



Amir expresses gratitude for Omani hospitality, economic collaboration



Photo by Mohammad Morsi
Kuwait's Health Minister, Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi, addressing the audience during Thursday's annual conference on Diagnostic Imaging Updates.

MoH unveils 100-day health overhaul plan

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: The Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi has affirmed his keenness to implement the government's work program that was presented to the National Assembly. The work program has many goals that will be implemented within 100 days, including new constructions and openings, increased attention to primary health care, and the digitization of health services. In a press statement issued on the sidelines of the launch of the annual Diagnostic Radiology

Continued on Page 5

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Wednesday a cable to the Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tariq, expressing gratitude towards the great hospitality His Highness received during his state visit to the Sultanate.

In the cable, His Highness the Amir said that he felt the Omani leadership and people's great hospitality, affirming that it was another milestone in the historic relations between the two brotherly nations.

He commended the stature of Oman as one of the leading nations in the region and the world,

Continued on Page 5

Sahel app adds Aman feature to counter phishing attempts

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8, (KUNA): The official spokesman of the unified government application of electronic services "Sahel" Yousef Kathem, announced Thursday the launching of the Communications and Information Technology Commission's "Aman" service, to monitor phishing scams.

In a statement, Kathem said that Aman (safety) service will appear to users through the commission's services list on "Sahel" application, allowing people to directly report phishing scams.

The goal is to allow application users to report any phishing attempt, whether through messages or fake calls, he said. The service also aims to monitor all forms of electronic fraud facing citizens and residents through various means, involving text messages or voice calls, he pointed out.

"Sahel" application was launched in 2021 mainly to enhance the efficiency and speed of public services within the framework of electronic transformation in Kuwait.

Call to amend law

Lawmaker advocates sports clubs' 'political' engagement

By Raed Youssef
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: MP Badr Nashmi has submitted a proposal to amend some provisions of Decree Law No. 24/1962 in order to allow sports clubs and benefit associations to interfere in politics outside the election period.

The daily obtained a copy of the proposal, which includes lifting the absolute ban imposed on sports clubs and benefit associations from interfering in politics. This is in addition to revising Article Six to read as: "The association or club should not interfere in politics during the election period, starting from the issuance of the decree calling for elections until the end of the election."

The explanatory memorandum for the proposal confirmed that these amendments are essential in strengthening and developing civil society, and are in line with Article 43 of the Kuwaiti Constitution. The lawmaker proposed amending Article Six which, in its current form, prevents public benefit associations and sports clubs from interfering in politics, which directly conflicts with the purposes of the proposal. The founders and their objectives are mentioned in the explanatory memorandum, as well as the disruption of one of the pillars of public opinion oversight of the responsibility of the political executive authority. The proposed law removed this obstacle to popular oversight and restricted non-interference in politics at election time until the end of voting in order to distance associations or clubs from electoral competition between candidates.

Registration

It stated that the current form of Clause D of Article Eight stipulates prior oversight by the Ministry of Interior during the registration of the request to establish associations and clubs, assumes bad faith in citizens, and reinforces security opinions in civil transactions in a crude and incomprehensible manner; while the executive authority is supposed to deal with associations and clubs on a single basis and in good faith, except in the event that they violate the laws. The aforementioned clause only states that the Ministry of Interior could object, without explaining the reason for objection. The proposed law has abolished this clause to ensure that the registration of associations and clubs is easy and uncomplicated.

According to the memorandum, Article Nine of the current law directly conflicts with Article 166 of the Kuwaiti Constitution, so it was amended; such that if the concerned minister refuses, the reason for refusal should be presented within a month. Failure to respond will be considered approval of the registration request. This will force the minister to explain the rejection. The matter should not stop here with the minister, as those requesting registration of the association or club have the right to submit a grievance against the decision of the concerned minister to the Council of Ministers. The proposed article also stipulates the reason for the rejection, if it exists. In the event that the grievance is not responded to, it is considered acceptable. This will force the executive authority to give reasons for the rejection. Therefore, when the rejection is clear and justified by the concerned authority, those requesting registration of the association or club have the right to appeal the unjustified rejection decisions at the judiciary to decide on them.

Finally, Article 27, in its current form, allows the executive authority to dissolve associations and clubs without oversight of this dissolution and sets loose, unregulated provisions that enable it to abuse these articles. Accordingly, it was amended to be consistent with clear standards. The amendment provides the opportunity for dissolved associations to appeal the dissolution decision at the judiciary.

Expats voice concerns over one-month family visit visa

'Extend visa duration to 3 months'

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: The "Meta" platform facilitates 30 visitors to secure appointments every hour in the residency affairs departments across the six governorates of Kuwait, reports Al-Anba daily.

The daily added, the residency affairs departments in Al-Jahra and Mubarak Al-Kabeer governorates experienced lower turnout compared to those in Farwaniya and Hawally due to lower population densities compared to other areas.

Numerous expatriates interviewed by the daily in expressing their sentiments wished the

Kuwait government will increase the duration of the family visit visa to 3 months saying they feel "one month is not enough." They argue that bringing their spouses entails renting an apartment and bearing travel expenses, making a month seem insufficient.

Meanwhile, a security source assured expatriates that visits will continue unhindered. Government initiatives aim to boost commercial activities in the country without imposing additional burdens on essential services like healthcare.

However, the expatriates lamented that the national airline doesn't serve all destinations where their families reside. They proposed a solution where entry visas to Kuwait are granted only if travelers can show tickets issued by the national carrier.



Photo by Mahmoud Jadeed
On Thursday, the setting sun bathes Kuwait City's skyscrapers in beauty, casting an ambiance of tranquility and a poetic panorama.

Kuwait preps for imminent domestic worker shortage

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: As Kuwait prepares for an imminent domestic worker shortage crisis within the next two months, the government is taking proactive measures to mitigate the situation, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Bassam Al-Shammari, an expert in domestic worker affairs, disclosed that discussions between Kuwait and Ethiopia will resume shortly to finalize the terms of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) governing the recruitment of domestic workers from Addis Ababa.

Once completed, the MoU will be officially signed and put into effect, said Al-Shammari stressing that this initiative will create a new avenue for recruiting domestic workers to address Kuwait's current shortage.

He highlighted the eager anticipation among local agencies for the MoU's signing, which will facilitate the conclusion of initial recruitment contracts, known as "job orders," with counterparts in Addis Ababa.

Recruiting workers from Ethiopia is viewed as a viable solution due to the comparatively lower costs associated with their recruitment and salaries, thus easing financial burdens on citizens and residents.

In addition to Ethiopia, Al-Shammari underscored the importance of diversifying recruitment sources and avoiding dependence on a few countries. He emphasized the need to rectify any past shortcomings in workers' rights and to rigorously enforce laws against violators to ensure smooth recruitment processes.

Al-Shammari urged relevant government agencies to expedite the signing of the MoU with Ethiopia and to commence recruitment at the earliest to preempt any emergency situations that could further strain the domestic worker market.

Continued on Page 5

Attack adds to regional tensions

US airstrike kills Kataib Hezbollah commander in East Baghdad

BAGHDAD, Feb 8, (AP): A US drone strike blew up a car in the Iraqi capital Wednesday night, killing a high-ranking commander of the powerful Kataib Hezbollah militia who is responsible for "directly planning and participating in attacks" on American troops in the region, the U.S. military said Wednesday.

The precision blast hit a main thoroughfare in the Mashtal neighborhood in eastern Baghdad, attracting a crowd as emergency teams picked through the wreckage. It came amid roiling tensions in the region, and will likely further anger Iraqi government leaders, who U.S. officials said were not notified in advance of the strike.

Security forces closed off the heavily guarded Green Zone, where a number of diplomatic compounds are located, and there were concerns about social media postings urging protesters to storm the U.S. embassy.

There were conflicting reports on the number of those killed, with U.S. officials saying the initial assessment was one, and saying there were no civilians hurt or killed. But two officials with Iran-backed militias in Iraq said that three died, including Wissam Muhammad Sabir Al-Saadi, known as Abu Baqir Al-Saadi, the commander in charge of Kataib Hezbollah's operations in Syria. Kataib Hezbollah later

announced his death "following the bombing of the American occupation forces" in a statement.

Those officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to speak to journalists.

In a statement, U.S. Central Command said "there are no indications of collateral damage or civilian casualties at this time." It added that the U.S. "will not hesitate to hold responsible all those who threaten our forces' safety."

The strike - which came at 9:30 p.m. local time - is certain to inflame already seething relations between Washington and Baghdad. It comes just days after the U.S. military launched an air assault on dozens of sites in Iraq and Syria used by Iranian-backed militias and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in retaliation for a drone strike that killed three U.S. troops and injured more than 40 others at a base in Jordan in late January.

The U.S. has blamed the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a broad coalition of Iran-backed militias, for the attack in Jordan. President Joe Biden and other top leaders have repeatedly warned that the U.S. would continue to retaliate against those responsible for the Jordan attack. And officials have suggested that key militia leaders would be likely targets.

Newswatch

CAIRO: The State of Kuwait has been and continues to unequivocally support the Palestinian cause since the first seeds of the freedom struggle were planted decades ago, said a prominent Kuwaiti official on Thursday.

In a KUNA interview via phone, Palestinian Authority Presidential adviser **Mahmoud Al-Habbash** commended the Kuwaiti stance with Palestine, saying that such support was reflected in the recent 19-point pro-Palestinian report issued by the committee of Arab League permanent representatives, chaired by Kuwait.

The report was published within an economic, legal, political, and diplomatic frameworks all geared toward condemning the Zionist inhumane policies against Palestinians, he indicated. Al-Habbash affirmed that Kuwait remained steadfast in supporting the just Palestinian cause, sparing no effort to promote it regionally and internationally.

He also commended Kuwait's strong political, economic, and humanitarian stance with the people of the Gaza Strip who are experiencing a brutal and animalistic Israeli military campaign with many crimes amounting to genocide.

Al-Habbash thanked the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) for its assistance to the people of Gaza, providing them with the necessities and supplies needed to fend off their dire situation. (KUNA)

Kuwait dermatology center receives global recognition

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8, (KUNA): The Ministry of Health announced on Thursday that the Global Allergy and Asthma European Network (GA2LEN) selected Asaad Al-Hamad Dermatology Center as "Center of Excellence" in the field of "Atopic Eczema" worldwide.

Dermatology Consultant and Head of Dermatology at the Center Dr. Atfal Al-Alafi said in a press statement that the selection of

the center by a globally renowned organization such as GA2LEN added to the accomplishments of the health system in Kuwait.

The Asaad Al-Hamad Center became the first recognized government center in the Middle East, part of 37 international centers, aiming to cooperate, pursue research, participate in global studies, hold educational workshops and exchange experiences to improve quality of health care.



KUNA photo
Asaad Al-Hamad Dermatology Center

Prayer Timings

Fajr 05:12 Asr 15:09
 Sunrise .. 06:33 Maghrib .. 17:32
 Zohr 12:02 Isha 18:50

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Warm with light variable wind to light to moderate southeasterly wind, with speeds of 06-26 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

Weather

By Night: Rather cold to cold and clouds will increase gradually with light variable wind to light to moderate southeasterly wind, with speeds of 08-30 km/h with a chance for fog forming over some areas.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	24	13
Kuwait Airport	23	07
Abdaly	23	08
Jahra	23	10
Salmiyah	20	15
Nuwaisib	24	11

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



Winners and officials after the prize-giving ceremony

KUNA photo

Kuwait Science Club announces winners of 14th international invention fair

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8, (KUNA): Kuwait Science Club announced on Thursday the winners of the 14th International Invention Fair in the Middle East (IIFME), held in Kuwait under His Highness the Amir's patronage, drawing 200 participants from 40 countries.

The IIFME's grand prize was given to the Egyptian inventor Dr. Ibrahim Al-Sherbini for his first invention in nanotechnology for continuous vasodilation, registered in his name and world-famous Egyptian Dr. Magdi Yagoub, and his second invention for environment friendly, long-lasting, biodegradable urea fertiliser.

Kuwait inventors Hussain Al-Sayegh, Hussain Bahzad, and Nawaf Al-Juwaihel received the Kuwait Science Club Award for effervescent tablets capable of producing nanofluids once placed in water, while Jordanian inventor Sahar Javal seized the award of the International Exhibition of Inventions Geneva for her invention of a small incubator box.

Emirati inventor Yousef Al-Burei won first place in the Gulf Cooperation Council Patent Office (GCCPO) awards for his invention of a water leak detector, while Ku-

waiti inventor Sara Al-Ghareeb won second place for a multifunctional agricultural machine, and Omani inventor Hajar Al-Azaria won third place for biofuels produced from animal waste.

Other participants from Iraq, China, Tajikistan, and Kuwait received awards for their inventions in various fields.

Chairman of the Kuwait Science Club and the Organizing Committee of IIFME Talal Al-Kharafi said during the winners announcement ceremony that His Highness the Amir's patronage reflects the leadership's support for creativity and invention.

Al-Kharafi added that holding the fair in Kuwait showed the important role Kuwait plays in spreading the culture of invention and innovation, affirming that the event has become one of the most important international exhibitions, especially in the Middle East since its launch in 2007.

He noted that the increasing number of participating countries indicated the influence of the IIFME as a platform for economic opportunities to exchange ideas on inventions with potential investors to turn into marketable products that benefit society and contribute to their development.

'Kabd, Abdali and Salmi roads will be completed before Feb 25 break'

Potholes, cracks to be filled up

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: According to informed sources in the Ministry of Public Works, 70 percent of the urgent plan implemented by the ministry to repair the Kabd, Abdali and Salmi roads has been completed, and the entire plan will be completed before the national holidays.

