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FRIDAY-SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 2-3, 2024 / RAJAB 21-22, 1445 AH

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150 FILS

KFH reports record net profit of KD 584.5 million, up by 63.4%

- Details Page 9 -



KUNA photo
Speaker of the National Assembly Ahmad Al-Saadoun received the Head of Kuwait Anticorruption Authority (Nazaha) Abdulaziz Al-Ibrahim on Thursday. During the reception, Al-Ibrahim handed the top lawmaker a copy of Nazaha's semi-annual report.

'Unify school vacation'

Committee urges inquiry into excessive leave cash

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh and Raed Youssef

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: The parliamentary Budgets and Final Accounts Committee has urged all government agencies – each within its jurisdiction – to conduct an internal investigation into anyone who caused imbalances identified by the State Audit Bureau (SAB) during the implementation of the provision of Article 41 of the decree issued on April 4, 1979 regarding the civil service system and its amendments to allow employees to convert their unused leave days into cash while they are still in service.

The committee asked each government agency to submit the investigation results to SAB within three months, which will be used as basis for the follow-up report that will be submitted to the National Assembly along with the final account of the State administration for fiscal 2023/2024.

Committee Chairman MP Adel Al-Damkhi stated in an incoming letter that he sent to the Assembly: "The legislative authority assigned SAB to review the encashment of unused leave days of civilian and military personnel in the public sector. The committee asked the Assembly to take this step after it became clear during its discussion of the draft law on linking the budgets of ministries and government departments for fiscal 2023/2024 that the Ministry of Finance requested the inclusion of new financial appropriations for the project mentioned in Chapter One for Expenditures (Workers' Compensation) to cover the overspending on the implementation of Article 41 of the decree issued on April 4, 1979. SAB submitted its report on Nov 29, 2023; revealing that the expenditure for leave encashment reached KD422,477,072 -- more than the KD300 million budget allocated for this purpose. This is a violation of Article 147 of the Constitution, stating 'in no case may the maximum estimate of expenditure, included in the budget law or the laws amending it, be exceeded.'"

Inconsistency

He went on to say that "other results became clear for SAB, the most important of which is the rise in the risk index in all government agencies in terms of inconsistency in decisions and systems for accruing, granting and settling leaves; weak oversight of leave systems and their accrual; failure to deduct them regularly, which led to the accumulation of days due to some employees and replacing them without auditing or reviewing them; weak internal control in following up the employees' commitment to work and their absence at work; lack of control over the extent of employees' commitment to the attendance system; exempting others from proving attendance in accordance with regulatory decisions; exaggeration in the value of comprehensive salaries in the statements in a way that does not reflect the actual salary as it was found that some employees whose actual salaries are less than what is listed on the statements; and temporary contract employees (non-Kuwaitis) were included in the decision to disburse cash for unused leave days."

He added the committee attached in its letter a summary of the results and recommendations of SAB, as well as the obstacles it faced during the completion of its task; so that the Assembly will take them into consideration.

Meanwhile, MP Badr Nashmi Al-Anzi has submitted a proposal to specify the same vacation period for schools, institutes, colleges and universities in the public and private sectors. He explained that his proposal is aimed at giving families a chance to spend their vacation with all members of the family.

On the other hand, Deputy National Assembly Speaker Muhammad Al-Mutair forwarded queries to Minister of Justice, Endowments and Islamic Affairs Faisal Saeed Al-Ghareeb about the measures taken regarding lawsuit number 1899/2022 filed at the Capital, how the case started, how the investigations progressed, who are involved in the case, if this is related to the judges bribery case, number and nationalities of judges suspected of

Continued on Page 5

Day by Day

WE urge the Minister of Public Works to sustain this unprecedented level of activity that Kuwait has not experienced in thirty years.

May God bless your efforts. The nation is grappling with waste and unpleasant odors, as evidenced by the state of Al-Wafra streets and the prolonged suffering of its residents.

Minister of Public Works, it is imperative that you visit Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Khaitan to witness the sewage waterfalls, the stray cats and dogs roaming freely in these areas, and other regions also facing similar challenges.

O Minister, the journey ahead is indeed long. ... Yet tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar

Kuwait sets fees for part-time work permits through 'Sahel'

Bid to address demographic imbalance

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) has launched the service for obtaining part-time work permit through the Sahel platform, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

This is part of procedures aimed at developing the labor market in order to meet manpower demands and to ease the process for employers to benefit from workers who are already in Kuwait as one way of addressing the demographic imbalance issue.

Following are the conditions and fees for obtaining part-time work permit:

1. Approval of the original employer,
2. Maximum part-time work is four hours except the contracting sector,
3. Payment of corresponding fees — KD 5 for one month, KD 10 for three months, KD 20 for six months and KD 30 for one year.

On the other hand, citizens are exempted from these conditions and fees. They can apply for part-time work with the approval of the original employer in line with the laws on protecting competitiveness.



KUNA photo
The Kuwait Kite Team, featuring numerous patriotic kites adorned with Kuwaiti flag colors, participates in the ongoing Qatar Kite Festival 2024 at the Old Doha Port. Team leader Omar Bu Hamad highlighted the fusion of ancient and modern Kuwaiti folk heritage in the uniquely designed kites.

NewsWatch

MANAMA: Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa commended Wednesday accomplishments made in all domains by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) since its establishment.

The King made praise while receiving, at Safriya Palace, GCC Secretary General **Jasem Al-Budaiwi** who is visiting the Kingdom, Bahrain News Agency (BNA) said. (KUNA)

ABU DHABI: UAE's Foreign Ministry announced Wednesday the success of new mediation efforts for the exchange of prisoners of war between **Russia** and **Ukraine**.

In a statement, the ministry stressed the UAE's commitment to continuing efforts aiming to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in Ukraine. (KUNA)

WASHINGTON: The United States on Wednesday attributed the drone attack that killed three U.S. service members in **Jordan** to the Islamic Resistance in **Iraq**, an umbrella group of **Iran**-backed militias, as President **Joe Biden** weighs his options to respond to the strike.

Iran threatened to "decisively respond" to any U.S. attack on the Islamic Republic after the U.S. said it held Tehran responsible. (AP)

WASHINGTON: British Secretary of State for Defense **Grant Shapps** has held talks with top US officials in Washington to discuss the situation in the **Middle East** following the recent attacks on American troops.

Shapps held talks with Secretary of Defense **Lloyd Austin**, Secretary of State **Antony Blinken** and National Security Advisor **Jake Sullivan**, on Wednesday. (KUNA)

WASHINGTON: The US Army announced it has shot down a Houthi anti-ship ballistic missile and three Iranian unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in Gulf of Aden.

In a statement, the US Central Command said late Wednesday that Iranian-backed Houthi militants launched an anti-ship ballistic missile from the areas they control in **Yemen** towards the Gulf of Aden. (KUNA)

TEHRAN: Iran began construction on four more nuclear power plants in the country's south, with expected total capacity of 5,000 megawatts, the official IRNA news agency reported Thursday.

Iran seeks to produce 20,000 megawatts of nuclear energy by 2041. (AP)

Kuwait banks heighten scrutiny on source, purpose of deposits

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: Sources have revealed that certain banks are not only inquiring about the source of a customer's funds but are also seeking information on the purpose behind obtaining the money. This heightened scrutiny particularly applies to checks from known parties issued by other local banks, especially when the check amounts are significant compared to the client's usual income, reports Al-Rai daily.

Banks have recently intensified their calls to customers who deposit checks into their accounts, focusing not just on the source of the check, but also questioning the reason behind receiving it. Some customers find this practice intrusive, arguing that not all financial transactions should stem from busi-

ness relationships. Several individuals have informed banks that the check amounts received are gifts, emphasizing that there is no legal prohibition on the exchange of financial gifts between individuals, especially within socially acceptable limits. Banks typically refrain from escalating such matters to the Financial Investigation Unit unless the value is exceptionally substantial and unexplained.

In an effort to safeguard against money laundering and terrorist financing, local banks are now restricting the deposit of funds from exchange companies. They are only accepting deposits of specific cash levels, particularly if the amounts differ from the standard liquidity rates of these companies.

Kuwait grapples with childhood obesity surge

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: The Assistant Undersecretary for Public Health Services at the Ministry of Health Dr. Mundher Al-Hasawi says the Ministry of Health has been paying great attention to the health and rights of children throughout the past years.

He affirmed the readiness to commence operations at the new Maternity and Pediatric building within the project site of the Adan Hospital expansion, revealing that it is a specialized center concerned with maternity and pediatrics, has more than 600 beds, and serves the southern part of the country.

In a press statement he issued during the inauguration of the 1st Kuwait Multidisciplinary Pediatrics Conference, which was held under the patronage of the Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi, Dr. Al-Hasawi highlighted many achievements realized by the ministry based on its interest in the health and rights of children.

Continued on Page 5



Photo by Mohamad Morsi
Assistant Undersecretary for Public Health Affairs – Dr. Al-Mundher Al-Hasawi joins a group photo at the inaugural Kuwait International Multidisciplinary Pediatrics Conference.

Prayer Timings

Fajr 05:16 Asr 15:05
Sunrise .. 06:38 Maghrib .. 17:26
Zohr 12:02 Isha 18:45

Local

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

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: A significant decrease in temperature, rather cold and partly cloudy with moderate to fresh northwesterly wind, with speeds of 20-45 km/h with a chance for rising dust with a

Weather

chance for scattered rain.

By Night: Cold with light to moderate northwesterly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of 08-32 km/h.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	23	14
Kuwait Airport	22	13
Abdaly	22	07
Jahra	23	12
Salmiyah	21	15
Nuwaisib	22	13
Wafra	23	10

'Durra' solution through dialogue

Kuwaitis can enter Iran without visa from next week: Toutounji

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: The Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Toutounji says his country is always ready for cooperation and constructive dialogue with Kuwait, stressing that the issue of Al-Durra field is "purely technical" and will be addressed through dialogue and understanding.

In a press conference held yesterday on the occasion of Iran's National Day, Ambassador Toutounji praised the Kuwaiti-Iranian relations, declaring that Kuwaiti citizens will be able to enter Iran without a visa starting from the beginning of next week.

Regarding the possibility of opening new discussions about the Durra field, he said, "We hope and pray for success for the new Kuwaiti government.

Iran has always expressed its readiness for any cooperation and constructive dialogue. We believe that the issue of Al-Durra field is a purely technical one, and can be addressed through dialogue and understanding."

The ambassador announced his government's decision to cancel entry visas for citizens of Kuwait, and a number of other countries, coinciding with the Iranian National Day, adding that the Iranian government decided to implement this decision from Sunday.

He said, "This will be available to citizens of 28 countries including Kuwait. It also applies to holders of regular, diplomatic passports. Article 17 and special passports will still have their own specific conditions.

Every Kuwaiti citizen can visit Iran without a visa within six months. The time available for a visa is 15 days, which cannot be extended. If he wishes to stay for a longer period, he must obtain a visa from the embassy.

The implementation of the decision was supposed to be in March, but the date has been advanced."

Ambassador Toutounji revealed that there is an opportunity for Kuwaiti citizens to obtain an annual visa.

Regarding the cancellation of tourist visas, he explained that it will happen unilaterally every six months, with a 15-day stay for citizens of 28 countries, which are Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tunisia, Mauritania, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, Seychelles, Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam, Japan, Singapore, Cambodia, Vietnam, Brazil, Peru, Cuba, Mexico, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, Belarus, and India.

The implementation steps have been communicated to the relevant authorities as of February 4, taking into account that only holders of ordinary passports

of the aforementioned countries can enter without a visa every six months, and stay for a period of 15 days that cannot be extended.

Those who wish to reside or enter more than once for tourism purposes or to obtain other types of visas must apply for visas through diplomatic missions. There are provisions for canceling visas for Indian citizens through airports only.

Ambassador Toutounji stressed that the path of the Iranian-Kuwaiti bilateral relations, throughout the 62 years since the beginning of diplomatic relations between the two countries, has passed through different stations, but religious ties and historical and popular commonalities have led to relations moving for the better.

He said, "During the past two years of the government of Dr. Ibrahim Raisi, there was a special trend to strengthen relations with neighboring countries. Thanks to Almighty Allah, today we are witnessing balanced and deep-rooted relations between Iran and Kuwait."

Meanwhile, the ambassador affirmed that the Iranian community in Kuwait is considered one of the oldest communities that have inhabited the country for decades, and is distinguished by good behavior and proficiency in work.

He said, "This community enjoys trust, as we have doctors, university graduates, and trade and business workers. Today, there are more than 30,000 Iranians residing in Kuwait. Iranian private schools receive more than 1,600 students of the three educational levels.

The trade relations between the two countries are continuing even before the launch of diplomatic relations and have not been interrupted even in the darkest circumstances such as the days of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the volume of trade exchange is below the level of ambition, as there are enormous possibilities to enhance trade and provide food security for Kuwait due to the short distance and competitive prices, and the quality of Iranian goods that the Kuwaiti citizen has experienced over the past years."

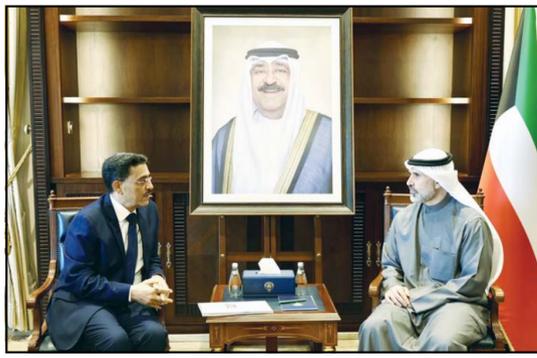
Regarding the possibility of a preemptive American strike on Iran, Ambassador Muhammad Toutounji said, "We always aspire to peace, tranquility and stability in the region, as there are always pretexts they are looking for to launch attacks. There is no doubt that such actions will not help in establishing security in the region. If some Iranian sites were targeted, Iran would undoubtedly respond to that."

Regarding Iran's relationship with the attacks on American bases, he said, "This is an allegation."

Ambassador Toutounji stressed that the resistance factions in the region work according to their program and plans without any interference from outside, and do not receive orders from Iran about their decisions, actions and positions regarding the Zionist aggression against the Palestinian people.



Toutounji



The Deputy Foreign Minister discusses with the Yemeni ambassador fraternal relations and the latest developments.



The Deputy Foreign Minister discusses with the German Ambassador bilateral relations and issues of common interest.

Deputy FM, German, Yemen envoys discuss ties

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: The British Ambassador to Kuwait, Belinda Lewis, expressed pride in the United Kingdom remaining the preferred travel destination for many Kuwaitis. She welcomed an increased number of Kuwaiti visitors, particularly with the recent launch of the electronic travel permit, reports Al-Qabas daily.

As of today, Kuwaiti citizens, as well as citizens from Gulf Cooperation Council countries and other residents, are eligible to apply for an Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA). This authorization enables travel to the UK on or after February 22, 2024.

Ambassador Lewis highlighted that the ETA, priced at only 10 pounds sterling (approximately 4 Kuwaiti dinars), facilitates unlimited short trips to the United Kingdom. It covers visits of up to six months for purposes such as tourism, visiting family and friends, studying, conducting business, or transiting to another destination.

It remains valid for two years or until the passport used to submit the application expires (whichever comes first). Unlike its predecessor, the Electronic Visa Waiver (EVW), an ETA can be used multiple times during this period and has the added benefit of not being tied to a specific trip. This will make short trips to the UK more flexible and spontaneous.

She added, "We welcome more Kuwaiti visitors to enjoy the beauty, culture and job opportunities that the United Kingdom has to offer, and help strengthen the connections between people that have long strengthened the deep and special partnership between our two countries."

Meanwhile, Ambassador Lewis, announced that all preparations have been made to receive Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) applications for Kuwaitis wishing to visit the United Kingdom, starting today.

Lewis said, "I would like to point out that February 1, 2024 is the date on which Kuwaiti citizens, GCC citizens and other Jordanians become eligible to apply for an Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA), which can be used to travel to the United Kingdom on February 22, 2024, or after.

She added, it remains valid for two years or until the passport used to submit the application expires (whichever comes first). Unlike its predecessor, the Electronic Visa Waiver (EVW), an ETA can be used multiple times during this period and has the added benefit of not being tied to a specific trip, this will make short trips to the UK more flexible and spontaneous.

According to the system, the electronic multi-travel permit is for an open period of no less than two years, and is used for short tourist, therapeutic, commercial, and academic visits of less than 6 months (training courses). The traveler can also enter Britain with this electronic visa once, and if he wishes to travel again, the traveler must apply for a new visa with a fee of £30.

With this decision, all citizens of the Gulf states are allowed to travel to Britain for a period of no less than 180 days. The visa cannot be used for work purposes or contracting a civil marriage, and every traveler, including children, must apply online.

During the meeting, both sides discussed ways of strengthening bilateral relations between the two friendly countries and issues of mutual concerns.

Sheikh Jarrar Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah also received on Thursday the Ambassador

of Yemen to Kuwait Ali Mansour Bin Sefa'a. During the meeting, both sides discussed the brotherly relations between the two countries and ways of enhancing them, in addition to the latest regional and international developments. (KUNA)

ETA becomes effective Feb 1

UK preferred destination for Kuwaitis: Lewis

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'MPW's budget spikes by KD30m new fiscal'

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: According to the report on the draft law regarding apportioning the budget of ministries and government departments for the 2024/2025 fiscal year, an amount of KD 952.424 million had been allocated to the total annual budget of the Ministry of Public Works, which is an increase of KD 30 million compared to the budget of KD 922.267 million for the current fiscal year, to cover all items.

The report explained that the budget for the capital expenditures item witnessed an increase of KD 55 million to reach KD 566 million from KD 511 million during the current fiscal year in order to cover the projects implemented by the ministry, especially major projects such as Kuwait International Airport's T2 terminal, Mubarak Port, and road construction and maintenance projects, as well as payments to the companies that implement these projects.

The employee salary item witnessed an increase of only KD 2 million, reaching KD 299 million, compared to the budget for the current fiscal year of KD 297 million, to cover the item of salaries, bonuses, and allowances that employees receive in all technical and administrative sectors of the ministry.

Meanwhile, the Central Authority for Public Tenders (CAPT) has set March 3 as the closing date for bids for two projects - the construction of the Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Complex for the Printing of Qur'an, and the construction of the new building of the State Audit Bureau.

According to informed sources, these two projects are among the important construction projects currently being offered by the ministry through CAPT. On March 3, the bids of companies competing to win the project will be opened and referred to the ministry for study through specialized committees, then returned back to the agency to make the award decision, after which the implementation of these two projects will begin.



Minister of Health, Dr. Ahmad Al Awadhi, Indian Ambassador to Kuwait, Dr. Adarsh Swaika and other officials pictured at the blood donation campaign.

Health minister attends event

Indian embassy, IDF launch Adan 'blood donation' drive

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: The Embassy of India in Kuwait, in collaboration with the Indian Doctors Forum (IDF), organized a blood donation campaign at the Al Adan Hospital.

The distinguished gathering at the event included His Excellency Dr. Ahmad Al Awadhi, Minister of Health for the State of Kuwait; His Excellency Dr. Adarsh Swaika, the Ambassador of India to Kuwait; Dr. Hussein Jasser, Director of Al Adan Hospital; Dr. Reem Al Radwan, Director of Kuwait Central Blood Bank; and Dr. Hanan Al Awadhi, Medical Director of Kuwait Central Blood Bank and Dr. Diwakar Chaluvaiiah, President of IDF.

A significant turnout of members from the Indian community actively participated as donors, underscoring the annual tradition of thousands of Indian citizens in Kuwait generously donating blood.

This event not only served as a testament to the Indian community's altruism but also showcased their preparedness to meet Kuwait's medical needs.

In an ongoing commitment to community well-being, the Indian Embassy, Indian Doctors Forum, and various Indian community associations in Kuwait consistently organize blood donation and free medical camps.

In 2023 alone, the Embassy and IDF jointly organized three free medical camps, while over 50 blood donation camps were independently conducted by various Indian associations in Kuwait.

Beyond the vital act of blood donation, the event also spotlighted the substantial contribution of the Indian community to the medical field in Kuwait.

A significant number of Indian doctors, paramedical professionals, and nurses are actively engaged in both government and private hospitals, earning recognition for their expertise, diligent work ethic, and compassionate care. The Indian medical community remains a preferred choice due to their commendable qualities and dedication.

'Conference sheds light on rapidly advancing spinal ops techniques'

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: As a member of the Scientific Committee for the 13th Arab Spinal Surgery Association Conference, Dr. Muhammad Doghaim underscores the conference's importance amid swift progress and scientific breakthroughs in spinal surgeries, especially with the integration of cutting-edge technological approaches.

Dr. Doghaim emphasizes that the choice of Kuwait as the conference venue reflects its scientific stature, enriched with medical, human, and technological proficiency in spinal surgeries. Surgeries conducted in Kuwaiti hospitals adhere to the latest global methods, prompting many patients to opt for various treatments within the country, avoiding the challenges and expenses of overseas travel. This is possible through unwavering support from the political leadership, ensuring the healthcare sec-

tor has all the necessary resources to meet global standards.

Dr. Doghaim also notes that the conference features a series of workshops on spinal surgery during its initial days, along with discussions on various research papers covering a spectrum of specialties related to spinal surgery. These discussions cater to a broad range of medical services and diverse specializations.

He confirms that the conference gains added significance with the presence of elite international, regional, and local medical speakers shedding light on the latest studies, research, experiments, and innovations in the realm of spinal health and surgery. He expresses hope that the conference fulfills its intended objectives of serving patients and providing optimal means of diagnosis and treatment.

Appeal hearing in murder on Feb 5

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

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Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Dr. Fatma Al-Salem, and Bulgarian Ambassador Dimitar Dimitrov during the discussions.

Media cooperation discussed

Director-General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Dr. Fatma Al-Salem received on Thursday Bulgarian Ambassador to Kuwait Dimitar Dimitrov, discussing means to boost media cooperation between the two friendly countries.

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

She highlighted KUNA's interest in enhancing and developing media co-

operation with other nations, as this would contribute to delivering its media goal and serve Kuwait's foreign policy.

On his part, Dimitrov said that the bilateral relations between the two friendly nations are longstanding and close, looking forward to promoting cooperation between the two countries' official news agencies.

He stressed that both friendly countries have long decades of significant diplomatic and cultural relations. (KUNA)

Winter in Kuwait mild to moderate

El Niño cause of high temp in '23

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: The Al-Ajairi Scientific Center, in collaboration with the Swiss organization "Metoblue," has conducted an analysis aimed at understanding the factors contributing to the elevated temperatures experienced during 2023 and the initial months of 2024, leading to a diminished perception of cold weather this season, reports Al-Rai daily.

Engineer Yousef Al-Ajiri, the Director General of the Center, explained in a press release that the current winter season has witnessed temperatures surpassing the annual average.

Al-Ajiri emphasized that, particularly in Al-Murabbaniyah, the cold percentage has been significantly lower than usual. The average temperatures for the Al-Murabbaniyah season, covering the period from De-

ember 7, 2023, to January 14, 2024, were identified as the highest compared to those recorded in the same time-frame over the past six years.

This year's recorded temperature for the Murabbaniyah season is 17.16 degrees Celsius, indicating an increase from the range of 14.81 to 15.39 degrees Celsius observed in the past six years, signifying a rise of approximately 1.77 degrees Celsius.

Al-Ajiri pointed out that weather experts involved in the analysis attribute the temperature surge this year to two primary factors. Firstly, the ongoing global climate changes, and secondly, the El Niño phenomenon, a natural occurrence associated with elevated temperatures in the Pacific Ocean, thereby influencing temperatures on a global scale.

Minister of Justice signals government's willingness to collaborate on legislation

Al-Gharib urges unity, condemns extremism

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: Minister of Justice, Endowments and Islamic Affairs Faisal Al-Gharib has confirmed that the government is fully open to cooperating with the National Assembly to issue more laws, through which the government's work program is implemented and leads to the development of human and financial resources for the benefit of the country and its people, reports Al-Anba daily.

