch. I wasn’t even supposed to watch it with him, but seeing the great master watching? It was sort of irresistible.

We talk a lot about the picture, but it’s also the sound. To me, it’s the difference between going to a live concert and listening to a CD or record on a really beautiful stereo system.



Kylie Minogue poses at the premiere of the film ‘Bob Marley: One Love,’ Tuesday, Feb. 6, in Los Angeles. (AP)

Variety

STUDIO CITY, Calif.: A crewmember who was working on the Marvel Studios series “Wonder Man” died following an accident on set Tuesday morning at CBS Radford Studios in Studio City.

The man, whose name was not made public, was a rigger who fell from the rafters, according to the trade publication Deadline, which first reported the news.

“Our thoughts and deepest condolences are with his family and friends, and our support is behind the investigation into the circumstances of this accident,” a Marvel spokesperson said in a statement.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration, or OSHA, will be the investigating body.

Matthew D. Loeb, president of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, said the labor union was shocked and saddened.

“We are working to support our member’s family, and his fellow members and colleagues,” Loeb said in a statement.

“Safety on set is our highest priority and we will assist Cal/OSHA in their investigation in any way that we can.”

While crew injuries and deaths on film and television sets have historically been underreported, there have been several fatalities in recent years that have resulted in high-profile lawsuits and calls for industry reforms.

They include the 2021 fatal shooting of cinematographer **Halyna Hutchins** on the set of the movie “Rust,” when a gun that actor **Alec Baldwin** was pointing at her went off, and the 2014 death of **Sarah Jones**, a 27-year-old camera assistant killed in a train accident on the set of the movie “Midnight Rider.” (AP)

□ □ □

LOS ANGELES: After two years of his popular **Las Vegas** residency at Park MGM, releasing his first solo album in eight years, and headlining the 2024 Super Bowl halftime show, **Usher** will embark on a North American tour.

The R&B-pop icon will embark on his 24-city “Past Present Future” tour beginning Aug. 20 at the Capital One Arena in **Washington D.C.** It will hit many major cities in **North America** before concluding in **Chicago** at United Center on Oct. 29.

The tour will also hit **Baltimore; Boston; Philadelphia; Toronto; Brooklyn, N.Y.; Detroit; Denver; Los Angeles; Oakland, Calif.; Dallas; Austin, Texas; Miami; Atlanta; Charlotte, N.C.** and **St. Louis.**

According to a press release, general ticket sales will begin Monday at 10 a.m. local time at LiveNation.com. A Citi and Verizon presale begins Wednesday. No openers have been announced.

Usher will take on the Super Bowl on Sunday at Las Vegas’ Allegiant Stadium. He has performed there once before - as a guest appearance with Black Eyed Peas frontman will.i.am in 2011. (AP)

□ □ □

CHICAGO: Actor **Jussie Smollett** has asked the **Illinois** Supreme Court to intervene in his yearslong legal battle stemming from charges that he staged a racist,

homophobic attack against himself in 2019 and lied about it to Chicago police.

His petition, filed Monday, asks the state’s highest court to hear the case two months after an appeals court upheld his disorderly conduct convictions and sentence. In 2021, a jury convicted the “Empire” actor on five felony counts of disorderly conduct, a charge that can be filed in Illinois when a person is accused of lying to police.



Usher



Smollett

He was sentenced to five months in jail, but was released pending appeal of his conviction and sentence. Smollett has maintained his innocence.

The state Supreme Court could take the case or let the lower court’s decision stand.

“What should have been a straightforward case has been complicated by the intersection of politics and public outrage,” Smollett’s attorneys wrote in Monday’s filing. (AP)

The Conversation

Unregulated industry raises alarming concerns

Experts highlight dark side of dietary supplements

By Emily Hemendinger University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus and Katie Suleta, George Washington University

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

Dietary supplements are a big business. The industry made almost US\$39 billion in revenue in 2022, and with very little regulation and oversight, it stands to keep growing.

The marketing of dietary supplements has been quite effective, with 77% of Americans reporting feeling that the supplement industry is trustworthy. The idea of taking your health into your own hands is appealing, and supplements are popular with athletes, parents and people trying to recover more quickly from a cold or flu, just to name a few.

A 2024 study found that approximately 1 in 10 adolescents have used nonprescribed weight loss and weight control products, including dietary supplements.

Notably, that systematic review found that nonprescribed diet pill use was significantly higher than the use of nonprescribed laxatives and diuretics for weight management. These types of unhealthy weight control behaviors are associated with both worsened mental health and physical health outcomes.

As a licensed clinical social worker specializing in treating anxiety disorders and eating disorders and a biomedical research director, we've seen firsthand the harm that these supplements can do based on unfounded beliefs. The unregulated market of dietary supplements is setting consumers up to be misled and potentially seriously harmed by these products.

The Food and Drug Administration specifies that supplements must contain a "dietary ingredient" such as vitamins, minerals, herbs, amino acids, enzymes, live microbials, concentrates and extracts, among others.

Unfortunately, manufacturers can claim that a product is a supplement even when it doesn't meet those criteria, such as products containing the drug tianeptine, a highly addictive drug that can mimic the biological action of opioids. Some of these products are labeled as dietary supplements but are anything but.

Products containing kratom, a substance with opioidlike effects, which are sold over the counter in many gas stations, claim to be herbal supplements but are mislabeled.

Efficacy

Under a 1994 law, dietary supplements are classified as food, not as drugs. This means dietary supplements are not required to prove efficacy, unlike drugs. Regulators also don't take action on a product until it is shown to cause harm.

However, the FDA's website states that "many dietary supplements contain ingredients that have strong biological effects which may conflict with a medicine you are taking or a medical condition you may have. Products containing hidden drugs are also sometimes falsely marketed as dietary supplements, putting consumers at even greater risk."