The sources explained that the plan began with directives and clear instructions from the Minister of Public Works and the Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan immediately after she assumed the ministerial portfolio. The Kabd Road is being repaired by the Maintenance Engineering Sector of the ministry, and the Salmi and Kabd roads are being repaired by the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation (PART).

The plan includes closing all potholes and cracks on the roads caused by heavy trucks, which puts the lives of citizens and residents at risk.

The reforms currently taking place are based on an urgent plan that differs from future contracts that the ministry will implement throughout the country through national cadres who are currently being prepared to supervise the work that will be conducted in accordance with the necessary standards and quality.

The problem of supervision is considered one of the problems facing road maintenance, as it requires trained technicians to follow up the work with precision and complete professionalism.

The sources indicated that the materials used in repairing and treating roads were tested and inspected by the ministry's laboratories at the Government Center for Quality Control.

Civilians, military social security takers increase

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Statistics issued by the Public Institution for Social Security (PIFSS) revealed that the total number of civilian and military personnel covered by social security increased by about 13,730 from January to September 2023, indicating the number increased from 676,270 at the end of December 2022 to 690,000 by the end of September 2023, reports Al-Anba daily.

The average salary of a retiree in Kuwait at the end of September was about KD1,316; while the average salary of a retiree from the government sector was KD1,203; KD1,843 in the oil sector, KD1,377 in the private sector, KD752 for self-employed civilians; KD1,681 in the Ministry of Defense; KD1,606 in the Ministry of Interior and KD1,592 in the National Guard.

The number of insured people increased by 5,922 in the first months of 2023; rising from 423,680 at the end of December 2022 to 517,750 at the end of September 2023.

The number of insured people in the government sector increased by 5,844, reaching 333,250 at the end of September 2023, compared to 327,410 at the end of December 2022.

The number of insured people in the oil sector increased by 317 -- 22,095 by the end of September 2023, compared to 21,770 by the end of December 2022.

The number of insured people in the private sector decreased by about 291 -- from 51,730 in December 2022 to 51,440 in September 2023.

The number of insured self-employed civilians increased by 52 -- 16,880 in September 2023, compared to 16,828 in December 2022.

The number of new retirees increased by 5,768, as the number of living pensioners reached 169,220 in September 2023, compared to 163,450 in December 2022.

The number of living civilian pensioners working for an employer increased by 4,452 -- 129,400 in September 2023, compared to 124,900 in December 2022.

The number of living civilian pensioners working for an employer in September 2023 was about 110,760 from the government sector; 7,955 from the oil sector and 10,680 from the private sector.

The number of retirees from the Ministry of Defense increased by about 513 -- 13,970 in September 2023 compared to 13,450 in December 2022.

The number of retirees from the Ministry of Interior increased by about 182 -- 13,980 in September 2023 compared to 13,710 in December 2022.

Envoy lauds Kuwait response

Quake victims remembered

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: The Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Tube Sönmez affirmed that Turkey, exactly one year ago, woke up to one of the darkest days and the most devastating disasters in the country's modern history, due to the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes which resulted in huge loss of life in 11 provinces.

In her speech during the commemoration of the first anniversary of the February 6 earthquake disaster, Ambassador Sönmez said, "The earthquakes affected an area of about 70,000 square kilometers, more than four times the area of Kuwait. It was considered as one of the rare disasters in the world that claimed the lives of 53,000 people. Millions of our people lost their homes and were forced to leave their areas. Several historical artefacts and valuable architectural works of our ancient cities were destroyed.

We, as an embassy in the State of Kuwait, worked hard side-by-side with our citizens to provide all possible support to those in need in the affected areas. This happened through the mobilization of solidarity that began from the first day of the disaster. We worked with all our might to organize an intensive aid campaign for two months.

Kuwait was one of the fastest countries to respond to the call made by our country for international aid on the day of the earthquake.

Based on the instructions of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, an air bridge was established between Kuwait and Turkey. Two military cargo planes were allocated for the rapid and efficient transportation of the search and rescue team, medical team, health supplies and other needs of the post-disaster period.

Kuwait announced an aid package worth USD 15 million to support earthquake areas. Approximately USD 35 million was collected to support our country



The Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Tube Sönmez at the embassy event.

in the "Kuwait Beside You" aid campaign organized by the Kuwait government. Kuwaitis carried out humanitarian aid activities through non-governmental organizations, charities, private companies and their own citizens."

Sönmez expressed her gratitude to the generous people of Kuwait and citizens of other countries living in Kuwait for their support on that difficult day.

Meanwhile, the ambassador stressed that the Palestinian people are alone in facing their fate, as even the most basic aid supplies are not delivered to the residents of Gaza, and they have nowhere to go or escape from the Israeli aggression that amounts to genocide and is being committed before the eyes of the whole world.

She said, "I pray to Almighty Allah to have mercy on our Palestinian brothers who lost their lives in the endless Israeli attacks. I wish for patience and steadfastness to all our brothers who are struggling to stand firm in Gaza, which has turned into a pile of rubble."

Call to track down mischief-mongers

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Hawally Governor and acting Capital Governor Ali Al-Asfar has stressed the need for concerted security efforts to protect the public and to prevent any untoward incident in the governorates, reports Al-Anba daily.

Al-Asfar made the statement when he visited the Capital Governorate Security Directorate building, where Director of the directorate Brigadier General Khaled Bonashi warmly welcomed him in the presence of several security officials. The governor reviewed the security prepara-

tions for the national celebrations in February.

During the visit, the governor also emphasized the importance of applying the law on anyone who tampers with national security and stability, and not to give way to those who try to terrorize citizens and expatriates residing in the governorate.

He expressed gratitude and appreciation for the hard work and dedication of the Interior Ministry of employees, while imploring Allah Almighty to spread stability and tranquility in the hearts of citizens and expatriates.



Largest display screen installed on Kuwait Municipal Council building for national celebrations.

Largest transparent, display screen

By Talal Al-Senafi

A highlight of the country's national celebrations is the installation of the largest display screen on Kuwait Municipal Council building.

The 1,200-square meter screen is located at the intersection of Nayef Palace (Al-Assimah Governorate Building).

Kuwait Municipality said the display is operated by the (screen net) system, which enables content from phones, TVs, or satellite channels.

The screen was designed to be transparent, ensuring it does not affect the exterior appearance of the building. (KUNA)

Onus on human resources

Minister stresses forum importance

DOHA, Feb 8, (KUNA): It is important to participate in the high-level Arab Forum for Multidimensional Social Development in Doha, to improve the values and structure of Arab families, said a top Kuwaiti government official, Thursday.

Kuwaiti Minister of Social Affairs, and Family and Childhood Affairs Sheikh Firas Saud Al-Malik Al-Sabah said in a statement to KUNA that the two-day Forum, which began yesterday, contributed to strengthening collective Arab social developmental efforts.

He added that the forum would contribute to realizing the desired sustainable development, fostering peace and security, and advancing prosperity and social justice in the region.

Al-Sabah mentioned that the Ministry of Social Affairs was one of the most prominent ministries and institutions in Kuwait, playing a significant role in social protection.

Al-Sabah said that he with other Arab social ministers, as well as the Arab League, signed the Doha Declaration for the resilient Arab family, which builds on Qatar's efforts to uphold the principles and identity of the Arab family through safeguarding it from threats to its unity and structure.

The High-Level Arab Multidimensional Social Development Forum began in Doha, Qatar, on Wednesday with the participation of several countries, including Kuwait.

Speaking at the opening of the two-day event, Qatari Minister of Social Development and Family Mariam Al-Misnad affirmed it was important to invest in human beings and their

ingenuity to achieve social development.

The drastic transformation seen in the Arab region required reviewing and serious contemplation to face challenges and move forward in all aspects, she added, noting that it was very important to achieve the goals of sustainable development in eradicating poverty, boosting human rights, and enabling individuals with special needs to bring upon much-sought progress.

On her part, Egyptian Social Solidarity Minister and president of the 43rd session of the Arab social ministers' council Nevine Al-Kabbaj indicated that Arab social cooperation was necessary nowadays due to the grave challenges facing the region, namely the current inhumane Israeli campaign against the Palestinian people and their families.

Poverty

Addressing issues of poverty and concerns of people with special needs are major topics to be addressed by Arab countries, she said.

She affirmed that promoting the family unit was an initial aspect that all Arab countries must work towards.

Delivering his speech, Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abu al-Gheit indicated that the current forum came during a turbulent time as Israeli merciless war machine is committing atrocities against the Palestinian people.

He affirmed that the Arab League was working on all domains to counter crimes committed against the Palestinian people and especially against families, women, elderly, and children.

While casualties amounted to nearly 100,000 people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the forum has crucial task in bringing the voice of Palestinians to the world, added Abdul-Gheit.



Sheikh Firas

diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

'Bumpy road ahead for govt despite intention to reform'

"THE government's outlined program, along with the objectives articulated by His Highness the Prime Minister during his meeting with the newspapers, has effectively quelled much of the controversy surrounding political and economic affairs," columnist **Ahmad Baqer** wrote for **Al-Jarida** daily.

"It not only validated the warnings issued by reputable Kuwaiti economists but also aligned closely with the perspectives expressed in this column, granting a sense of triumph over the misguided and corrupt rhetoric.



Ahmad Baqer

"His Highness the Prime Minister underscored the imperative truth: sustaining the welfare state on dwindling oil revenues is untenable. He projected a significant influx of 300,000 citizens into the labor market over the next decade, posing challenges for absorption within the public sector.

"With a projected deficit of 60 billion dinars over the next five years, he emphasized the painful consequences of delaying essential reforms. The volatility of oil prices presents an unprecedented challenge, highlighting the urgent need to pivot away from rentier policies towards strategic alternatives.

"This initial triumph signals a breakthrough in the protracted struggle that Kuwait has faced for years. However, it must be recognized as a temporary victory. The true test lies in enacting these goals within the National Assembly and translating them into tangible realities for Kuwait. This endeavor presents a new battle, fraught with three potential outcomes:

"Firstly, the government may succeed in pushing its agenda forward, despite opposition within the National Assembly. However, recent challenges, such as the narrow margin in the Finance Committee's reports postponement vote, suggest this path may be arduous.

"Secondly, if opposing factions within the Assembly prevail, the government's initiatives could be stymied, perpetuating fiscal depletion and threatening the nation with deficits and rampant unemployment. Constitutional measures may be necessary to address this scenario.

"Lastly, the government may opt to compromise with dissenting members, resulting in a sluggish pace of reform and perpetuating fiscal imbalances. While this approach may prolong the government's tenure, it risks exacerbating the chronic issues highlighted by the Prime Minister.

"To secure a definitive victory, unwavering support from His Highness the Amir, steadfast adherence to the outlined program by the government, and a comprehensive media campaign aimed at fostering public awareness and combating corruption are imperative. Furthermore, impartiality and backing for national representatives advocating genuine reform, rather than merely seeking parliamentary seats, are crucial elements in navigating the path ahead."

Also:

"The attack on the American Burj base in Jordan, which was carried out via a drone, and led to the death of three American soldiers and the wounding of nearly 30 others, constitutes a dangerous development in the context of developments that the region has witnessed since the Al-Aqsa Flood. For the first time since October 7, the United States has been targeted directly and on the territory of stable Jordan, which is not involved in any internal or regional conflict," columnist **Dr Noura Al-Majim** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"According to official American statements, the perpetrator of the attack was the 'Quds Force' of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, which has its bases in Syria and Iraq. Therefore, its goals are inseparable from Iran's goals and plans, about which opinions differ greatly.

"But most likely, Iran wants to send Washington three messages, the first of which is to stop supporting Israel in its raging war in Gaza, and thus pressure it to accept the prisoner exchange deal, stop the war, and abandon the goal of eliminating Hamas.

"The second is to put pressure on Washington to dissuade it from plans to return focus to the region, which constitutes a huge stumbling block for Iran in the way of its hegemonic project in the Gulf. Third, it is necessary to include the nuclear program settlement file as a priority for Washington after the end of the war in Gaza.

"The American reaction or retaliation for the Jordanian attack was definitely expected, but the limits and consequences of this response are what must be considered objectively in light of many circumstances and data.

"The Biden administration's initial response immediately after the attack

was largely calm and cautious. According to what Biden said, 'we will hold those who committed this terrorist act accountable, but at the appropriate time and manner'.

"More importantly, there are the statements of successive American officials, even Biden, whose content revolved around the intention not to expand the retaliatory response into a comprehensive regional war, and not to target a specific force, meaning Iran. This indicates Washington's determination, since the attack, to follow a limited or non-escalatory response at all.

"After delaying the response for a week, the United States carried out operations targeting nearly 80 Quds Force sites in Syria and Iraq. Immediately after the response was implemented, Biden made statements stating that this response will continue at the times and place that we will choose, and the United States is only responding to the Jordanian attack and does not seek conflict in the region or outside it. The Pentagon also made direct statements saying that this response does not aim to expand the confrontation with Iran.

"Thus, Washington has confirmed the limited response policy that it intended from the beginning. This is attributed to several reasons, perhaps the most important of all is Washington's suppression of any data or reasons motivating its military involvement in the region, not only at the level of direct confrontation with Iran, but also at the level of intensifying its military focus in the region, which will cause severe damage to Washington's strategy in Asia to confront the Chinese threat.

"Among the reasons is also the impact of an escalatory approach on Biden's electoral chances in 2024, because it will be like an adventure with uncalculated consequences. In addition, opening a wide conflict front with Iran at this particular time will have a severe impact on Israel, as Iran is certain to implement a policy of unifying the arenas against Israel and Washington's interests in the region.