Asked about the Friday sermon circular that the ministry distributed to the mosques on the need to tackle national unity and rejection of extremism and terrorism, Al-Gharib stressed that everyone sees the great dangers surrounding Kuwait and the region, and the threat to regional security and stability. "This calls us to emphasize unity of ranks and more cohesion between the people of our dear country, and to take all necessary measures to protect the homeland and guarantee the safety of citizens and residents of the land of Kuwait," he asserted.

He praised the efforts of the Ministry of Interior and the vigilance of the security personnel in uncovering the terrorist cell that targeted the security and safety of the country. He affirmed that the Kuwaiti people are committed to moderation, love and peaceful coexistence among their children and rejecting all forms of hatred, violence and terrorism.

He stated there is full coordination with the judiciary, represented by the Supreme Judicial Council, to ensure justice, equality and equal opportunities, in addition to the development of the litigation system in Kuwait by introducing modern technology to speed up the decision on cases and the completion of rulings.

He added that Kuwait has been known throughout its history for the independence of its judiciary and the separation of powers, which distinguishes judicial work in the country. He implored Allah Almighty to perpetuate the blessing of security, safety, stability and prosperity for the dear homeland under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.



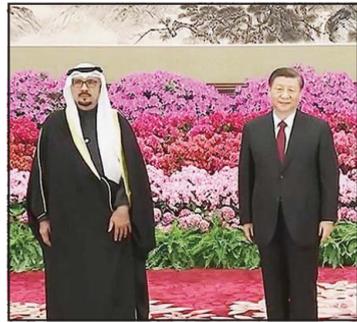
Al-Gharib

Legal measures, bans await defaulters

MEW seeks payment for facility damages

By Mohammed Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: According to informed sources in the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy, the ministry has again sent a



KUNA photo
Ambassador Jassem Al-Najem with the Chinese President.

number of letters to the various state ministries to deduct the amounts owed to the ministry for damages to its facilities by contractors implementing contracts for these government agencies, including the ministry itself.

The sources explained that the ministry seeks to collect the largest amount of this debt before the end of the current fiscal year. It received KD 413 thousand last fiscal year out of a total of KD 5.852 million, bringing the remaining amount to KD 5.439 million.

There is also a specialized technical committee formed to follow up the collection and settlement of fines and damages.

The ministry, in the event that the debts of these companies and individuals are not paid, will implement the mechanism it approved by banning most of the wanted persons and taking legal measures against them, considering that these amounts are public money that must be preserved through the mechanisms and frameworks in place. This is especially since these aforementioned damages were the result of incidents in which judicial rulings were issued against companies and individuals and must be implemented.

The amounts collected last year represent seven percent of the total debt, and the ministry will not hesitate to collect the rest of the debt amounts, despite the difficulty in collecting some of them, as they date back to 1992 and have not been collected.

On the other hand, the sources reported that the ministry has been making moves regarding renewable energy projects.

They revealed that it recently proposed two projects, first to supply the photovoltaic cell system on car awnings in the main workshops and the emergency services department in Subhan to produce 7,000 kilowatts, and another on car awnings in the power stations in the northern region to produce 6,200 kilowatt.

The sources said these projects are part of the projects included in the ministry's plan to produce renewable energy, which will achieve self-sufficiency for the ministry's sites in renewable energy instead of traditional energy generated by fossil oil, which the state seeks to reduce dependence on in order to preserve the environment and reduce expenses.

Kuwait envoy to China presents 'credentials'

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1, (KUNA): Kuwait's Ambassador to China Jassem Al-Najem has presented his credentials to Chinese President Xi Jinping.

During the reception, Ambassador Al-Najem conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the Chinese leader, the Kuwaiti Embassy in China said in a press statement to KUNA on Thursday.

The Chinese leader also asked the ambassador to convey his greetings to His Highness the Amir, and hoped for further development of Chinese-Kuwaiti ties.

Critical roles of NATO activities

Complex dynamics of American foreign policy in the Middle East

In this special interview with the Reconnaissance Research, Peter Berkowitz, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, reveals to us the complex dynamics of American foreign policy in the Middle East, and through him we learn about the critical roles of NATO activities, and the internal debates in Washington regarding the military presence in the region and its impact on Kuwait.

It also highlights the strategic shifts in US military operations, especially towards Kuwait, and the repercussions of the growth of Chinese influence.

The discussion also addresses controversial issues surrounding the relationship between the United States and Israel and Palestinian human rights needs. Berkowitz offers a frank perspective on the influence of Congress in shaping Middle East policy, and the position of the United States as a mediator in Israeli-Palestinian affairs.

Abdulaziz Al-Anjari, founder and CEO of the Reconnaissance Research, said:

"At the Reconciliation Center for Research and Studies, we believe in the importance of presenting diverse and multi-dimensional points of view to understand the complex dynamics of the regional and international situation. This presentation is an integral part of our responsibility as an independent and specialized research center. We realize that listening to different points of view does not necessarily mean agreeing with them. In the same way our dissemination of these viewpoints does not mean we support them, and dialogue with others does not mean complete acceptance of their opinions, and listening does not mean admiration for what is heard. But by exploring different opinions, we can understand how others think, how they justify their actions, and how they explain their policies. This approach motivates us to hear from prominent figures such as Peter Berkowitz, who held important positions during the administration of former US President Donald Trump, and who is currently considered one of the influential scholars in Washington on US policy. We hope that this interview will contribute to providing a more comprehensive understanding of the current and future landscape of US foreign policy in the East. Middle East, in addition to the strategic considerations followed and their impact on international relations and security."

Question: How does Iranian-Iraqi proxy group activity influence U.S. foreign policy decisions in the Middle East, especially regarding military withdrawal from Iraq?

Answer: The presence of Iranian proxy groups in Iraq and throughout the Middle East reinforces the need for U.S. military forces throughout the region. We have long known that Iran, the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism, foments regional instability. The heightened military conflict in the region since Hamas' Oct 7 attacks on Israel have thrown into sharp relief Iran's destabilizing influence.

Israel, which the United States continues to see as vital to regional stability, faces a seven-front war with Iranian-backed forces: Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Hamas in the West Bank, Hezbollah in Lebanon, other Iranian proxy forces in Syria, Iranian proxy forces in Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen, and Tehran itself.

Under these circumstances, and with regional stability a priority for U.S. foreign policy, a withdrawal of U.S. forces would further destabilize a precarious situation.

Q: What are the implications for NATO's role in the region following the U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq?

A: The US and Iraq have not yet agreed to a withdrawal of US forces. If agreement is reached and the United States does withdraw forces, NATO itself will not have a major role in the Gulf. But the United States and allies, including fellow NATO members, will continue to partner to maintain a shared national security interest in preserving stability throughout the Middle East, especially in the Gulf.

NATO was designed for a specific purpose – the defense of liberal democracies in Europe and North America against the Soviet challenge. NATO is not well suited to protect all North America's and Europe's security interests around the world.

Accordingly, the United States and fellow NATO member nations must show flexibility and creativity in forming alternative partnerships, coalitions, and alliances that are carefully designed to address the specific challenge of maintaining stability in the Middle East.

Q: Can you discuss the internal divide within Washington on the continuation of U.S. military presence in the Middle East?

A: Powerful forces within both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party seek to reduce America's presence in the Middle East.

For those in both parties who recognize that stability in the Middle East requires America's engagement in the region, the key divide concerns Iran.

Democrats have been inclined to believe that the United States can negotiate fruitfully with Iran; they seek to cajole Tehran to the negotiating table with sanctions relief. Republicans have been disposed to see Iran as the principal source of instability in the Middle East; they believe that America must take a hard line to bring Tehran to the negotiating table by intensifying sanctions.

The Obama administration relaxed sanctions on Iran to persuade it to enter the JCPOA. The Trump administration withdrew from the Iran deal and then intensified sanctions to convince Iran to reenter negotiations on terms more favorable to the United States. To lure Iran back to the negotiating table, the Biden administration once again relaxed sanctions, causing tens of billions of dollars to flow to Iran, which enabled Tehran to increase funding of its terrorists proxies.

The intensifying military conflict in the Middle East since Oct. 7 can be traced to a single source: Iran's quest for hegemony in the region through the export of extreme ideology and terrorism, and through the pursuit of nuclear weapons. It is to be hoped that the Biden administration will adopt a tougher stance against the multi-dimensional threat posed by Iran, especially following the deadly drone attack on U.S. forces in Jordan.

Q: What strategic advantages are offered by relocating U.S. military operations to Kuwait, and how might this affect



Peter Berkowitz



Abdulaziz Al-Anjari

U.S. capabilities in the region?

A: The United States, according to Axios, has more troops and military contractors in Kuwait than in any other country in the Middle East. For example, around 2500 American troops and contractors are stationed in Iraq and about 8500 in Qatar whereas 13,500 are stationed in Kuwait. The big advantage to the United States of relying more on our friends in Kuwait is that Kuwait does not harbor Muslim terrorists, does not disseminate anti-Western propaganda, and does not maintain cordial relations with Iran, the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism and the principal source of instability in the region.

Q: How does the U.S. plan to balance its strategic interests with its goal of promoting regional stability and countering extremism in the Middle East?

A: While there are important differences between the parties, the top priority for the United States is increasingly seen on both sides of the aisle as countering efforts by the Chinese Communist Party to bring more states within its authoritarian orbit.

Strategic competition between the United States and China takes place in all regions of the world, very much including the Middle East.

Consequently, promoting regional stability in the Middle East by countering extremism is part of America's larger efforts to maintain a free and open international order, one based on respect for national sovereignty and human rights. Regional stability in the Middle East is not a distraction from America's strategic competition with China but rather crucial to America's prevailing in that competition.

Q: Considering Kuwait's strategic importance in U.S. plans, how do you view Kuwait's autonomy against pressures from global powers like China or Russia?

A: The United States has a strong interest in working with Kuwait to enable it to maintain its independence and prosperity. Russia's interest and China's interest are to bring Kuwait within their orbit and subordinate Kuwait. America's interest is to keep Kuwait part of the free and open international order, which would allow Kuwait to develop in ways that Kuwait believes best. Similar efforts around the world suggest that China's efforts to build and finance infrastructure in Kuwait will cost Kuwait in the long run and decrease its independence and prosperity.

The United States must develop private- and public-sector partnerships that offer Kuwait better deals. These public-private partnerships must find ways to team up with Kuwait entrepreneurs, Kuwait civil society, and the Kuwait government to expand opportunity in the Kuwait economy and cooperation between the two nations.

Q: Is the U.S. prioritizing its military capabilities in the region over the stability and security of host countries?

A: It is a mistake to see military capabilities and the promotion of stability and security as in conflict. The United States would undermine its vital national security interests if the presence of its military in the region destabilized a host country and rendered it less secure. That means that the United States must be vigilant in understand the culture, language, religion, history, and political and economic systems of nations in the region to avoid inadvertently causing problems for host countries.

During my time in the State Department, where I served as director of the Policy Planning Staff, Secretary Pompeo issued a directive to the Department to bolster foreign language capabilities to promote greater understanding of nations around the world.

It is common to say that we must understand our enemies. In the United States we must also do a better job of understanding our friends so that we can more effectively shape our diplomacy and defense assistance to suit our friends' beliefs, practices, and geopolitical challenges.

Q: Can the U.S. Congress effectively influence U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, or is it controlled by the Zionist lobby as some believe?

A: Congress has a limited role in foreign policy under the US Constitution, but because of its power of the purse and its lawmaking responsibilities, its limited role is crucial.

Congress is not controlled by the so-called Zionist lobby or any other single lobby.

Many groups seek to influence Congress and Congress is influenced by them. Supporters of Israel represent one such group. The Arab Gulf monarchies and their friends represent another. Congress listens to both but is controlled by neither. Both exert influence, sometimes in opposite directions, sometimes in the same direction.

Peter Berkowitz is the Tad and Dianne Taube Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. In 2019-2021, he served as the Director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, executive secretary of the department's Commission on Unalienable Rights, and senior adviser to the Secretary of State. He is a 2017 winner of the Bradley Prize. At Hoover, he is a member of the Military History/Contemporary Conflict Working Group.



February

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Empowering Kuwaiti youth for social entrepreneurship success

LOYAC launches second edition of 'Be-Tenew' program



Photo during the LOYAC Foundation's launching of the second edition of the 'Be-Tenew' program for social entrepreneurship.

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: In an effort to support youth initiatives addressing societal challenges and providing solutions to Kuwaiti communities, the LOYAC Foundation has launched the second edition of the "Be-Tenew" program for social entrepreneurship, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Created in collaboration with the prestigious American Babson College and facilitated through partnerships with Zain and Agility, the program is hosted by the Wajha Cultural Center. Geared towards individuals aged 20 to 37, the initiative empowers participants to transform innovative ideas into impactful projects.

The 6-week program, conducted from 6 to 9 pm, encompasses various facets of entrepreneurship, project development, feasibility assessment, and value

addition to Kuwaiti society. Participants undergo specialized training sessions, attend lectures, engage in discussions, and receive guidance from local experts and mentors to bring their project ideas to fruition.

The program caters to ambitious young individuals striving for professional success, aspiring entrepreneurs, dreamers committed to project realization, and those seeking to grow and develop existing projects.

Mona Zuaier, Corporate Relations Officer at LOYAC, underscores the program's focus on ambitious youth, aspiring entrepreneurs, and individuals committed to transforming their projects into reality for the benefit of the community.

Walid Al-Khashti, Chief Relations and Corporate Affairs Of-

ficer at Zain Kuwait, expresses ongoing support for LOYAC's initiatives, emphasizing the pivotal role emerging companies play in revitalizing the national economy.

Hanadi Al-Saleh, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Agility, expresses delight in supporting LOYAC's initiatives, stating Agility's pleasure in sponsoring the "Kun-Tenew" program in its second year. The aim is to empower young people to realize their ideas and contribute to leadership in society.

Maryam Al-Muhareb, Executive Director and Founder of the Wajha Center, highlights the partnership's goal to support entrepreneurship, enable young individuals to create entrepreneurial projects, and provide a nurturing environment for these ideas.

Initiatives praised

AmCham, KBA holds conference on digital innovation in banking sector

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: On Wednesday, the American Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with the Kuwait Banking Association, organized the "Digital Innovation in the Banking Sector" conference, attracting a diverse audience that included senior officials from government agencies, local and international universities, private sector institutions, and the Kuwaiti banking sector, reports Al-Qabas daily.

Sheikh Ahmed Duaij Al-Sabah, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Banks Association and Chairman of the Commercial Bank of Kuwait, inaugurated the conference with a speech highlighting the commitment of the Kuwaiti banking sector to align with global financial developments.

He underscored the sector's dedication to fostering digital innovation, particularly in financial technology, with the aim of enhancing efficiency, reducing costs, and elevating customer experiences.

Al-Sabah praised the Central Bank of Kuwait's initiatives within its digital transformation strategy and commended efforts to position Kuwait as a financial center.

Al-Sabah also pointed out the Central Bank's directives for Kuwaiti banks to establish innovation and digital transformation departments to enhance the digital solutions provided to customers.

In his address, Al-Sabah revealed that Kuwaiti banks are actively leveraging cutting-edge technologies to deliver advanced banking services to individuals and businesses. The COVID-19 pandemic expedited the transformation of banking services,

predominantly operating through smartphones, offering a convenient and user-friendly platform.

He emphasized that mobile banking, online payments, and digital wallets have become integral components of customer interactions.

Meanwhile, statistics from the Central Bank of Kuwait for the third quarter of 2023 indicated that approximately 51% of local bank customers are users of digital banking services, a significant increase from the 24% reported in 2017.

Digital banking services offer users secure and convenient financial transactions, enabling them to manage accounts and conduct transactions anytime and anywhere.

Discussion sessions at the conference included representatives from government agencies such as Abdullah Al-Ajmi from the Communications and Information Technology Authority, Zahra Al-Mousa from the Capital Markets Authority's Financial Technology Unit, and Muhammad Al-Sharif from Kuwait International Bank's Digital Transformation and Innovation Department. From the banking sector, participants included Hamad Al-Fawzan from Warba Bank's Strategic Planning Group and Bushra Al-Wazzan from Boubyan Bank's Internal Audit.

This conference reflects the ongoing collaboration between Kuwait and the United States, facilitated by the Kuwaiti-American Business Council. The exchange of valuable ideas and visions aims to enhance the regional competitiveness of the Kuwaiti banking sector and foster innovation.

Kuwait Municipality designates six parks for Nat'l celebrations with Agriculture Authority

Preparations in full swing as teams ensure readiness

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1, (KUNA): The Kuwait Municipality announced that six public parks have been allocated to host events and activities celebrating the 63rd anniversary of National Day and the 33rd Liberation Day this February. This initiative is in collaboration and coordination with the Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fisheries Affairs.

In a press release from the Public Relations Department on Thursday, the municipality affirmed the ongoing daily preparations and arrangements by the cleaning departments to ready the locations designated for hosting activities and events that coincide with the celebrations of national holidays.

The release explained that the teams of the public hygiene departments in the municipality have conducted cleaning activities in these public parks and distributed containers. Additionally, they have raised the state flag on the pole at the main entrance to the parks, where the events will take place throughout February.

The statement highlighted that the field teams are consistently engaged in daily cleaning activities. They are also conducting numerous inspection tours throughout the month to monitor the progress of the cleaning teams.

These teams are responsible for maintaining cleanliness and distributing containers in various sites and locations designated for celebrations.

These include areas in front of the official buildings of the governorates, the coastal strip, the Mubarakiya markets, the Red Palace, and Al-Ahmadi City.



KUNA photo

Gardens designated for holding national celebrations.

Kuwait, Saudi eager to boost bilateral ties

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: His Royal Highness Prince Turki Al-Faisal bin Abdulaziz affirmed that the two brotherly peoples of Kuwait and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia look forward to further strengthening relations between the two countries, reports Al-Anba daily.

In his statement to the daily about the visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the Kingdom, His Royal

Highness asserted: "Every successor comes like a predecessor. His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad, may Allah protect him, is familiar with all the issues concerning the two countries and their peoples, as well as the Arab and Islamic concerns."

On the support of Kuwait and the Kingdom for the Palestinian cause, His Highness said on the sidelines of the meeting of the Al-Quds Fund and Endowment, which was hosted by

Kuwait: "If I wrote words, I would need to extend the sea -- as mentioned in the Holy Qur'an -- to fully cover the continuous and praiseworthy support, God willing, of sister Kuwait and the Kingdom and their peoples for Palestine and the Palestinian cause." His Highness also stressed that "Palestine and Jerusalem are in our hearts and they are our greatest concern as Muslim citizens. We always strive for good."

Committee urges

Continued from Page 1

involvement in the case, if the term of any of these judges was renewed or if they were terminated in case they are non-Kuwaitis, number of judges whose judicial immunity was requested to be lifted because of their involvement in the case, if their immunity was lifted, when it was lifted if the answer is 'yes', reasons for not lifting the immunity if the answer is 'no', and if any of the senior officials tasked to conduct investigations are related to any of the judges implicated in the case.

MP Muhammad Al-Mahan asked Minister of Health Dr Ahmed Al-Awadhi if his ministry has a plan to open dialysis centers in the southern residential areas. If yes, he requested for a copy of the plan, including the current number of patients who need dialysis. He also inquired if the necessary medical teams and equipment are available to operate these dialysis centers, if it is true that the donation of Sabah Al-Ahmad Cooperative Society has been allocated for the establishment of a dialysis center in Sabah Al-Ahmad, and if there is a plan to establish specialized clinics in the South including Sabah Al-Ahmad, Wafra, Khiran and Ali Sabah Al-Salim. If yes, he requested for a copy of the plan. He wants to know the number of suspended or out-of-service clinics in these residential areas, reasons for suspending the establishment of X-Ray units in Khiran and Wafra, and if there is shortage of medical staff in the southern areas.

Al-Mahan also asked Minister of Public Works and State Minister for Municipal Affairs Noura Muhammad Al-Masha'a about the contracting company tasked to put street tiles in Wafra, copy of the contract, if there are variation orders, if the contractor is committed to the schedule for completing the project, if the teams tasked to follow up the project have recorded violations of the contracting company, and penalties imposed if the answer is 'yes'.

MP Abdulkareem Al-Kandari forwarded queries to Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and State Minister for Housing Affairs Salem Falah Al-Hajraf about the number of housing plots qualified for housing loans in the budget for fiscal 2023/2024, budget allocated for this purpose, num-

ber of plots whose owners already obtained housing loans from Kuwait Credit Bank (KCB), total amount of granted loans so far, factors leading to the increase or decrease of the actual budget for housing loans compared to the estimated budget in fiscal 2023/2024, impact of such developments on the construction of houses, if KCB received the total capital from Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) as per law number 1/2022, and measures that KCB took if the answer is 'no'.

Moreover, the Ministry of Finance confirmed that "the presence or absence of approvals from Kuwait Municipality, the Municipal Council and the service ministries will not change the fact that the Sabah Al-Ahmad Marine City contract is not subject to prior oversight provisions as it is an implementation of the terms of the original contract, and is subject to subsequent rather than prior oversight by SAB. This is a confirmation of the contents of a letter dated Jan 9, 2023 from the Legal Advice and Legislation Department.

In response to the question of MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf, the ministry disclosed it had a correspondence with SAB regarding the Sabah Al-Ahmad Marine City, which began with the approval of SAB issued in July 2002 -- approving all terms and materials of the contract that regulate the implementation of the two phases of the project (phases A and B). It confirmed receiving a letter from SAB dated Oct 4, 2023 canceling letter number (1/1/22) S (23) dated Jan 9, 2023 which stated: "the implementation of the terms of the original contract is not subject to the prior oversight provisions." None of these letters mentioned the cancellation of the previous approval of SAB issued on July 27, 2002.

The ministry responded to SAB's letter saying, "what prompted SAB to send its letter dated Jan 9, 2023 is the data contained in the Ministry of Finance's letter dated Dec 25, 2022, in which it was stated that 9,197,117 square meters remaining for the company in the second phase had not been delivered to it, and there are approvals from the Municipality, Municipal Council and other service ministries. This statement contradicts the reports of the regulatory authorities regarding the result reached by SAB in its letter dated Jan 9, 2023 stating that: "The subject of the research

is the implementation of the terms of the original contract mentioned above and is not subject to the provisions of its prior supervision, and accordingly it will continue with subsequent supervision and follow-up of the audit of the subject."

According to the ministry, the value of the plots sold was determined according to the price per square meter mentioned in the contract, and the company committed to the price specified in the sale of the plots of the first phase in five batches (A1-A2-A3-A4-A5).

The ministry stressed that the concerned authorities in the government have fulfilled all their contractual obligations in the Sabah Al-Ahmad Marine City project, and there is no difference between the first phase and the second phase, as the same uses have been approved for the two phases. It added that the implementation of the project is in accordance with the conditions and obligations contained in the contract concluded with the company, including the requirements in each phase.

Furthermore, Assembly Speaker Ahmed Al-Saadoun recently met with Chairman of Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) Abdulaziz Abdulatif Al-Ibrahim who submitted the semi-annual report of the authority to the speaker.

In another development, MP Jenan Bushehri attended the online regional forum organized by the International Parliaments Union (IPU) recently, in collaboration with a number of concerned global organizations that are keen on expediting the economic empowerment of women.

During the forum, Bushehri talked about the challenges in the economic empowerment of women, indicating the challenges vary from one country to another. She disclosed the major challenges include the educational and professional gap between women and men in some countries. She said the share of women in education and professional programs is lower than that of men, which negatively affects the opportunities for women in the labor market. She added that women also face difficulties like the higher rate of unemployment and differences in salaries compared to their male colleagues, as well as the difficulty of occupying leading positions and to be part of decision-making.

She revealed that women usually en-

counter problems in obtaining loans for opening or expanding their business due to bureaucracy and discriminatory legislation that make it too difficult for women to find financing entities. She stated the cultural and social customs have a negative impact on the economic role of women in society, taking into consideration the traditional view about the roles of men and women. She affirmed the laws in Kuwait have contributed to enhancing the economic role of women, but more laws are still needed to push women toward achieving economic progress.

She said the economic empowerment of women in Arab countries requires addressing the abovementioned challenges by adopting integrated strategies, effective support programs, assessment and revision of relevant legislation, exchanging experiences, benefiting from the successful models in some advanced countries, and correcting the wrong social and cultural concepts on the role of women.