In other words, supplements are regulated as food instead of drugs, even though they can interact with medications and may be laced with hidden drugs not included on the label.

Manufacturers of dietary supplements can make claims about their products that fall into three categories: health claims, nutrient content claims and claims about the product's function, structure or both, all without needing to provide supporting evidence.

Misbranding and false advertising are rampant with dietary supplements, including false claims of curing cancer, improving immune health, improving cognitive functioning, improving fertility, improving cardiovascular health and, of course, promoting weight loss and weight control.

You can find supplements that claim to be good for just about every health condition, concern or goal, so it should be no surprise that there are supplements marketed for weight loss.

In August 2021, the FDA cracked down on some of these weight loss products because of the presence of undeclared drugs. For example, of the 72 products recalled, the drug sibutramine, sold as Meridia, was found in 68 of them.

While the FDA may take further action beyond the recalls, the agency acknowledged that

it is not able to test every weight loss supplement for contamination with drugs.

These crackdowns demonstrate some progress, though several issues remain. Warning label placement, ingredients and beliefs based on misleading or false advertising are still highly problematic.

Some weight loss supplements may have FDA warnings on them. Of those that do, the disclaimers are rarely displayed on the front of the product label, so consumers are less likely to see them.

Ingredients in weight loss supplements can and do have adverse effects. They have caused people to be admitted to the emergency room for cardiovascular and swallowing problems, including in young, seemingly healthy people.

Mental health concerns and eating disorders are on the rise. As a result, researchers are examining unhealthy weight control behaviors, including the use of dietary supplements and how accessible they are to adolescents and children.

People who have eating disorders often suffer related health issues such as bone loss, osteoporosis and vitamin deficiencies. In response, their doctors may prescribe dietary supplements like calcium, vitamin D and nutritional supplement shakes. But these are not the dietary supplements of concern.

Protein

The concern is with supplements that promote weight loss, muscle building or both.

People with eating disorders may be attracted to dietary supplements that claim quick and pain-free weight loss or muscle gain. Additionally, dietary supplement users may struggle with an increase in compulsive exercise or other unhealthy weight control behaviors.

Diet pill and supplement use has also been associated with increased risk for developing eating disorders and disordered eating, as well as low self-esteem, depression and substance use. While dietary supplements do not solely cause eating disorders or disordered eating, they are one contributing factor that may be addressed with preventive measures and regulations.

Protein powders and other fitness supplements also have wide appeal. Research shows that girls are more at risk than boys for using weight loss supplements. But a growing problem in boys is the use of fitness supplements such as protein powder and creatine products, a compound that supplies energy to the muscles.

Use of fitness supplements sometimes signifies a preoccupation with body shape and size. For example, a 2022 study found that protein powder consumption in adolescence was associated with future use of steroids in emerging adulthood.

Protein powders make claims of building lean muscles, while creatine boasts providing energy for short-term, intense exercise.

Protein itself is not harmful at recommended doses. However, protein powders may contain unknown ingredients, such as certain toxins or extra and excessive sugar. They can also be dangerous when used in excess and to replace other foods that possess vital nutrients.

And while creatine can usually be safely used in adults, overuse can lead to health problems and is not recommended for minors. Ultimately, the impact of long-term use of these supplements, especially in adolescents, is unstudied.

One proposed regulation by researchers at Harvard University includes taxing dietary supplements whose labels tout weight loss benefits.

Another policy recommendation involves banning the sale of dietary supplements and other weight loss products to protect minors from these underregulated and potentially dangerous products.

In 2023, New York successfully passed legislation that banned the sale of these products to minors, while states including Colorado, California and Massachusetts have considered or are considering similar action.

Ultimately, medical professionals recommend that parents and caregivers encourage their children to get protein and vitamins from whole foods instead of turning to supplements and powders. They also recommend encouraging teens to focus on balanced nutrition, sleep and recovery, and a variety of resistance, strength and conditioning training. (AP)

FDA urges lower doses amidst patient concerns

Patients, doctors push back on cancer drugs' harsh side effects

NEW YORK, Feb 7, (AP): For cancer patients, the harsh side effects of powerful drugs have long been the trade-off for living longer. Now, patients and doctors are questioning whether all that suffering is necessary.

They've ignited a movement to radically change how new cancer drugs are tested, with the US Food and Drug Administration urging drugmakers to do a better job at finding the lowest effective dose, even if it takes more time.

Advances in treatment mean millions of people are surviving for years with incurable cancers. Jill Feldman, 54, of Deerfield, Illinois, has lived 15 years with lung cancer, thanks to that progress. Her parents both died of lung cancer months after their diagnoses.

But her cancer drug causes joint pain, fatigue and mouth sores that make eating and drinking painful.

"If you drink something that's too hot, you really burn your mouth. That's how my mouth feels 24/7," Feldman said.

Tolerated

She has lowered the dose with her doctor's blessing but she wants drugmakers to study lower doses early in the research process.

"No one should have to endure avoidable harmful effects of treatment," she said.

Unlike in other diseases, cancer drug development has focused on finding what's called the "maximum tolerated dose."

To speed testing of chemotherapy drugs, researchers ramp up the dosage in a few people in early studies to determine the highest possible dose patients can tolerate. That "more is better" philosophy works for chemotherapy, but not necessarily for newer cancer drugs - like the one Feldman takes - which are more targeted and work differently.

Chemotherapy is like a battering ram where aggressive strikes are a good strategy. But newer cancer drugs are more like having a front door key. They target a mutation that drives cancer cell growth, for example, or rev up the body's immune system to join the fight.

"You might only need a low dose to turn off that cancer driver," said Dr. Lillian Siu, who leads cancer drug development at the Princess Margaret Cancer Center in Toronto. "If you can get the same bang for your buck, why go higher?"