"The bottom line is that Washington's retaliatory response does not bode well for comprehensive expansion or open war with Iran. Rather, it will crystallize in the coming days into a limited, specific or selective response against all Iranian militias in the region, especially targeting key symbols and leaders."

"Sources of income... Even before the era of independence, we have been hearing about diversifying sources of national income and the need to stop relying on one source of income -- the export of oil!" columnist **Talal Al-Saeed** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"More than two decades have passed, yet we have not seen the diversification of the sources of national income. Rather, we are still talking about diversifying sources of income without any practical application or tangible measure confirming this trend. The reality states that we still depend on one main source of income -- oil. In Arabic, it says 'the State sells oil and spends on us!' This will continue and there will be no diversification of the sources of income. All talks about the alleged diversification is just constructive talk, which has been proven to be unworkable over the years! Thus, the government must confront the people with this fact, and then shift to another direction with the support of the public. The other direction is not less important than diversifying sources of income and it could be the solution if we think correctly.

"What is preventing us from working hard and planning to transform the State of Kuwait into the oil capital of the world? We have to exert effort and spend money to achieve this important goal. This will give us another income that is equivalent to the income from selling oil. We have to take the first step in the right direction towards diversifying the sources of our national income in the same field and upon which our economy depends. We should have been more skilled in this field, after long decades of manufacturing, refining and exporting oil!

"Perhaps, the experts working in the oil field are more knowledgeable than me about the details of this project, that is, if the goal becomes clear. There is no objection to holding seminars and opening the way for public participation, until we reach the desired goal.

"Nevertheless, it is crucial that we have an aim. We should not deceive ourselves with constructive talk about diversifying sources of income. In this manner, it becomes clear in every budget that oil exports constitute more than 95 percent of our national income. The work programs of our successive governments still talk about diversifying sources of income without implementation. We talk about diversifying sources of income as a wish, not a goal that we want to achieve."

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes

'Judicial docs forged'

Ex-minister faces imprisonment

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: A former minister has been referred to the Ministers' Court for trial and is facing potential imprisonment over allegations of presenting a falsified document to the judiciary during his tenure as a serving minister. This incident is linked to an ongoing investigation into a case concerning public funds, reports **Al-Qabas** daily.

According to sources, the investigation committee, headed by Counselor Dr. Omar Al-Masoud and including advisors Saud Al-Sanea and Ahmed Al-Muqlad, the former minister

was summoned for interrogation and has been released on bail. However, the committee will proceed with trial proceedings.

It has been disclosed that the State Security Service initiated action against the former minister after discovering forgery within the document submitted to the judiciary.

Furthermore, the source has revealed that two additional reports are pending against other former ministers. These individuals are expected to be summoned in the coming days, facing charges related to the misappropriation of public funds.

Streamline procedures for deportees: minister

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Acting Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahd Al-Yousef, accompanied by Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior for Financial Affairs, Sheikh Hamoud Al-Mubarak, visited the Deportation and Temporary Detention Affairs Department. The purpose of the visit was to oversee the progress of work, identify challenges, and devise solutions, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

During the visit, Al-Yousef assessed the capacity of the deportation prison and conducted an inspection tour of several prisoner wards, including those for men and women. He listened to the inmates' most significant complaints and observations.

Al-Yousef instructed the removal of obstacles facing inmates in accordance with the law. He also called for the establishment of a mechanism to streamline procedures for deportees, particularly those without passports, in coordination with their respective embassies to expedite their repatriation.

Additionally, he emphasized the need to address all shortcomings and devise a future vision for the development of the deportation administration and temporary detention affairs, aiming to resolve obstacles and issues pertaining to this critical administration.



Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Acting Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahd Al-Yousef during his visit to the deportation center.

Al-Yousef also visited the Juvenile Administration Building, also known as the Social Evaluation House.

Three Indian fishermen flee with Kuwaiti's boat, arrive in Mumbai

'Salaries not paid for 2 years, passports with sponsor'

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Three Indian fishermen from the state of Tamil Nadu, India made a daring escape from Kuwait aboard a Kuwaiti fishing boat, only to find themselves arrested upon their arrival in Mumbai. The incident, which initially sparked speculation and media frenzy under headlines such as "Suspicious Kuwaiti Boat Enters Indian Waters," unfolded into a mix of comedy and tragedy as the details emerged, as reported by the Arabic daily **Al-Seyassah**.

The escapade came to light when a patrol boat from the "Yellow Gate" police station near Mumbai's Sasun pier spotted the vessel, leading to the eventual apprehension of the three individuals. With language barriers hindering communication, the Indian Navy was summoned to assist. Identified as Vijay Vinod Anthony (29), Nedisu Ditto (31), and Sahaya Anthony Anish (29), all fishermen by trade, the trio had embarked on their journey two years prior, seeking employment on the Kuwaiti boat of a local sponsor.

However, their hopes for a better life turned sour as their employer failed to pay their salaries for two years and subjected them to mistreatment. Faced with dire circumstances, they made the decision to flee by boat, ultimately landing in Mumbai. Remarkably, they found themselves without passports, claiming their documents were held by their employer in Kuwait.

The saga of the three fishermen serves as a poignant reminder of the vulnerabilities faced by migrant workers abroad and the lengths they may go to seek justice and a better future.

Rehearsal ceremony: Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Lieutenant General Sheikh Salem Al-Nawaf attended the rehearsal of the graduation ceremony for the 31st batch of university officers at Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

Several assistant undersecretaries of the Ministry of Interior attended the event in order to evaluate the preparations of the academy and other sectors for the graduation ceremony, which is under the auspices of His Highness the Amir and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Patrol cars 'stoned'

'Drifters' giving hard time to police on Wafra Road

By Munaif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Investigations have been launched to find and arrest the reckless motorists who gathered on Wafra-Jawakhir Road and drove their vehicles in a dangerous manner, as well as threw stones at patrol vehicles.

According to security sources, when the Operations Room of the Ministry of Interior received information about the reckless driving and stunt performance on Wafra road, patrol officers were immediately dispatched to the location.

As soon as the patrol teams arrived, the reckless drivers threw stones at them, which resulted in damaging the windshield of one of the patrol vehicles.

Officers managed to seize one of the vehicles but its driver managed to escape. A search has been launched to find him as well as the drivers of the two other vehicles that managed to flee from the site.

The seized vehicle has been referred to the police station in preparation for arresting its driver. A case was registered.

65 held in week: Statistics from the Ministry of Interior revealed that the number of people arrested for violating the Residency and Labor law reached 681 within a week, reports **Al-Rai** daily.

The Public Relations and Security Media General Department at the ministry explained in a press statement that the violators were arrested during the intensive security campaigns conducted throughout the country.

79-year-old drug runner: The Criminal Court, headed by Judge Mohammad Al-Sanea, recently dealt with the biggest drug trafficking case so far, involving a 79-year-old Kuwaiti drug dealer who was arrested in Waha with a huge quantity of different types of drugs in his possession, reports **Al-Rai** daily.

The accused resisted arrest by using a firearm in confronting the security officers and even destroyed the officers' vehicle in an attempt to escape from the scene, where a big quantity of various types of drugs and psychotropic substances were found.



Indian police take custody of the three men who entered Indian shores illegally.

'No criminal intent'

Court cancels fine on media outlet

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: The Court of Appeals presided over by Judge Nasr Salem Al-Heid canceled the KD 5,000 fine imposed on a media outlet, and acquitted it of insulting a candidate in the 2022 elections and influencing the results of the election through an incident that was reported by the media at the time.

According to the case file, a former MP in the 2020 parliament was running for the 2020 parliament elections. During an interview with a reporter, an argument occurred between them over the positions of the MP and the policy of the media outlet. This was reported by the media at the time.

After the former MP lodged a complaint, the Public Prosecution accused the media outlet of influencing the election results and

distorting and damaging the reputation of the candidate.

The Criminal Court ordered the accused - the owner of the media outlet - to pay a fine of KD 5,000, and refer the civil case to the competent court.

During the court session, the accused denied the charges, insisting that he did not intend to offend the plaintiff by publishing the video clip of the altercation.

The Court of Appeals acquitted the defendant, and canceled the fine based on the absence of criminal intent, stating that what was published is considered as permissible criticism, does not affect the outcome of the elections and is not considered an electoral crime.



Nasr Al-Heid

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Kuwait's infertility rate at normal rate of about 15%

Lifestyle factors blamed

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: According to Head of the Fertility Medicine Unit at the New Jahra Hospital Consultant Dr. Hazem Al-Rumaih, the rate of infertility in Kuwait does not differ from other countries in the world, as it is about 15 percent, which means 15,000 out of every 100,000 men and women are expected to suffer from infertility.

In a press statement issued yesterday, Dr. Al-Rumaih explained that male diseases are the most common reason behind fertility problems in men, and ovulation and blockage of the fallopian tubes are the reason for fertility problems among women.

A change in lifestyle, eating fast food, lack of exercise, use of modern technology in life, smoking, and the use of hormones by young people negatively affect fertility rates.

The Fertility Medicine Unit at the New Jahra Hospital will organize three workshops on male diseases and surgeries, hysteroscopy, and advanced and specialized check-ups over a period of three days from February 8 to February 10, as part of the activities of the 26th Annual Conference of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

Dr. Al-Rumaih affirmed that the workshops will host a number of international experts to discuss complex cases and participate in performing advanced surgeries for male diseases and hysteroscopic surgeries, in addition to providing lectures and giving technical opinions for the treatment and diagnosis of some complex cases.



The new Jahra Hospital.

Kuwait Int'l College of Law renews its global academic accreditation

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: The Kuwait International College of Law has successfully completed the International Quality Review (IQR) standards and obtained renewal of its global academic accreditation from the British Quality Assurance Association for Higher Education (QAA). Five years after the completion of the IQR, quality assurance standards and processes have become the backbone of the college's work, and we are keen to meet all its requirements.

Meanwhile, Chris Bland, Head of Accreditation and Consulting at the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), stated: "The Quality Assurance Foundation would like to congratulate the Kuwait International Law School on completing its international quality review and renewing its global accreditation in this field. We have greatly enjoyed working with our colleagues in Kuwait, and we look forward to co-operating with them in the future."

Head of the College Professor Dr Muhammad Al-Muqata said: "The Kuwait International College of Law is proud to be the first institution in the Middle East and the first in the Arab

world to obtain the International Institutional Quality Accreditation Certificate and the accreditation certificate for its scientific programs from the British Quality Assurance Association for Higher Education (QAA). Five years after the completion of the IQR, quality assurance standards and processes have become the backbone of the college's work, and we are keen to meet all its requirements."

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Lecture on tobacco and e-smoking risks

Kuwait Society raises cancer awareness

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: The Kuwait Society for Combating Smoking and Cancer organized a lecture entitled, "Tobacco and E-Smoking ... Risks and Harms," as part of the activities of the Ninth Gulf Joint Cancer Awareness Week to highlight smoking as one of the most important risk factors that may lead to cancer, reports Al-Anba daily.

Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Society Dr Khaled Al-Saleh delivered a lecture on combating smoking and cancer.

In the lecture, Al-Saleh pointed out that smoking is a global problem, considering the rising rate of smoking-related death. He said about eight million people die every year due to smoking, while highlighting the damages it causes to one's health -- the most common of which is lung cancer. He affirmed the number of people suffering from the disease increased remarkably, especially after the emergence of electronic smoking, which is being promoted as less dangerous than smoking tobacco.

He revealed the number of smokers in the world has reached 1.3 billion, while the percentage of men who smoke in Kuwait reached 39.2 percent and 3.3 percent for women. He said studies have shown that nicotine, which is present in regular smoking methods, is present in different proportions in electronic smoking, including cigarettes, hookahs and pipes, in addition to emissions. "The harmful effects of burning means the dangers are the same. Studies have proven that those who started smoking at an early age are three times more likely to become adult smokers, and there is no evidence that e-cigarettes are effective in quitting smoking," he added.

He stressed the need to pay attention to issuing laws and regulations restricting smoking, including electronic smoking in all forms, as well as allocating a budget for raising public awareness and the treatment of smokers that match the burdens smoking put on the health system. "Addressing the smoking issue must involve government, civil and private agencies; because it is the duty of everyone to protect our children, our society and our environment from the harms of smoking," he asserted.

He then expressed his gratitude to the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs for its co-operation in ensuring the success of the lecture, which he considers an opportunity to address an important segment of society that does everything necessary to prepare and convey the correct message to society in order to achieve the goal of preserving human health. He added: "Allah has commanded us to protect our health and to stay away from everything that hurts us or makes us sick."



Dr. Khaled Al-Saleh speaking during the lecture.

Kuwait adopts construction modeling for gov't agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development Dr Khaled Mahdi has confirmed the existence of a government trend to model construction projects for government agencies, reports Al-Anba daily.

In a press statement on the sidelines of the opening of the Gulf Conference for Construction Information Modeling and Digital Building, Mahdi emphasized the importance of this trend in modern architecture; such that the building is operated and managed with high efficiency. He said this saves the budget allocated for operation, while extending the lifespan of the building.

He disclosed that based on the studies conducted by the Council, this is the highest level of planning; as this trend saves 30 to 35 percent of marginal workers, which leads to the management of properties, facilities and establishments in the country in a highly efficient manner. The idea of the project revolves around having a life story for each establishment from the moment of construction with an integrated database, he added.

Meanwhile, Conference Organizing Committee Chairperson Dr Manal Al-Adwani thanked the ambassadors, officials and representatives of companies supporting the conference and the accompanying exhibition.