Kuwait grapples

Continued from Page 1

He explained that these achievements include the establishment of an office within the ministry concerned with child protection, designation of a 24-hour hotline No. 147 to receive complaints, observations and reports about violations of children's rights, dealing with these reports promptly and confidentially, and ensuring the protection of the whistleblower.

The Ministry of Health opened an Intensive Care Unit at Amiri Children's Hospital a few weeks ago, which helps in expanding the number of intensive care units for pediatric care in the country.

Dr. Al-Hasawi went on to explain that the conference includes 42 scientific lectures and six specialized workshops to be held throughout five days. An elite group of doctors will present lectures in various medical specialties including pediatrics, surgery, plastic surgery, ear, nose and throat, infectious diseases, public health, and other specialties that enhance maximum benefit in the scientific and medical fields.

Such conferences constitute a great opportunity to exchange expertise and

Web Summit Qatar 2024 'opportunity' to strengthen economic position: chairman

DOHA, Feb 1, (KUNA): Chairman of the Web Summit Qatar 2024 Organizing Committee, Qatar's Sheikh Jassem Bin Mansour said Thursday that hosting the summit is an opportunity to highlight the country's enormous potential and enhance its position as a global economic power.

He expressed confidence that Doha, which will host for the first time in the Middle East and Africa the largest technological event in the world on February 26, is the ideal starting point towards a new era of innovation, cooperation and growth.

He stressed the importance of emerging technologies in changing the work environment, the world of business, investment and all sectors, especially in education and public services.

On her part, CEO of the Web

Summit Katherine Maher said in a similar statement that Doha's hosting of the first ever Web Summit in the Middle East represented a wonderful opportunity to benefit from Qatar's investments in building an economy that provides an ideal environment business.

Maher added that the time had come for startups and investors to participate in this event, which will be a turning point for Qatar in its technology sector.

Some 1,000 startups were selected from more than 80 countries representing more than 30 sectors, which would be considered the largest participation of its kind for startups in the history of the Web Summit.

The State of Qatar would be hosting the Web Summit over a period of five years, starting this February.

experiences, and transfer knowledge and ideas between researchers and specialists in the field of pediatrics.

It aligns with the ministry's strategy to promote training, development, capacity building, and intellectual growth in accordance with the sustainable development goals and the objectives outlined in the State of Kuwait's development plan. These objectives specifically focus on capital building and enhancing human capacity development.

Meanwhile, the President of the conference Dr. Mohammad Al-Humaidan said, "There are high rates of obesity among children in the country, such that obesity ranks second among the most common diseases affecting children in Kuwait after respiratory diseases such as asthma, allergies, and other chronic diseases common among children."

He highlighted the conference organizers' keenness to discuss the problem of obesity from several aspects, so that it could come up with recommendations that would help those in charge of treating children and society in general to confront this problem.

Dr. Al-Humaidan revealed that more

than 100,000 cases were reviewed in pediatric emergencies at Jaber Hospital during the year 2023, most of which were respiratory diseases, intestinal infections, and other infections common among children.

In a speech he delivered during the conference, he stressed the keenness of the conference organizers to ensure that its scientific program is close and distinctive, covering the latest medical and scientific developments in the various pediatric specialties and sub-specialties.

Dr. Al-Humaidan affirmed that the conference aims to be an exceptional experience for all participants, and an opportunity for cooperation and communication among healthcare providers, academic researchers and residents in the field of pediatrics, adding, "This goal can be realized by establishing a scientific platform to explore accomplishments, share ideas, and propel the field of pediatrics toward creating a healthier future for children. A robust foundation is essential for them to become pillars of the nation and contribute to the construction of a better future."

World News Roundup

Europe

Attack injures 3

Putin 'vows' to make military gains in Kyiv

MOSCOW, Feb 1, (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin has vowed to push back Ukrainian forces to reduce the threat of attacks on Russian territory as he met with activists running his campaign ahead of the March presidential election that he's all but certain to win.

Asked about plans for the military campaign in Ukraine, Putin said the line of contact needs to be pushed back to "such a distance from our territory that will make it safe from Western-supplied long-range artillery that Ukrainian authorities use for shelling peaceful cities."

He added the Russian military has been doing just that, "pushing the enemy back from vital populated centers."



Putin

"This is the main motive for our guys who are fighting and risking their lives there -- to protect the Motherland, to protect our people," he added.

Ukraine has struck inside Russia recently, including a Dec 30 attack on the border city of Belgorod that killed 25 people, injured over 100.

Putin also said Russian investigators concluded that Ukraine used US-supplied Patriot air defense systems to shoot down a Russian military transport plane in the Belgorod region on Jan. 24. Russian authorities said the crash killed all 74 people onboard, including 65 Ukrainian POWs heading for a swap.

Ukrainian officials didn't deny the plane's downing but didn't take responsibility and called for an international investigation.

Russia, Ukraine swap scores of POWs: Russia and Ukraine have exchanged about 200 prisoners of war each, the countries said Wednesday, despite tensions stemming from last week's crash of a military transport plane that Moscow claimed was carrying Ukrainian POWs and was shot down by Kyiv's forces.

After the Jan. 24 crash of the Il-76 plane in Russia's Belgorod region near the border with Ukraine, some Russian officials had publicly questioned the possibility of future POW swaps.

Russia's Defense Ministry said the countries exchanged 195 POWs each. After the statement was released, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said 207 Ukrainians were freed. There was no immediate explanation for the different figures.

"We remember each Ukrainian in captivity. Both warriors and civilians. We must bring all of them back. We are working on it," Zelenskyy said on X, formerly Twitter.

'Corrosive substance' attack injures 3: A woman and her two young daughters were in a hospital on Thursday being treated for injuries after a man threw a corrosive substance at them in south London.

The Metropolitan Police said officers received reports that a man pushed a 3-year-old girl to the ground and threw an alkaline substance at her, her 8-year-old sister and their 31-year-old mother near Clapham Common, a residential area in south London, on Wednesday evening.

The woman and the 3-year-old girl suffered potentially life-changing injuries, police said.

Police said a manhunt was underway to find the suspect, who they believe is known to the woman.

Three members of the family who tried to help the family were also admitted to the hospital with minor burn injuries. Five police officers at the scene were also being treated in the hospital for injuries.

UK judge dismisses Trump's lawsuit: A judge in London on Thursday threw out a lawsuit by former US President Donald Trump accusing a former British spy of making "shocking and scandalous claims" that were false and harmed his reputation.

Judge Karen Steyn said the case Trump filed against Orbis Business Intelligence should be dismissed.

"There are no compelling reasons to allow the claim to proceed to trial," she said.

The ruling comes as Trump is the front-runner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination while facing legal problems on both sides of the Atlantic.

Trump sued the company founded by Christopher Steele, who created a dossier in 2016 that contained rumors and uncorroborated allegations that caused a political storm just before Trump's inauguration.

Norway's storm leaves trail of destruction: Residents of central Norway awoke to scenes of havoc and homes without power Thursday following the country's most powerful storm in more than three decades.

Hurricane-force winds hit parts of the Scandinavian country, with gusts of up to 180 kilometers per hour (112 miles per hour). Near Laerdal, a small, picturesque town northeast of Bergen, Norway's second-largest city, a bus with 14 passengers was blown off a road, though no injuries were reported, police said.

Some areas were flooded, and airlines and ferry operators temporarily suspended service. There were scattered reports of closed schools, roads, tunnels and bridges both Wednesday and Thursday.

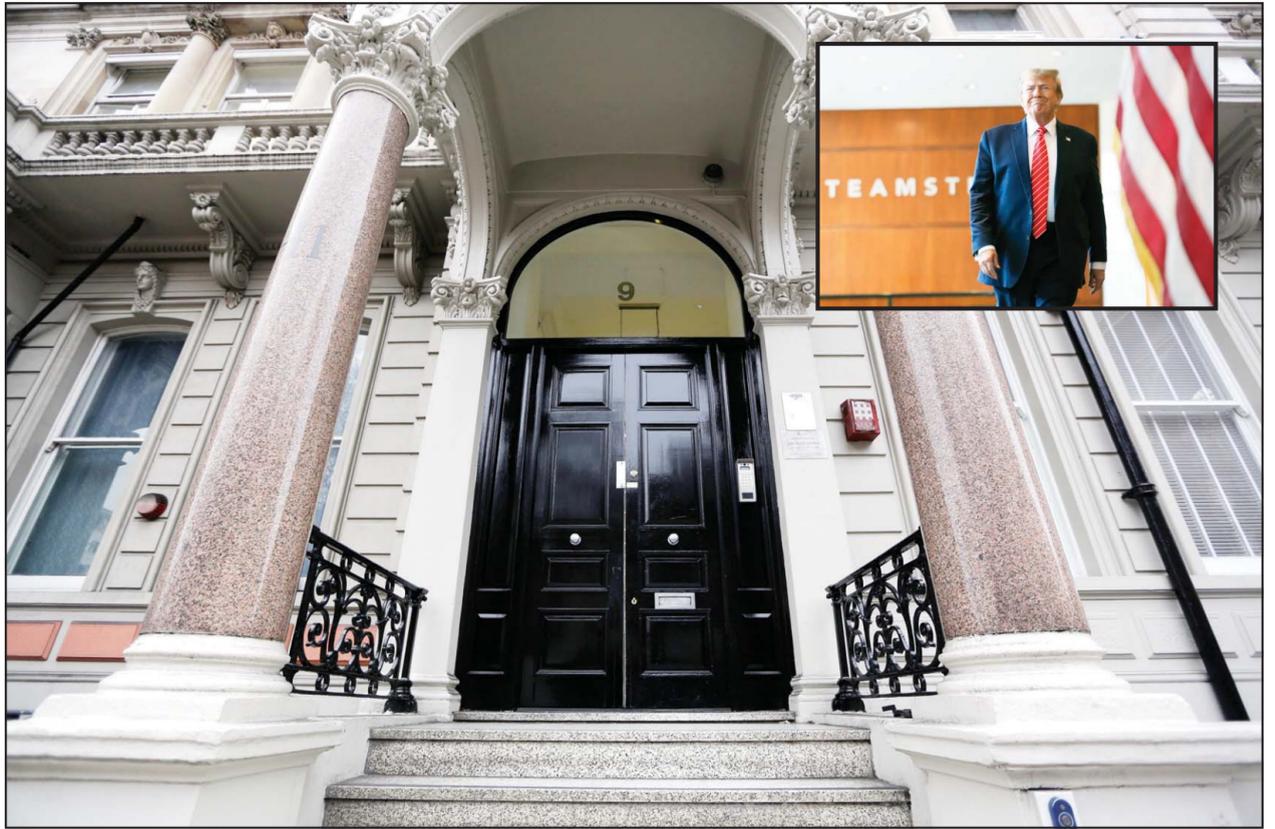
'Life sentences for 3 suspects': Prosecutors requested life sentences on Wednesday for three suspects in the killing of Dutch investigative journalist Peter R. de Vries and sentences of three to 21 years for six others in a trial in Amsterdam.

The life sentences were sought for the man who allegedly shot de Vries in a downtown Amsterdam street on July 6, 2021, the alleged getaway driver and a man suspected of organizing the assassination. De Vries, a popular reporter and television presenter, died nine days later of his injuries at age 64.

Prosecutors had previously asked judges to impose life sentences on the suspected killer and driver at an earlier trial that was halted in 2022 without verdicts when new evidence came to light and more suspects were arrested.

Villages bearing worst of record drought: Plastic jugs in hand, Joan Torrent takes a path into the woods in search of drinking water. He fills the 8-liter (2-gallon) receptacles at a natural spring and then hauls them back to his home in Gualba, a picturesque village near Barcelona that like many towns in Spain is bearing the worst of a record drought.

For Torrent, making this walk for water several times a week is a minor inconvenience, but one that may become more common as Spain and the rest of the Mediterranean adapt to climate change.



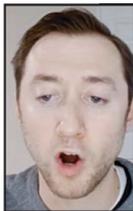
The main entrance door to a building where offices of Orbis Business Intelligence Ltd are located, in central London on Jan 12, 2017. A judge in London on Feb 1 threw out a lawsuit by former US president Donald Trump accusing a former British spy of making 'shocking and scandalous claims' that were false and harmed his reputation. Judge Karen Steyn said the case Trump filed against Orbis Business Intelligence should be dismissed. Inset: Trump arrives to speak after meeting with members of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters at their headquarters in Washington on Wednesday. (AP)



Recently swapped Ukrainian prisoners of war covered in national flags hug each other after a prisoner exchange on the Ukrainian Russian border, on Jan 31. Russia and Ukraine have exchanged about 200 prisoners of war each, the countries said Wednesday. (AP)



Hummel



Mohn

America

Hangar collapse kills 3, 9 hurt: A hangar under construction on the grounds of the airport in Boise, Idaho, collapsed Wednesday, killing three people and injuring another nine, officials said.

Five of those injured in the collapse at the Boise Airport are in critical condition, the city said in a statement released Wednesday night.

Authorities responded at about 5 pm to the privately owned steel-framed hangar, which suffered a "catastrophic" collapse, Boise Fire Department Operations Chief Aaron Hummel said during an earlier news briefing. Everyone who had been at the site had been accounted for as of Wednesday evening, he said.

The city statement said that the three people killed died at the scene. It said that responding fire crews worked to stabilize the scene and rescued multiple victims.

"It was a very chaotic scene," Hummel said, describing the incident as a "large-scale collapse" of the framework of the building. "I don't know what caused it, but I can tell you it was a pretty global collapse," he said. (AP)

Man accused of beheading dad: A man accused of beheading his father in suburban Philadelphia posted a gruesome video on social media that shows him holding up the severed head and railing against the government, authorities said Wednesday.

Justin Mohn, 32, who is charged with first-degree murder and abusing a corpse, was armed and had jumped a fence at a National Guard facility about 100 miles (160 kilometers) away when he was arrested late Tuesday, hours after the killing, a Guard spokeswoman said.

The father, identified as Michael F. Mohn, was found decapitated in the bathroom of the home in Levittown where his son also lived.

The YouTube video, more than 14 minutes long, showed Justin Mohn picking up the head and identifying his father by name. Police said it appeared he was reading from a script as he encouraged violence against government officials and called his father a traitor to his country. (AP)

Politics

GOP lawsuits challenge mail ballot deadlines

Possible union endorsement: Trump

WASHINGTON, Feb 1, (AP) — Former US President Donald Trump met with leaders of the Teamsters Union in Washington Wednesday as he tried to chip away at President Joe Biden's organized labor support heading into a likely general election rematch.

Trump participated in a roundtable with the union's executive board, its president and members as he works to win over the blue-collar workers who helped fuel his 2016 victory and who are expected to play a major role in November, particularly in critical Midwestern swing states like Wisconsin and Michigan.

Speaking to reporters after what he called "a very productive meeting," Trump acknowledged the union typically backs Democrats, but said of a possible endorsement, "Stranger things have happened."

"Usually a Republican wouldn't get that endorsement," he said. "But in my case it's different because I've employed thousands of Teamsters and I thought we should come over and pay our respects."

"As you know, a big part of the voting bloc votes for me." Union members tend to vote Democratic, with 56% of members and households backing Biden in 2020, according to AP VoteCast. And Biden has already received significant organized labor backing with early endorsements from the AFL-CIO and others. But Trump is hoping to cut into that support as he casts himself as pro-worker and tries to exacerbate divisions between union leaders and some rank-and-file members.

Days before the meeting, he called on members of the United Auto Workers to oust their president, Shawn Fain, after the group endorsed Biden.

"Shawn Fain doesn't understand this or have a clue," Trump wrote on his Truth Social network. "Get rid of this dope & vote for DJT. I will bring the Automobile Industry back to our Country."

Also:

WASHINGTON: Republicans are challenging extended mail ballot deadlines in at least two states in a legal maneuver that could have widespread implications for mail voting ahead of this year's presidential election.

Deal on wartime aid and border security 'stalls' in US Congress

WASHINGTON, Feb 1, (AP) — With time slipping to bolster Ukraine's defenses, Senate negotiators struggled Wednesday to finalize a bipartisan deal that would pair policy changes at the US southern border with wartime aid for Kyiv as their carefully negotiated compromise ran into strong resistance from House Republicans and Donald Trump.

Senate negotiators have kept a close hold on the details of a bipartisan package on border enforcement and immigration policies that was supposed to unlock Republican support in Congress for aiding Ukraine. But conservatives view the tens of billions of dollars in proposed support with growing skepticism, unmoved by arguments about the larger stakes for global security. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg was making the case for the aid on Capitol Hill Wednesday, including at the Heritage Foundation, a power center for Trump's allies in Washington.

President Joe Biden, who is pushing for a deal alongside Republican and Democratic leaders in the Senate, faces a daunting task in convincing Republicans to defy Trump's wishes and embrace the deal — especially in the midst of an election year.

Republican leaders, including House Speaker Mike Johnson,

A lawsuit filed last week in Mississippi follows a similar one last year in North Dakota, both brought in heavily Republican states before conservative federal courts. Democratic and voting rights groups are concerned about the potential impact beyond those two states if a judge rules that deadlines for receiving mailed ballots that stretch past Election Day violate federal law.

They say it's possible such a deci-

had looked to February as a potential deadline to approve another tranche of military aid for Ukraine. But the \$110 billion national security package that congressional leaders say is essential to buttressing American allies around the globe, including Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, has been swept up in the fight over border policies.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian troops are running short of weapons, including air defenses and artillery to defend against Russia's ongoing attack. The Pentagon reported last week it is out of money for Ukraine.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer warned in a morning floor speech that "the survival of Ukraine is on the line."

"The only way we'll rise to the occasion is if both sides are serious about finding a bipartisan compromise," he said, adding, "We have not concluded negotiations so we will keep going to get this done."

Even if the Senate is able to finish the deal and pass it, resistance is strong in the House, where Trump, the likely Republican presidential nominee, holds significant sway over lawmakers. His opposition has left Republican leaders increasingly questioning whether the border legislation should be jettisoned from the package in a last-ditch effort to get the Ukraine funding through Congress.

sion would lead to a nationwide injunction similar to one last year when a Texas judge temporarily paused the FDA's approval of the abortion pill mifepristone.

"This effort risks disenfranchising Mississippi voters, but we don't want that to also be precedent for other states," Abhi Rahman, communications director of the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee, said in response to the most recent lawsuit.

4 shot in traffic dispute: A traffic dispute in suburban Chicago erupted into gunfire Wednesday, with four people taken to hospitals after being shot, authorities said.

Saul Mazon told the Chicago Tribune said he was headed to a store when he saw several cars traveling quickly down a street, one car hit another, and the vehicles pulled

into a parking lot where people got out and were yelling and arguing before he heard several shots.

Dolton Village Trustee Kiana Belcher said she was in the drive-thru lane at a Dunkin' Donuts when people in two vehicles started shooting at each other. (AP)

Parents charged: The parents of a social media model charged with fatally stabbing her live-in boyfriend in South Florida have been arrested in Texas on charges related to the case, jail records show.

Deborah Lyn Clenney, 57, and Kim Dewayne Clenney, 60, were taken into custody Tuesday in Austin, Texas, on an out-of-state warrant, according to the records. A Miami-Dade circuit judge had signed arrest warrants for the couple last week, charging them each with a felony count of unauthorized access to a computer.

Their daughter, 27-year-old Courtney Clenney, faces the same new charge. Jail records show she's been held without bond on a second-degree murder charge since August 2022.

Clenney, who had used the name Courtney Taylor on such platforms as Instagram and OnlyFans, fatally stabbed Christian Obumseli at the couple's Miami apartment in April 2022 as the culmination of a "tempestuous and combative relationship" that began in November 2020, prosecutors said previously. (AP)



Authorities respond to the scene of a reported building collapse near the Boise Airport on Jan 31 in Boise, Idaho. A hangar under construction on the grounds of the airport in Boise, Idaho, collapsed on Wednesday, killing three people and injuring another nine, officials said. (AP)

Asia

NZ will contemplate sharing military tech: New Zealand said Thursday it will contemplate sharing advanced military technologies with the United States and Britain as it pursues closer defense ties with Australia amid worries over an increasingly assertive China.

The defense and foreign ministers of Australia and New Zealand met in Melbourne to discuss deepening security ties between the neighboring nations. It was their first joint meeting since New Zealand's right-leaning coalition government took office last year.

New Zealand prime minister is **Christopher Luxon**.



Luxon

Australia announced it will send officials to New Zealand this year to discuss the three-way defense partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

China, the United States and others are wrangling for influence in the strategically crucial Pacific.

The US and Britain have agreed to provide Australia with a fleet of submarines powered by US nuclear technology.

New Zealand has banned nuclear-powered ships from using its ports since 1984.

However, it is pondering whether to become involved in a commitment between Australia, Britain and the United States to develop and share advanced military capabilities, including artificial intelligence, electronic warfare and hypersonic technology. (AP)

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China, Russia discuss military cooperation: Chinese Defense Minister Dong Jun and his Russian counterpart Sergei Shoigu discussed bilateral military cooperation on Wednesday, China's Defense Ministry said.

During their video call, Dong said that under the strategic guidance of President Xi Jinping and President Vladimir Putin, China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era has maintained a high level of development, according to a press release by the ministry.

As 2024 marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Russia, the two militaries should implement the important consensus reached by their heads of state, firmly respond to global challenges, constantly enhance strategic mutual trust, Dong said.

He also called on the two militaries to continuously expand practical cooperation, push the mil-to-mil relationship to a higher level, and play a greater role in deepening China-Russia comprehensive strategic coordination and maintaining global security and stability.

For his part, Shoigu said that under the guidance of the two heads of state, Russia-China relations are at the highest level in history.

He also said Russia is willing to work with China to take the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties this year as a new starting point to innovate the fields and ways of bilateral military cooperation, and to push bilateral relations between the two countries and the two militaries to a new level. (KUNA)

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'Tide turning against the military': When the army overthrew Myanmar's elected government on Feb. 1, 2021, it looked like a walkover that could entrench the military in power indefinitely. Three years later, a poorly armed grassroots resistance movement has shaken the military's grip in a modern-day David vs. Goliath conflict.

Overshadowed by the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, Myanmar's civil war is no longer on the front pages, even as violence perpetrated under the military government has risen. Air strikes on villages have increased and civilian casualties have grown, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, a US-based nonprofit organization, and Myanmar Witness, a project headquartered in Britain.

The war has engendered a humanitarian crisis, the UN special rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar said in an interview.

"Thousands and thousands have been killed, 2.3 million people have been displaced, 18.6 million in Myanmar are in need right now of humanitarian aid," Tom Andrews said. "Half the country has fallen into poverty. The education system doesn't exist for millions of children. The health care system is in shambles."

Inside Myanmar, opponents of military rule called for a "silent strike" on Thursday's anniversary, with people showing their solidarity by staying inside their homes or workplaces. (AP)

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Member of KMT elected speaker: Han Kuo-yu of Taiwan's pro-unification Nationalists was elected speaker of the island's legislature on Thursday, a sort of consolation prize for China, which claims the self-governing democracy as its own territory.

The Nationalists, also known as the Kuomintang or KMT, won 52 of the legislature's 113 seats in a Jan. 13 election. The Democratic Progressive Party won 51, a decline from the 63 seats it held in the last legislature. The remainder went to two independents and the recently formed Taiwan People's Party.

Han secured the speaker position without an absolute majority but won the support of the two independents for a total of 54 votes. The eight Taiwan People's Party legislators, all of whom hold large seats, abstained from voting in the second round.

Vice President Lai Ching-te was elected president on Jan. 13, giving the independence-leaning DPP a third consecutive four-year term in office. The Chinese government loathes Lai and has refused most contact with Taiwan's government since his predecessor, Tsai Ing-wen, won a first term in 2016. (AP)

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'Party must stop trying to change law': Thailand's Constitutional Court ruled Wednesday that the progressive Move Forward party must cease advocating amending the law on royal defamation - a decision that leaves the party vulnerable to being dissolved.

The court's nine judges deemed it unconstitutional to advocate a change in Article 112 in the country's Criminal Code - also known as lese-majeste law - which protects the royal institution from criticism by imposing severe penalties on those found to violate it, including up to 15 years in jail per offense.