Through a program called Project Optimus, the FDA is pushing drugmakers to include more patients in early dose-finding trials to get better



A prescription bottle named osimertinib (brand name: Tagrisso) is seen on a table as Jill Feldman looks at her prescription bottle at her home in Deerfield, Ill., Friday, Jan. 19, 2024. (AP)

data on when lower doses can work. A key motivation for the project was "the growing calls from patients and advocates that cancer drugs be more tolerable," said FDA spokesperson Chanapa Tantibanchachai in an email.

Many of the new cancers drugs were developed using the old strategy. That leads to problems when patients skip doses or stop taking the drugs because of side effects. Some dose recommendations have been officially lowered after the drugs were approved. Other dose-lowering happens one patient at a time. Nearly half of patients in late-stage trials of 28 targeted therapy drugs needed to have their doses lowered, according to one study.

"We were pushing the dose as high as we could go," said Dr. Patricia LoRusso, who leads drug discovery at Yale Cancer Center. "You get side effects and then you have to stop the drug to recover from the side effects and the tumor can grow."

There's also huge patient-to-patient variation. The amount of a pill that reaches the bloodstream can vary because of liver and kidney function and other differences. But that means lowering the dose for everyone risks underdos-

ing some patients, LoRusso said.

"The challenge is: Where is the sweet spot?"

LoRusso said.

Dr. Julie Gralow, chief medical officer of the American Society of Clinical Oncology, is planning a 500-patient study to test lower doses of two drugs for breast cancer that has spread.

The study will compare two strategies: Starting treatment at the full dose then lowering the dose for side effects versus starting with a lower dose and increasing dosage if the patient does well.

Much of the questioning of high doses has come from metastatic breast cancer patients, including the Patient Centered Dosing Initiative, which has done influential surveys of patients and cancer doctors.

"We will be on treatment for the rest of our lives," said Lesley Kailani Glenn, 58, of Central Point, Oregon. "We want to try to live the best that we can, knowing that treatment is never going to stop."

During the 11 years she's lived with the disease, she has summited Mount Whitney in California, hiked the Cinque Terra in Italy and started a nonprofit.

Ecuador identifies tainted cinnamon source

Decadelong listeria outbreak traced to Calif cheese

CALIFORNIA, Feb 7, (AP): A California cheese and dairy company is the source of a decadelong outbreak of listeria food poisoning that killed two people and sickened more than two dozen, federal health officials said Tuesday.

New lab and inspection evidence linked soft cheeses and other dairy products made by Rizo-Lopez Foods of Modesto, California, to the outbreak, which was first detected in June 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said.

Since then, at least 26 people in 11 states have been sickened. They include a person who died in California in 2017 and one who died in Texas in 2020, CDC officials said.

On Monday, the company recalled more than 60 soft cheeses, yogurt and sour cream sold under the brands Tio Francisco, Don Francisco, Rizo Bros, Rio Grande, Food City, El Huache, La Ordena, San Carlos, Campesino, Santa Maria, Dos Ranchitos, Casa Cardenas, and 365

Whole Foods Market.

The CDC previously investigated cases of food poisoning tied to queso fresco and other similar types of cheese in 2017 and 2021, but there was not enough evidence to identify a source.

New illnesses were reported in December, prompting CDC to reopen the investigation. The strain of listeria linked to the outbreak was found in a cheese sample from Rizo-Lopez Foods. Federal officials confirmed that queso fresco and cotija made by the company were making people sick.

The recalled products were distributed nationwide at stores and retail deli counters, including El Super, Cardenas Market, Northgate Gonzalez, Superior Groceries, El Rancho, Vallarta, Food City, La Michoacana, and Numero Uno Markets.

Also:

QUITO, Ecuador: Officials in Ecuador have

named the likely source of contaminated ground cinnamon used in fruit pouches tied to more than 400 potential cases of lead poisoning in US children, the Food and Drug Administration said Tuesday.

Carlos Aguilera, a cinnamon-processing company in Ecuador, supplied the spice added to WanaBana and other applesauce pouches sent to the US, according to the Ecuadorian regulatory agency ARCSA. The cinnamon, which was sent to another supplier, Negasmart, was found to be contaminated with high levels of lead and chromium, an FDA analysis showed. Carlos Aguilera is not operating at this time, ARCSA said.

The unprocessed cinnamon sticks used in the products were originally imported from Sri Lanka. The sticks were tested and found to have no lead contamination, ARCSA told FDA. The Ecuador agency's investigation is continuing.

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Big investments being made in clubs, leagues

How private equity is changing the global soccer ‘landscape’

MADRID, Feb 7, (AP): Atletico Madrid is revamping its training facilities. Sevilla and Valencia are rebuilding their stadiums. Sporting Gijon is expanding its youth academy.

Spanish clubs this week are meeting to showcase and discuss projects funded by their shares of the \$2.1 billion that private equity group CVC Capital Partners is investing in the Spanish league. Real Madrid and Barcelona opposed the deal and are not part of the agreement that gave Luxembourg-based CVC a 8.25% stake in a new company that manages TV rights from the Spanish league, whose two-day conference began Tuesday.

The 2021 deal was the first of its kind in Europe’s top soccer leagues, but CVC has since made a similar investment in the French league and is competing with Blackstone, another private equity firm, for a stake in the media rights of the German league.

SOCCER

Here’s a look at how private equity and other investment funds are building a presence in global soccer - despite pushback from some clubs, federations and fans.

Covid effect

Investors seized the opportunity when clubs became cash-strapped during the coronavirus pandemic and now are thriving in a niche few of them had fully explored before. More than one-third of the teams in the top five European leagues currently have financial backing from private equity, venture capital or private debt firms, according to a report released late last year by financial data company PitchBook. They have invested some 5 billion euros (\$5.4 billion) in Spain, France, Italy, Germany and England, up from less than 66 million euros (\$71 million) in 2018, PitchBook said.