Al-Adwani pointed out that the current uses of building information modeling had a major impact on the development of technology and the construction industry in previous years in several countries such as the United States of America, Britain, Singapore and others; stressing this has become an important part of the strategies of several countries, and that the application of technology benefits all parties involved in projects, including contractors, engineering offices, and government departments.

Government pledges solutions

Al-Hajraf to address Mutlaa City concerns

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: Head of the Mutlaa Residents Committee Mishal Al-Hajri announced the intention of the Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and the Minister of State for Housing Affairs Salem Al-Hajraf to visit Mutlaa City on Saturday, February 10 to review all the obstacles and demands put forward by the residents.

In a press statement issued after his meeting with Minister Al-Hajraf yesterday, Al-Hajri said the minister promised to solve the problem of the mortgage loan installment with the Kuwait Credit Bank for a second fiscal year and to continue disbursing the rent allowance in coordination with the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW), as the Mutlaa City still needs many services.

Al-Hajri expressed his regret that the Kuwait Credit Bank's installment, which is ten percent of the total salary for this month, will be due for some of the pensioners, with approximately 9,200 families in Mutlaa City and 3,500 in South Abdullah Mubarak City.

He explained that this installment will reduce the cost of rent allowance because they live in housing cities, but in reality these housing cities do not enjoy services, and the residents are still living on rent. The reason is that the government was late in completing these projects or services in housing cities such as the Mutlaa City, South Abdullah Mubarak City, and South Khaitan.

The minister promised to solve the problem of low electricity in N1, N2, N3, N4, N5

and N12 suburbs, whose contracts were offered at the beginning of the year 2023 but the signing was delayed until January 2024. Even though the people received permits to build one year ago, electrical supply has not been activated until now, but Minister Al-Hajraf promised to complete the contracts within the next six months. He also promised to coordinate with the Ministry of Public Works to move the temporary sewage station from its current location in Sabah Al-Ahmad City to Mutlaa City.

PAHW had signed a special contract for a number of tanks to transport sanitary tools in order to ensure smooth completion of the transfer of the aforementioned station.

Meanwhile, PAHW reported that it had obtained judicial rulings from the Court of Cassation after it had submitted appeals regarding the lack of eligibility to open a housing application or pay rent allowance to those who own a property, even if it is a vacant land.

In a press statement, PAHW stressed that it is forbidden to receive a housing application or pay a rent allowance to anyone who with real estate ownership, which is can either be a built structure like a house or an apartment, or a vacant land, as long as the conditions stipulated in the housing care regulations are met.

It added that the rulings of the Court of Cassation issued in several appeals in the same regard established the validity of PAHW's opinion and responded to its appeals, which is considered a very important principle for the Court of Cassation.

Mol pledges topnotch service for airport travelers

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8, (KUNA): The Ministry of Interior will facilitate procedures at Kuwait International Airport, providing topnotch services possible for all travelers, said a senior government official on Thursday.

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Saud Youssef Al-Sabah affirmed that all of the ministry's capabilities and services would be dedicated to facilitate travel procedures.

Security and safety of travelers would be of highest priority, added the minister after an inspection tour terminals (T1), (T4), and (T5) as well as other facilities.



KUNA photo Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Youssef Al-Sabah during an inspection tour at Kuwait International Airport.

Mubarakiya markets project modified

Municipal Council approves formation of temporary 'cmte' for disabilities affairs

By Inaas Awadh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: The Municipal Council during its regular session recently headed by Abdullah Al-Mahri, approved the formation of a committee under the title "People with Disabilities Affairs Committee".

The committee consists of five members - Dr. Hassan Kamal, Sharifa Al-Shalfan, Munira Al-Amir, Farah Al-Rumi and Alia Al-Farsi.

The committee will be tasked with cooperating with the relevant authorities regarding the affairs of people with disabilities by holding workshops and creating a road map to facilitate the activation of the Kuwait code for accessibility according to overall design, in addition to discussing other topics referred by the committee.

The Municipal Council agreed to amend the third item regarding the development of

the Mubarakiya markets affiliated with the municipality to allow the museum to be implemented in isolation from the rest of the project components.

It also approved the request of the Ministry of Aqwaq and Islamic Affairs for the allocation of a mosque site of an area of 440 square meters and a parking lot with an area of 770 square meters within the agricultural holding in the Wafra Agricultural Area, Block 14.

The Municipal Council approved the solution to the encroachment on plots 26 and 27 of the spatial plan of Sabah Al-Ahmad Marine City and plot A1, with the necessity of deducting part of the corridor adjacent to plot 25, so that plot 26 will have an area of 1,275 square meters, and plot 25 will have an area of 1,274 square meters, according to the areas contained in the cadastral plan approved by the municipality and according to their legal documents.

February

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Great poet Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain honored for the first time

29th Qurain Cultural Festival to commence under PM's auspices

Many surprises for new and existing clients

Warba Bank launches 2024 salary campaign

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: In light of the continuous developments in banking services, Warba Bank, the leader in smart Islamic banking solutions in Kuwait, is pleased to announce the launch of its new and innovative campaign for salary clients, which promises an exceptional experience that exceeds all expectations.

In this regard, Mr. Abdullah Nasser Al-Shuail - Senior Director of the Branches and Private Banking at Warba Bank - said that the new campaign is different from the campaigns previously launched by the Bank, as it gives the clients many opportunities to win various prizes throughout the year.

Al-Shuail explained that new Priority and Royal segments of clients who transfer their salaries to Warba Bank will be offered to every Kuwaiti client (employee or retiree) during the campaign period with immediate cash prizes by holding an immediate draw. For the Priority segment, whose salaries range from KD1,500 to 2,499, they will receive 2 coupons, and for the Royal segment, for those whose salaries exceed that amount, they will receive 3 electronic coupons.

The value of one coupon will range from KD 50 to 5 thousand, and the prize will be deposited to the client in the form of points in the "Al-Makhba" program in the Warba Bank application immediately. These points are redeemable in cash or can be converted into travel miles on the Al-Waha Club of Kuwait Airways at the rate

of 100 miles for each KD.

On the other hand, Al-Shuail confirmed that the Bank will hold a weekly draw throughout the campaign period, starting from Wednesday 02/07/2024 until Wednesday 12/25/2024. Every new or existing Kuwaiti client who has an active salary account and receives a KD 500 and more monthly salary will be eligible to enter the weekly draws during the campaign period, which will announce (3) winners on a weekly basis, where the first winner will receive a cash prize worth KD1,000, while the second winner will receive 25 grams of gold, and the third winner will receive 35,000 miles from the Oasis Club of the Kuwait Airways.

Regarding the monthly draws, Al-Shuail stated the Bank will hold a monthly draw throughout the campaign period, starting from Wednesday 02/14/2024 until Wednesday 12/25/2024. All Kuwaiti clients who transferred their salaries to Warba Bank, whether new or existing client, will participate in this draw, and the prize for one winner will be a travel package that includes tickets, accommodation, and reservations for special events to

have an exceptional experience. He noted that the monthly draw is also for every new or existing Kuwaiti client who has an active salary account and receives a monthly salary of KD 500 dinars more, is eligible to enter the monthly draws during the campaign period.

Warba Bank spokesman, Abdullah Al-Shuail, pointed out: "We do not just offer promotional campaigns; rather, we offer experiences that go beyond the ordinary. Our new campaign reflects our commitment to our vision of creating unique value that goes beyond traditional banking services, and emphasizes that our customers are at the heart of everything we do."

He added that this campaign truly expresses our values, the trust that we build with our clients, the innovation that we strive to achieve at every step, the performance in which we excel, the cooperation that brings us together with our clients, and the ambition that drives us to always provide the best. He said, "We at Warba Bank promise to always be your partners in the journey of success and achieving dreams."

Warba Bank is one of the banks that has achieved great successes in a short period, as it occupied a leading position in the field of Islamic digital banking services for individuals, and it is one of the largest local banks in the number of shareholders, and these are among the most prominent components that make the bank close to all members of society.

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8, (KUNA): Under auspices of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah the 29th Qurain Cultural Festival will open at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center on Sunday, February 11, and last until February 22.

The opening ceremony will see the honoring of winners of the state incentive and recognition awards for 2023, Assistant Secretary-General of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) Aisha Al-Mahmoud said Wednesday.

"This year's edition of the annual event has a distinctive features as it coincides with NCCAL's golden jubilee," she said in a pre-event press release, noting that the cultural activities of the festival will continue throughout the year.

"Unlike the usual tradition of celebrating an Arab personality, this year's edition chose Dr. Khalifa Al-Woqan - a celebrated Kuwaiti poet and a co-founder of NCCAL, as personality of the festival in recognition of his contributions to the Arab and Kuwaiti cultural movement.

"For the first time, this year's edition is named after the great poet Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain," Al-

Mahmoud noted.

After honoring the state award laureates and honoring the cultural celebrities, the opening ceremony will culminate in a musical-theatrical performance starring maestro Amer Jaafar, director MUSAED AL-Zamel and artist Jassem Al-Nabhan.

The agenda of this year's festival includes nearly 30 activities covering a wide range of types of culture and arts, such as symposia, seminars, lectures, concerts, art exhibitions, interactive shows, cinema, and heritage and book fairs.

A two-day interactive show, themed "Celebration of 50 Years" is scheduled to highlight the achievements of NCCAL over the past five decades, Al-Mahmoud said, noting that the personality of poet Fahad Al-Askar was selected as logo of NCCAL's golden jubilee celebration.

"The festival will see the launching of 'the third art - murals project' aiming to decorate the streets and public facilities with beautiful paintings."

"NCCAL's antiquities sector made great effort to coordinate with government agencies, artists and volunteers for the launching of this project at Al-Masayel area on February 17," Al-Mahmoud disclosed.

The Palestine question will be present at this year's festival with a lecture on "literature of resistance," to be given by Adaniya Shalabi at the Kuwait National Library, she added.



Al-Mahmoud



Al-Shuail



KUNA photo
Kuwait's Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs Sheikh Feras Al-Sabah during a high-level meeting.

Doha declaration discussed

Ministry of Social Affairs eager to meet basic needs of citizens

DOHA, Feb 8, (KUNA): Kuwait's Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs Sheikh Feras Al-Sabah affirmed Wednesday the ministry's eagerness to meet basic needs of citizens by providing aid for the financially-challenged.

Sheikh Feras's remark to KUNA came following a high-level meeting on the declaration approved by the 32nd Arab summit in Saudi Arabia, as part of the High-Level

Arab Multidimensional Social Development Forum in Doha.

The Social Affairs Ministry is one of the most outstanding ministries in Kuwait that plays a great role in social protection, the minister said, adding that business incubators are instrumental in supporting entrepreneurs and small-sized enterprises.

During the two-day meeting, a working paper on implementing the Doha declaration was discussed.

Kuwait's PADA offers services to more than 65,000 disabled people – official

Authority makes significant progress in digital transformation

DOHA, Feb 8, (KUNA): Kuwait's Public Authority for Disability Affairs (PADA) provides services for over 65,000 people with disability, based on the latest statistics in January 2024, said a senior PADA official Thursday.

The PADA's services are offered to people with physical, visual, developmental, psychological, and educational disabilities as part of international, Arab and Gulf obligations, said Supervisor of the PADA's Technical Office in the Administration, Zainab Al-Enezi, in a statement to KUNA.

The official made the remark on the sidelines of the two-day Arab High-Level Forum for Multidimensional Social Development in Qatar.

Creating more opportunities in both public and private sectors for people with disabilities is a real investment that comes within Kuwait's 2035 vision, in cooperation with the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, Kuwait Municipality, and Ministry of Public



KUNA photo
Zainab Al-Anazi, Career follow-up supervisor at the Public Authority for Disability Affairs.

Works, she added.

Al-Enezi noted the PADA's portal aims at meeting international standards for cybersecurity and becoming a digitalized platform, adding that the digitization of PADA is a step forward for people with disabilities in order to facilitate their use of the government mobile application Sahel.

Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Child Affairs Dr. Feras Al-Sabah attended the two-day Arab High-Level Forum for Multidimensional Social Development.

Kuwait's envoy discusses upgrading cultural coop with Tunisian minister

TUNIS, Feb 8, (KUNA): Kuwait's Ambassador to Tunisia Mansour Al-Omar discussed on Wednesday with Tunisia's Minister of Culture Hayet Guettat upgrading cultural cooperation, including the possibility of holding a Kuwaiti cultural week in the North African country.

The meeting tackled expanding cooperation in maintaining and preserving heritage, holding music and puppets performances, and organization of cultural and artistic events, the Tunisian Ministry of Cultural unveiled in a press statement.

It added that the Kuwait envoy Al-Omar and Minister Guettat mulled a number of plans and proposal to materialize this goal, including the organization of a Kuwaiti cultural week in Tunisia, exchanging expertise in restoring historical manu-

scripts, and signing a cooperation agreement between Tunisia's National Heritage Institute (INP) and Kuwait's Dar al-Islamiyyah.

They discussed cooperation for the assessment of the intangible

heritage as a prelude to registering it with the UNESCO and Tunisia's participation in "the Kuwait, Capital of the Arab Cultural 2025" festival.

They touched upon providing support to the Tunisian project to establish an international center for calligraphy in the capital Tunis.



Al-Omar

Kuwait preps

Continued from Page 1

Furthermore, Al-Shammari emphasized that the willingness of countries exporting domestic workers to engage in bilateral agreements with Kuwait hinges on the effective implementation of Law No. 68/2015 and its executive regulations.

These legal frameworks, which introduce new rights for domestic workers, have gained widespread acceptance among stakeholders in the recruitment sector and are expected to bolster Kuwait's reputation as a destination for workers seeking employment opportunities.