Critics say the law is often wielded as a tool to quash political dissent. Student-led pro-democracy protests beginning in 2020 openly criticized the monarchy, previously a taboo subject, leading to vigorous prosecutions under the law. (AP)

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SKorean court convicts man of murder: A South Korean judge convicted a man of murder Thursday for an unprovoked car-and-stabbing rampage that killed two people and injured 12 others in a city near Seoul last year.

Prosecutors had sought a death penalty for 23-year-old Choi Won-jong, who was arrested in August after he rammed his car into pedestrians in a bustling leisure district in Seongnam and then stepped out of the crashed vehicle and stabbed people at random at a nearby shopping mall. Two of the five people who were hit by the car died of their injuries, while nine others were treated for stab wounds.

Judge Kang Hyun-koo of the Suwon District Court's Seongnam branch gave Choi a life prison sentence, rejecting defense lawyers' appeal for leniency based on the defendant's mental health problems.

Choi had been diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder, which the court acknowledged fueled his delusional beliefs that he was being secretly watched by a gang of stalkers. (AP)

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Hong Kong court convicts 4 for rioting: A Hong Kong court convicted four people Thursday for rioting over the storming of the city's legislative council building at the height of the anti-government protests more than four years ago.

The break-in on July 1 in 2019 - the 22nd anniversary of the former British colony's return to China - was one of the most chaotic episodes of the massive protests sparked by a now-withdrawn extradition bill.

Hundreds of protesters swarmed into the legislature that night, defacing pictures and smashing furniture. Some spray-painted slogans in the chamber and painted over the territory's emblem on a wall before vacating the site as riot police cleared surrounding streets with tear gas and then moved inside. The legislature eventually spent about 36 million Hong Kong dollars (\$4.6 million) on repairing the damages, the court heard earlier.

Six defendants, including actor Gregory Wong and two reporters, Wong Ka-ho and Ma Kai-chung, pleaded not guilty in 2023 to rioting. (AP)



This image made from video shows Australia Foreign Minister Penny Wong, (left), New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters, (second left), Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles, (third left), and New Zealand Defence Minister Judith Collins attend a press conference in Melbourne, Australia on Feb. 1. (AP)

Lat/Am

Bullfights suspended in Mexico

El Salvador's Bukele seeks re-election

SAN SALVADOR, Feb. 1, (AP) - Love him or hate him, all eyes are on Nayib Bukele.

To many, El Salvador's president is a national hero who took on the country's violent gangs with an unrelenting hand. To others, the populist is a 21st century autocrat who has committed mass human rights abuses and has altered the rules of the game to concentrate power in his own hands.

Bukele has captured the world's attention in a way few other Latin American leaders have in recent times.

The self-described "world's coolest dictator" is likely to easily skate into a second presidential term in the election Sunday. After sidestepping El Salvador's constitution prohibiting re-election in six different places, Bukele has the support of from seven to nine of every 10 voters, according to recent polling.

Alex Cisneros is among those who plan to vote for Bukele, many saying they have few options after years of corruption and violence under El Salvador's traditional parties.

"He's done many good things and many bad things," said Cisneros, 32. "People criticize him, but he's at least changed something."

Dangerous

Growing up in one of the most dangerous areas of San Salvador, Cisneros fled to the US when he was 20 after his cousin was slain by the Mara Salvatrucha gang.

Now back home, he says he was disturbed when police jailed an elderly neighbor for protecting her son, a likely gang member, but he adds he can walk the streets freely at night for the first time in his life.

Bukele's almost certain victory will further cement his grip on power as his tough tactics ripple out from this small Central American nation to other places with their own security crises like Ecuador, Honduras and the Dominican Republic.

That worries rights advocates across the region.

Tyler Mattiace, Americas researcher at Human Rights Watch, considers Bukele "one of the biggest risks for human rights and for democracy that we see in Latin America right now."

"Bukele is incredibly popular, not only at home in El Salvador," Mattiace said. "We see a growing number of people in countries across Latin America who are supporting this kind of authoritarian populism because they believe that it could be the only way to address rising levels of violence."

When he was first elected in 2019, Bukele, a former publicity manager of Palestinian descent, became Latin America's youngest leader. Fond of spectacle, he has attracted some of the world's biggest names, recently hosting the Miss Universe pageant and pulling in soccer star Lionel Messi to play a pre-season match.

But his rise to wide recognition came in 2022 with his harsh war on the gangs that had long terrorized El Salvador.

Under a state of emergency, his government has locked up 76,000 people - more than 1% of the population - in prisons where rights groups have documented cases of torture and the deaths of more than 150 inmates.

Also:

MEXICO CITY: A federal court granted a temporary injunction against bullfighting in Mexico City on Wednesday, as activists and supporters of the practice once again locked horns in court.

Bullfighting had only just returned Sunday to the capital's Plaza Mexico, which held the city's first legal bullfight in almost two years.

The ruling will apparently force the postponement of fights scheduled for Feb. 4-6; organizers have not yet announced what they will do.

In May 2022, a local court ordered an end to bullfighting, ruling that the practice violated city resident's rights to a healthy environment free from violence.

That case had been appealed to the Supreme Court, which struck down the ban on largely technical grounds but left the underlying questions unresolved.

But the joy of bullfighting enthusiasts only lasted a few days. Animal rights supporters quickly filed another legal challenge that resulted in Wednesday's ruling, which suspends fights until Feb. 7.

At that point, another hearing will be held to consider activists' complaints that the practice subjected the animals to cruelty and violated humans' rights to be free of degrading spectacles of cruelty and environmental insensitivity.

Animal rights groups have been gaining ground in Mexico in recent years while bullfighting followers have suffered several setbacks. In some states such as Sinaloa, Guerrero, Coahuila, Quintana Roo and the western city of Guadalajara, judicial measures now limit the activity.

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armed forces and paramilitary rivals are committing crimes in the western Darfur region during the country's current conflict.

Karim Khan, who recently visited neighboring Chad where tens of thousands of people from Darfur have fled, warned that those he met in refugee camps fear Darfur will become "the forgotten atrocity." He

urged Sudan's government to provide his investigators with multiple-entry visas and respond to 35 requests for assistance.

Sudan plunged into chaos last April when long-simmering tensions between the military, led by Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces paramilitary, commanded by Mohammed Hamdan Daga-

lo, erupted into street battles in the capital, Khartoum, and other areas.

Darfur, which was wracked by bloodshed and atrocities in 2003, has been an epicenter of the current conflict, an arena of ethnic violence where paramilitary troops and allied Arab militias have been attacking African ethnic groups. (AP)



Activist known as 'Grandma Wong' is surrounded by police outside court on the verdict day of a trial involving protesters who stormed the Legislative Council during the pro-democracy protests in 2019, in Hong Kong, on Feb. 1. (AP)



Sikhala

Mnangagwa

Africa

6 militia members dead: The Somali National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) announced on Wednesday that six of Al-Shabab militia leaders were killed in province of Hirán in central Somalia.

NISA said in a statement carried by the Somali National News Agency (SONNA) that this came in a military operation in cooperation with international partners on January 28 in Hirán.

It resulted in the death of six of the most wanted prominent leaders of the Al-Shabab militia, noted the agency. NISA reaffirmed commitment to eliminating al-Qaeda-affiliated militia and protect civilians. (KUNA)

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Sikhala gets suspended sentence: A Zimbabwe opposition figure who spent nearly two years in pretrial detention is set to be freed after a magistrate sentenced him to a suspended prison sentence on Tuesday for inciting violence.

Job Sikhala, an outspoken official with the main opposition Citizens Coalition for Change party and a former member of parliament, was given the suspended two-year sentence after a trial that supporters criticized as being politically motivated. Amnesty International has called the charges "baseless" and said his treatment was an example of the government's attempts to silence dissent.

Sikhala, seen by many as the face of resistance to Zimbabwe's ruling ZANU-PF party and President Emmerson Mnangagwa, was arrested in June 2022 following the killing and dismembering of an activist from his party. He was accused of using social media to encourage opposition supporters to violently respond to the death of Moreblessing Ali. (AP)

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Man arrested in Kenya: A man wanted for allegedly killing his girlfriend and leaving her body in a parking lot at a Boston airport before flying to Kenya has been arrested, Kenyan police said Tuesday.

Kevin Kangethe, 40, was apprehended at a nightclub Monday following a tipoff. Director of Criminal Investigations Mohammed Amin told The Associated Press.

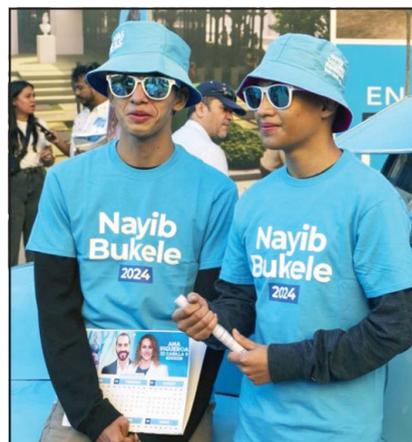
Amin said Kangethe will be extradited. The body of Margaret Mbitu, 31, was discovered in early November in a car at a parking garage at Boston Logan International Airport.

Mbitu, of Whitman, Massachusetts, had been reported missing by her family two days before her body was discovered.

Law enforcement officials said it was unclear if Kangethe had a lawyer yet. Suffolk District Attorney Kevin Hayden in Boston praised the efforts to track down Kangethe. (AP)

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'Both sides commit crimes': The International Criminal Court's prosecutor told the UN Security Council Monday his "clear finding" is that there are grounds to believe both Sudan's



Supporters of El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele campaign for his re-election in San Salvador, El Salvador on Jan. 31. El Salvador will hold a presidential election on Feb. 4. Bukele has captured the world's attention in a way few other Latin American leaders have in recent times. (AP)

Peru gets 'Development Partner' status at ASEAN

KUWAIT CITY, Feb. 1: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has granted Peru the Development Partner status at the meeting of foreign ministers held in Luang Prabang, Laos, the Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Andina Peru News Agency, based on this Peru strengthens its presence in the Southeast Asian region and opens a new stage of ties with the bloc, which constitutes an opportunity to increase trade and cooperation flows, as well as to project "our country's interests among ASEAN member States."

Peru is the sixth country in the world, after Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Chile, to obtain this type of relationship with the bloc.

ASEAN was established in 1967. Its current members are

Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, plus East Timor as an Observer State.

The bloc is made up of 10 member countries, more than 600 million inhabitants, and an economy of almost US\$4 trillion.

It has one of the highest GDP growth rates worldwide (over 5%), making it the third-largest economic force in the Asia-Pacific region.

It is important to highlight that Peru and ASEAN are united by common interests in regional agreements, such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Pacific Alliance-ASEAN, among others.

		Change	Closing pts
SAUDI	- Tadawul	+117.66	11,914.29
UAE	- DFM	+51.27	4,220.35
EGYPT	- EGX 30	+152.46	28,434.37
PAKISTAN	- KSE 100	+483.02	62,464.86

		Change	Closing pts
JAPAN	- Nikkei	-275.25	36,011.46
PHILIPPINES	- PSEi	-23.43	6,623.01

Business

Business and household credit set to improve in Kuwait for 2024

Kuwait's credit growth at 1.7% in 2023, outlook brightens for 2024

By National Bank of Kuwait

Domestic credit growth was a relatively decent 0.9% in Q4, resulting in an 1.7% increase in 2023, down from 7.7% in 2022. The growth in Q4 was boosted by solid credit for securities purchase (+4.9% q/q) and to banks & financial institutions (+4.3%). Business and household credit growth weakened sharply in 2023, but both should witness an improvement this year given the sharp pick up in project awards in 2023, ongoing job gains among Kuwaitis, steady-to-falling interest rates, and a very weak 2023 naturally opening-up growth opportunities this year.

Business credit inched up by 0.3% q/q, bringing 2023 growth to 0.9%, down from a multi-year high of 6.8% in 2022. Sectors showed wide differences with "construction" and "trade" up 14.5% and 6.8%, respectively, in 2023 while "oil/gas" and "industry" fell by 8.1% and 5.9%, respectively, essentially reflecting a similar sector leadership as in 2022. Real estate, the heavyweight sector with a 41% share, increased by 1.4% in 2023. Looking ahead, growth should improve with the very weak 2023 naturally opening room for a better performance this year, especially with the major rebound in project awards, which soared to KD 2.5 billion in 2023, the highest since 2017, and more than double the 2018-2022 annual average of KD 1.2 billion.

On the other hand, household credit edged up 0.6% q/q, resulting in growth of 1.5% in 2023, a sharp deceleration from 9.1% in 2022. However, trends have slightly improved given that nearly all the 2023 increase occurred in the second half of the year, and where the last six-month annualized growth rate stands at a more decent 3%. For 2024, household credit growth should improve given ongoing job gains among citizens (+1.5% YTD in 1H2023), salary increments, and as the pressure on debt burden ratios from higher rates is somehow absorbed. Finally, credit for securities purchase and to banks & financial institutions supported headline growth in 2023, as they expanded by 6.9% and 4.6%, respectively, accounting for nearly 40% of the increase in credit despite constituting only 12% of total credit.

Public-institution and government deposits rebounded in Q4 while private-sector deposits weak in 2023

Resident deposits jumped by 2.9% in Q4 driven by soaring public-institution (+18%) and government deposits (+9.4%), putting 2023 growth at 3.9%. Government deposits were the growth driver in 2023, soaring by 37% (KD 1.26 billion) and accounting for 69% of the total increase in deposits in the year. Private-sector deposits remained muted (falling in six of the last seven months) to inch up by just 1.2% in 2023, down from 7.1% in 2022. Within private-sector KD deposits, CASA fell 11% in 2023 while time deposits rose 12%. However, the peak divergence between their growth is likely behind us given a limited drop of 1.3% in CASA in Q4 while time deposits were flat, recording the weakest quarterly growth in two years.

Market-implied pricing more aggressive than the Fed's dot-plot with respect to interest rate cuts in 2024

Finally, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) has hiked the discount rate by a cumulative 2.75% since March 2022, compared with a cumulative 5.25% increase by

Table 1: Credit growth

Credit	Dec-2023	% growth			
	KD billions	q/q	YTD	y/y	2022
Business	23.2	0.3	0.9	0.9	6.8
of which Real Estate	9.6	1.3	1.4	1.4	5.6
Household	18.8	0.6	1.5	1.5	9.1
Securities	3.4	4.9	6.9	6.9	14.3
Banks & financial instit.	2.3	4.3	4.6	4.6	-3.1
Total domestic credit	47.7	0.9	1.7	1.7	7.7
Non-resident credit	5.9	5.8	5.7	5.7	17.2
Total credit	53.6	1.4	2.2	2.2	8.6

Source: Central Bank of Kuwait

Table 2: Deposit growth

Deposits	Dec-2023	% growth			
	KD billions	q/q	YTD	y/y	2022
Private sector	37.3	-0.2	1.2	1.2	7.1
of which Time dep.	20.7	0.0	12.1	12.1	19.8
of which CASA dep.	14.9	-1.3	-11.0	-11.0	-4.1
Public Institutions	6.8	18.3	2.0	2.0	-8.9
Government	4.6	9.4	37.2	37.2	19.4
Total resident dep.	48.7	2.9	3.9	3.9	5.3
Non-resident deposits	4.3	4.4	-0.7	-0.7	-1.7
Total deposits	53.0	3.0	3.5	3.5	4.6

Source: Central Bank of Kuwait

the Fed. While the Fed's most recent dot-plot (December 2023) pointed to three 25 bps rate cuts in 2024, current futures market pricing is indicating a more aggressive five to six cuts in the year. While it is uncertain whether the CBK will follow suit, any cuts to the discount rate in Kuwait will likely be positive for credit growth.

Ratio analysis techniques unveiled in training

Center for Investment Studies hosts financial statement analysis training

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: The Center for Investment Studies, affiliated with the Federation of Investment Companies, recently conducted a training program under the title "Advanced Analysis of Financial Statements (Budget Analysis)" from January 28 to 30, 2024, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The program was inaugurated by Fadwa Darwish, Secretary-General of the Federation, who highlighted its significance in delving deep into financial statement analysis. The focus was on comprehending various elements of budgets, income statements, and cash flow statements as per international accounting standards.

The program covered techniques for calculating ratios to assess liquidity, solvency, and asset utilization, aiding financial analysts in identifying company strengths and weaknesses for informed investment decisions.

Participants included financial analysts, credit officers, and executives from investment companies, real estate firms, banks, and insurance companies.

The program addressed the analysis of fixed assets and financial assets budgets, income statements, cash flow statements, ownership leases, bond issuances, and other topics pertinent to financial analysis.

Oil price up 60 cents on Wednesday

Kuwait Petroleum Corp. announces propane, butane prices for February

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1, (KUNA): Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) announced Thursday new prices of propane and butane liquefied gases for February.

In a statement to KUNA, KPC said a metric ton of propane would be sold for USD 630, while butane would be sold for USD 640 in February.

Both liquefied natural gases, propane and butane, are used in petrochemical industry, cooking and heating purposes, it added.

Liquefied gas prices are mainly affected by the increase and decrease of global oil prices, market supply and demand

and other factors.

Also:

KUWAIT CITY: The price of Kuwaiti crude oil went up by 60 cents to USD 84.09 per barrel on Wednesday, compared with USD 83.49 on Tuesday, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Thursday.

In international markets, the Brent crude oil future contracts fell by USD 1.16 to reach USD 81.71 pb, while the West Texas Intermediate crude dropped USD 1.97 to reach USD 75.85 pb.

QatarEnergy & TotalEnergies collaborate on \$6B Al-Shaheen project

DOHA, Feb 1, (KUNA): QatarEnergy has announced the award of the four main Engineering, Procurement, Construction, and Installation (EPCI) contracts, worth USD six billion, related to the development phase of the offshore Al-Shaheen field to increase production by about 100,000 barrels of oil per day (bpd).

According to a statement by the company, the deal was part of Project Ru'ya (vision in Arabic), which is the third phase of Al-Shaheen's development since North Oil Company, a joint venture between QatarEnergy, owns 70 percent of shares, and TotalEnergies, owning 30 percent,

took over the field's operation in July 2017.

Project Ru'ya, which will develop more than 550 million barrels of oil, will be executed over a period of five years with first oil expected in 2027. The project includes the drilling of more than 200 wells and the installation of a new centralized process complex, nine remote wellhead platforms, and associated pipelines.

The four EPC packages, with varying scopes of work, valued in total at more than USD six billion consisting of and EPC package for nine wellhead platforms valued at about USD2.1 billion and awarded to a consortium of

McDermott Middle East Inc. and Qingdao McDermott Wuchuan Offshore Engineering Co.

The second EPC package for a Central Processing Platform valued at about USD 1.9 billion and awarded to a consortium of McDermott Middle East Inc. and Hyundai Heavy Industries.

The third EPC package for a riser platform valued at about USD 1.3 billion and awarded to Larsen and Toubro Limited.

The fourth EPC package for subsea pipelines and cables valued at about USD 900 million and awarded to China Offshore Oil Engineering Co (COOEC).

Highest in Kuwait banking sector

Praise be to Allah

Net Profit for Shareholders - 2023

بيت التمويل الكويتي
Kuwait Finance House

Record and Historic Profits

584.5

KD Million

63.4%

Net Profit for Shareholders "KD Million"

2023	2022	%
584.5	357.7	63.4

Earnings per Share "Fils"

2023	2022	%
38.49	29.71	29.6

Net Financing Income "KD Million"

2023	2022	%
965.9	800.5	20.7

Total Operating Income "KD Million"

2023	2022	%
1,460.9	1,072.3	36.2

Net Operating Income "KD Million"

2023	2022	%
945.4	723.3	30.7

Dividends to Shareholders

Cash Dividends

10% Cash dividends paid for half year 2023 and 10% proposed cash dividends on the remaining profit up to the end of the year 2023

2023	2022
20	15

The proposed dividends for 2023 is subject to the approval of General Assembly and other regulatory entities.

Bonus Shares

Proposed Bonus Shares

2023	2022
9	10

Total Assets "KD Million"

2023	2022	%
38,010	36,969	2.8

Financing Receivables "KD Million"

2023	2022	%
19,425	18,801	3.3

Depositors' Accounts "KD Million"

2023	2022	%
21,813	21,030	3.7

Shareholders' Equity "KD Million"

2023	2022	%
5,316	5,358	(0.8)

To Investors

	2023 %	2022 %
Investment Deposit "Al-Khumasiya"	5.000	4.000
Investment Deposit "Al-Mustamera"	4.500	3.500
Investment Deposit "Al-Dimah" 12 Months	4.250	2.725
Investment Deposit "Al-Dimah" 6 Months	4.125	2.225
Long Term Investments Plans	3.950	2.550
Investment Deposit "Al-Sedra"	3.850	2.325
Investment Saving Account	0.250	0.230

Profits will be credited to their bank accounts

kfh.com 180 3333

EPS at 38.49 fils; proposed cash dividend of 20% and bonus share of 9%

KFH records net profit of KD 584.5 mln for shareholders in 2023, an increase of 63.4% compared to '22: Al-Marzouq



KFH Chairman — Hamad Al-Marzouq



KFH Acting Group CEO — Abdulwahab Al-Rushood

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: Chairman of Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Hamad Abdulmohsen Al-Marzouq said that, by the grace of Allah, KFH has reported record net profit of KD 584.5 million attributable to the shareholders of the bank for the year ended 2023, an increase of 63.4% compared to 2022. The historic profits are the highest ever recorded in the Kuwaiti banking sector of which government and semi-government share represented KD 224 million, which is higher than the share during the pre-acquisition phase at KD 68.6 million, an increase of 50%.

Additionally, the share of the governmental entities in the Group market cap increased by KD 285 million compared to the pre-acquisition phase in 2021. This reflects a significant benefit for public funds due to the strategy set by KFH Board of Directors.

Earnings per share reached 38.49 fils for the year 2023 (after the distribution of the acquisition shares), an increase of 29.6% compared to 29.7 fils in 2022.

Net Financing income for the year ended 2023 reached KD 965.9 million; an increase of 20.7% compared to last year. Net operating income for the year ended 2023 reached KD 945.4 million, an increase of 30.7% compared to 2022. Financing receivables increased to reach KD 19.4 billion, an increase of KD 624.7 million or 3.3% compared to 2022. Total assets increased to reach KD 38.01 billion, an increase of KD 1.04 billion or 2.8% compared to last year. Total shareholders' equity reached KD 5.3 billion in 2023. Depositors' accounts reached KD 21.8 billion, an increase of KD 782.4 million or 3.7% compared to last year. In addition, the capital adequacy ratio reached 18.18% for the year 2023 (17.66% in 2022), which is above the minimum requirement. This percentage confirms the solid financial position of KFH.

Al-Marzouq explained that the solid financial position of KFH Group has enhanced its ability to increase cash dividends to its shareholders this year and for the coming fiscal years. The Board of Directors has proposed cash dividends to shareholders of 10 fils per share for the remaining profits until the end of 2023, in addition to 10 fils in H1 2023, totaling 20% for the year 2023, compared to 15% in the previous year. The Board of Directors also recommended the distribution of bonus shares of 9% of the issued paid capital.

Remarkable performance

Al-Marzouq said that the unprecedented profits recorded by KFH in the first year the success of the acquisition at all

Al-Marzouq: A Record Net Profit for KFH Shareholders at KD 584.5 Million in 2023, an increase of 63.4%

- ❑ The largest bank in Kuwait in terms of assets, exceeding KD 38 billion and in terms of net profits
- ❑ Historic profits in the Kuwaiti banking sector
- ❑ Net Financing income increased by 20.7% to KD 965.9 million
- ❑ Net operating income increased by 30.7% to KD 945.4 million
- ❑ KD 224 million share of governmental entities from 2023 net profits, an increase of 50% (KD 74.5 million) compared to the pre-acquisition phase in 2021
- ❑ KFH tops all listed companies on Bursa Kuwait with a market cap currently reaching KD 11.4 billion
- ❑ Remarkable performance and historic financial results
- ❑ High liquidity ratio and solid capital base
- ❑ Consistent leading role in providing corporates and mega projects financing
- ❑ Leading and arranging Sukuk issuance exceeding US\$ 7.5 bn
- ❑ Prominent efforts in sustainability and green finance products

levels, transforming KFH into the largest bank in Kuwait in terms of total consolidated assets amounting to KD 38 billion as of 31 December 2023, and the second largest Islamic bank in the world. He noted that the acquisition contributed to enhancing the profitability level, in which KFH successfully recorded the highest-ever profit rates in the local banking sector and the highest returns on the total key indicators.