“Part of the economic reality of this is that these businesses were distressed after COVID,” said Jonathan Lutzky, an operating partner at holding company 777 Partners. “There was a unique opportunity the past three years to kind of get in at a good price point.”

Multi-club owners

Miami-based 777 Partners entered the club-ownership business a few years ago and today has stakes in Genoa in Italy, Vasco da Gama in Brazil, Standard Liege in Belgium, Red Star in France, Melbourne Victory in Australia, Hertha Berlin in Germany and Sevilla in Spain. Its purchase of English club Everton is pending final approval from the Premier League.

The multi-club ownership approach often relies on investing in small- and medium-sized clubs with lower valuations and greater growth potential. More than 40% of clubs in the top five European leagues have been linked to multi-club owners, according to PitchBook.

“You just get a lot of advantages that you don’t get from owning a singular club,” Lutzky said. “The more clubs that you own, the more data points that you have, the more flexibility that you have in your strategy, the more synergy you can create. When you own multiple clubs you can learn what the best practices are in different domains. And then all the clubs benefit.”

Other investors with multi-club ventures include California-based private equity firm Silver Lake, which has a stake in Abu Dhabi-controlled City Football Group. The group’s flagship team is Manchester City, and it has other partnerships with clubs in the United States, Japan, Spain and Brazil.

Other industry players include Sixth Street Partners, which has deals unrelated to ownership with Real Madrid and Barcelona in Europe, and Clearlake Capital, which recently acquired Chelsea. RedBird Capital Partners purchased controlling interest of both AC Milan in Italy and Toulouse in France, and has a stake in Fenway Sports Group, which owns Liverpool in England.

Some of the hurdles to this model



General view of the Mestalla stadium played in an empty stadium because of the coronavirus outbreak, during the Champions League round of 16 second leg soccer match between Valencia and Atalanta in Valencia, Spain, Tuesday March 10, 2020. Atletico Madrid is revamping its training facilities. Sevilla and Valencia are rebuilding their stadiums. Sporting Gijon is expanding its youth academy. This week Spanish clubs are showcasing projects funded with their shares of the \$2.1 billion that private equity group CVC Capital Partners is investing in the Spanish league. (AP)

Irving teams with Doncic to guide Mavs past Nets



Phoenix Suns guard Bradley Beal (3) slips past Milwaukee Bucks guard Malik Beasley (5) to get a shot off against Bucks center Robin Lopez during the second half of an NBA basketball game Tuesday, Feb. 6, 2024, in Phoenix. (AP)

Suns burn Bucks

NEW YORK, Feb 7, (AP): Kyrie Irving scored 36 points in a dazzling return to Brooklyn exactly one year after he was traded to Dallas, leading the Mavericks to a 119-107 victory over the Nets on Tuesday night.

Luka Doncic had 35 points, 18 rebounds and nine assists as the Mavericks’ guard tandem took turns hitting some deep 3-pointers in the second half when the Nets were trying to make a run.

Irving was booed when he touched the ball in the early going but was later cheered for plays including his slam of a lob pass in the third quarter.

Mikal Bridges scored 28 points and Royce O’Neal had 18 for the short-handed Nets, who trimmed a 23-point deficit to 107-101 with about five minutes remaining before Irving knocked down two straight 3-pointers for a 113-101 lead.

Suns 114, Bucks 106

In Phoenix, Devin Booker scored 32 points, Kevin Durant added 28 Phoenix beat short-handed Milwaukee.

Durant hit five straight shots and had 14 points in the fourth quarter.

The Bucks played without star guard Damian Lillard, who missed the game with a sprained ankle, and starting center Brook Lopez, who was out for personal reasons. Milwaukee forward Khris Middleton left in the first quarter with a sprained ankle.

BASKETBALL

Giannis Antetokounmpo led Milwaukee with 34 points on 13-for-24 shooting and had 10 rebounds. The Bucks fell to 1-4 since hiring coach Doc Rivers, who replaced the fired Adrian Griffin.

Bulls 129, Timberwolves 123, OT

In Chicago, Coby White and DeMar DeRozan scored 33 points apiece, and Chicago erased a 23-point deficit to beat Anthony Edwards and Minnesota in overtime.

Nikola Vucevic had 24 points for the Bulls, and Andre Drummond finished with 16 points, 16 rebounds and four blocked shots.

Edwards had 38 points and 12 rebounds for the Timberwolves, who had won three of four. Karl-Anthony Towns scored 33 points, and his 3-pointer tied it at 115-all with 50.5 seconds left in regulation. He made seven 3s.

DeRozan scored the Bulls’ first six points of overtime.

Knicks 123, Grizzlies 113

In New York, Jalen Brunson had 27 points and eight assists before exiting with an apparent ankle injury, Donte DiVincenzo had 32 points, and New York beat short-handed Memphis.

Isaiah Hartenstein had 17 points and eight rebounds and Precious Achiuwa scored 17 as the Knicks shot 55.8% and won for the 10th time in their past 11 games, improving to 16-3 over their last 19.

Vince Williams Jr. scored 19 points for Memphis.

Brunson appeared to injure his ankle when he was fouled by G.G. Jackson in the fourth quarter.

Heat 121, Magic 95

In Miami, Jimmy Butler scored 23 points to lead sev-

en Miami players in double figures, and the Heat beat Orlando.

Butler also had eight rebounds, eight assists and three steals for the Heat, who won for just the second time in their last seven home games. Terry Rozier scored 18 while Tyler Herro and All-Star Bam Adebayo each scored 14 for Miami, which won the season series against Orlando 3-1.

All-Star forward Paolo Banchero scored 23 points for Orlando, the 18th consecutive road game in which he’s scored at least 20 - tying Tracy McGrady for the second-longest such streak in Magic history.