MoH unveils

Continued from Page 1

Conference titled "The Latest Developments in the field of Diagnostic Radiology", Minister Al-Awadhi said the government's work program includes a plan to develop the primary health care sector, which will take place under the supervision of the Assistant Undersecretary for Healthcare Affairs Dr. Nadia Al-Jam'iyah.

He revealed that the program also includes opening new centers, extending the working hours, training and paying attention to national cadres, and strengthening the infrastructure.

Minister Al-Awadhi revealed the receipt of 79 ambulances, which will enter into service soon.

He affirmed the keenness to pay attention to digitization, archive files, and activate digital programs as a comprehensive plan for the ministry.

In his speech during the opening of the conference, Dr. Al-Awadhi said the future vision for the healthcare services in the field of diagnostic radiology in Kuwait will extend to include the roles and responsibilities of providers, and confront challenges related to the safety and rights of patients.

He highlighted the need to take advantage of the latest technologies and promising opportunities, and harness them to serve patients.

The minister stressed the importance of continuing to work as a single team to meet the desired professional and humanitarian responsibilities.

He explained that the conference will hold discussions on many challenges, including artificial intelligence (AI), with the aim of improving health services to ensure accuracy in diagnosis and treatment, specifically for cancer and cardiovascular patients.

Scientific conferences serve as an opportunity to exchange future visions for enhancing scientific and professional cooperation between specialists in this

field. The annual diagnostic radiology conference reflects the Ministry of Health's keenness and constant commitment to keep pace with the latest technologies and scientific developments in this specialty.

There is a clear global interest in the latest and most advanced technologies in the field of diagnostic radiology. The minister expressed his great pride in the contribution of national cadres in many international scientific researches in the field of diagnostic radiology, which were published in many famous international journals.

Meanwhile, the President of the conference and Head of the Radiology Department at the Amiri Hospital Dr. Asma Al-Failakawi said in a similar speech that the conference will host an elite group of international experts and consultants in the field of diagnostic radiology, as well as national expertise and competencies to raise the level of health services and efficiency of medical personnel.

She explained that the conference activities will continue for three days under the patronage of the Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi and under the supervision of the Chairman of the Radiology Departments Council Dr. Buthaina Al-Kandari.

The conference follows the continuing medical education program and will give the participating doctors 19 points from the Kuwait Center for Medical Specialties (KIMS).

It will hold discussions on many topics about diagnosing diseases related to chest, heart and digestive system. This will happen by organizing six workshops and many interactive lectures, which began yesterday and will continue until the end of the conference on Saturday.

The lectures and workshops include a workshop on breast X-rays and two cerebral vascular ultrasound workshops for children and adults, as well as workshops for radiology technicians on the latest research and developments in the fields of radiology, in addition to a lecture on artificial intelligence and how to use it in the field of radiology.

Amir expresses

Continued from Page 1

expressing tremendous appreciation for being honored with the Order of Al-Said, which reflected sentiments of brotherhood and solidarity.

His Highness the Amir also said he was elated to have joined Sultan Haitham in the opening of Al-Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Company, which embodies a quantum leap in Kuwait-Omani economic partnership.

His Highness hoped that the vital joint project would be beneficial for both countries and add to their economic development.

Ministry to expand scope of diagnostic and therapeutic services

Ministry of Health's Kalandar inaugurates 26th Obstetrics & Gynecology Conference

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: The Assistant Undersecretary for External Services Affairs at the Ministry of Health Dr. Hisham Kalandar, on behalf of the Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi, inaugurated the 26th Obstetrics and Gynecology Conference, which is organized by the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department of Jahra Hospital.

Dr. Hisham Kalandar explained that the ministry is working to expand the scope of diagnostic and therapeutic services in the field of obstetrics and gynecology in accordance with the latest protocols in force globally, with a focus on providing advanced care.

It aims to apply the latest technologies to improve services and achieve progress in the field of women's health, and increase the number of maternal and child health clinics, which reflects the dedication to meet the needs of society in a comprehensive and effective manner.

The obstetrics and gynecology departments in Kuwait play a vital and important role, including the maternity department of Jahra Hospital, which conducted 150 successful cases using 3D technology in gynecological laparoscopy that had contributed to great positive results for patients.

Meanwhile, Head of the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department at Jahra Hospital and the Conference President Dr. Hanan Al-Husseini said, "The conference is considered the largest scientific training forum in the field of obstetrics and gynecology. Its topics are consistent with the ministry's vision and its keenness to keep pace with the latest global

MEW plans to build 14 substations in Khaitan Residential Project area

By Mohammed Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: According to informed sources in the Distribution Networks Sector of the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, there is a plan to establish and operate 14 secondary transfer stations in Khaitan Residential Project in 2024. A total of 22 stations were installed during the past year.

The last date for establishing the stations in the area is December 24, 2024. The secondary substations will be responsible for transferring electricity from the main substations to the residential plots in the area.

development, and support the capabilities of the health system to meet the goals and objectives consistent with the global goals and objectives for sustainable development and the future Kuwait vision 2035."

She explained that the conference sheds light on many important topics, especially those related to obstetrics and gynecology. It focuses on the latest scientific developments in these vital fields, which will have a positive impact on realizing more achievements, and positive indicators in everything related to obstetrics and gynecology.

The three-day conference addresses precise topics centered around encouraging scientific research and enhancing communication and knowledge exchange between participating doctors and researchers. It represents a turning point in the world of health care.

Experts are present at the conference to share their experiences and research vital top-

The main substations in the area have been established. Coordination is underway to complete all electricity and water facilities in the area including the supply and extension of ground cables to connect the main substations in the area to the electrical network through a tender to supply and extend ground cables in various areas (the ninth stage).

The sources affirmed the keenness of the ministry to finish establishing all electricity and water facilities in the area, adding that the ministry makes announcements at various intervals that it will receive requests for power connection from the people of the area as soon as the electrical infrastructure in each residential plot is completed.

ics about the future of maternity and obstetrics, the problems of weak fertility in men and women, the future of embryology and genetics, the future of robotic surgeries, artificial intelligence in fetal ultrasounds, and the latest technologies and discoveries in multiple fields of gynecology.

The conference will include training workshops on advanced detailed ultrasound in obstetrics and gynecology, male surgeries, fertility operations, and hysteroscopy. It will also focus on the legal and religious perspective of AI applications in medicine particularly in the field of obstetrics and gynecology.

A total of 1,672 natural births and 828 emergency Cesarean deliveries (C-sections) were performed in the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department of Jahra Hospital during the year 2023, which demonstrates the prominent interest in caring for mothers and children.

World News Roundup

Europe

Volcano erupts in Iceland for 3rd time: A volcano in southwestern Iceland erupted for the third time since December on Thursday, sending jets of lava into the sky and triggering the evacuation of the Blue Lagoon spa, one of the island nation's biggest tourist attractions.

The eruption began at about 0600 GMT (1 am EST) along a three-kilometer (nearly two-mile) fissure northeast of Mount Sundhnukur, the Icelandic Meteorological Office said. The event is taking place about four kilometers (2½ miles) north-east of Grindavik, a coastal town of 3,800 people that was evacuated before a previous eruption on Dec. 18.

The Icelandic Meteorological Office said that lava was flowing to the west and there was no immediate threat to Grindavik, or to a major power plant in the area. Civil defense officials said that no one was believed to be in the town at the time of the eruption, Icelandic national broadcaster RUV reported.

"They weren't meant to be, and we don't know about any," **Vióir Reynisson**, the head of Iceland's Civil Defense, told Icelandic national broadcaster RUV.

The nearby Blue Lagoon thermal spa was closed when the eruption began and all the guests were safely evacuated, RUV said. The Icelandic Met Office said earlier this week warned of a possible eruption after monitoring a buildup of subsurface magma for the past three weeks. (AP)



Reynisson

Russian politician rejected as 'candidate': Antiwar politician Boris Nadezhdin was rejected Thursday as a candidate in next month's presidential balloting by Russian election authorities, a strong signal from the Kremlin that it would tolerate no public opposition to the invasion of Ukraine.

The move by the Central Election Commission provides an even smoother path for President Vladimir Putin to win a fifth term in power. He faces only token opposition from pro-Kremlin candidates in the March 15-17 vote and is all but certain to win, given his tight control of Russia's political system.

Nadezhdin, a local legislator in a town near Moscow, had needed to gather at least 100,000 signatures of supporters - a requirement that applies to candidates of political parties that are not represented in the Russian parliament.

The Central Election Commission declared that more than 9,000 signatures submitted by Nadezhdin's campaign were invalid, which was enough to disqualify him. (AP)

Putin, Zelenskyy congratulate Aliyev: The Ukrainian and Russian presidents congratulated Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev after his expected landslide win as preliminary results released Thursday indicated his resounding victory in the presidential election held the day before.

Aliyev had called an early vote just months after his forces swiftly reclaimed the Karabakh region from ethnic Armenian separatists who had controlled it for three decades. He is now heading into another, seven-year term in office.

Russian President Vladimir Putin called Aliyev and the two spoke about continuing their "strategic partnerships," according to the Azeri leader's press service.

Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy posted his congratulations on X, formerly known as Twitter, saying that he appreciated Azerbaijan's humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and valued the "mutual support for our states' sovereignty and territorial integrity."

With just over 93% of the ballots counted, Aliyev secured more than 92% of the votes, the head of the Central Election Commission, Mazahir Panahov, said early Thursday. His three main challengers trailed far behind and conceded the race, congratulating Aliyev, the Interfax Azerbaijan news agency reported. (AP)

Prince William returns to public duties: Prince William returned to royal duties Wednesday for the first time since his father, King Charles III, announced his cancer diagnosis and his wife, Kate, was hospitalized for abdominal surgery.

Speaking about his families' health scares in public for the first time, the 41-year-old heir to the throne thanked the public for their "kind messages of support" at a charity gala dinner. Earlier in the day, he performed an investiture ceremony at Windsor Castle.

"I'd like to take this opportunity to say thank you for the kind messages of support for Catherine and for my father, especially in recent days," William told the gala dinner for London's Air Ambulance Charity. "It means a great deal to us all."

"It's fair to say the past few weeks have had a rather medical focus, so I thought I'd come to an air ambulance function to get away from it all," he added jokingly. (AP)

Babis loses final appeal: Former Czech populist Prime Minister Andrej Babis lost his final appeal in Slovakia Wednesday in a case concerning allegations that he collaborated with communist-era secret police in what was then Czechoslovakia.

Babis, who was born in Slovakia, was suing the Institute for National Memory, which holds parts of his secret police files following the division of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993.

In a decision on Feb. 1 but only published Wednesday, Slovakia's Constitutional Court, the highest court in the land, upheld the rulings by lower courts dismissing the case.

Some of the files were destroyed, but the institute said those that still exist contain evidence that Babis was an agent under the code name "Bures" from 1982. Babis has vehemently denied that.

The regional court in the capital, Bratislava, originally rejected the lawsuit in 2018, but the Constitutional Court ordered a retrial, saying the institute could not be sued and the respondent should be the Slovak Interior Ministry. (AP)

EU launches legal action against Hungary: The European Union on Wednesday launched legal action against Hungary's right-wing government over a new law that allows authorities to investigate and prosecute people accused of undermining the country's sovereignty.

The "sovereignty protection act" took effect in December. It created a government authority with the power to gather information on any groups or individuals that benefit from foreign funding and influence public debate. Hungary's secret services can assist in the authority's investigations.

The law allows prison terms of up to three years for anyone convicted of violating it. Opponents compare the act to Russia's "foreign agent" law. They say its broad language can be used to arbitrarily target government critics. (AP)

Thousands rally in Slovakia: Thousands rallied in front of Slovakia's Parliament on Wednesday to condemn a plan by the new government of populist Prime Minister Robert Fico to eliminate the office of the special prosecutor dealing with major crime and corruption.

The rally took place as lawmakers concluded a debate over that and other proposed changes to the penal code. The ruling coalition, which has a majority in Parliament, postponed the final vote until Thursday.

A number of people linked to the prime minister's party face prosecution in corruption scandals. European Union institutions have questioned the planned changes, which also include reducing punishments for corruption and a significant shortening of the statute of limitations. (AP)

NATO allies warn Hungary: US national security adviser Jake Sullivan said that he and his NATO counterparts cautioned Hungary on Wednesday against further delaying Sweden's membership in the military alliance, and he warned that patience in Washington has its limits.

Lawmakers from the party of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán boycotted an emergency session of parliament on Monday where a vote was scheduled to place Sweden's bid to join NATO on the legislative agenda, adding to 18 months of delays that have angered Hungary's allies.

The governing Fidesz party, which holds an absolute majority in Hungary's parliament, has stalled Sweden's bid since July 2022, alleging that Swedish politicians have told "blatant lies" about the state of Hungarian democracy. The party insists that Sweden's prime minister must come to Hungary first. (AP)



The US Capitol is seen at sunrise on Feb 7, in Washington. A Senate deal on border enforcement measures and Ukraine aid has suffered swift and total collapse. Republicans withdrew support despite President Joe Biden urging Congress to 'show some spine' and stand up to Donald Trump. But Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell says that a deal to pair border policy changes with \$60 billion in wartime aid for Ukraine is dead. (AP)

Politics

Haley hunts for California votes

Williamson suspends presidential campaign

WASHINGTON, Feb. 8, (AP) - Self-help author and spiritual guru Marianne Williamson on Wednesday announced the end of her long-shot Democratic challenge to US President Joe Biden.

The 71-year-old onetime spiritual adviser to Oprah Winfrey contemplated suspending her campaign last month after winning just 5,000 votes in New Hampshire's primary, writing that she "had to decide whether now is the time for a dignified exit or continue on our campaign journey."