"KFH successfully achieved the key goals of Group strategy, strengthened its leading position, and overcame different challenges and operating difficulties. Additionally, High liquidity ratios, solid capital base, and strong operating performance resulted in growth in operating income, profits, financings portfolio, and all key financial indicators," Al-Marzouq said.

He pointed out that the Group's market capitalization has increased and trading in KFH shares attracted record levels of high liquidity. KFH also ranked first on Bursa Kuwait in terms of market capitalization which reached KD 11.4 billion. This reflects the increase of KFH's capital value for KFH shareholders, a third of whom are governmental and semi-governmental institutions.

Al-Marzouq added that KFH services expanded to include new strategic countries, including Britain, Egypt, and others following the acquisition of

AUB-Bahrain, which proved successful during its first year. He pointed out the completion of converting AUB-Bahrain's conventional banking services to be compliant with Shariah principles. The bank officially received the approval as a licensed Islamic Bank from the Central Bank of Bahrain (CBB). Since last December, the Bank has offered an integrated range of products and services that are compliant with the provisions and principles of Shariah, including retail and corporate services, saving and investment products, in addition to trade finance and wealth management solutions.

"The acquisition has resulted in dividend and accretion value of 17.9% for the dividend share of each shareholder at KFH as of 31 December 2023 (before synergies)", added Al-Marzouq "It is expected to increase while achieving synergies in the coming periods, particularly after the completion of the merger with AUB-Kuwait."

Return on average tangible shareholders' equity reached 20.5% (before synergies) as of 31 December 2023. It is the highest return on shareholder's equity in the banking sector.

Foreign investment contribution increased to reach 12.92% as at the end of 2023 compared to 10.34% at the end of 2021 and 7.44% at the end of 2019. This is an increase of 73.6% compared to 2019 end, reflecting the

strength of KFH share following the acquisition and indicating the trust confided of investors.

Al-Marzouq pointed out that KFH is currently in the process of completing the merger by amalgamation with the Ahli United-Kuwait, one the final acquisition stages leading to numerous benefits for both parties and the overall banking industry in Kuwait.

"The new entity has become a source of strength for KFH's financial position, solidifying its ability to deal with financial challenges, boosting its standing as a leading bank locally, regionally and internationally and supporting the country's endeavors in transforming Kuwait into a financial hub and a leader of Islamic finance industry in the region taking into account the new employment opportunities offered to nationals" said Al-Marzouq

Supporting corporate and mega projects

Al-Marzouq pointed out that KFH's new position as a banking entity spread across 11 countries and contributed to boosting its role in the national economies as one of the dominant banks in the Middle East. This also enabled KFH to enter new markets and expand its financing contributions with high efficiency at the regional and local levels.

It is worth noting that KFH participated in financing deals for electricity, petrochemical and aviation projects, amounting to approximately USD 10.5 billion, in addition to many local and regional financing deals. These mega deals confirm the high financing capability and financial strength KFH enjoys.

Meanwhile, he confirmed that KFH has played a vital role for the micro and SME community and succeeded in growing its SME portfolio, ascending as a strategic partner of society.

US\$7.5 billion Sukuk transactions

Al-Marzouq said that KFH Group expanded its leading role in the international Sukuk market and managed and arranged, through Group investment arm, KFH Capital, over US\$7.5 bn in Sukuk issuances for different corporate and sovereign issuers in different sectors and geographies.

Sustainability and CSR

Al-Marzouq said that KFH continued its efforts in sustainability and promoting green financing products, at both the retail and corporate levels. It also played an important role in ESG by linking its financial transactions to sustainability. He noted KFH's participation in the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai.

Al-Rushood: KFH achieved the best profit rate and the highest ratios in all key indicators

- ❑ KFH leads the competition and achieves growth in terms of market share and customer base
- ❑ The Banker awarded KFH "Bank of the Year 2023 – Kuwait"
- ❑ Euromoney ranked KFH "Market Leader" for its excellence in digital transformation
- ❑ Hiring around 400 employees, with a Kuwaitization rate of 100% of total new hires
- ❑ Treasury executed Sukuk transactions worth more than USD 13 billion

Al-Marzouq said that KFH crowned its sustainability efforts in 2023 by earning several prestigious awards, notably Euromoney "Best Islamic Bank for ESG- global category" award.

He explained that KFH's social initiatives in 2023 were purposeful and comprehensive as it succeeded in implementing strategic activities with added value and positive impact on all segments of society. Also, KFH was recognized as the "Market Leader" in social responsibility in Kuwait by Euromoney magazine.

Solid financial position

KFH Acting Group Chief Executive Officer, Abdulwahab Iesa Al-Rushood, said that KFH maintained its solid balance sheet, enhanced the Group's financial position, and maintained a strong capital reserve thanks to the following elements: abundant liquidity, continuous diversification of financing, flexible business model, wide geographical spread and the Group's harmonious performance, among many other elements of strength.

He pointed out that KFH reported the best profit rate and the highest ratios in all key indicators, improved asset quality, developed operating profits, and diversified the revenues, all of which helped achieve financial solidity and sustainable growth.

Digital Transformation

Al-Rushood said that KFH leads the competition and expands its customer base and market share in the retail banking sector. He added that KFH is moving forward with its digital transformation strategy, launching innovative digital financial solutions through KFH (mobile application and website), XTMs and KFH-GO. He pointed out that KFH launched Tam, the first Islamic digital bank in Kuwait and Zaheb digital platform, in addition to several innovative banking solutions.

Al-Rushood said Euromoney Magazine ranked KFH as a Market Leader- Kuwait in digital solutions in recognition of its outstanding digital solutions.

Empowering local talents

Al-Rushood said that KFH successfully empowered local talents and creative thinking at work through its massive recruitment efforts. In 2023, around 400 employees were hired with a noteworthy 99% of the total 2023 hires. The Kuwaitization rate exceeded 81%. In addition, the top positions have been filled during the year with national competencies. Additionally, KFH offered over 83,000 hours of training to 3,116 employees.

Sukuk transactions

Al-Rushood said that KFH Group Treasury investment transactions exceeded USD 13 billion in the Primary and Secondary markets. KFH also continued to expand its short-term Sukuk trading in the IILM program. Group Treasury maintained its position as a Main Market Leader in the short-term IILM Sukuk market.

26 prestigious awards

Al-Rushood said that KFH won 26 prestigious awards such as the "World's Best Islamic Financial Institution 2023" award from Global Finance and "Bank of the Year- Kuwait" from The Banker. The awards were in appreciation of KFH's excellence, innovation, and its advanced services and products. He pointed out that the awards confirm KFH's pioneering role in digital transformation and the new level KFH reached in banking experience and achieving customers' aspirations. They also confirm KFH's strength of financial performance and leadership in the Islamic finance industry.

In conclusion, Al-Rushood expressed his appreciation for the support of the Board of Directors and thanked the Central Bank of Kuwait and the regulatory authorities for supporting the banking sector. He also praised the efforts of Executive Management, employees, all partners, and stakeholders for their key role in expanding KFH's leading position and maintaining its excellence.

MSCI GCC index drops 0.9% in January after reaching 13-month high

Kuwait leads GCC markets with 6.6% gain in January 2024

By KAMCO Invest

GCC index goes from a 13-month high to a 5-week low in 3 days...

GCC equity markets witnessed a positive start to the year with incremental gains across most markets during the month. However, declines during the last week of the month wiped out almost all the gains since the start of the month. The MSCI GCC index reached a 13-month high level on 28-Jan-2024 but consecutive declines during the last three trading sessions completely offset the gains since the start of the month resulting in a decline of 0.9% during January-2024. The monthly performance was affected by a steep decline in Qatar that was further supported by marginal monthly declines in Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi. These declines were partially offset by gains in the remaining four markets in the GCC.

Kuwait was the best performing market in the GCC during January-2024 with a gain of 6.6%, the highest monthly gain in almost five years. Gains in Kuwait were broad-based and was reflected in all market segments. Bahrain and Dubai were next with monthly gains of 4.9% and 2.7%, respectively. Gains in Dubai came despite the index seeing 21.7% gains in 2023. On the other hand, Qatar witnessed the biggest decline at 6.8% after seeing fall in almost all the sectors. Meanwhile, the contraction in Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi benchmarks was led by rising regional geopolitical issues as well as the oil output cap announcement from Aramco.

The monthly sector performance chart for the GCC region also showed mixed trends with an equal number of gainers and decliners during the month. F&B was the best performing sector with a gain of 7.0% followed by Pharma and Transportation sectors with gains of around 4%. Banks saw a sharp fall during the last three days and closed with a gain of 0.7%. On the other hand, the Energy sector recorded the biggest decline at 6.0% followed by other large-cap sectors like Materials and Real Estate with declines of 5.7% and 3.5%, respectively.

Boursa Kuwait

Boursa Kuwait witnessed broad-based gains during January-2024 with all market segments recording monthly gains. The Premier Market index breached the 8,000 mark after consistent gains during the second half of the month and recorded an intraday peak of 8,083.1 points. However, declines in the subsequent sessions pushed the index down to a monthly close of 7,959.5 points. Mid-

GCC Equity Markets	Index Closing	MTD Chg%	M-Cap (USD Bn)	Monthly Val Traded (USD Bn)	P/E (x) TTM	P/B (x) TTM	Div. Yield
Kuwait - Premier Market Index	7,959.5	6.5%	140.7	4.8	13.3	0.9	2.8%
Kuwait - Main 50 Index	5,919.2	7.9%					
Kuwait - Main Market Index	5,973.1	7.2%					
Kuwait - All Share Index	7,268.4	6.6%					
Saudi Arabia	11,796.6	(1.4%)	2,846.6	52.2	20.0	2.4	3.1%
Abu Dhabi	9,508.3	(0.7%)	775.2	6.5	26.9	3.0	1.6%
Dubai	4,169.1	2.7%	192.8	2.1	8.9	1.3	4.1%
Qatar	10,089.2	(6.8%)	161.3	3.2	12.0	1.3	4.8%
Bahrain	2,067.2	4.9%	90.5	0.1	8.3	0.7	8.1%
Oman	4,561.9	1.1%	23.2	0.2	10.4	0.7	4.8%
Total GCC			4,230.3	69.1	18.5	2.1	3.1%

Monthly Indicators	Feb-23	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24
Premier Market Index	8,069.8	7,821.7	7,912.5	7,494.7	7,809.3	8,060.9	7,695.2	7,520.8	7,142.7	7,291.7	7,477.0	7,959.5
Monthly % Change	(0.2%)	(3.1%)	1.2%	(5.3%)	4.2%	3.2%	(4.5%)	(2.3%)	(5.0%)	2.1%	2.5%	6.5%
Main 50 Index	5,703.1	5,593.1	5,644.1	5,365.8	5,375.0	5,574.1	5,634.2	5,710.1	5,277.4	5,361.0	5,487.4	5,919.2
Monthly % Change	(0.4%)	(1.9%)	0.9%	(4.9%)	0.2%	3.7%	1.1%	1.3%	(7.6%)	1.6%	2.4%	7.9%
Main Market Index	5,548.7	5,500.8	5,606.4	5,440.8	5,463.6	5,630.1	5,692.6	5,717.4	5,396.0	5,463.5	5,569.7	5,973.1
Monthly % Change	(1.3%)	(0.9%)	1.9%	(3.0%)	0.4%	3.0%	1.1%	0.4%	(5.6%)	1.1%	2.1%	7.2%
All Share Market Index	7,244.4	7,050.8	7,142.5	6,796.8	7,029.8	7,253.8	7,005.8	6,886.7	6,531.8	6,653.8	6,817.3	7,268.4
Monthly % Change	(0.5%)	(2.7%)	1.3%	(4.8%)	3.4%	3.2%	(3.4%)	(1.7%)	(5.2%)	1.9%	2.5%	6.6%
Market Cap (KWD Mn)	46,423	45,130	43,989	40,228	41,615	42,939	41,580	40,877	38,630	39,577	40,496	43,170
P/E (X) - TTM	17.94	16.72	14.10	13.10	13.41	13.85	13.30	13.40	13.12	13.32	13.39	13.27
P/BV (X) - TTM	1.66	1.09	0.80	0.79	0.82	0.85	0.80	0.80	0.77	0.78	0.79	0.86
Dividend Yield (%)	3.46%	3.59%	2.76%	2.97%	2.88%	3.01%	3.10%	3.10%	3.30%	3.00%	2.95%	2.80%
Volume (Mn Shares)	2,297.8	2,553.4	2,131.3	2,986.1	3,444.8	4,354.4	3,705.0	3,412.4	3,648.8	3,983.1	3,387.7	6,242.0
Value (KD Mn)	699.7	889.3	643.9	941.2	815.9	904.8	796.8	772.5	970.2	1,017.3	883.8	1,477.5
Trades ('000)	153.1	181.3	151.3	209.3	169.7	218.3	228.0	204.6	255.1	236.5	176.0	341.5



Ahli United Bank reports net profits of KD 42.5 million, up by 16.8% in '23

Total assets record at KD 4.50 billion

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: Ahli United Bank K.S.C.P. (AUBK) announced its results for the financial year ended on 31 December 2023. The Bank has recorded a net profit for 2023 amounting to KD 42.5 million, which is higher by 16.8% than KD 36.4 million of 2022.

The Bank's total assets has recorded KD 4.50 billion at the end of December 2023. The net financing receivables portfolio recorded at KD 3.19 billion as of December 2023 and customer deposits recorded at KD 3.16 billion. The shareholders' equity has reached KD 0.50 billion at the end of 2023 representing a growth of 2.0%, while Earnings per Share (EPS) recorded 15.7 fils for the year 2023.



J. Al-Kazemi



J. Al-Humaidhi

Commenting on the bank's financial results, Mr. Jamal Al-kazemi, AUB Vice Chairman said: "Throughout 2023, Ahli United Bank has successfully sustained profitability. The financial indicators achieved by the bank affirm its financial resilience and the ability to maintain a strong level of profitability. This derived from a prudent strategy and a conservative risk appetite. In addition to the balanced performance, the Bank has retained its capacity for growth".

Al-kazemi added "AUB is undergoing an exceptional phase in its evolutionary journey, marking a pivotal moment in its successful trajectory, as it is on the verge of completing the merger by amalgamation with Kuwait Finance House K.S.C.P. Al-kazemi emphasized that AUB has achieved success throughout its long journey since its inception in 1941 as the first bank to operate in Kuwait. It laid the foundation for the Kuwaiti banking industry and held a prominent position in the Kuwaiti-banking sector. Throughout this great journey, the bank actively and positively contributed to and supported the national economy's development goals".

Al-kazemi extended sincere thanks and appreciation to the members of the Board of Directors, the Executive Management, and all AUB employees for their dedication and genuine efforts that have shaped the success and excellence of the bank, ensuring its continuity.

He also expressed profound gratitude to the Bank's shareholders for their support and backing, acknowledging the bank valued customers for their unwavering loyalty, trust, and engagement with the bank's services and products, tailored to the evolving aspects of life.

TUNIS, Feb 1, (AP): Cash-strapped Tunisia wants to take the unprecedented step of borrowing billions from its central bank to address budget deficits and bandage its economic crisis, a step that experts warn could bring inflation and lessen faith in institutions.

In an emergency meeting behind closed doors, parliament's finance committee on Wednesday considered a request from President Kais Saied's government to borrow the funds after it previously overhauled laws designed to guarantee the bank's autonomy.

Those laws added the central bank to a growing list of institutions that critics say Saied has sought to undermine since taking power in the North African nation, along with briefly suspending parliament and rewriting Tunisia's constitution.

His government wants the central bank to directly buy up to 7 billion Tunisian dinars (\$2.25 billion) in interest-free bonds to help plug a 10 billion dinar (\$3.2 billion) budget deficit.

But in Tunisia - where inflation and shortages of basic goods have become routine - the request is raising concerns about maintaining the bank's independence from politics, causing inflation and further spooking foreign lenders and investors.

It comes as Tunisia finds itself unable to borrow from traditional creditors, including the International Monetary Fund, whose proposed \$1.9 billion bailout package remains in limbo.

Though the IMF has said purchasing securities like bonds may serve a monetary policy purpose at times, it has warned countries that central banks should not finance government expenditures.

"Amending the status of the Central

Bank of Tunisia just to allow it to finance the government's budget and nothing else ... is a misguided approach that brings with it numerous risks - notably inflationary - for the country's economy and relationship with its partners," said economist Aram Belhadj, a professor at the Faculty of Economics and Management of Tunis.

Borrowing from the central bank may fund the budget in the short term, retaining subsidies for everyday goods like flour, electricity and fuel. But with shortages of key goods and bread lines in recent memory for Tunisians, the decision

could further destabilize trust in the currency and its value, said Raouf Ben Hedi, an analyst at Tunisia's Business News.

Because of Tunisia's debt and its likelihood of defaulting, Fitch upheld Tunisia's CCC- credit rating in December. The ratings firm at the time warned that a borrowing scheme allowing the central bank to directly finance government "would endanger the credibility of the central bank and raise pressure on prices and the exchange rate."

The government's unprecedented request comes as other sources of financing are scarce.

Govt seeks \$2.25 bln loan

Tunisia seeks central bank funds to tackle budget deficit



A view of Tunisian Central Bank in Tunis, Wednesday Feb. 16, 2011. Cash-strapped Tunisia wants to borrow billions from its central bank to shore up budget deficits and bandage its ongoing economic crisis. In a meeting behind closed doors, the North African country's parliament on Wednesday, Jan. 31, 2024, mulled a request from the President Kais Saied's government to borrow funds after it previously overhauled laws designed to guarantee the bank's independence. (AP)

stand shocks, adapt to changing circumstances, and continue to lead in providing top-notch services and products that align with the latest developments in the banking market.

"We look forward to the bank's continued success, particularly under its merger by amalgamation with Kuwait Finance House, one of the largest and most reputable Islamic financial institutions globally," Al-Humaidhi added.

"The bank has sustained a track record of achieving robust profitability, striking a balance between financial management and prudent risk management which reinforced our confidence in our business model and our ability to achieve the bank's strategic objectives," Al-Humaidhi emphasized.

Al-Humaidhi underscored that AUB has launched numerous digital transformation initiatives as part of a strategic vision to enhance the bank's customer digital experience, meet all their needs, achieve more than their aspirations, and provide them with innovative banking solutions and services.

Al-Humaidhi highlighted that AUB takes pride in its support for human resources through an attractive work environment capable of fostering business development. She also underlined that the bank is swiftly advancing towards achieving comprehensive sustainability.



Agility announced a partnership with Education for Employment (EFE) that will offer training in use of artificial intelligence to 3,500 young people in Egypt.

Course trains 3,500 job seekers
Agility and EFE partner to deliver AI training in Egypt

CAIRO, Feb 1: Agility, a global leader in supply chain services, infrastructure and innovation, announced a partnership with Education for Employment (EFE) that will offer training in use of artificial intelligence to 3,500 young people in Egypt.

The training is intended to familiarize young men and women from under served populations in Egypt with artificial intelligence concepts, tools and ethical considerations. It is designed to give them a competitive edge in the job market by teaching them to harness the power of transformative AI technology.

Underemployment or lack of entrepreneurial opportunities inhibit economic and social development. EFE's skills development programs provide young people with opportunities to gain employment or start their own businesses. These lead to greater prosperity, stability and social and economic development.

Frank Clary, Agility VP of Sustainability, said the company is supporting EFE's free employment and job skills training so that attendees can better understand how to use AI for job searches and tasks they may need to perform in the course and scope of employment or business management.

"AI literacy is quickly becoming a priority area for recruiters. EFE and Agility are committed to making training available to young people

who would otherwise not have access to it. Our shared goal is to create a future-ready workforce for Egypt and the broader Middle East because employment and entrepreneurial skills enable development, prosperity and stability," Clary said.

Andrew Baird, EFE-Global CEO, said: "EFE targets young people from underserved populations who are unemployed and having difficulty getting jobs. This training plays an important role in bridging the gaps in formal education and development of social capital."

EFE training participants undergo a selection process and are accepted into programs based on motivation and socio-economic background. Priority is given to those most in need. Of the 3,500 individuals taking part in the Agility-sponsored AI course in Egypt, at least half are young women. EFE's AI curriculum includes basic concepts of AI, its applicability at work, ethical considerations, responsible use of online information, and use of AI tools in job searches.

In Egypt, Agility has also partnered with UNHCR to fund education for refugee children. Agility has been working with UNHCR since 2016. Its partnership with UNHCR in Egypt has paid for tuition, transportation, uniforms, books, stationery and devices such as computers for roughly 1,800 school-age children.

Earnings fall to \$28.3 billion

Shell reports 29% profit decline

LONDON, Feb 1, (AP): Oil giant Shell saw profits tumble by nearly a third in 2023 as a result of lower oil and natural gas prices, which had surged the year before in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In a statement Thursday, London-based Shell said its post-tax earnings fell 29%, to \$28.3 billion from the previous year's all-time high of \$40 billion.

The main reason behind the decline was the fall in energy prices, with oil trading at an average of \$82 a barrel against \$100 the year before.

Shell CEO Wael Sawan said the company had "made good progress" over the year and that it would focus on "more value with less emissions."

Shell's green credentials, which have been under fire over the past year, were in focus again Thursday

as Greenpeace activists protested outside the company's London headquarters dressed as partying Shell board members.

Greenpeace campaigners said the oil group should pay some of its profits into a fund agreed at U.N. climate talks in December to help pay for loss and damage caused by climate change.

Last year, Shell effectively abandoned one of its green pledges, which was to cut oil production by 1% to 2% each year until the end of the decade, saying it had already met the goal.

But this was largely as a result of it selling off some oil and natural gas fields, which meant the company's production was already lower than it would have been in 2030 under the old plan.

China overtakes Japan as world's top car exporter

China overtook Japan as the world's biggest car exporter in 2023 for the first time, with 4.42 million exported vehicles in 2023, data from the Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association showed.

The volume fell short of the 4.91 million cars exported by China, with a 58 percent surge, due to the growing demand for all-electric vehicles around the world, the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers announced in a statement.

Chinese exports of gasoline-powered cars to Russia also rose, after Japanese, US and

European automakers pulled out of the market due to the war in Ukraine, it said.

Data showed Japan's car exports rose for the first time in two years but fell short of the pre-pandemic level of 4.82 million vehicles in 2019.

Japanese automakers such as Toyota Motor Corp. have been reviewing their production strategies in recent years, aiming to rely less on gasoline-powered cars and ramping up sales of gasoline-electric hybrids, which in many cases have higher mileage than pure EVs. (KUNA)

Deutsche Bank said Thursday that it would cut 3,500 jobs as part of efforts to slash costs by 2.5 billion euros (\$2.7 billion) through next year and boost profits even as Germany's largest lender benefits from higher global interest rates.

The bank said it would seek to streamline its marketing network and computer systems and software as it seeks to cut costs. It said the reduction in the number of positions would mostly be for jobs that don't involve

directly dealing with customers.

The announcement came alongside the release of annual profit figures showing the bank made 4.2 billion euros (\$4.5 billion) last year, a decline of 16% compared with 2022. It was, however, the fourth straight year in which the bank made a profit.

The bank has benefited along with its peers from the global rise in interest rates, which can increase the profit margin between what the bank pays out in interest and what it can earn.

CEO Christian Sewing said the results "demonstrated impressive resilience in a difficult environment, expanded our business and shown everyone our bank is sustainably profitable."

Revenue grew 6.8%, to 28.9 billion euros. The company announced it was raising its dividend to 45 euro cents per share from 30 cents per share and would put more cash in shareholders' hands by buying back 675 million euros in shares by the end of June. (AP)

Bank of England keeps interest rates on hold

Cbank fails to signal imminent cuts

LONDON, Feb 1, (AP): The Bank of England kept its main interest rate at a near 16-year high Thursday as inflation remains too high for comfort, and like the U.S. Federal Reserve a day earlier, it gave no signal that it is close to cutting borrowing costs anytime soon.