Pacers 132, Rockets 129

In Indianapolis, Pascal Siakam scored 29 points and teamed up with T.J. McConnell to spur a third-quarter comeback as Indiana beat Houston.

The Rockets led 85-75 early in the third, but the Pacers allowed just 14 points the rest of the period.

McConnell had 17 points and four assists as the Pacers won for the second time in three days. They’ve won nine straight in the series.

Jalen Green had 30 points to lead the Rockets, who have lost two straight. Dillon Brooks added 23 points and rookie Amen Thompson finished with 13 points, 13 rebounds and six assists.

Jazz 124, Thunder 117

In Salt Lake City, Lauri Markkanen had 33 points and 11 rebounds as Utah beat Oklahoma City.

John Collins chipped in 22 points and nine rebounds for the Jazz. Keyonte George added 16 points.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander led Oklahoma City with 28 points and seven assists. Jalen Williams scored 26 points and Chet Holmgren added 22. The Thunder fell percentage points behind the Los Angeles Clippers for the best record in the Western Conference.



Dallas Mavericks guard Luka Doncic (77) shoots over Brooklyn Nets guard Ben Simmons (10) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in New York, Tuesday, Feb. 6, 2024. (AP)

Olympic organizers to release new tickets

PARIS, Feb 7, (AP): Olympic organizers will release tens of thousands of extra tickets for the Paris Games on Thursday, when they will also unveil their medal designs.

Organizers said the sale will start at 10 a.m. local time on the official ticketing website, with seats available for all sports.

Tickets will be sold on a first come, first served basis, without a lottery. Organizers said that 95% of these new tickets on sale will be for events in the Ile-de-

France region around Paris, and 45% of the released seats will be offered for less than 100 euros (\$108).

Tickets for the opening and closing ceremonies of the Games and the Paralympics will also go on sale.

The 2024 Paris Games, which run from July 26-Aug. 11, will feature 32 sports and 48 disciplines across 37 sites. The Paralympics will then take place from Aug. 28-Sept. 8.

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Al-Arabi & Al-Qadisiya renew rivalry in Amir Cup semifinals

Al-Salmiya and Al-Tadamon vie for final spot

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: Soccer enthusiasts eagerly await an exciting face-off at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium at 8:00 pm. The much-anticipated clash in the Amir Cup semifinals will feature traditional rivals



Players challenge for the ball in this file photo.

Al-Arabi and Al-Qadisiya. Simultaneously, Al-Salmiya is set to meet Al-Tadamon at 4:40 pm at Ali Sabah Al-Salem Stadium.

This evening’s match marks the third encounter between Al-Arabi and Al-Qadisiyah this season, having previously drawn 1-1 and 2-2

in the Zain Premier League. The teams are scheduled to meet twice more in the Zain League (Big Six). The outcome tonight is crucial as one team aims to assert supremacy over the other.

The last Amir Cup face-off between these rivals occurred on September 21, 2021, in the semi-finals, with Al-Qadisiya emerging victorious with a goal from Iraqi Ali Faez.

Al-Arabi, currently tied for the Zain League lead with Kuwait at 33 points each, advanced to this round after a narrow 1-0 victory over Sulaibikhat in the preliminary round and a 3-1 win against Al-Nasr in the quarter-finals. The team reinforced its squad during the winter transfer period, bringing in Tunisian Ayman and Algerian Imad Eddine Boubacar.

Al-Qadisiya, occupying the third position in the league with 32 points, faced challenging qualifiers, defeating Yarmouk 2-1 and Al-Fahaeel with the same score in the preliminary and quarterfinal rounds, respectively. Omani Abdullah Fawaz joins Al-Qadisiyah, replacing Tunisian Youssef Bin Souda, as the team aims to clinch a title absent from its trophy cabinet since the 2014-2015 season.

In the second clash, Al-Salmiya aspires to extend its successful journey and secure a spot in the final, seeking a championship it has not claimed since the 2000-2001 season. The team progressed to this round by overcoming Khaitan 4-2 on penalties (1-1) in the preliminary round and triumphing over Kazma on penalties 4-3 (4-4) in the quarter-finals.

SOCCER

Al-Salmiya underwent a strategic transformation during the winter transfer period, welcoming Libyan Senussi Al-Hadi and Austrian Srdan Spiridonović while parting ways with Senegalese Cesar and Brazilian Sebastião Junior.

Al-Tadamon, mirroring Al-Salmiya’s path, secured a place in the semi-finals by defeating Al-Jahra 5-4 on penalties (2-2) in the preliminary round and eliminating defending champion Kuwait in the quarter-finals, also on penalties with a score of 5-4 (1-1).

The “Sons of Farwaniya” are determined to prolong their adventure, qualify for the final, and vie for a title that has eluded them since the club’s inception.

High-stakes action as int’l show jumping Championship kicks off



International referee Yahya Al-Hadban with other officials gearing up for the championship.

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 7: At 1:30 pm today, the Marina Beach will come alive with the commencement of the “The Stadium” International Show Jumping Championship, proudly sponsored by Kuwait International Bank and meticulously organized by the seasoned event management firm, “SAFEX.”

Dr. Yahya Al-Hadban, a distinguished Kuwaiti international referee, emphasized the significance of this three-star tournament in the current season. This event serves as a qualifying platform for the World Cup and boasts participation from referees hailing from Europe, the Gulf countries, and Kuwait.

The championship unfolds across nine rounds, with particular anticipation surrounding the Grand Prix round, set at an impressive height of 150 cm. Dr. Al-Hadban extended his best wishes

for success to all participants and expressed gratitude for the substantial contributions from the private sector, notably acknowledging “SAFEX” for its commendable efforts in organizing the event. The previous edition, held just two weeks ago, saw international jockey Ali Al-Kharafi emerge victorious.