Williamson ultimately opted to continue on for two more primaries, but won just 2% of the vote in South Carolina and about 3% in Nevada.

Prepared

"I hope future candidates will take what works for them, drinking from the well of information we prepared," Williamson wrote in announcing the end of her bid. "My team and I brought to the table some great ideas, and I will take pleasure when I see them live on in campaigns and candidates yet to be created."

Minnesota Rep. Dean Phillips is the last nationally known Democrat still running against Biden, who has scored blowout victories in South Carolina and Nevada and easily won in New Hampshire - despite not being on the ballot - after his allies mounted a write-in campaign.

Biden is now more firmly in command of the Democratic primary. That's little surprise given that he's a sitting president, but it also defies years of low job approval ratings for Biden and polls showing that most Americans - even a majority of Democrats - don't want him to run again.

Williamson first ran for president in 2020 and made national headlines by calling for a "moral uprising" against then-President Donald Trump while proposing the creation of the Department of Peace.

She also argued that the federal government should pay large financial reparations to Black Americans as atonement for centuries of slavery and discrimination.

Her second White House bid featured the same nontraditional campaigning style and many of the same policy proposals. But she struggled to raise money and was plagued by staff departures from her bid's earliest stages.

She tweaked Biden, an avid Am-

and as vice president. Sensitive records were found at his Delaware home and at a private office that he used in between his service in the Obama administration and becoming president.

The resolution of the investigation arrives in a pivotal year for the president as he pursues reelection in a deeply polarized political climate. Though the probe's outcome is expected to lift a legal cloud over Biden, criticism of his handling of classified records could blunt his ability to attack Donald Trump - his presumptive opponent in November - over a pending indictment charging the former president with hoarding top-secret files at his Mar-a-Lago estate and obstructing FBI efforts to get them back.

Trump and other Republicans are likely to challenge the legitimacy of the investigation by noting that it was launched by the Biden Justice Department.

Trump and other Republicans are likely to challenge the legitimacy of the investigation by noting that it was launched by the Biden Justice Department.

ald Trump and again sought to tamp down any talk that she might leave the race.

"I'm not going anywhere. I'm in this for the long haul," Haley said to cheers during an indoor rally in Los Angeles' historic Hollywood neighborhood, where she did not mention the embarrassing Nevada outcome.

With mail voting underway in California, supporters who turned out on a rainy night were eager for Haley to continue her one-on-one rivalry with Trump and shrugged off the Nevada setback as insignificant and soon to be forgotten.

"I hope she fights," said Democratic voter **Steven Whiddon**, who works in film and TV production. Though he can't vote in the state GOP primary, which is open only to registered Republican voters, he's backing Haley because "she's sane, she's practical."

The Nevada vote was "completely rigged by Trump supporters," he said. Haley "didn't lose a thing."

Also: After a symbolic snub in Nevada's primary, **Nikki Haley**'s presidential campaign headed to California, where she faces another long-shot bid against former President Don-

ald Trump and again sought to tamp down any talk that she might leave the race.

reportedly negotiating to plead guilty to perjury in connection with his testimony in the case.

Judge **Arthur Engoron** had asked state

'No information to share': Lawyers in Donald Trump's civil fraud trial told the judge Wednesday they had no information to share regarding a key witness



David Shreeve, co-founder and Director of The Conservation Foundation and an Environmental Adviser to the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, (right), is made a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) by Britain's Prince William, the Prince of Wales, at Windsor Castle, Windsor, England on Feb 7. William returned to royal duties on Wednesday for the first time since his father, King Charles III, announced his cancer diagnosis and his wife, Kate, was hospitalized for abdominal surgery. (AP)



Stollsteimer



Engoron

America

Californians recount mudslides: Jesus Barron answered his wife's panicked phone call warning him that a mudslide was smashing into their bedroom in the hills of eastern Los Angeles County. Then, the line went dead.

"She called me and told me the mountain was coming down," he recalled Wednesday. "I thought the worst."

Wendy Barron escaped their Hacienda Heights home during Tuesday's historic downpours in Southern California, but it was seriously damaged when mud flowed down the hillside and blasted through the two retaining walls the family built when they moved in seven years ago.

The storm fueled by the second of back-to-back atmospheric rivers to hit California in days came ashore last weekend in the state's north before it moved down the coast and parked itself over the south for days, turning roads into rivers, causing hundreds of landslides and killing at least nine people. (AP)

6 missing after fire, shooting hurt 2: At least six people were unaccounted for following a fire at a home that started after two police officers were called there and wounded by gunfire Wednesday, authorities said.

"Our fear is there may be multiple people inside that home who have died," Delaware County District Attorney **Jack Stollsteimer** said. "We are hopeful that that is not true."

Officers responded to the house in East Lansdowne around 3:45 p.m. after a 911 call reporting that an 11-year-old girl had been shot, Stollsteimer said.

They immediately came under fire. One officer was shot in the arm and the other in the leg, officials said. They were both described by Stollsteimer as male, veteran officers. One works for the East Lansdowne department, and the other for neighboring Lansdowne.

Officers from Upper Darby saved their lives by dragging them out of danger, he added, and "we expect them to be perfectly fine." (AP)



US President Joe Biden hugs Kathy Lebel, co-owner of Schemengees Bar and Grille, one of the sites of last week's mass shooting on Nov 3, 2023, in Lewiston, Maine. A special commission organized to investigate the response to the Lewiston, Maine, mass shooting last year was set to hear testimony from more police on Feb 8. (AP)

lawyers and defense counsel to provide him with letters by Wednesday "detailing anything you know" about the situation involving witness and co-defendant Allen Weisselberg, the former longtime chief financial officer at Trump's company, the Trump Organization.

The New York Times reported last week that Weisselberg was in negotiations with the Manhattan district attorney's office to plead guilty to perjury and "admit that he lied on the witness stand" when he testified at the civil fraud trial in October. The Times cited "people with knowledge of the matter." (AP)

Man guilty in Jan 6 insurrection: A Montana appliance store owner and supporter of former president Donald Trump was convicted Wednesday for his role in the Jan 6, 2021, breach of the US Capitol that interrupted certifying the 2020 Electoral College vote. The US Attorney's Office in Montana announced the verdict.

Henry Phillip Muntzer of Dillon was arrested based on social media posts and videos taken inside the Capitol, according to court records. Muntzer, 55, was found guilty of obstructing an official proceeding and civil disorder, both felonies, following a bench trial before US District Court Judge Jia M. Cobb. Muntzer was also found guilty of four misdemeanor charges. Sentencing is set for June 20. (AP)

Lat/Am

Martinelli gets asylum

Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry urges calm

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Feb 8, (AP): Haitian Prime Minister **Ariel Henry** urged calm in a public address early Thursday following three days of violent protests that have paralyzed the country demanding his resignation.

The brief speech did little to appease thousands of people angry and frustrated over unrelenting gang violence, deepening poverty and no general elections in sight.

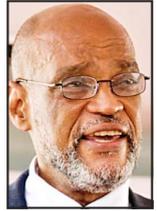
"I think the time has arrived for all to put our heads together to save Haiti, to do things another way in our country," Henry said without offering specifics.

He urged Haitians not to look at the government or at Haiti's National Police as their adversaries. Those who choose violence, destruction and killing people to take power are "not working in the interests of the Haitian people," he said.

His comments come as thousands of Haitians gathered daily this week in cities and towns across the country to demand that Henry step down, saying they will keep protesting until he leaves.

Haiti's legislature is currently empty, after the terms of its last 10 senators expired in January 2023. The country failed to hold planned elections in 2019 and 2023, and Henry assumed power with the support of the international community following the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse.

On Wednesday, police killed five armed environmental protection agents in the capital of Port-au-Prince in a shooting some worry could worsen Haiti's crisis.



Henry

'Nullify congressional election results': As El Salvador's electoral body begins a vote-by-vote count of last week's election results, the political opposition warned Wednesday they could ask to nullify results of the legislative elections due to irregularities.

No one questions the victory of highly popular President Nayib Bukele, who won re-election with 83% of the votes, leading by a massive margin with 70% of the votes counted. Attention has been focused, instead, on the fight for the 60 seats in dispute in Congress.

Control of Congress is crucial for Bukele. He hopes to continue to waive fundamental constitutional rights in his war against El Salvador's gangs, which has handed him his soaring popularity, and carry out other parts of his agenda.

Bukele already declared his Nuevas Ideas party had won 58 of the 60 congressional seats following the election Sunday night, despite just a tiny fraction of the count being made public.

Now, the vote count has become a subject of scrutiny after a number of irregularities and glitches resulted in the collapse of the system transmitting results. Because of the chaos, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal called for a manual recount of the legislative election votes and part of the presidential votes.

'Piñera drowned after copter crash': Chilean prosecutors on Wednesday released more details about the death of former president Sebastian Piñera, saying he drowned after the helicopter he was piloting crashed into a lake.

Piñera, 74, died on Tuesday after a flight over Lake Ranco, more than 560 miles (900 kilometers) south of Santiago. The crash remains under investigation, but bad weather conditions were reported in the area.

As more details of his death were released, tributes hailing him as a champion of democracy continued to pour in.

On Tuesday night, the former president's body was taken to Valdivia for an autopsy. On Wednesday morning, Chilean President Gabriel Boric received Piñera's body at Santiago airport, accompanied by his widow, Cecilia Morel, and other relatives.

The public can start paying their last respects to Piñera on Wednesday night, with a state funeral to be held on Friday.

Piñera was an experienced helicopter pilot, former Defense Minister Alberto Espina said Tuesday night, and was flying the aircraft in which three other people were also traveling. Of the four occupants, the other three passengers survived the crash.

Martinelli receives political asylum: Panama's former President Ricardo Martinelli has received political asylum from Nicaragua days after Panama's Supreme Court denied his appeal over a money laundering conviction that carried a 10-year sentence.

Martinelli's attorney Shirley Castañeda said outside the Nicaraguan embassy Wednesday that "his political asylum had already been granted." Asked why Martinelli had requested asylum, she said "because his life was in danger."

Nicaragua's Foreign Affairs Ministry confirmed that it granted Martinelli asylum in a statement Wednesday. It said Martinelli requested asylum on the basis of political persecution and imminent risk to his life. It called on Panama's government to allow his prompt exit to Nicaragua, to which Panama's Foreign Affairs Ministry acknowledged that it had received the advisory from Nicaragua.

Martinelli, a 71-year-old businessman and supermarket magnate who governed Panama from 2009 to 2014, wrote in a letter released and confirmed as authentic by his team that politically motivated prosecutions had forced him to seek Nicaraguan asylum.

Asylum was necessary to "protect myself from the ongoing lack of legal protection, the denial of justice and my personal safety," Martinelli wrote.

Ex-head of Honduras police pleads guilty: For years, Juan Carlos Bonilla, better known as "El Tigre," was a feared figure in Honduras. His roots were in the military and he brought that bearing to the National Police that he ultimately led.

But Bonilla's tenure was plagued by allegations of human rights violations, including running death squad s and being a hired killer for drug traffickers. On Tuesday, nearly two years after he was extradited to the United States, he pleaded guilty to drug trafficking in a federal court in New York.

By pleading guilty to a single drug trafficking charge, Bonilla avoided a trial scheduled to begin Monday and likely a much longer sentence. His plea also dramatically darkened the landscape for former president Juan Orlando Hernández, who had been his co-defendant.

US District Judge Kevin Castel confirmed Wednesday that Hernández's trial would begin Monday.



A South Korean navy's floating base is seen near Yeonpyeong island, South Korea on Feb 7. South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol reiterated that the country would not seek its own nuclear deterrent in the face of threats from nuclear-armed North Korea as he vowed further efforts to sharpen nuclear deterrence strategies with ally United States. Inset: In this photo provided by the North Korean government, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un inspects an industrial factory in Kimhwa county, North Korea, on Wednesday. (AP)



Asia

Fukushima N-plant leaked radioactive water

'Seoul will not seek its own nuclear deterrent'

SEOUL, South Korea, Feb 8, (Agencies): South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol reiterated that the country would not seek its own nuclear deterrent in the face of threats from nuclear-armed North Korea as he vowed further efforts to sharpen nuclear deterrence strategies with ally United States.

In a pre-recorded interview with KBS television that aired Wednesday night, Yoon insisted that South Korea clearly has the technology to quickly acquire nuclear weapons capabilities if it ever decides to do so. But taking that step isn't a realistic option as it would ruin a trade-dependent economy, he said.

Develop

"If we develop nuclear weapons, we will receive various economic sanctions like North Korea does now, and our economy will be dealt a serious blow," Yoon said, while emphasizing Seoul's commitment to the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

Yoon, a conservative who took office in 2022, has made similar comments before as he pushed for stronger reassurances from Washington that it would swiftly and decisively use its nuclear capabilities to defend its ally in the event of a North Korean nuclear attack.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula are at their highest point in years, as North Korean leader Kim Jong Un continues to accelerate his country's weapons tests while issuing provocative threats of nuclear conflict with the South.

South Korea has responded by expanding its combined military exercises with the United States and Japan, and the countries have also been upgrading their nuclear deterrence strategies built around strategic US military assets.

In a fiery speech at North Korea's rubber-stamp parliament last month, Kim declared that the North was abandoning its long-standing objective of reconciliation with the war-divided South and ordered the rewriting of the North Korean constitution to define the South as its most hostile foreign adversary.

Pyongyang's rubber-stamp parliament during a meeting on Wednesday formally abolished laws on economic cooperation with South Korea, according to the North's Korean Central News Agency on Thursday.