In a statement, the central bank said it had maintained its key rate at 5.25%, where it has stood since August of last year. The nine-member Monetary Policy Committee was split, with two voting for a quarter-point increase and one voting for a quarter-point cut.

There had been "good news" on inflation in recent months, bank Gov. Andrew Bailey said, but at 4%, it's still double the bank's goal.

"We need to see more evidence that inflation is set to fall all the way to the 2% target, and stay there, before we can lower interest rates," he said.

According to economic projections published alongside the rate decision,

the Bank of England expects inflation to fall to 2% between April and June, about 18 months earlier than previous forecasts.

However, it expects inflation to carry on rising as wages remain high and oil prices recover.

Overall, it indicated that monetary policy will remain "restrictive for sufficiently long" to ensure inflation returns to its target and stays there. That's code that interest rates will stay at current levels, or higher, until the bank is convinced inflation will settle down to 2%.

Similarly on Wednesday, the Fed held rates steady but surprised financial markets with its cautious statement that it "does not expect it will be appropriate" to cut rates soon.

The Bank of England, like the Fed and other central banks around the world, raised interest rates aggressively from near zero to counter price rises first stoked by supply chain issues during the coronavirus pandemic and then Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which pushed up food and energy costs.

In December, inflation in Britain unexpectedly rose to 4%, an increase that tempered market expectations that the central bank would cut borrowing costs as soon as May.

"It's hardly surprising that inaction is the order of the day, given that inflation ticked up in December," said Susannah Streeter, head of money and markets at stockbrokers Hargreaves Lansdown. "It hardly set the stage for an interest rate cut."

Higher interest rates - which cool the economy by making it more expensive to borrow, thereby bearing down on spending - have contributed to bringing down inflation worldwide.

Though a predicted recession has not materialized over the past year, economic growth is muted as high rates hold people back from borrowing to buy houses or invest in businesses.

The backdrop is hardly ideal for the governing Conservative Party ahead of a general election in the coming year. Opinion polls point to a big victory for the main opposition Labour Party.

2.8% fall matches with what was expected by analysts

Inflation in Europe edges down again. But will Houthi attacks on ships spoil the relief?

FRANKFURT, Germany, Feb 1, (AP) Inflation in Europe edged lower in January to 2.8%, keeping alive speculation about quick interest rate cuts that would lower borrowing costs for businesses and consumers - and help boost the stagnating economy.

The annual figure released Thursday by the European Union statistics agency Eurostat compares with 2.9% in December and matched what was expected by market analysts.

Energy prices fell 6.3%, contributing to the drop in inflation in the 20 European Union countries that use the euro currency. The overall decline brings the European Central Bank closer to its goal of 2% considered best for the economy.

The steady fall in inflation should help the stagnant European economy show stronger growth later this year as moderating prices and wage increases help consumers make up the purchasing power they lost when inflation surged to record-high double digits in late 2022.

Inflation has fallen steadily as the ECB rapidly raised interest rates, the typical antidote to out-of-control price increases.

Price spikes in Germany eased despite the end of both a lower tax rate on restaurant bills and some energy subsidies that should have pushed prices up - a good sign for the rest of the year, according to Christoph Swonek, macroeconomic analyst at DZ Bank.

"Even if spring is still a ways off, it's the first rays of sunshine from the current economic sky," he wrote in an emailed analysis.

Inflation decreased to 3.1% in Germany, Europe's biggest economy, down from 3.8% in December and the lowest since June 2021. France, Europe's No. 2 economy, saw inflation dip to 3.4% from 4.1%.

Core inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy prices and is monitored closely by the ECB, fell to 3.3% from 3.4%.

Yet the downward inflation path faces risks from disruptions to shipping through the Red Sea, a key route for goods and fuel headed for Europe.

Attacks on ships by Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen have led to ships being routed around the southern tip of Africa rather than taking the shorter route through the Suez Canal. That has raised shipping costs and could slow the decline in inflation.

The trade disruption has so far not led to a spike in prices for oil and natural gas, but that remains a risk if the Israel-Hamas war escalates or spreads to other countries in the Middle East.

The decline in inflation has unleashed speculation that the European Central Bank could start cutting interest rates as early as April. ECB officials - much like policymakers at the Bank of England meeting Thursday and the U.S. Federal Reserve a day earlier - have not committed to a timetable for rate cuts, saying they will decide based on incoming economic data to ensure inflation is definitely trending toward their target.

Some analysts say a cut is more likely at the bank's June policy meeting, around the same time the

Musk cannot keep Tesla pay package worth more than \$55 bln, judge rules

DOVER, Del., Feb 1, (AP) Elon Musk is not entitled to landmark compensation package awarded by Tesla's board of directors that is potentially worth more than \$55 billion, a Delaware judge ruled Tuesday.

The ruling by Chancellor Kathleen St. Jude McCormick comes more than five years after a shareholder lawsuit targeted Tesla CEO Musk and directors of the company. They were accused of breaching their duties to the maker of electric vehicles and solar panels, resulting in a waste of corporate assets and unjust enrichment for Musk.

The shareholder's lawyers argued that the compensation package should be voided because it was dictated by Musk and was the product of sham negotiations with directors who were not independent of him. They also said it was approved by shareholders who were given misleading and incomplete disclosures in a proxy statement.

Defense attorneys countered that the pay plan was fairly negotiated by a compensation committee whose members were independent, contained performance milestones so lofty that they were ridiculed by some Wall Street investors, and blessed by a shareholder vote that was not even required under Delaware law. They also argued that Musk was not a controlling shareholder because he owned less than one-third of the company at the time.

An attorney for Musk and other Tesla defendants did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

But Musk reacted to the ruling on X, the social media platform formerly known as Twitter that he owns, by offering business advice. "Never incorporate your company in the state of Delaware," he said. He later added, "I recommend incorporating in Nevada or Texas if you prefer shareholders to decide matters."

Musk, who as of Tuesday topped Forbes' list of the world's richest people, had earlier this month challenged Tesla's board to come up with a new compensation plan for him that would give him a 25% stake in the company. On an earnings call last week, Musk, who currently holds 13%, explained that with a 25% stake, he can't control the company, yet he would have strong influence.

In trial testimony in November 2022, Musk denied that he dictated terms of the compensation package or attended any meetings at which the plan was discussed by the board, its compensation committee, or a working group that helped develop it.

McCormick determined, however, that because Musk was a controlling shareholder with a potential conflict of interest, the pay package must be subject to a more rigorous standard.

Fed is expected to cut. The ECB's benchmark rate is at a record-high 4% after being hiked from negative levels in just over a year.

Higher rates combat inflation by making people's purchases on credit more expensive, thus holding back spending. For the same



Tesla CEO Elon Musk attends the first plenary session of the AI Safety Summit at Bletchley Park, on Nov. 1, 2023 in Bletchley, England. A Delaware judge this week invalidated Elon Musk's \$55.8 billion Tesla pay package, saying it is too big and that Musk set the terms with a complaint board. (AP)

"The process leading to the approval of Musk's compensation plan was deeply flawed," McCormick wrote in the colorfully written 200-page decision. "Musk had extensive ties with the persons tasked with negotiating on Tesla's behalf."

McCormick specifically cited Musk's long business and personal relationships with compensation committee chairman Ira Ehrenpreis and fellow committee member Antonio Gracias. She also noted that the working group working on the pay package included general counsel Todd Maron who was Musk's former divorce attorney.

"In fact, Maron was a primary go-between Musk and the committee, and it is unclear on whose side Maron viewed himself," the judge wrote. "Yet many of the documents cited by the defendants as proof of a fair process were drafted by Maron."

McCormick concluded that the only suitable remedy was for Musk's compensation package to be rescinded. "In the final analysis, Musk launched a self-driving process, recalibrating the speed and direction along the way as he saw fit," she wrote. "The process arrived at an unfair price. And through this litigation, the plaintiff requests a recall."

Greg Varallo, a lead attorney for the shareholder plaintiff, praised McCormick's decision to reverse the "absurdly outsized" Musk pay package.

"The fact that they lost this in Delaware court, it's a jaw dropper," said Wedbush Securities analyst Dan Ives. "It's unprecedented, a ruling like this. I think going in investors thought it was just typical legal noise and nothing was going to come out about it. The fact that they went head to head with Tesla and Musk and the board and voided this, it's a huge legal decision."

During his trial testimony, Musk downplayed the notion that his friendships with certain Tesla board

members, including sometimes vacillating together, meant that they were likely to do his bidding.

The plan called for Musk to reap billions if Tesla, which is based in Austin, Texas, hit certain market capitalization and operational milestones. For each incidence of simultaneously meeting a market cap milestone and an operational milestone, Musk, who owned about 22% of Tesla when the plan was approved, would get stock equal to 1% of outstanding shares at the time of the grant. His interest in the company would grow to about 28% if the company's market capitalization grew by \$600 billion.

Each milestone included growing Tesla's market capitalization by \$50 billion and meeting aggressive revenue and pretax profit growth targets. Musk stood to receive the full benefit of the pay plan, \$55.8 billion, only by leading Tesla to a market capitalization of \$650 billion and unprecedented revenues and earnings within a decade.

Tesla has achieved all twelve market capitalization milestones and eleven operational milestones, providing Musk nearly \$28 billion in stock option gains, according to a January post-trial brief filed by the plaintiff's attorneys. The stock option grants are subject to a five-year holding period, however.

Defense attorney Evan Chesler argued at trial that the compensation package was a "high-risk, high-reward" deal that benefitted not just Musk, but Tesla shareholders. After the plan was implemented, the value of the company climbed from \$53 billion to more than \$800 billion, having briefly hit \$1 trillion.

Chesler also said Tesla made sure that the \$55 billion compensation figure was included in the proxy statement because the company wanted shareholders to know that "this was a heart-stopping number that Mr. Musk could earn."

significant increase in output since the third quarter of 2022, although unemployment remains low.

The tepid performance contrasts with stronger-than-expected growth in the U.S. of 0.8% in the fourth quarter, or an annual pace of 3.3%.



President Joe Biden speaks to members of the media before boarding Marine One on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, Jan. 30, 2024. U.S. adults are only feeling slightly better about the economy, despite stocks being near record highs and surprisingly strong growth last year. A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds that 35% of U.S. adults call the national economy good. (AP)

Uptick not boosting Biden

AP-NORC poll finds an uptick in positive ratings of US economy

WASHINGTON, Feb 1, (AP) Stocks are near record highs. Growth was surprisingly strong last year. And once-hot inflation has begun to cool. But so far, U.S. adults are feeling only slightly better about the economy.

A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds that 35% of U.S. adults call the national economy good. That's an uptick from 30% who said so late last year and up from 24% who said so a year ago. While 65% still call the economy poor, that's also an improvement from a year ago, when 76% called it poor.

Voters' confidence in the economy could be a pivotal factor in this year's presidential election as it is consistently rated as a top issue. Recent data on the economy has shown that growth accelerated last year even as inflation returned closer to the Federal Reserve's 2% target, proving wrong a multitude of Wall Street and academic economists who said a recession would be the consequence of efforts to lower inflation.

President Joe Biden and his aides have taken to highlighting the economic positives as consumer sentiment has rebounded. Biden is also drawing an open contrast with former President Donald Trump, the Republican front-runner. Trump supporters remember his tenure with pride for how the economy fared, but his term was marred by job losses tied to the coronavirus pandemic.

The evidence of a stronger economy has yet to spill over into greater support for Biden. The new poll puts his approval rating at 38%, which is roughly where that number has stood for most of the past two years. Biden's approval rating on handling the economy is similar, at 35%.

Respondents interviewed for the survey often expressed their views on the economy through a personal lens. Some judged it based on their grocery bills and prices at the gasoline pump. Others assessed the economy based on their appreciating investments. Housing prices mattered, and so did job prospects for their adult children and the upward trajectory of the federal debt.

Molly Kapsner, 58, lives on a farm in Wisconsin and thinks the economy is doing "pretty well" because she has three children finishing college this year and all of them have job options. She voted for Biden in 2020 and plans to do so again.

"He has a lot on his plate right now and he's doing quite well," she said. "He's just putting his head down and doing his job and not trying to create a circus in our country."

David Veksler, who voted for the libertarian candidate, Jo Jorgenson, in 2020, said he's worried about the rising federal debt. The 43-year-old software engineer manager from Denver said the borrowing will hurt growth in the long term, even if his investments are doing well now.

"I think he's similar to his predecessors in furthering unsustainable deficits," Veksler said of Biden. "I'm as negative on him as I was on Trump."

Harry Broadnax, a 62-year-old retiree, said he increasingly thinks about the economy in relation to the increase in migrants illegally crossing the U.S. southern border. He feels their presence is diverting financial resources from U.S. citizens.

"I would like to see them block up the border like Trump wanted," said Broadnax, who is from North Carolina, adding for emphasis, "I'm a Democrat."

Broadnax doesn't see himself voting for Biden or Trump, whose criminal indictments worry him.

The Biden administration has tried to put a greater focus on the big numbers used to assess the overall economy, making its case through hard data. Lael Brainard, director of the White House National Economic Council, told a group of reporters last week that skeptics about the economy had overlooked how Biden's policies boosted the labor market and repaired supply chains wrecked by the pandemic.

"The big miss here was not to understand how much, by surging back into the workforce, by addressing supply chains that were completely broken, those inflationary pressures would come down," she said.

Trump has said that the economy is "fragile" and "running off the fumes of what we did." The Republican front-runner has said on social media that stocks are rising because he is likely to return to the White House. That claim overlooks the influence of the Fed, as well as the fact that average annual growth has been higher under Biden so far than it was during Trump's term.

There continues to be a political split in how people think about the economy. As a consequence, there might be a limit on how much Biden's approval numbers can climb even if the economy keeps thriving as it did last year.

Democrats remain far more likely than Republicans to describe the economy as good, 58% to 15%. Still, views have improved at least slightly since the same time last year, when 41% of Democrats and 8% of Republicans called the economy good.

Sixty-five percent of Democrats, but just 7% of Republicans, say they approve of Biden's handling of the economy, both largely unchanged since last year.

However, the poll did show a brighter outlook on the economy from some key voter demographics. Since a year ago, a disproportionate increase in sentiment has come from college graduates and older adults - two groups that tend to turn out to vote at higher rates. There is also the possibility that voters will care more about the personalities of the Democratic and Republican nominees than they do about the state of the economy.

Deborah Shields, 70, who works in direct sales, said she's noticed an improvement in the economy as her investments have improved. Yet she said her opposition to Trump will determine her vote in November.

People & Places

Music

Grammys preview

Music extravaganza vows exciting twists

LOS ANGELES, Feb. 1, (AP) — The 66th annual Grammy Awards are on Sunday, airing live from Los Angeles' Crypto.com Arena on CBS and Paramount+. So, what can viewers expect?

Some new, some old. Executive producers Raj Kapoor, Ben Winston, and Jesse Collins are returning for their fourth year - evolving the show from their first, which required completely reimagining the Grammys for COVID-19. In 2021, they had the idea to turn musicians into each other's audiences when there couldn't be one, a concept that has informed every Grammys since.

For example: artists sit at tables near the front of the stage to give the sense that the musicians and the audience as "just having a really lovely evening together," Winston told The Associated Press. "We've gone away from the big, grandiose, massive theaters with rows and rows of people and actually try to make a really beautiful, bespoke concert every year."

He says there will continue to be no close ups of musicians as the winners are read out - "and then people rewind to see the disappointment in people's faces," he says. "We've changed that because it becomes a bit too competitive. We've really just tried to make it a loving room for the music community."

Some elements of the stage - like the gramophone in the middle - will remain the same. "I really like the ideal of keeping elements of last year, but then changing key parts of it," he says - building off of what has succeeded in the past and making appropriate alterations for the new year.

Similarly, comedian **Trevor Noah** will host for a fourth time. "There's never a hesitation, never a hiccup. There's never a stumble," says Recording Academy CEO and President Harvey Mason Jr. of their returning host. "He relates so well to the artists and to the music community in my mind, because he's a fan and he's an appreciator and a lover of music."

Performance

But what's new in 2024, and what should viewers keep an eye out for? Here are five burning questions - and answers.

Winston says "best pop solo performance" will likely be the first award of the night - remarkable because every nominee in the category is a woman.

"That's the same throughout the show, really - it's dominated by women," he says, joking that he brought up doing "ladies' night" at the Grammys with only women performers," which was quickly shot down.

"I'm really excited about the mix of talent we have, and that's based on the nomination this year, which skew heavily female," says Kapoor. "That is something we're really celebrating. It's almost unprecedented."

Mason agrees, crediting the inclusion of so many women to the changing demographics at the Recording Academy.

"We have so many great women nominees leading some of the general feeling categories, which to me is a direct result of a lot of the changes that we've been making at the academy," he says.

Last year, the organization announced over 2,400 diverse music creators joined their voting bloc - 50% are people of color, 46% are under the age of 40, and 37% are women.

Winston says there will be between "12 to 15 performers - it depends on if the memoriam counts as one or three."

"He likes to put an arc through our show beyond just seeing performances on the stage," Mason says of Winston. "It feels like teamwork at all times - each artist brings their creative ideas; they have a creative director from their team collaborate with a creative director from our team - so it is this incredible mashup of ideas to produce the final results you see on TV."

Winston says that for some artists, his team has created short films to play before their performances in order to "tell the story of the artist's year."

"We're going to put the spotlight on them and the significance of the moment that the audience are about to witness," he says, to provide helpful context for a general audience.

There are three new categories at the 2024 Grammy Awards as well, including the first-ever best African music performance award. Burna Boy, who is among the announced performers, is nominated in the category.

Protocols

Kapoor points out, too, that this is the second year in a row that the Grammys are collaborating with a visual artist for its design: this year is Dave McLeod, a digital artist from the fine art world.

Last year, the Recording Academy announced a series of changes to the Grammy Awards to better reflect an evolving music industry. Of those newly instituted guidelines, protocols involving technological advancements in machine learning sparked headlines: "Only human creators" could win the music industry's highest honor in a decision aimed at the use of artificial intelligence in popular music.

What has been the public reaction - and how will artists respond? "I haven't heard much yet - I'm sure we'll hear more after the show," says Mason. "And I'm sure how we treat AI next year will be different than how we treat it next year. Right now, the way our awards team functions, there wouldn't be any music that was not eligible in any of the categories - so voters were able to vote with confidence that the screening has already taken place."

That's impossible to predict, but there are certainly a few contenders: if Taylor Swift takes home album of the year, she'd break the record of the artist with the most wins, ever, with four.

If Victoria Monét's "Hollywood" wins best traditional R&B performance, her daughter Hazel Monét will become the youngest Grammy winner in history at 2 years old. Karol G could become the first female artist to ever win in the best música urbana album category if she wins for "Mañana Será Bonito." Jack Antonoff could tie Babyface as the producer with the most consecutive wins in the producer of the year, non-classical category with a third win in 2024.

Kelly Clarkson could break the record for most best pop vocal album wins if she gets her third trophy for her 2023 album "Chemistry." Kendrick Lamar could extend his record in the best rap performance category if he wins for a seventh time for "The Hillbillies," his track with his cousin Baby Keem.



Noah



Pearl Jam's lead vocalist Eddie Vedder performs in concert in Sao Paulo, Brazil on Nov. 3, 2011. Pearl Jam's forthcoming album shows the rockers are not mellowing with age. Vedder and other members of the band that began in Seattle in the early 1990s gave an advance listen of their 12th studio album to a select group of family, friends and industry insiders on Wednesday, Jan. 31, at the Troubadour club in the Los Angeles area. (AP)



Actor Donald Glover attends the Amazon Prime Video television series premiere of 'Mr. & Mrs. Smith' at Weylin on Wednesday, Jan. 31, 2024, in New York. (AP)



Jay



Uman

Variety

MOSCOW: A dissident Russian rock band angered by Moscow's war in Ukraine has arrived in Israel after being deported from Thailand under suspected pressure from the Kremlin, the performers said Thursday.

The seven members of the band Bi-2 were arrested last week after playing a concert on the southern resort island of Phuket, reportedly for not having proper working papers. On Facebook, they said all their concerts "are held in accordance with local laws and practices." Phuket is a popular destination for Russian expats and tourists. After paying a fine, the band members were sent to an immigration detention center in Bangkok.

Speaking in the arrival hall of Israel's Ben Gurion International Airport in Tel Aviv, guitarist and singer Aleksandr "Shura" Uman of Bi-2 said the band was doing well and very tired after their ordeal. He also called the conditions he and his band faced in a Thai jail as "horrible."

"We are free and we will keep moving forward," Uman said.

Uman thanked the Israeli, American and Australian diplomats, as well as human rights organizations, for their work to bring them to Israel. A handful of supporters met their early-morning flight with signs to welcome them to Israel.

Russia has denied it had a hand in trying to get the band deported. However, Moscow has a reputation for cracking down on artists critical of the war, even those working abroad. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: For about 15 years, Uriel Rincon told authorities he didn't recognize the gunman who killed Run-DMC's **Jam Master Jay** and wounded Rincon himself in the rap star's recording studio.

But on Wednesday, Rincon pointed across a Brooklyn federal courtroom and identified **Karl Jordan Jr.** as the shooter in one of the world's most infamous killings in hip-hop history. Jordan and **Ronald Washington**, an accused accomplice, have pleaded not guilty to murder.

Rincon told jurors in the men's trial that Jam Master Jay, born **Jason Mizell**, was in his studio's lounge area on the evening of Oct. 30, 2002, playing a football video game and talking business with him and another aide, when the door opened. In walked Jordan, the rap star's godson, Rincon said.

Music

Vedder calls new album 'our best work'

Pearl Jam's music hits the pinnacle

WEST HOLLYWOOD, Calif., Feb. 1, (AP) — Pearl Jam blasted out their forthcoming album to a few hundred family, friends, industry insiders and reporters Wednesday, and the tracks showed they are doing anything but mellowing with age.

Singer Eddie Vedder, 59, lead guitarist Mike McCready, 57 and bassist Jeff Ament, 60, played the record for the first time for invited guests at the Troubadour, the legendary Los Angeles-area club where Elton John and many other Rock & Roll Hall of Famers first made their names.

The Republic Records release will be the 12th studio album and first since 2020's "Gigaton" for the saints of the 1990s Seattle scene, who have been plying their trade together for more than three decades.

"You all get together as a group as we've been doing for 30-plus years and you say, 'Let's try it again,'" Vedder said from the stage as he introduced the album. "No hyperbole, I think this is our best work."

The title of the record and its songs, recorded by producer Andrew Watt at Rick Rubin's Shangri-La studio in Malibu, California, are not yet being made public, nor is the date it drops. But musically, it's ready for release.

"We made this record like a year ago," Ament told the audience. "We've been sitting on it."

"Gigaton" surprised many fans and critics with how hard-rocking it was.

The new one goes even harder. It's almost athletic in its speed, aggression, and tenacity, sounding like it would make men of their age sore in the af-

termath.

While Vedder remains the face and voice of the band, the star of this album is drummer Matt Cameron, who joined the Jam in 1998 after starting out with Soundgarden.

His relentless pounding opens many of the 11 tracks, and drowns out his bandmates' playing and Vedder's vocals at times.

"It's one of the greatest drum records we've ever made," Vedders said to cheers from a crowd that included Red Hot Chili Peppers drummer Chad Smith. "Matt Cameron is just playing out of his skull, especially seeing as how it's our last record."

Hopefulness

Vedder struggled to hide that he was (probably) joking as he said that last part, to laughs and boos.

The lyrics to the new songs are often dark and bleak, especially at the album's start, but at it goes on the determined hopefulness that has been central to the band from the beginning shines through.

The alcohol flowed freely at the afternoon event, including a mass toast. It was strategic, Vedder said he has been softening his aging friends with booze to prepare them to listen to kind of loud tunes they may no longer be used to.

"Every time I've played someone the record it was like a two-day recovery," Vedder said.

The band members credited Watt, who was less than a year old when their first album "Ten" was released in 1991, for lifting them to the heights

they hit.