EQUESTRIAN

Today’s schedule includes three runs at heights of 115 cm, 130 cm, and 140 cm. The competition will continue tomorrow with runs set at heights of 120 cm, 130 cm, and 145 cm. The championship will culminate on Saturday with the final runs at heights of 120 cm, 135 cm, and the challenging 150 cm.

Hossam appointed Egypt ‘head’ coach

CAIRO, Feb 7, (AP): Egypt has put twin brothers in charge of its national soccer team with Hossam Hassan taking over as coach and Ibrahim Hassan as team director.

The Egyptian Football Association said that Hossam Hassan - the country’s all-time top-scorer with 68 goals - will succeed Portuguese coach Rui Vitória, whom it fired Sunday after the team’s disappointing performance at the Africa Cup of Nations.

Egypt, which has won a record seven Africa Cup titles, failed to win a game in the 34th edition of the tournament and was knocked out by Congo in a dramatic penalty shootout in the round of 16.

As a forward, the Cairo-born Hossam Hassan helped Egypt to three of those titles. He played mostly for hometown club Al Ahly, with a sojourn at PAOK in Greece and Swiss team Neuchâtel Xamax. He also played for other Egyptian clubs before retiring in 2008.

He since coached many Egyptian clubs and the Jordan national team.

Ibrahim Hassan, a former defender, also played for Egypt and accompanied his brother at various clubs.

The Egyptian federation had said it was looking for a foreign coach to succeed Vitória. French coach Herve Renard had been tipped to take over.

Vitória, who was appointed Egypt coach on a four-year deal in 2022, failed to get the best out of the team. The Pharaohs drew all their Africa Cup group games by the same score of 2-2 against Mozambique, Ghana and Cape Verde before its loss on penalties to Congo.

Williamson completes second century of match NZ dominate under-strength South Africa series opener

MOUNT MAUNGANUI, New Zealand, Feb 7, (AP): New Zealand beat an under-strength South Africa lineup by 281 runs on the fourth day of the first cricket test Wednesday to take an early lead in the two-match series.

Captain Tim Southee declared New Zealand’s second innings overnight at 179-4, with an overall lead of 528. New Zealand bowled out South Africa in the fourth innings for 247.

New Zealand posted 511 batting first and dismissed South Africa for 162 for a 349-run first innings lead. Southee chose not to enforce the follow-on and Kane Williamson completed his second century of the match, the 31st of his career, before the declaration.

“I think it was pretty good on a good (pitch) for the batters to set it up and the bowlers to take 20 wickets,” Southee said. “We knew the South Africa side would be a strong one. You look at them in all sports, they compete, they’re a very proud nation so we knew they were going to come out and fight.”

South Africa was in trouble early Wednesday, losing the wickets of openers Neil Brand and Edward Moore within the first four overs.

Zubayr Hamza and Raynard van Tonder batted more than 100 minutes to carry South Africa to lunch

without further loss. But both were out to undisciplined shots immediately after the break, hastening the end.

David Bedingham lifted South Africa’s hopes after lunch with a career-best 87 from 96 balls in a partnership of 105 for the fifth wicket with Keegan Petersen (16).

The partnership occupied most of the middle session and while Bedingham and Petersen were together New Zealand was faced with the prospect that the test might continue into the fifth day.

Bedingham had benefited from New Zealand’s short-pitched bowling, hitting 13 fours and a six. But he chased a short ball once too often and fell to Kyle Jamieson not long after the tea interval.

CRICKET

Jamieson removed both partners as South Africa slumped from 178-4 to 181-6. Bedingham tried to pull a ball which reached him sooner than he expected and his miscued shot flew to Mitchell Santner at deep midwicket.

Petersen attempted to hook a ball which bounced to chest height, tucked him up and his pull shot was taken by Ravindra at fine leg.

With such a big lead, New Zealand

land was able to work on plans to dismiss the key South Africa batters and, while it was expensive, the short-pitch policy eventually yielded the wicket of Bedingham.

Clyde Fortuin’s dismissal was indicative of the bad luck South Africa has had throughout the test. He pushed a rank short ball from part-time spinner Glenn Phillips which hit the knee of Tom Latham as he ducked at short leg and flew up to be caught by wicketkeeper Tom

Blundell.

Duanne Olivier was caught by Daryl Mitchell at first slip from Santner’s bowling as he pushed forward outside off. Santner found a lot of turn earlier in the day and was unlucky not to enjoy more success.

Tshepo Moreki was caught out by a ball from Santner which pitched in line and hurried on, catching him in front as he squared up in front of his stumps.

The end finally came 40 minutes



Kane Williamson of New Zealand bats during the first day of the first cricket test between New Zealand and South Africa at Bay Oval, Mt Maunganui, New Zealand. (AP)

Messi plays but Vissel Kobe edge Miami 4-3 on penalties in friendly

TOKYO, Feb 7, (AP): After leaving fans disappointed in Hong Kong, Lionel Messi put in a 30-minute appearance in Tokyo on Wednesday in Inter Miami’s latest exhibition match in Asia - although he still left some supporters wanting more.

Messi came off the bench for the final half hour, energized his teammates and probably had the best chance of the match in the 80th with two point-blank shots that were both stopped by the Vissel Kobe defense.

After a 0-0 draw in regulation, the match went to penalty kicks and Vissel won the shootout 4-3. Messi did not take a penalty, however, which brought jeers from the crowd of 28,614 in Tokyo’s National Stadium, which seats 68,000.

SOCCER

But it wasn’t close to the level of booing that broke out in Hong Kong after Messi stayed on the bench for the entire game with a groin injury. Some fans demanded refunds.