Some experts say Kim is seeking to drive up pressure in an election year in South Korea and the United States.

Indonesian presidential hopefuls trying social media, K-pop to win young voters

JAKARTA, Indonesia, Feb 8, (AP): Seventeen-year-old Naima Khairiya Ismah started being bombarded by social media posts from candidates for Indonesia's presidential election on before she'd even given voting any thought.

As three candidates vie to replace popular but term-limited President Joko Widodo in an election later this month, they've been aggressively seeking millennials and Gen Z voters. People between the minimum voting age of 17 and the age of 43 make up about 55% of the country's 205 million eligible voters.

Candidates are reaching out through the apps young voters use, the K-pop music many love, and even video gaming events.

"As young people, we can't meet the candidates in person," said first-time voter Ismah, chatting after class outside her Jakarta high school. "The easiest way to know them is through social media platforms, which is very effective."

The candidates - former defense minister Prabowo Subianto, 72; governing party candidate Ganjar Pranowo, 55; and former Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan, 54 - are all from Indonesia's conservative,

male-dominated political scene. But their campaigns have been stressing issues that matter to young people: job opportunities, climate change and institutional corruption.

Also:

SYDNEY: Papua New Guinea Prime Minister **James Marape** on Thursday became the first Pacific leader to address Australia's parliament, vowing "nothing will come in between our two countries."

The nations announced that **Australia** will spend AU \$100 million (US \$65.3 million) on Papua New Guinea's internal security, including the development of a police recruiting and investigation training facility and a police barracks.

The speech, Marape's meeting with Australian counterpart, **Anthony Albanese**, and the neighbors' release of details of a security pact signed in December, come as Pacific nations deal with **China's** growing ambitions.

Resource-rich Papua New Guinea has rebuffed overtures from China, which struck a security pact with **Solomon Islands** in 2022 that caused worry among some in the region.

Also:

KUALA LUMPUR: The Thai government and separatists in south Thailand have agreed in Kuala Lumpur on a new peace roadmap, as stated by the Malaysian facilitator of peace talks.

During a press conference in Kuala Lumpur late Wednesday, Malaysian facilitator **Zulkifli Zainal Abidin** said that the two sides had agreed "in principle" to a joint comprehensive peace plan.

He added that both sides had shown during the talks firm commitment to putting the agreed peace plan in place, leading up to a permanent peace agreement to serve the population of Muslim-dominated southern provinces in the country.

Zainal Abidin underlined that if the two sides' negotiating teams agreed, the plan would be signed as soon as possible.

TOKYO: Highly radioactive water leaked from a treatment machine at the tsunami-hit Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, but no one was injured and radiation monitoring shows no impact to the outside environment, the utility operator said Thursday.

A plant worker found the leak Wednesday morning during valve checks at a SARRY treatment machine designed to mainly remove cesium and strontium from the contaminated water, the Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings said. The machine has been idled for maintenance work.

An estimated 5.5 metric tons (6 tons) of radioactive water - enough to fill two ordinary backyard swimming pools - leaked out through an air vent, leaving a pool of water on an iron plate outside and seeping into the soil around it, TEPCO said, but no radioactive water escaped the compound.



Thousands who are fleeing the ongoing conflict between government forces and M-23 rebels reach the entrance the Democratic Republic of Congo eastern city of Goma on Feb 7. One of eastern Congo's most active rebel groups is attacking a community considered the last line of defense before the region's largest city of Goma, fleeing residents said Wednesday, even as the rebels claimed they had no intention to seize it again. (AP)



Dagalo



Griffiths

Africa

'Sudan generals agreed to talk': A top UN official said Wednesday that the two generals in Sudan whose forces have been at war for the last 10 months assured him recently that they would attend a meeting in Switzerland to discuss humanitarian issues and Sudan's beleaguered civilians.

"I'm still waiting to see when that happens," **Martin Griffiths**, the UN undersecretary for humanitarian affairs, told reporters in Geneva during an appeal for more aid funding to help Sudan's people.

Sudan slipped into chaos in April after tensions between military chief Gen Abdel-Fattah Burhan and Gen **Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo**, commander of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, exploded into open fighting in the capital, Khartoum, and beyond. Fighting has since left at least 12,000 people dead and sent millions fleeing their homes both within Sudan and abroad.

Meanwhile, the United Nations announced on Wednesday launching the humanitarian response plan and refugee support plan, which provides USD 2.7 billion to aid more than 17.4 million people in Sudan. The plan aims to support 2.7 million refugees by providing shelters in neighboring countries, as well as healthcare and education. (Agencies)

Congo residents scatter: One of eastern Congo's most active rebel groups is attacking a community considered the last line of defense before the region's largest city of Goma, fleeing residents said Wednesday, even as the rebels claimed they had no intention to seize it again.

The M23 rebels in a statement, however, warned that "attacks targeting our forces and/or indiscriminate shelling of civilian population will be dealt with at their source." The group rose to prominence a decade ago by seizing Goma, an important base for Congolese forces and for humanitarian workers.

The M23, with alleged ties to Rwanda, detonated explosives in North Kivu's Sake city 27 kilometers (16 miles) from Goma, residents said as they hurried from fighting between the rebels and security forces.

"Bombs are being dropped in the city," said a resident, Alain Bauma. "We are fleeing but we don't know where we are going to live."

Carrying bedrolls, babies and other be-

longings, hundreds of people marched in the heat along a narrow roadway clogged with banged-up trucks and vans, in flight once again from the unrest that has gripped eastern Congo for decades.

An aid worker in Sake, Marc Sere, said

another aid worker was killed in Wednesday's bombing and called for urgent support.

"Humanitarians had to stop actions in this city for security reasons because bombs were falling at any time," Sere said.



A giant wood dragon is displayed at a mall at Binondo district, said to be the oldest Chinatown in the world, in Manila, Philippines on Feb 6. Crowds are flocking to Manila's Chinatown to usher in the Year of the Wood Dragon and experience lively traditional dances on lantern-lit streets with food, lucky charms for good fortune. (AP)

At least 70% of Sake residents have fled to Goma as rebels continue to advance, said civil society leader Leopold Muissha, who reported four deaths and 25 people injured in recent days. (AP)

Man escapes from police custody: A man awaiting extradition on a Massachusetts warrant alleging he killed his girlfriend and left her body in a car at a Boston airport escaped from police custody in Kenya, police said Thursday.

Kevin Adam Kinyanjui Kangethe slipped out of the police station and jumped into a privately owned minivan, Nairobi police chief Adamson Bungei said. A fresh search for him began immediately.

Four police officers who were on duty at the station are in custody and have recorded statements, according to a police report seen by The Associated Press.

The officers said that around 4 pm on Wednesday, a man named John Maina Ndegwa introduced himself to the officers as Kangethe's lawyer and said he wanted to speak with his client.

"The officers agreed to his request and removed the prisoner from the cells and took him to (an) office ... leaving them there. After a short while the prisoner escaped by running away and left the (lawyer) behind," the report said.

Officers pursued Kangethe but did not catch him, the police report said, adding that Ndegwa was arrested. (AP)

oil price up

The price of Kuwaiti crude oil rose by 49 cents on Wednesday to reach USD 78.74 per barrel, compared to USD 78.25 a day earlier, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Thursday.

In international markets, Brent crude oil went up by 63 cents to USD 79.21 per barrel, while West Texas Intermediate rose by 55 cents to reach USD 73.86. (KUNA)

'LNG accounts 43% of global energy trade'

Liquefied natural gas (LNG) makes up some 43 percent of global energy trade operations, the chief of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Jamal Al-Loughani said on Wednesday, expecting the figure to possibly surpass natural gas shares.

The increase in LNG trade is attributed to soaring demand, which hit an "unprecedented record" of 405 million tons last year, he told a gathering of LNG experts via video link a day earlier, underlining that a continued rise in demand would

pave the way for more projects in the field. He mentioned that a growing number of countries should witness marquee LNG projects this year, citing the US, Russia and Mexico as cases in point, which would boost global LNG capacity by some 21 million tons, he added.

Arab countries have contributed significantly towards global LNG export operations, where a number of regional LNG projects in the works could augment Arab exports by up to 50 percent in the year 2027, added the OPEC chief. (KUNA)

'Al-Duqm exemplifies Kuwaiti-Omani ties'

Oman's Minister of Energy and Minerals Salem Al-Aufi has said that Al-Duqm Refinery and Petrochemicals Industries Company is one of the biggest joint investments of its kind in the Gulf. Al-Aufi affirmed this in a press release following His Highness Kuwait's Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tariq's inauguration of the refinery, the economic significance of such project for both nations.

The refinery utilizes the latest advancements in technology to treat, re-

fine and produce high quality products adhering to health and safety regulations. The facility has achieved a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, demonstrating its commitment to environmental sustainability.

Al-Aufi further said that the facility will have the capacity to generate 230,000 barrels per day, with its primary output comprising sought-after commodities such as diesel, liquefied gas, naphtha, kerosene, and sulfur. These products are in high demand in the worldwide market. (KUNA)

Market Movements 08-02-2024

	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts
SAUDI	-	Tadawul	+36.85	12,202.78	
JAPAN	-	Nikkei	+743.36	36,863.28	
EGYPT	-	EGX 30	+505.46	28,411.41	
PHILIPPINES	-	PSEI	+20.12	6,850.16	
UAE	-	DFM	-2.84	4,159.10	

Business

Boursa Kuwait indices surge on active buying

Investors focused on bank stocks amid optimism

By Mahmoud Shendi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: The Boursa Kuwait indices climbed in the sixth week of 2024, driven by active buying of most listed stocks. The optimism surrounding the fiscal year 2023 results of banks and companies propelled the market value to rise by approximately 105 million dinars, reaching 42.849 billion dinars compared to 42.744 billion dinars last week.

Investors in the market are notably directing their attention to-

wards bank stocks, particularly after several banks reported significant growth in their financial results for 2023. This trend is further fueled by the desire to capitalize on cash dividend distributions.

During the week, the market value of the first market increased by 184 million dinars, reaching 33.888 billion dinars from 33.704 billion dinars. However, the main market experienced a decrease of 80 million dinars, dropping from 9.040 billion dinars to 8.960 billion dinars.

The general market index showed a gain of 17.8 points, or 0.2%, closing at 7,256.1 points compared to 7,238.3 points at the previous week's close. Conversely, the main index dipped by 52.4 points, or 0.8%, settling at 5,919.3 points from 5,971.7 points last week, while the primary market index closed at 7,961 points.

In the latest trading session, the Boursa Kuwait saw a decline in its general index by 5.7 points, reaching 7,256 points, marking a 0.08 percent decrease. A total of 246 million shares were traded in 14,438 cash transactions, amounting to 75.5 million dinars (approximately 230 million dollars).

For the main market, the index fell by 51 points to 5,919 points, down by 0.8 percent. The Premier Market Index, however, rose by 10.1 points to reach 7,961 points, reflecting a 0.13 percent increase. The (Main 50) index experienced a decline of 66.7 points, reaching 5862 points, marking a 1.13 percent decrease.

During the session, seven sectors witnessed an increase, with technology leading by 4.69%, while five other sectors declined, particularly communications, down by 3.11%. The health care sector was the only one to remain stable.

Govt initiatives expected to boost market

Recent surge in stock market shares revitalizes earlier stagnant accounts

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: The recent surge in stock market activity since the beginning of the year has notably revitalized previously stagnant accounts, which experienced a relative decline in January last year, reports Al-Jarida daily.

These accounts witnessed a significant increase, rising by 6.7 percent compared to January 2023. The total number of active shares during this period surged to 19,017 from 17,809, indicating a positive trend.

Moreover, the total number of accounts in the market saw an uptick to 423,677, marking a growth of approximately 6,401 accounts over the span of a year, representing a rise of 1.5 percent. Despite challenges faced by small investors in unlocking frozen liquidity from stagnant stocks, there is optimism regarding potential improvements in the number of active accounts in the coming months.

This optimism is fueled by the anticipated positive impact of the proposed government direction and economic program on the market. If even a portion of these initiatives, estimated at 40 to 50 percent, is implemented, it is expected

to significantly bolster market performance.

However, the resurgence of activity in many small investors' accounts hinges on their ability to liquidate shares, including those with declining prices or delisted stocks moved to the Over-The-Counter (OTC) platform. Yet, the OTC platform lacks essential data and information, hindering investors' ability to make informed decisions and execute transactions efficiently.

Moreover, the persistence of long-term investment strategies is a significant factor contributing to the stagnation observed in a substantial portion of traders' accounts. This trend is particularly evident as many investors opt to retain blue-chip and preferred stocks over extended periods.

Furthermore, foreign ownership within the primary market remains considerable, with its value currently standing at 5.25 billion dinars. Recent settlements hint at ongoing efforts to discreetly select dividend stocks amidst a market that has relatively stabilized. Despite the current momentum in value, there's a recognized necessity for broader alternatives to the primary market stock base.

Administration freezes LNG export permits

Biden's LNG export review spurs US climate goal alignment debate

By Emily Grubert,

University of Notre Dame

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



The Biden administration has frozen pending decisions on permit applications to export liquefied natural gas, or LNG, to countries other than U.S. free trade partners. During this pause, which will last for up to 15 months, the administration has pledged to take a "hard look" at economic, environmental and national security issues associated with exporting LNG.

Environmental advocates, who have expressed alarm over the rapid growth of U.S. LNG exports and their effects on Earth's climate, praised this step. Critics, including energy companies and members of Congress, argue that it threatens European energy security and energy jobs in the U.S.