"He's a force," bassist Jeff Ament said.

Watt is a Pearl Jam super fan (he wore a band basketball jersey Wednesday) who brought to the project what Ament called an "encyclopedic" knowledge of their musical history that is more detailed and deep than the members' own memories.

A Grammy winner for 2021 producer of the year, Watt has worked with the Rolling Stones, Post Malone, Miley Cyrus and Vedder on his 2022 solo album "Earthling."

McCready said the Troubadour stage took him back. He played there with his metal band Shadow in 1987, when the Sunset Strip outside was the teased-hair capital of the world, and his solos on the new record are metallic in their speed and ferocity.

Vedder compared the current process of making a record together to surfer Kelly Slater's attempt to create the perfect wave far from the ocean, but instead of water, the group was trying to make something of "an anxiousness, an anger, a sadness, a joy, a regret."

The band acknowledged that it was surreal to stand there and listen to a recording as audience members bobbed their heads in front of an empty stage.

"It's an unusual situation," Vedder said.

But the afternoon was emotional anyway. Ament nearly got choked up as he talked about coming so far together.

"I couldn't be prouder of us as a band at this point," he said. "I feel grateful."

"He kind of walked directly to Jay and gave - like, half a handshake, with an arm. And at the same time, that's when I hear a couple of shots," Rincon testified. He said he was looking down at his ringing phone as the gunfire erupted, then looked up again.

"And then I see Jay just fall," he said.

Then, Rincon said, he felt pain in his left leg and realized that he'd been shot and that the 37-year-old hip-hop luminary was gravely wounded.

"I'm trying to tend to my wound, and at the same time, I'm trying to give Jay attention - asking him: Is he OK? Can he talk? Whatever - and he is just not responding," Rincon testified.

He said that during the shooting, Washington was at the studio door, telling the

other aide to get on the ground and stay there. Both suspects fled down a hallway toward the building's back door and fire escape, he said.

The rap star had a gun, which was sitting by his side on a sofa armrest during the 10-to-15-second encounter, Rincon said. (AP)

NEW YORK: Melinda Ledbetter Wilson, the longtime wife and manager of Brian Wilson whom the Beach Boys co-founder often credited for stabilizing his famously troubled life, has died at age 77.

Wilson died Tuesday at the couple's home in Beverly Hills, California, Brian Wilson announced online. Brian Wilson's spokesperson **Lauren Mele** said Wednesday that she passed away "suddenly," but no other details were available.

"Our five children and I are just in tears. We are lost," Brian Wilson wrote on his web site. "Melinda was more than my wife. She was my savior. She gave me the emotional security I needed to have a career. She encouraged me to make the music that was closest to my heart. She was my anchor. She was everything for us. Please say a prayer for her."

In "Love and Mercy," the 2014 film about Wilson that drew in part on Melinda Wilson's memories, she is played by Elizabeth Banks.

Melinda Ledbetter was a Pueblo, Colorado, native who grew up in Whittier, California, and had worked for years as a model before taking a job as a sales representative at a Cadillac dealership in Los Angeles. One day, in the mid-1980s, Brian Wilson turned up, looking to buy a car. As he recalled in his memoir from 2016, "I Am Brian Wilson," he was immediately attracted to Ledbetter and impressed that she didn't treat him like a celebrity. (AP)



South Korean K-pop group NewJeans members pose during the Seoul Fashion Week at Dongdaemun Design Plaza in Seoul, South Korea, Thursday, Feb. 1. (AP)

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MEMPHIS, Tenn.: Fans of the soulful sounds of Detroit's Motown and Memphis' Stax Records will be able to enjoy music from both brands in the same place if they watch and listen to a free, online show streaming during Black History Month in February.

Registration has begun for "Stax Meets Motown," which features musicians from Stax Music Academy playing hits from both of the influential soul and R&B music labels. It features musical performances intertwined with filmed segments related to Black history.

The show includes songs from Motown's **Stevie Wonder**, **Diana Ross** and **The Supremes**, **Marvin Gaye** and **Tammi Terrell**, and the **Jackson Five**. Stax's contribution comes from **Otis Redding**, **Sam and Dave**, **Rufus Thomas**, **Johnnie Taylor** and the **Bar-Kays**. (AP)

Calls for heightened awareness and customized care

Young-onset cancer cases rise globally, vigilance urged

CLEVELAND, Feb 1: With cancer diagnoses in young people on the rise worldwide, it is important to raise awareness of symptoms, family history and differences in treatment approaches for adolescents and young adults, says an expert from global health system Cleveland Clinic, speaking ahead of World Cancer Day (February 4).

Global cancer cases in people under the age of 50 rose by 79% between 1990 and 2019, according to research recently published by the UK's University of Edinburgh. The study also shows cancer deaths among this population grew by more than 27%, and it estimates there are now more than 1 million under-50s a year dying of cancer. Cancers of the breast, windpipe, lung, bowel and stomach are responsible for the majority of these deaths.



Dr. Liska

"Cleveland Clinic and other institutes globally are conducting research into why cancer incidence in young people is increasing so significantly, and we believe the cause is multifactorial," says David Liska, M.D., a colorectal cancer surgeon who leads a multidisciplinary program to improve treatment approaches and outcomes for adolescent and young adult (AYA) and young-onset cancer patients at Cleveland Clinic.

"Researchers have noted a birth cohort effect, showing that people born in each decade since the 1950s have a higher incidence of young-onset colorectal cancer than those born in the preceding decades. This indicates that shared exposures to certain factors in the environment could be elevating their risk, whether this is changing eating habits, use of chemicals or any number of factors. Interestingly, we have discovered differences in the gut microbiome, the metabolome, and the tumor immune microenvironment of younger and older people with the same cancers. Another consideration is that individual cancer risk factors such as obesity and leading a sedentary lifestyle are increasingly prevalent in this age group, and therefore likely contributing to the problem," says Dr. Liska, who is also director of Cleveland Clinic's Center for Young-Onset Colorectal Cancer.

Dr. Liska's advice to young people focuses on prevention, early diagnosis, and ensuring that treatment is managed by an experienced multidisciplinary team.

Prevention

"In terms of prevention, we recommend following a healthy lifestyle, incorporating a balanced diet and regular exercise, and avoiding tobacco and excessive alcohol use," says Dr. Liska. "Early diagnosis is important, too, as the earlier a cancer is diagnosed and treated, the better the outcome will be. Individuals should never ignore persistent symptoms of any kind, but instead report them to a physician. People should also discuss any family history of cancer with their doctor, who can then advise on the optimal timing and frequency of cancer screenings, and whether they could be candidates for genetic testing."

As far as seeking treatment is concerned, Dr. Liska says customized approach is needed in younger patients as the biology of the cancers as well as the psychosocial and long-term treatment implications are different compared to older patient populations.

Dr. Liska explains that at Cleveland Clinic, a wide team of experts works closely with oncologists and surgeons to ensure that all of the young patients' needs are met. "There are unique factors facing younger patients at their life stage - for example, they might want to start a family, in which case consulting a fertility preservation specialist is important. Other younger people might have children and/or be looking after older parents, so the transition from becoming a primary caregiver to a person who needs care can be difficult financially and socially, which is where psychologists and social workers would be involved. Younger patients also benefit from the advice of wellness experts who can work with them to modify their diet, exercise and other lifestyle habits to support treatment, avoid complications related to the cancer or treatment, and reduce the risk of the cancer returning."

"Finding a multidisciplinary team specialized in treating young cancer patients is important as the quality of treatment received can have a significant impact on outcomes, not just in terms of a patients' survival but also their quality of life after treatment," says Dr. Liska.

Study links Camp Lejeune water to several cancers

Military personnel had 20% higher cancer risk

NEW YORK, Feb 1, (AP): Military personnel stationed at Camp Lejeune from 1975 to 1985 had at least a 20% higher risk for a number of cancers than those stationed elsewhere, federal health officials have said in a long-awaited study about the North Carolina base's contaminated drinking water.

Federal health officials called the research one of the largest ever done in the United States to assess cancer risk by comparing a group who live and worked in a polluted environment to a similar group that did not.

The study found military personnel stationed at US Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune were at higher risk for some types of leukemia and lymphoma and cancers of the lung, breast, throat, esophagus and thyroid. Civilians who worked at the base also were at a higher risk for a shorter list of cancers.

The study is "quite impressive," but cannot count as final proof that the tainted drinking water caused the cancers, said David Savitz, a Brown University disease researcher who is consulting for plaintiffs' attorneys in Camp Lejeune-related litigation.

"This is not something we're going to be able to resolve definitively," he said. "We are talking about exposures that happened (decades ago) that were not well documented."

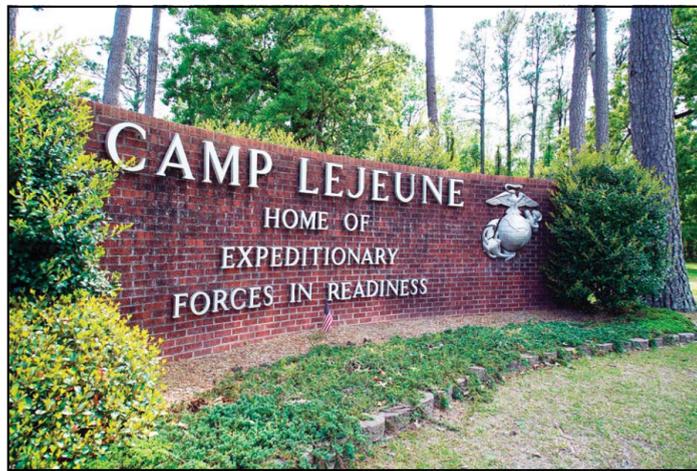
But he said the new research will add weight to arguments made on behalf of people who got sick after living and working at the base.

Camp Lejeune was built in a sandy pine forest along the North Carolina coast in the early 1940s. Its drinking water was contaminated with industrial solvents from the early 1950s to 1985. The contamination - detected in the early 1980s - was blamed on a poorly maintained fuel depot and indiscriminate dumping on the base, as well as from an off-base dry cleaner.

Before wells were shut down, contaminated water was piped to barracks, offices, housing for enlisted families, schools and the base's hospital. Military personnel and families drank it, cooked with it and bathed in it.

The contamination has spawned a wave of litigation by law firms who have aggressively sought out clients with TV ads.

People who got sick after being at Camp Lejeune have accused the Marine Corps of failing to protect the health of its personnel and criticized the federal government for being slow to investigate. Marine Corps officials have repeatedly said that federal environmental regulations for these cancer-causing chemicals were not finalized until



Signage stands on the main gate to Camp Lejeune Marine Base outside Jacksonville, N.C., April 29, 2022. (AP)

1989, after the wells were shut down.

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, or ATSDR, an Atlanta-based sister agency to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has done about a half-dozen studies focused on health problems in people at Camp Lejeune. Those studies were smaller than the new one, and had varied focuses, including ale breast cancer rates and birth defects in children born to base personnel.

Research

The earlier studies pointed out health risks, but the new work "more fully establishes the scope," said Richard Clapp, a Boston University emeritus public health professor who has been involved in past Camp Lejeune research.

Dr. Aaron Bernstein, the head of the ATSDR and CDC's environmental health programs, called the new study "remarkable" for being bigger and more rigorous than past research.

In the new paper, the ATSDR investigated cancer in about 211,000 people who were stationed at or worked at Camp Lejeune between 1975 and 1985 and compared them to about 224,000 people at California's Camp Pendleton - which was not known to have polluted ground-

water - during the same time period.

Frank Bove, a senior epidemiologist, has led the agency's Camp Lejeune research for many years and was in charge of the latest study. He relied on staff at Battelle Memorial Institute and others to comb through cancer registries across the country to look for cases tied to either base.

They found a similar number of malignant cancers in each group, about 12,000. But the numbers - and the relative risks calculated from those numbers - were higher in the Camp Lejeune population for a number of specific types of cancer. That list included some that weren't clearly identified in some earlier studies, most notably thyroid cancer, Clapp said.

A federal law signed by President Joe Biden in August 2022 included language to address concerns of people who developed certain health problems they believe were linked to Camp Lejeune water contamination. It gave them a two-year window to file claims.

The new study may lead to inclusion of thyroid cancer to be added to the list of diseases for which Camp Lejeune personnel and their families might one day be compensated, Clapp said.

The paper, which underwent external peer review, is being submitted for publication, agency officials said.

Also:

PORTLAND, Ore.: Several elected leaders in Oregon declared a state of emergency on Tuesday for downtown Portland over the public health and public safety crisis fueled by fentanyl.

Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek, Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler and Multnomah County Chair Jessica Vega Pederson made the declaration for a 90-day period during which collaboration and response will come from a command center downtown. The three governments are directing their agencies to work with first responders in connecting people addicted to the synthetic opioid with resources including drug treatment programs and to crack down on drug sales.

"Our country and our state have never seen a drug this deadly addictive, and all are grappling with how to respond," Kotek said in a statement.

The declaration is a recommendation from a governor-established task force that met for several months last year to determine ways to rejuvenate downtown Portland.

People addicted to fentanyl who interact with first responders in Portland's downtown in the next 90 days will be triaged by this new command center. Staff can connect people with various resources from a bed in a drug treatment center to meeting with a behavioral health clinician to help with registering for food stamps.

"We cannot underestimate the tremendous value of bringing leaders from different disciplines in a room on a daily basis who all account for a different part of the solution," Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler said in a statement.

Mike Myers, the director of Portland's Community Safety Division, will head the city's command team. Nathan Reynolds, deputy policy chief at the state's Office of Resilience and Emergency Management, will be the state's incident commander.

The effort also extends the Portland Police Bureau's partnership with Oregon State Police to jointly patrol downtown streets for fentanyl sales. It additionally kicks off information campaigns centered on drug use prevention and recovery programs across the region. The county will expand outreach and training on how to administer Narcan, an overdose-reversal drug.

The program doesn't establish any goals to measure success. Kotek said the next 90 days will provide a road map for the next steps.

Focus on alternative treatment

Biogen stops sale of Alzheimer's drug Aduhelm

NEW YORK, Feb 1, (AP): Biogen will stop selling its Alzheimer's treatment Aduhelm, a drug once seen as a potential blockbuster that stumbled after its launch a few years ago.

The drugmaker also said Wednesday that it will end a study of the drug needed for full approval from the Food and Drug Administration.

Patients taking doses of Aduhelm available through the commercial market can continue until November. A company representative said there are about 2,500 people worldwide taking Aduhelm.

Biogen said it will turn its focus to other treatments for the fatal, mind-robbing disease. The company also is helping Japanese drugmaker Eisai sell another Alzheimer's treatment, Leqembi, which received full FDA approval last summer.

Leqembi is the first medicine that's been convincingly shown to slow the cognitive decline caused by Alzheimer's disease, though only modestly. Regulators have approved it for patients with mild dementia and other symptoms caused by early Alzheimer's.

When Aduhelm debuted in 2021, it was the first new Alzheimer's drug in nearly two decades. The FDA had granted accelerated approval but required the additional study for full approval, which can spur broader insurance

coverage.

Aduhelm promised to slow the progression of the disease instead of just managing its symptoms, like other drugs on the market.

Initially priced at \$56,000 a year, analysts predicted it would quickly become a blockbuster that would generate billions for Biogen. The federal government's Medicare program raised the premium it charges for its coverage partially because of an expected influx of Aduhelm claims.

But doctors were hesitant to prescribe the intravenous drug, given weak evidence that it meaningfully improved Alzheimer's patients lives. Insurers blocked or restricted coverage. Medicare, which eventually scaled back its premium hike, imposed strict limits on who could get it.

That proved especially challenging for Biogen. Most U.S. Alzheimer's patients are old enough to qualify for the federal program, which covers patients age 65 and older.

The drug wound up generating millions, not billions, in quarterly sales. Biogen announced in 2022 that it would largely shut down marketing of Aduhelm.

Last year, Biogen started an unsuccessful search for outside financing or partners to help with Aduhelm. That was done as part of a review the company did of its research and devel-

opment program.

Biogen said it had considered during that review the time and investment that would be required for that additional study and likely advancements in the field before Aduhelm received full approval.

Aside from Leqembi, patients also may soon have another treatment option. The FDA is currently reviewing a potential drug from Eli Lilly and Co. A decision is expected early this year.

Biogen said it would book a charge of about \$60 million in its fourth quarter for shutting down the Aduhelm program.

Shares of Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Biogen Inc. climbed around \$4 to \$251.11 in late-morning trading while the Standard & Poor's 500 index slipped.

Also:

JACKSON, Miss.: Mississippi could allow Medicaid coverage earlier in pregnancy in an effort to improve health outcomes for mothers and babies in a poor state with the nation's worst rate of infant mortality.

With wide bipartisan support, the state House passed a bill Wednesday to allow up to 60 days of "presumptive eligibility" for Medicaid, starting July 1. This means a pregnant woman's outpatient medical care would be paid by Medicaid

as her application for coverage by the government insurance program is being considered.

Processing Medicaid applications can take weeks, and physicians say early prenatal care is important.

House Medicaid Committee Chairwoman Missy McGee of Hattiesburg pointed out that Mississippi has high rates of fetal mortality, infant mortality and maternal mortality.

"I think this will go a long way in helping moms and babies be healthy ... and give babies the best shot for a healthy life," McGee said.

Mississippi ranks worst in the US for infant mortality, with Black infants nearly twice as likely as white ones to die over the past decade, according to a report unveiled Jan. 18 by the state Department of Health.

Presumptive Medicaid eligibility during pregnancy would be based on questions about income, asked by health care providers such as employees of county health departments. If a woman's Medicaid application is ultimately rejected because her income is too high, Medicaid would still pay health care providers for services they provided during the time of presumptive eligibility.

McGee said presumptive eligibility could cost the Medicaid program just under \$600,000 a year.

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Blazers spoil Lillard's Portland return with victory over Bucks

Suns ease past Nets

PORTLAND, Ore., Feb 1, (AP): Anfernee Simons scored 24 points, including making a floater with 17.1 seconds left, and the Trail Blazers spoiled Damian Lillard's return to Portland with a 119-116 victory over the Milwaukee Bucks on Wednesday night.

Lillard had with 25 points for the Bucks in their second straight loss under new coach Doc Rivers. Giannis Antetokounmpo added 27 points and eight rebounds.

BASKETBALL

Lillard played his first game in Portland since he was traded to the Bucks in the offseason. He was the face of the Trail Blazers' franchise for his first 11 seasons in the NBA.

Deandre Ayton added 20 points and 11 rebounds for Portland.

Suns 136, Nets 120

In New York, Kevin Durant scored 33 points in his return to Brooklyn, leading Phoenix over the Nets.

Durant added eight assists in his first game in Brooklyn since being traded to Phoenix nearly a year ago. He got a mixed reception early before helping take the crowd out of it with 11 points in the third quarter, when the Suns outscored the Nets 42-26 after leading by three at half-time.

Jusuf Nurkic added 28 points and 11 rebounds for the Suns, overwhelming an undersized Nets team as the Suns won for the ninth time in 11 games.

Cam Thomas scored 25 points for Brooklyn. Mikal Bridges, who came to the Nets in the Durant trade, had 21.

Timberwolves 121, Mavericks 87

In Minneapolis, Karl-Anthony Towns had 29 points and nine rebounds for Minnesota against depleted Dallas, which played without stars Luka Doncic and Kyrie Irving.

Rudy Gobert scored 17 points for the West-leading Wolves (34-14). They endured a sluggish start until



Phoenix Suns center Jusuf Nurkic (20) goes to the basket past Brooklyn Nets forward Cameron Johnson during the first half of an NBA basketball game, Wednesday, Jan. 31, 2024, in New York. (AP)

Towns sparked their surge with two 3-pointers in the last 35 seconds of the first half to give them the lead for good. Towns had 11 points in the third quarter.

Doncic (sprained right ankle) and Irving (sprained right thumb) both sat for the third game this season, and the Mavericks have lost all three. They've played without at least one of them 26 times in 48 games.

Josh Green had 18 points and Tim Hardaway Jr. added 14 points for the Mavericks. They shot just 6 for 29 from 3-point range against the NBA's best scoring defense.

Thunder 105, Nuggets 100

In Oklahoma City, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 34 points to help Oklahoma City beat short-handed Denver in a matchup of teams near the top of the Western Conference standings.

Denver star Nikola Jokic sat out because of pain in his lower back. Oklahoma City took advantage of the two-time league MVP's absence by holding the defending champion Nuggets to 39.8% shooting.

Chet Holmgren had 18 points, 13 rebounds and five blocks and reserves Aaron Wiggins and Vasilije Micic each added 12 points for the Thunder.

Aaron Gordon had 16 points, 13 rebounds and seven assists and Michael Porter Jr. had 15 points and eight rebounds for the Nuggets.

Clippers 125, Wizards 109

In Washington, Kawhi Leonard scored 31 points, James Harden added 25 and Los Angeles pulled away with a big third quarter to beat Washington.

Los Angeles outscored Washington 40-19 in the third after leading by 10 in the first half.

Harden's pullup 3 from the top of the arc stretched the lead to 20 for the first time with 5:42 left in the period. Later, Leonard's emphatic dunk off a driving, spinning feed from Russell Westbrook pushed it to 25, and Norman Powell's basket made it 106-79 at the end of the third.

Kyle Kuzma scored 23 of his 27 points the first half for Washington. The Wizards are 2-2 under interim coach Brian Keefe after Wes Unseld Jr. was fired last week.

Cavaliers 128, Pistons 121

In Cleveland, Donovan Mitchell scored 20 of his 45 points in the fourth quarter, Darius Garland had 19 points in his return from a broken jaw and Cleveland held off NBA-worst Detroit.

Jarrett Allen had 14 points and 11 rebounds, and Isaac Okoro added 14 points. Cleveland won for the 11th time in 12 games and is an NBA-best 16-4 since Dec. 16.

Danilo Gallinari scored 20 points and went 4 of 4 on 3-pointers, and Cade Cunningham had 19 points and

seven assists for Detroit, which was seeking its first back-to-back wins since Oct. 27-28. The Pistons are 6-41.

Heat 115, Kings 106

In Miami, Jimmy Butler scored 31 points and Miami beat Sacramento to end a seven-game losing streak.

Butler shot 10 of 14 from the field and had seven rebounds for the Heat, who ended their longest losing streak since dropping 15 straight during the 2007-08 season. Josh Richardson was 6 of 10 from 3-point range and finished with a season-high 24 points.

Domantas Sabonis had 19 points, 17 rebounds and 13 assists for his 13th triple-double of the season for Sacramento. Keegan Murray scored 33 points.

Pelicans 110, Rockets 99

In Houston, Jonas Valanciunas scored 25 points, Brandon Ingram added 24 and New Orleans beat Houston to snap a three-game skid.

New Orleans led by five to start the fourth quarter before scoring the next 15 points to make it 99-79 with just under 6 1/2 minutes remaining. Jose Alvarado hit a 3-pointer during that stretch and Valanciunas had six points to help the Pelicans pad the lead.

Jalen Green led the Rockets with 31 points.

Magic 108, Spurs 98

In San Antonio, Paolo Banchero scored 25 points, Franz Wagner added 20 and Orlando held on to beat San Antonio.

Devin Vassell had 26 points and Victor Wembanyama 21 for San Antonio.

After trailing by 25 points in the final quarter, San Antonio went on a 15-0 run over 3:38 to pull within three at 99-96. But the Spurs had three turnovers in the final three minutes.

Bulls 117, Hornets 110

In Charlotte, N.C. Coby White scored 35 points, Nikola Vucevic had 22 points and 12 rebounds and Chicago sent Charlotte to its fifth straight loss.

Ayo Dosunmu added 16 points for Chicago.

Miles Bridges had 30 points and 15 rebounds for Charlotte.



Dallas Mavericks guard A.J. Lawson (9) shoots the ball over Minnesota Timberwolves center Luka Garza (55) during the second half of an NBA basketball game, Wednesday, Jan. 31, 2024, in Minneapolis. (AP)

Briton said to leave Mercedes

Hamilton linked with shock 'move' to Ferrari next year

SEVEN-time Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton has been linked with a shock move from Mercedes to Ferrari next year, according to reports on Thursday.