The Argentina star was contrite in a rare press conference in Tokyo on Tuesday as he addressed the public relations disaster. He had said he wasn’t sure whether he would be fit enough to play in Tokyo, and left fans guessing until he started warming up in the second half - drawing loud cheers from the crowd.

Vissel hit the post twice in the first half and had by far the best chances in a match it largely dominated.

The match in Tokyo wrapped up Inter Miami’s global promotional tour - stretching from El Salvador

to Dallas into Saudi Arabia and Hong Kong and ending in Tokyo.

Inter won only one of the six games. The Miami preseason wraps up on Feb. 16 in Florida against Newell’s Old Boys, Messi’s boyhood club from Rosario, Argentina. Many expect him to finish his career there.

Inter Miami is loaded with former Barcelona players including Messi, Luis Suarez, Jordi Alba, and Sergio Busquets.

Andres Iniesta, another former Barcelona star, played several seasons in Japan with Vissel Kobe and spoke briefly to the crowd before the match.



Inter Miami’s Lionel Messi (left), battles for the ball against Vissel Kobe’s Hotaru Yamaguchi during the friendly soccer match between Vissel Kobe and Inter Miami CF at the National Stadium in Tokyo, Japan. (AP)

We deserved a better result: Alguacil Mallorca, Sociedad draw in first leg of Copa semifinals

MADRID, Feb 7, (AP): Mallorca and Real Sociedad drew 0-0 in a lackluster first leg of the Copa del Rey semifinals.

Neither team had many significant scoring chances at Son Moix Stadium in the Balearic Islands. Sociedad was slightly closer to breaking the deadlock in a match

in which the hosts ended with no attempts on target.

“They have a quality team, that is playing in the Champions League, so I’m satisfied with the result,” Mallorca coach Javier Aguirre said. “Of course we would have liked to win, but it wasn’t easy. The series remains open.”

Mallorca’s best chance was a shot by Abdón Prats that missed just wide in the 51st minute. Sociedad came close with Umar Sadiq’s close-range attempt that went over the crossbar in the 71st after a cross by Japan international Takefusa Kubo.

“If you look at the second half, we deserved a better result,” Sociedad coach Imanol Alguacil said. “We did more to deserve the win but in the end we couldn’t get the ball to go in.”

The second leg will be on Feb. 18 in Basque Country.

Sociedad is trying to return to the Copa final for the first time since it beat rival Athletic Bilbao to lift the trophy in 2019-20.

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Mallorca, partly owned by Golden State Warriors coach Steve Kerr and former NBA great Steve Nash, won the Copa in 2003 but hadn’t made it to the semifinals since 2009. Its last appearance in the final was 2003 when it beat Recreativo Huelva.

Mallorca, which had eliminated Girona in the Copa quarterfinals, sits just outside the relegation zone in the Spanish league.

Sociedad has drawn its last three matches 0-0. It is sixth in the Spanish league and will play Paris Saint-Germain in the round of 16 of the Champions League.

The first leg of the other semifinal will be played on Wednesday with Atletico Madrid hosting Athletic.

Atletico is playing in the last four of the Copa for the first time in seven seasons and is seeking its first title since 2013. Athletic eliminated Barcelona to reach the semifinals for the fifth straight season. The Basque Country club last won the competition in 1984.



Fatima Al Jasmi, the media officer at the Arab Women's Club Games.

Sports

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Sheikha Jawaher's vision elevates Arab Women's Club Games to new heights

Kuwait Olympic Committee member Hayat calls for support in women's sports development

By Suzan Nasser

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

SHARJAH, Feb 7: Fatima Hayat, a member of the Kuwait Olympic Committee and head of women's sports, emphasized the importance of supporting women's sports and advocating for fairness in the upcoming government sports plan. Speaking at the Arab Tournament for Women's Clubs in Sharjah, she commended the efforts of Sharjah in making the tournament a significant achievement in Arab sports.

Hayat expressed gratitude to Sheikha Jawaher Al Qasimi for

sponsoring the tournament and praised the efforts invested in ensuring its success for athletes from the Arab world. She highlighted the impressive organization of the tournament, especially the opening ceremony, which left a positive impression on attendees and followers.

She revealed plans for organizing a course for Gulf clubs to support female players, enhance their skills, and share experiences. Stressing the importance of increasing women's sports activities in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Hayat acknowledged the progress of women's sports in Kuwait,



Fatima Hayat speaking to Suzan Nasser.

thanks to the support of the political leadership and the commitment of the Olympic Committee and the General Authority for Sports.

Hayat congratulated Kuwaiti club players for their achievements in shooting, lauding the performance of the Salwa Al-Sabah Volleyball Club and the girl's basketball team. She wished them success in upcoming competitions, contributing to the presence of Kuwaiti girls in various sporting events.

Fatima Al Jasmi, the media officer at the Arab Women's Club Games, highlighted the tournament's prominence in

Arab women's sports events. She credited Sheikha Jawaher Al Qasimi for her vision and efforts in making the tournament a distinguished event. Al Jasmi expressed satisfaction with the wide media coverage of the seventh edition of the tournament, attributing its success to the collaboration with Emirati, Gulf, and Arab media institutions, whose correspondents covered the competition fields across various locations in Sharjah. This extensive media coverage played a vital role in conveying the tournament's message and generating widespread resonance for its activities.

Leverkusen's unbeaten run hits 30 games in thrilling German Cup win over Stuttgart

Bayern next in the league

LEVERKUSEN, Germany, Feb 7, (AP): Bayer Leverkusen reached 30 games unbeaten in all competitions this season with a 3-2 comeback win over Stuttgart to reach the German Cup semifinals.

Jonathan Tah's 90th-minute header won the game and spared Xabi Alonso's team extra time ahead of a league game Saturday against title rival Bayern Munich. On the sideline, Alonso jumped and punched the air in celebration.