Sky Sports News said Hamilton would leave Mercedes after the 2024 season and replace Carlos Sainz Jr. at Ferrari. It didn't cite any sources. The Daily Mail also said the deal would go through while motorsport.com said it wasn't a done deal yet but negotiations were at an advanced stage and could be concluded this week.

When contacted by The Associated Press, Mercedes and Ferrari declined to comment on if Hamilton will join Ferrari.

The move would surprise many F1 observers because the 39-year-old British driver signed a new two-year deal last summer until 2025, although it remains unclear whether the deal contained an escape clause.

Hamilton won six titles with Mercedes in seven years from 2014-20 and lost the 2021 championship to Red Bull's Max Verstappen on the final lap of the last race. He has not won a race since 2021 and remains stuck on a record 103 wins.

If he joins Ferrari he would likely replace Sainz, considering Sainz's teammate, Charles Leclerc, recently signed a multi-year contract extension.

Five years ago, Hamilton was asked if he could ever be tempted to drive for Ferrari.

"If there is a point in my life where I decide I want a change, that potentially could be an option," he said at

the time.

In late 2019, Italian newspaper La Gazzetta dello Sport reported Hamilton met with Ferrari chairman John Elkann twice that year and they discussed Hamilton potentially replacing then-driver Sebastian Vettel at Ferrari.

Hamilton was subsequently asked at the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix that year if he met Elkann.

MOTOR RACING

"Naturally, everything that happens behind closed doors is always private with whoever it is you end up sitting with," Hamilton said. "For many years, I've never ever sat down and considered other options, because we (Mercedes) have been driving straight ahead, on the same path. We're still on that path, and there's very little that's going to shift it."

Hamilton joined Mercedes in 2013 from McLaren in what was also a surprise move at the time.

After dominating to 2020, Hamilton and Mercedes have been frustrated in the past two seasons. Mercedes won only one race in 2022 when the car suffered from a bouncing effect, known in F1 as porpoising. The team admitted getting the design wrong.

Preseason F1 testing begins on Feb. 21 in Bahrain. Bahrain also hosts the first of a record 24 races on March 2, when Verstappen starts his bid for a fourth straight world championship. (AP)

Jannik Sinner does it his way

ROME, Feb 1, (AP): Jannik Sinner's career so far can be defined by the choices he made. And the freedom he had to make them.

From when he was a kid growing up in the German-speaking area of the Italian Dolomites and he chose tennis over skiing - even though he had won a national junior title on the slopes.

To the decision to leave home at age 13 for the Italian Riviera and enroll in a tennis academy.

And finally, when on the cusp of greatness he decided to leave his long-time coach, took a step back and created his own personalized team - the team Sinner had in his box when he won the Australian Open on Sunday and became the first Italian man to win a Grand Slam singles title in nearly a half century.

It all started when his parents left him alone at an early age to find his way while still teaching him a solid work ethic.

TENNIS

"My parents are special because when I (came) back from school my parents were not there, they were working and I used to go always go to ski," Sinner said Wednesday during an hour-long news conference upon his celebrated return to Italy. "When I came back home at 4:30 my mom used to be at home but I went to play tennis sometimes, a little bit of football (soccer)."

Sinner's parents worked in a ski lodge where his father was a chef and his mother was a waitress.

"That's the kind of mentality they gave me: 'If you want to reach something, you have to work.' This kind of work ethic you can learn but most of the time it's because your parents give it to you," Sinner said.

While his parents sometimes join him on the tennis tour now, they also still work - his dad helps out in the restaurant when he can and his mom runs the family guest house, Haus Sinner.

"So they are always working and that's what I love about them," Sinner said. "They're not changing anything with me. I'm a normal person who I was when I was a very young kid with a big dream and now I'm just 22 years old with still a big dream."

"It's all work, there are no secrets," Sinner added, "or maybe working more than everyone else."

Sinner landed in Rome on Tuesday and then visited with Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni. On Monday, even Pope Francis congratulated Italy for Sinner's victory.

After the rooftop news conference at the Italian Tennis and Padel Federation headquarters, Sinner headed to the Colosseum for a photo shoot.

The last Italian man to win a Grand Slam singles title was Adriano Panatta at the 1976 French Open.



Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton of Britain looks at Finnish driver Kimi Raikkonen's Ferrari after getting pole in the qualifying session for the Chinese Formula One Grand Prix at Shanghai International Circuit in Shanghai, China, Saturday, April 11, 2015. Seven-time Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton has been linked with a shock move from Mercedes to Ferrari next year. (AP)

Kilde urges better WC race-day schedules to protect athletes

GENEVA, Feb 1, (AP): Skiers must be consulted about better World Cup race-day schedules to help protect them from injuries, downhill star Aleksander Aamodt Kilde said Thursday.

The former overall World Cup champion and two-time Olympic me-

The 31-year-old Norwegian is among a slew of World Cup, Olympic and world champions to crash hard in a packed January program, including his partner Mikaela Shiffrin. The American standout women's skier is chasing a women's record-equaling sixth overall World Cup title.

Kilde hit the fences at the last turn of the longest downhill of the season when racing for the third straight day, and after two third-place results loaded his schedule with media and public events.

His injuries were reported as a dislocated shoulder and lacerated calf though both were more serious than first seemed.

Kilde explained he posted a social photograph of his leg injury on vivid media to help people understand the severity.

SKIING

alist spoke out in his first call with international media since a shocking Jan. 13 crash on the storied Wengen downhill ended his season.

"It's super important that we look at something that's more sustainable," Kilde said in an online call from his winter base in Austria where he expects to spend several weeks using a wheelchair.

"We as athletes need to speak up."

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Duaij Al-Otaibi, Chairman of the Kuwait Shooting Sport Club with other officials.

KUNA photo

Kuwait shooting club honors shooters and lauds progress

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1, (KUNA): Duaij Al-Otaibi, Chairman of the Kuwait Shooting Sport Club (KSSC), commended the remarkable achievements of national players in the recently concluded Asian Shotgun Championship held in Kuwait. Al-Otaibi expressed his appreciation during a press briefing following a KSSC ceremony dedicated to honoring shooter Mohammad Al-Daihani, who secured the second spot for Kuwait in the upcoming Paris Olympic Games 2024.

Al-Otaibi conveyed the club's commitment to actively support and prepare both Mohammad Al-Daihani and his fellow competitor Khaled

Al-Mudhaf, who also secured qualification for the Olympic Games. The chairman emphasized the club's dedication to assisting the athletes in achieving the desired results on the international stage.

SHOOTING

In his comments, Al-Daihani acknowledged the significance of hosting the Asian shooting tournament in Kuwait, highlighting that this opportunity played a pivotal role in securing his qualification for the Paris Olympics for the first time.

Handball transfer frenzy: Al-Qurain and Al-Fahaheel make key signings

By Khaled El Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: In the final hours leading to the closure of the second registration and transfer period, significant player movements characterized the handball teams. Al-Qurain Club, gearing up for the current year's league, announced the acquisition of Serbian professionals Nikola Skrupcek and Slovakian Oliver Rabic. The team, under the leadership of Serbian coach Zekia Milosavovich, also brought on board assistant coach Saad Salem, goalkeeper coach Nasser Al-Hajri, and team manager Mohammed Al-Awad.

Meanwhile, Al-Fahaheel secured Argentine professional Federico Pizarro



Mohammed Al-Awad receiving Nicola and Rabek.

and Croatian Sandro Abranovich. The club had previously enlisted Algerian coach Mohamed Masoudane to strengthen its coaching staff.

Under the guidance of Tunisian coach Saber Abu Qafsha, Al-Sahel revealed three notable signings: Yemeni Jassem Al-Barak, Egyptian Muhannad Ani, and former Kuwait Club goalkeeper Mustafa Jadid.

Defending league champion Al-Kuwait Club faced goalkeeper challenges due to an injury to Hassan Safar. As a solution, they brought in Mohamed Boyabes from Burgan. Additionally, Burgan signed orange professional Semedo after parting ways with Egyptian Mostafa Bashir.

Fahd Al-Anzi, Director of Handball at Al-Sahel Club, emphasized the management's commitment to infusing

new talent into the team. The club aims to strike a balance between experienced players and promising youngsters, with a focus on building a competitive team for the present and future handball competitions.

The upcoming 2023-2024 season's league format will feature a merger system involving 14 clubs. Notably, Al-Jahra and Al-Shabab withdrew for this season. The teams will engage in a single-round competition, with the top six qualifying for a title showdown in a two-division league. The remaining teams will compete for positions from seventh to fourteenth.



England's captain Ben Stokes bowls during a practice session a day ahead their second cricket test match against India, in Visakhapatnam, India. (AP)

Barca get back on track

Depay's late winner keeps Atletico third

MADRID, Feb 1, (AP): With coach Xavi Hernández still in charge, Barcelona got back on track with a 1-0 win over Osasuna in the Spanish league.

Young Brazil forward Vitor Roque scored his first goal since joining the club in Barcelona's first match since Xavi announced he will leave at the end of the season.

Xavi had made the announcement after a 5-3 home loss to Villarreal at home on Saturday, three days after Barcelona had been eliminated 4-2 by Athletic Bilbao in the quarterfinals of the Copa del Rey. He had hoped his announcement would lower the stress and tension surrounding both the team and himself.

"I made my decision to achieve this, to get the team to react," Xavi said. "I knew that if the players could give an extra 1 percent, they would. And the fans were superb. We need unity."

SOCCER

But Barcelona still struggled at home against an opponent that played with 10 men from the 67th minute after defender Unai Garcia was sent off with a second yellow card for a foul on Vitor Roque, who scored in the 63rd. The 18-year-old forward, making his sixth appearance after arriving from Brazil's Atletico Paranaense this season, headed in a cross by João Cancelo about a minute after coming off the bench.

The match was postponed from earlier this month because of the teams' participation in the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia, where Real Madrid beat Barcelona 4-1 in the final.

Osasuna, which qualified for the Super Cup as the runner-up finisher in the Copa del Rey last season, had won two of its last three league games. It stayed 12th in the standings.

Barcelona forward Ferran Torres had to be substituted seven minutes into the match with a hamstring injury.

Atletico Madrid stayed in third place, just ahead of Barcelona, after a 2-1 win over Rayo Vallecano, with Memphis Depay scoring a 90th-minute winner at the Metropolitan stadium.

It was the fifth goal in five matches for Depay, who had a goal disallowed for offside in the 82nd.

Reinildo had given the hosts the lead in the 35th with his first goal with Atletico, and Rayo equalized with Alvaro Garcia in the 42nd.

"We didn't play well but luckily we got the result we needed," Atletico



Barcelona's Pedri (right), and Osasuna's Lucas Torro fight for the ball during a Spanish La Liga soccer match between Barcelona and Osasuna at the Olimpic Lluís Companys stadium in Barcelona, Spain. (AP)

Al-Osaimi Dressage Championship starts

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: The Al-Osaimi Horse Dressage Championship, known as set to commence with sponsorship from jockey Abdullah Al-Osaimi.

Equestrian Alaa Salem Al-Sultan, a vital member of the organizing committee, highlighted the uniqueness of this championship, marking it as the inaugural tournament hosted in the impressive Al-Osaimi stable. The facility, fully equipped and ready, aims to become a hub for hosting future local and international championships. Al-Osaimi, a prominent supporter of equestrian competitions and riders, plays a pivotal role in encouraging athletes to persevere in their equestrian journey.

Al-Sultan emphasized that dressage



Abdullah Al-Osaimi

holds a foundational role in equestrianism, focusing on imparting balance, flexibility, and seamless transitions between

speeds with minimal effort from the rider while ensuring complete obedience from the horse. Notably, dressage garners substantial interest from show jumping enthusiasts.

EQUESTRIAN

The Al-Osaimi Championship stands as the fourth "Dressage" tournament in this season. The organizing committee, featuring Sheikhha Fajr Badr Al-Sabah, Alaa Salem Al-Sultan, Abdullah Mishari Al-Awadhi, Nasiba Al-Maousherji, Dana Boursli, Abdullah Al-Amer, and Amber Dean Heer, orchestrates the event, ensuring its success and smooth execution.

this season.

Rayo coach Francisco Rodríguez complained of fouls against his players in both of Atletico goals. He was sent off for complaining in stoppage time.

Anderson back in team

After visa issues, Bashir set for England debut vs India

VISAKHAPATNAM, India, Feb 1, (AP): England will debut 20-year-old spinner Shoaib Bashir against India in the second test starting Friday, barely a week after he was stranded at home without a visa to come on the tour.

Bashir, a British Muslim of Pakistani heritage, was the only member of England's touring party to be significantly delayed over his visa application. That drew comment from Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's office that it expects British citizens to be treated fairly by India.

Bashir has grounded following a training camp in Abu Dhabi while his teammates transferred to Hyderabad ahead of the first test, which was won in extraordinary fashion by England on Sunday. He had to return to London and eventually received approval, arriving in India last weekend. He

is in the team as a replacement for Jack Leach, who has been ruled out because of injury.

England captain Ben Stokes brushed aside concerns that Bashir's preparations for the tour have been affected, saying Thursday: "There's no issues for me that he's been away from the group for a period of time, then come back in to make his debut. It's not like he's forgotten how to bowl."

Bashir has taken just 10 first-class wickets in six games at an average of 67, while Leach's absence means England's three specialist spinners

have three caps between them - two for Rehan Ahmed and one for Tom Hartley.

At the other end of the age spectrum, 41-year-old seam bowler James Anderson - England's record wicket-taker - also came into the side for the match in Visakhapatnam, replacing Mark Wood.

CRICKET

Anderson will be the only pacer in the team as he sets out on his 22nd calendar year of international cricket, and the first since the retirement of long-time fellow fast bowler Stuart Broad.

"It's huge credit to him and lots of people should look up to Jimmy considering he is where he is at 41," Stokes said. "Bringing in Jimmy's

experience, and the class that he has, is great for us and I think it also goes under the radar how good his record in India is.

"Considering what Jimmy is known for - the swing king and all that - it just proves how good a bowler he is. Taking nothing away from Woody, we just feel like there's a bit more I can turn to him for."

Already missing star batter Virat Kohli because of personal reasons, India said on Monday the team would be without allrounder Ravindra Jadeja (hamstring) and batter KL Rahul (quadriceps) due to injuries sustained in the first test.

Squad England: Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Jonny Bairstow, Ben Stokes (captain), Ben Foakes, Rehan Ahmed, Tom Hartley, Shoaib Bashir, James Anderson.



Brentford's Keane Lewis-Potter (right), challenges for the ball with Tottenham's Oliver Skipp during the English Premier League soccer match between Tottenham Hotspur and Brentford at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London. (AP)

Sports

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Sheikha Naima congratulates volleyball team

Nottingham Forest active again

Salwa Al-Sabah Club emerges victorious in tournament

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: The Salwa Al-Sabah Club's women's volleyball team clinched the title at the recent friendly tournament. The event, held under the patronage and attendance of Sheikha Naima Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Chairwoman of the Board of Directors of Salwa Club, witnessed the Salwa team's triumphant victory over the Iraqi Akad Ankawa, the reigning league champion in Iraq. The final match ended with a decisive score of three games to none (25-20, 25-16, 25-15). As a result, Salwa claimed the first position, followed by Ankawa in second place, and the Lebanese Byblos team securing third place.

The tournament's conclusion was graced by the presence of the Salwa Al-Sabah Club's Board of Directors, leaders of participating delegations, and Abdullah Al-Ghurair, the Secretary of the Volleyball Association.

VOLLEYBALL

Sheikha Naima extended her congratulations to the Salwa players, as well as the technical and administrative staff, for their outstanding performance and the acquisition of the friendly championship title. She emphasized that this victory was the result of diligent work and dedication from both the players and the team management. Furthermore, she acknowledged the unwavering support of the club's board of directors in overcoming challenges and creating a conducive environment for preparation and participation in tournaments.

Sheikha Naima highlighted the significance of engaging with teams from Iraq and Lebanon, foreseeing a positive impact on the upcoming competitions, particularly local ones. She expressed the team's ambition to not only stop at this victory but to actively participate and compete in future tournaments.

Munir Ishaq, the head of the Iraqi Acad Ankawa delegation, expressed sincere gratitude to Sheikha Naima Al-Ahmad and the management of Salwa Sports Club for the warm reception extended to the Ankawa delegation since their arrival in Kuwait. He commended the excellent organization of the tournament and emphasized the team's admiration for the technical prowess of the Salwa Al-Sabah players. Ishaq concluded by stating his belief in the team's promising future in women's sports.

Eubanks replaces injured Taylor Fritz

VILNIUS, Lithuania, Feb 1, (AP): Chris Eubanks is replacing an injured Taylor Fritz, who is the top-ranked American man, in the lineup for the United States against Ukraine in the Davis Cup on Thursday.

The 32nd-ranked Eubanks, who reached the quarterfinals at Wimbledon last year, was scheduled to make his first appearance in a Davis Cup match against No. 498 Viacheslav Bielinskiy. The day's other match: Sebastian Korda of the U.S. against Oleksii Krut'kykh.

Eubanks is from Atlanta and played college tennis at Wake Forest.

Fritz, who is No. 9 in the rankings, was ruled out because of an injured right hip, the U.S. team announced hours before the start of the best-of-five-match series, which continues on Friday. It is being held in Lithuania because of the ongoing war in Ukraine, which began when Russia invaded in February 2022.

The other matches in this round of the men's team tennis competition are scheduled for Friday and Saturday, or Saturday and Sunday. The latter days include Lithuania hosting Georgia on indoor hard courts at the same arena in Vilnius as U.S.-Ukraine.

The 12 winners from this round will advance to the 2024 Davis Cup Finals, along with reigning champion Italy, 2023 runner-up Australia, and wild-card entries Britain and Spain.

Other matchups this week: Slovakia at Serbia (which is without No. 1 Novak Djokovic); South Korea at Canada; Belgium at Croatia; Germany at Hungary; Switzerland at Netherlands; Israel at Czech Republic; Portugal at Finland; France at Taiwan; Kazakhstan at Argentina; Brazil at Sweden; and Peru at Chile.



Sheikha Naima Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah crowns the Salwa team with the championship cup.

Premier League 'powers' Liverpool and Man City flash deep squads in big wins to fire up title race

Spurs edge Brentford, move to 4th

LIVERPOOL, England, Feb 1, (AP): Liverpool and Manchester City look primed and ready for another heavyweight clash for the Premier League title.

Liverpool routed Chelsea 4-1 to restore a five-point lead for Jürgen Klopp's team atop the table before going to third-placed Arsenal this weekend.

SOCCER

City eased to a 3-1 win over Burnley and moved up again to second, ahead of Arsenal on goal difference, and having played a game fewer than its two rivals.

With their fourth straight wins, the Premier League powers showcased deep squads, fast-improving young stars and, for City, the tentative return of feared forward Erling Haaland after nearly two months out injured.

Haaland came off the bench with City comfortably in a three-goal lead as Julián Álvarez again stepped up to lead the attack with two goals. The second was created by Kevin De Bruyne making his first start in the Premier League since August.

For Liverpool, Diogo Jota again covered for the absence of Mohamed Salah and opened the scoring early against a poor Chelsea taking a pass from the impressive Conor Bradley.

Bradley, an unheralded 20-year-old right-back filling in for Trent Alexander-Arnold, then scored his first goal for the club before assisting again for Dominik Szoboszlai to effectively seal the win in the 65th.

Liverpool had the luxury of forward Darwin Núñez missing a first-half penalty, one of a Premier League record four times one player struck the frame of the goal in a game.

caught up with Sancho, who has been out of training for much of this week with what coach Edin Terzić said was a problem with his adductor muscle.

Sancho could miss Friday's game at Heidenheim. Terzić said it's simply a matter of being cautious, and so far Dortmund has given no indication it's expected to be a longer-term injury. Terzić linked the muscle problem to Sancho's long spell away from the first team at



Yousef Abdullah Al-Baidan inspects the facility in the presence of Abdul Aziz Ashour.



Liverpool's Diogo Jota scores his side's first goal during the English Premier League soccer match between Liverpool and Chelsea, at Anfield Stadium, Liverpool, England. (AP)

Man City edged Liverpool in epic duels for the title in 2019 and 2022, and north London rivals Arsenal and Tottenham are also currently in this

United, saying it "is not surprising after the long break that he had."

SOCCER

A return to Germany has brought new life into Sancho's career, bringing back memories of when he was considered one of English soccer's brightest young stars and worthy of

a \$100 million fee. He's also helped Dortmund revive its season.

Before Sancho arrived, the team was winless in four Bundesliga games, its domestic league form failing to match bright Champions League group-stage efforts. With Sancho, Dortmund has three wins from three.

But this injury scare shows how quickly he has become important to Dortmund again and raises questions

Al-Baidan inspects cutting-edge sports 'facility' at Al-Arabi Club

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 1: Yousef Abdullah Al-Baidan, the Director General of the General Sports Authority, conducted an inspection of the indoor hall complex at Al-Arabi Sports Club to assess the project's progress. His visit aimed to evaluate the final stages of construction and development after the hall's reconstruction, anticipating its official opening and commencement of activities. The General Director and the Construction Sector team warmly received him, along with Abdul Aziz Ashour, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Arab Club.

The hall, recognized as one of the most advanced covered sports facilities, comprises a main hall with three

floors and international courts catering to handball, basketball, and volleyball. Additionally, it features main and auxiliary training halls, service rooms, building control rooms, medical clinics, lecture rooms, commentator cabins, and VIP visitor parking.

Expressing his admiration, the Director General commended the successful completion and execution phases of the project.

The initiative is geared towards enhancing the sports infrastructure for clubs and federations at various levels, aligning with Kuwait's preparation to host numerous tournaments on continental, Arab, and international scales in the upcoming period.

ing Liverpool by eight points.

Liverpool and Chelsea meet again in the League Cup final on Feb. 25.

Maybe this time there will be a winner at Wembley Stadium within 90 minutes after the teams on Wednesday ended their streak of seven straight draws in games between them for the past 2½ years.

Two of those seven were the English domestic cup finals in the 2021-22 season. Both the League Cup and FA Cup finals ended 0-0 before Liverpool won both penalty shootouts.

Just like two years ago, Liverpool is aiming for an unprecedented quadruple trophy sweep of each competition it entered.

Also like two years ago, the Premier League shapes up as the toughest to win with three-time defending champion Man City starting another of its mid-season surges.

On the day he turned 24, Julián Álvarez scored twice in the first 22 min-

utes to set Manchester City on its way to an easy win over Burnley. Rodri extended the lead 30 seconds after the second-half restart.

Álvarez now has six goals in his last five games to help the English, European and world champion manage the absence through injury of Erling Haaland.

The Argentina forward's scoring run started with two goals in a 4-0 win over Fluminense in the Club World Cup final on Dec. 22.

That title success capped a week in the Saudi Arabia sunshine that seemed to reset City's league campaign after a run of dropped points because of uncharacteristically conceding late goals.

City has won six straight since coming home from Jeddah and also now has Haaland back in action. The Norwegian, who has 19 goals in all competitions this season, came on in the 71st minute after missing six Premier League games and the Club World Cup.

Haaland had shooting chances but the only further goal was Ameen Al-Dakhil's consolation for Burnley in stoppage time.

Tottenham cannot be counted out just yet. Whatever Premier League road that coach Ange Postecoglou's team takes, it should be one of the most watchable on its journey.

After a poor first half at home to Brentford, Tottenham burst into a 3-1 lead within 11 minutes of the second half.

Destiny Udogie leveled in the 48th, one minute before Brennan Johnson scored the go-ahead goal. Richarlison scored what proved the decisive goal in the 56th.



Ribeiro

Forest's charge came after a 2022-23 season - its first in the league after a 23-year absence - when the club made an unprecedented 21 off-season signings at a cost of \$160 million. It also spent heavily in the second-tier Championship in a bid to get promoted.

SOCCER

Maybe that explains why Forest has been settling for loan moves for young players in this window. Reyna, who arrived from Borussia Dortmund, is 21 while Ribeiro is aged 18 and has already played in the Champions League with Sporting.

Premier League clubs have been unusually quiet in this transfer window, perhaps more careful with their spending in light of the charges against Everton and Forest.