Leverkusen had twice recovered from a goal down. Stuttgart took the lead at a corner when Waldemar Anton got away from his marker Edmond Tapsoba and headed in at the far post. Midfielder Robert Andrich leveled the score early in the second half with a curling shot from around 20 meters (yards) into the top-right corner.

Chris Führich restored Stuttgart's

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lead in a move that began when Andrich gave away the ball, but Amine Adli leveled again for Leverkusen on the break from a through ball from Florian Wirtz, who also assisted Tah's winner. It was the third time in Leverkusen's last five games that it won a on a goal scored in the 90th minute or stoppage time.

Both teams were left with questions over the refereeing, as Andrich was lucky to escape a second yellow card for a heavy tackle in which he stepped on Enzo Millot's foot.

Leverkusen was aggrieved when Stuttgart's Hiroki Ito brought down Jeremie Frimpong with a slide tackle in the box. The referee and video review opted not to give a penalty, even though Ito didn't seem to make any contact with the ball.

The win keeps alive the chance at a league and cup double for Leverkusen, a team sometimes dubbed "Neverkusen" for its historic tendency to fall just short of winning trophies. Leverkusen's last trophy was the German Cup in 1993.

Leverkusen joins second-division teams Fortuna Duesseldorf and Kaiserslautern in the semifinals. Top-division Borussia

The stadium briefly fell silent as a fan was treated after falling from a stand. The person was conscious, Leverkusen said.



Leverkusen's Patrik Schick (left), and Stuttgart's Anthony Rouault challenge for the ball during the German soccer cup quarterfinal match between Bayer 04 Leverkusen and VfB Stuttgart at the BayArena in Leverkusen, Germany. (AP)



Al-Marshad with the Taekwondo champions.

Klinsmann questioned about reaction to South Korea exit

AL-RAYYAN, Qatar, Feb 7, (AP): Jurgen Klinsmann's broad smile is part of his charm.

But on Tuesday in Qatar, the South Korea coach was left to explain why he was grinning after his team suffered a painful defeat in the semifinals of the Asian Cup.

Klinsmann warmly congratulated Jordan coach Hussein Ammouta on

the field after his team produced a big upset with a 2-0 win at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium.

Perhaps a little too warmly. "For me it's normal to congratulate the other coach when his team was better in a game. I think this is a sign of respect," Klinsmann said when questioned about his post-game reaction. "They deserved this win today. They were the better team, but this is for me totally normal. If you say I shouldn't smile, give somebody a smile that deserves a compliment in that moment, maybe we have different approaches."

There has been criticism of Klinsmann and South Korea's performances in reaching the semifinals. His tactics were questioned and the general impression is that he should have done more with such a talented squad, led by Tottenham forward Son Heung-min.

So it may have been jarring for some to see him smile as cameras focused on him after the final whistle against a Jordan team ranked 64 places below South Korea in FIFA's rankings.

He could then be seen seeking out Ammouta, who was celebrating on the field with players and staff.

It remains to be seen what the fallout will be after defeat to Jordan, which had never reached the semifinals of the Asian Cup before and had only advanced to the round of 16 as one of the best third-placed teams in the group stage - behind South Korea.

President 'hails' Kuwaiti taekwondo team success in Fujairah Champ'ship

FUJAIRAH, Feb 7: Kuwait taekwondo team secured two silver and a bronze medal at the 11th Fujairah International Taekwondo Championship. Hani Al-Marshad, the President of the Kuwaiti Taekwondo Federation, announced that Ahmed Al-Ali clinched the silver in the under 168 height cat-

egory, while Hussein Shamouh earned the bronze in the under 172 height category. Al-Marshad expressed satisfaction with the team's performance, deeming it a positive outcome.

Commending the Kuwaiti players for their remarkable display in the tournament, Al-Marshad emphasized that their success reflects determination and a commitment to excellence. He highlighted the significance of adding value to Kuwaiti sports and

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acknowledged the players' efforts in achieving remarkable results on the international sports stage.

Looking ahead, Al-Marshad stated that the team will undergo thorough preparation for the upcoming first Gulf Youth Games in April 2024 in the Emirates, as well as the 2025 World Championship, also to be held in the Emirates.

With the recent achievements, the Kuwaiti taekwondo team has amassed a total of six diverse medals, including one gold, two silver, and three bronze medals.

Harry appeals trial postponed for year

ATHENS, Greece, Feb 7, (AP): The appeals trial of Manchester United defender Harry Maguire over a nightclub brawl on the Greek island of Mykonos has been postponed for a year because of a lawyers' strike, court officials told The Associated Press.

The 30-year-old England international is appealing a 21-month suspended sentence following the incident in 2020. His case was due to be heard Wednesday at a court on the island of Syros, the region's administrative capital.

Yannis Paradeisis, a Syros lawyer assisting with the prosecution and representing four police officers allegedly assaulted in the brawl, said a new trial date was set for March 12, 2025.

Kuwait's medal count hits 17

Al-Rajhi secures double victory in Sharjah

ABU DHABI, Feb 7, (KUNA): Kuwait's team clinched two additional medals, bringing their total tally to an impressive 17 medals at the conclusion of the 12th Sharjah Para Athletics Forum. Faisal al-Rajhi secured the two medals by securing second place in both the 1500-m and 5000-m wheelchair running competitions.

Shafi al-Hajri, the President of Kuwait Disabled Sport Club, expressed immense pride in the achievements of Kuwait's athletes. He dedicated

this success to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Al-Hajri revealed that the Kuwaiti team is gearing up for the upcoming championship in Dubai, with hopes for continued progress and success.

In the three-day competition, Ku-

wait's team secured a remarkable haul of five gold, eight silver, and four bronze medals. The event, which commenced on Sunday and concluded on Tuesday, witnessed the participation of 290 male and female athletes from 38 countries.



Double silver medalist Faisal Al Rajhi