Emily Grubert, associate professor of sustainable energy policy at the University of Notre Dame and a former official at the U.S. Department of Energy, explains why large-scale LNG exports raise complex questions for U.S. policymakers.

The U.S. is now the world's largest LNG exporter. In November 2023, the most recent month with full data, the U.S. exported about 390 billion cubic feet of LNG, a record high.

The U.S. has been a net exporter since 2017, with export volumes now equal to about 15% of our domestic consumption. This gas sells for higher prices than natural gas delivered domestically, but it also costs more to process and deliver. As of 2022, the U.S. provided 20% of total global LNG exports.

The U.S. Energy Administration projects that North American LNG export capacity - largely from the U.S. - is likely to more than double from its current level by the end of 2027. In the U.S., five LNG export terminals are currently

under construction, and are not affected by the current pause.

Applications for additional export terminals are under review. These are the applications for which decisions have been temporarily paused.

LNG, and natural gas in general, has an uneasy place in the decarbonization transition. Natural gas is a fossil fuel. Burning it produces carbon dioxide that contributes to climate change.

Furthermore, natural gas that has been processed for use is essentially pure methane, which is itself a greenhouse gas. When natural gas leaks to the atmosphere from sources like wells, pipelines or processing plants, it adds to climate change. Since the mid-1800s, human activities - mainly, burning fossil fuel - have raised Earth's temperature by roughly 2 degrees Fahrenheit (1.1 Celsius) above preindustrial levels. Methane has caused about 0.9 degrees F (0.5 C) of that warming above preindustrial global temperatures.

Transition

LNG is not a transition away from fossil fuel - it is a fossil fuel. Hypothetically, substituting LNG for more carbon-intensive fuels, like coal or other natural gas supplies with higher methane emissions, could help reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the near term.

But there's debate over how much LNG is actually useful in that context, especially when it comes to whether LNG would actually prompt switching from coal to gas, and if so, whether the long-term lock-in of fossil gas use is worth it. Meanwhile, investing in new LNG infrastructure means either committing to operate these facilities for years, or planning to strand expensive assets by retiring them early.

LNG terminals also have significant local impacts. In addition to methane, they emit large quantities of other air pollutants, including nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds. Tanker traffic to and from them can damage marshes and waterways. Building more

terminals, especially in areas where energy facilities are already concentrated, raises important health and environmental justice concerns.

A transition to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions will require a commitment to actually shift away from fossil fuel. In my view, it's not clear that deploying LNG will achieve this goal unless it's done with an explicit plan and mechanism to ensure that the gas is only used where it is actually needed and can support an emissions phaseout.

As I see it, the most important step is to develop a coherent national strategy for the role of natural gas in the U.S. energy system, consistent with the Biden administration's stringent goals of making the U.S. electricity supply carbon-free by 2035 and achieving a net-zero greenhouse gas economy by 2050.

Such a blueprint would need to include a plan for reshaping the nation's energy infrastructure to phase out use of natural gas, along with coal and oil. In theory, it could include targeted deployment of gas resources to ensure that energy needs are being met while zero-carbon resources are deployed along the way.

I'd like to see a clear articulation of the climate, health and energy system impacts of approving additional LNG export terminals, with enforcement mechanisms in place to ensure that the U.S. will meet defined limits on climate and other pollution, and on operational conditions. I'd also like to see health and environmental justice considerations deeply embedded into energy and climate decisions in general, and especially for LNG projects.

These plants are sited mainly in communities that have suffered high rates of illness, premature deaths and environmental damage from hosting fossil fuel infrastructure for decades. Many of them have said they don't want additional LNG development. In my view, without clarity on where the U.S. is going on this issue, it will be extremely difficult to make good decisions about LNG, and about natural gas in general.



Kuwait Tax Seminar Speaker 2024

EY seminar upholds Kuwait's businesses in navigating region's evolving tax landscape

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: EY has hosted its Kuwait Annual Corporate Tax Seminar 2024 in Kuwait City with the aim of guiding businesses in navigating the evolving tax landscape in the country and the MENA region. The latest edition of the event provided an overview of the major developments in the tax landscape that have taken place in Kuwait and the wider region over the last 12 months. It also reviewed expected changes that are likely to be introduced in the country's tax laws and regulations.

The seminar saw the participation of around 200C-suite executives and finance professionals from Multinational and Kuwait-based companies and various regulatory bodies. The event leveraged the knowledge and practical experience of the EY's senior tax professionals to provide comprehensive insights that will help the participants understand major changes which may have impact on their businesses.

The agenda covered various aspects of the taxes that are currently imposed in Kuwait and in the MENA region. Key topics included Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) Pillar 2, practice changes related to Corporate taxes, zakat and national labor sup-

port tax (NLST) laws. The sessions also explored the potential implications of upcoming changes to the regulatory environment, such as the introduction of the business profit tax potentially applicable to all Kuwaiti companies, as well as the global minimum tax for Kuwaiti multinationals.

Furthermore, the seminar examined regulatory updates and recent tax trends across the MENA region with a focus on the GCC, which affect Kuwaiti businesses operating in other jurisdictions. These included the implementation of value-added tax (VAT) in other GCC countries, as well as the corporate income tax (CIT) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and e-invoicing in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). In addition, the seminar also covered role of technology in the Tax Transformation journey and the hot topic Environmental, Social and Governance.

Ahmed Al-Esry, EY MENA Tax Leader, says "The planned introduction of the business profit tax in Kuwait, which is currently at the law-drafting stage, is a game-changing move. Well-regulated and fair taxation can boost economic stability, making the country more attractive to investors from

around the world. This can lead to a surge in foreign investment, stimulating economic growth. In addition, the increased revenue from taxes could help the nation diversify its economy, reducing its dependence on oil and financing sustainable projects. Finally, the implementation of taxes promotes transparency and accountability among companies, thereby creating a more responsible business environment."

Ahmed Eldessouky, EY Kuwait, Qatar and Oman Tax Leader, says "Kuwait's new government is proactively working to enhance ease of doing business and create more transparency in the country's tax regime. In December 2023, the Kuwaiti parliament approved a change to the Agency Law that allows foreign companies to operate in the country without the requirement for a local agent. In addition, the country signed agreements to prevent double taxation with the UAE and Qatar. The nation has also recently joined the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)/G20 Inclusive Framework (IF) on BEPS, which seeks to ensure that multinational enterprises pay a fair share of tax wherever they operate."

GlobalRapid platform enables PSTN voice calls

Tata Communications & Microsoft join forces for 'Teams' connectivity in India

MUMBAI, Feb 8, (PRNewswire): Tata Communications, the global comtech (communications technology) player, has partnered with Microsoft to provide flexibility in collaboration and connectivity on Microsoft Teams for enterprises in India.

The Tata Communications GlobalRapid platform will enable both Indian enterprise users as well as multinationals with a presence in the country to seamlessly make and receive carrier-grade PSTN voice calls on any Teams device, anywhere across the globe, by utilizing the Operator Connect platform.

With an extensive reach across more than 190 countries through partnerships with over 700 mobile network operators, Tata Communications is uniquely positioned to offer this regulatory compliant cloud calling and audio-conferencing capability.

Fraud

GlobalRapid delivers on greater fraud prevention capability and strict diligence to local market regulations, thereby allowing businesses to securely interact and collaborate with their entire value chain across the globe.

The platform offers an end-to-end managed services layer, providing deployment, onboarding and management of Teams, endpoint devices and SBCs (session border controllers) with enhanced useability, security and regulatory compliance - all on a single platform. This will streamline the Teams platform management, providing enterprises with complete control and visibility and no additional hardware cost.

"While businesses are expanding, the geographical borders are constantly shrinking with the power of collaboration tools. To make the most of these innovative tools, enterprises need a global partner with local expertise," said Sriram Sampath, Vice President, Unified Communications & Collaboration, Tata Communications. "Our collaboration

Firm aims for 10% of India's GDP with AI

Microsoft's Nadella woos Indian developers to company's AI tools

BENGALURU, Feb 8, (AP): Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella urged in a speech to more than a thousand Indian computer code developers on Thursday that they use the company's artificial intelligence tools being deployed across its products.

Speaking in Bengaluru, India's "Silicon Valley," Nadella noted that more than 13.2 million Indian developers are currently on GitHub, an internet hosting service for software development, second only to the number from the United States, and that India is likely to move into first place by 2027 or 2028.

Nadella said Microsoft Corp. expects that use of AI can help achieve 10%, or \$500 billion, of India's GDP target for 2025. He did not elaborate.

Microsoft is building its fourth data center in India near the city of Hyderabad, where Nadella grew up. It already has data centers in Mumbai, Pune and Chennai. Nadella will visit Hyderabad before returning to the United States.

"Our investments here obviously start with the raw infrastructure itself," Nadella said.

Microsoft's partnership with OpenAI, the developer of ChatGPT, gave it a head start in the boom involving

generative AI, but the software giant faces competition from Google and other rivals. Nadella boasted in a speech in Mumbai on Wednesday that his company is still ahead on most benchmarks.

"We have the best model, today even," he said. "We're waiting for the competition to arrive. It'll arrive, I'm sure."

Earlier this week, Nadella marked his 10th year as Microsoft CEO. The company now has a market value of \$3 trillion, more than any publicly traded company, including longtime rival Apple Inc.

Microsoft's India subsidiary, which is headquartered in Hyderabad, has 11 offices across the country employing nearly 18,000 people. The company has announced various programs targeting the Indian market and Indian talent, including a monthlong AI training program for 100,000 developers and an announcement in Mumbai on Wednesday that the company will offer AI skills training for 2 million Indians by 2025.

India is a key market for Microsoft. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with Nadella during a visit to the U.S. last June. Microsoft said AI was among the key topics they discussed.

with Microsoft on Operator Connect for Teams will further enhance workforce productivity and efficiency for enterprises, while helping them abide with the local regulations and compliance."

"We are pleased to partner with Tata Communications to help our customers extend their global footprint through Operator Connect for

Teams. This collaboration reflects our commitment to delivering greater efficiencies and productivity gains for businesses across India. Together, we are committed to help enterprises grow and scale - seamlessly, efficiently and securely," said Shrut Bhatia, Country Head, Modern Work and Surface, India and South Asia, Microsoft.

BUSINESS

Germany sells shares in postal company

Germany's state-owned development bank has sold shares in the company that owns the national postal service for about 2.17 billion euros (\$2.3 billion), reducing the government's stake and raising money to help finance improvements to the country's rail network.

The KfW bank, which holds the government's remaining stakes in previously state-held companies, said late Tuesday

that it had sold 50 million shares of Deutsche Post - the name under which it still trades on the stock exchange, although the company is now known as DHL Group - at 43.45 euros each. That amounts to 4% of the company's shares.

The sale cuts the state's stake in DHL to 16.5%, though it is still the largest single shareholder. The proceeds are to be used to strengthen the capital of Ger-

many's main railway operator, the state-owned Deutsche Bahn, to help it upgrade railway infrastructure, the Finance Ministry said Wednesday.

The government is turning to privatization proceeds to help finance improvements to the rail network after a court ruling forced it to plug a big hole in this year's budget and reconsider its wider financial plans. (AP)

Japan's SoftBank Group marks a return to profit

Japanese technology conglomerate SoftBank Group returned to profitability in October-December after four straight quarters in the red, the company said Thursday. Tokyo-based SoftBank reported a 950 billion yen (\$6.4 billion) profit for the October-December quarter, a reversal from a 783 billion yen loss in the same period a year earlier.

It remained in the red for the first nine months of the fiscal

year that ends in March. Its 458.7 billion yen (\$3 billion) loss for April-December was still an improvement from the 912.5 billion yen in losses a year earlier.

Nine-month sales at SoftBank rose 2.6% to 5 trillion yen (\$33.6 billion). Quarterly sales rose nearly 5% to 1.77 trillion yen (\$11.9 billion) SoftBank, which invests in companies such as Yahoo Japan, T-Mobile, Alibaba and Line, said it reduced its losses

related to its array of investments called the Vision Fund.

But it added losses from its holding in Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba, though overall SoftBank has reduced its exposure to the Chinese market.

The company, led by visionary billionaire Masayoshi Son, has also invested in WeWork, a provider of shared work spaces, which filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection last year. (AP)

Profit in the last quarter was 253.3 billion yen

Honda reports its profit rose on back of strong U.S. demand

TOKYO, Feb 8, (AP): Japanese automaker Honda's profit rose 3.5% in the October-December quarter from a year earlier on the back of solid demand in the U.S. and Europe and a recovery in its home market, the company said Thursday.

Tokyo-based Honda Motor Corp's profit in the last quarter was 253.3 billion yen, or \$1.7 billion. Quarterly sales jumped 21% to 5.39 trillion yen (\$36 billion).

A favorable exchange rate helped amplify Honda's overseas profits in yen terms and is expected to continue through the rest of the fiscal year, which ends in March.

The dollar has been trading at about 148 Japanese yen, up from about

140 yen last year.

All the automakers have been hurt by shortages of computer chips and other parts, partly due to disruptions in manufacturing because of the coronavirus pandemic. The latest results show Honda has mostly but not yet fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels in some locations.

Honda's motorcycle sales grew in recent months in Brazil and Europe, according to the manufacturer of the Fit small car, Super Cub motorcycle and Asimo robot.

Honda said it remained committed to "initiatives toward electrification," pointing to the global electric vehicle concept models shown at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, such as the Saloon and Space Hub.

Japanese automakers including Honda have lagged in the global push toward pure EVs, partly because of their strength in other green models such as hybrids and fuel cells.

Over the first nine months of the fiscal year, Honda sold 3.1 million vehicles, up from 2.7 million vehicles the previous year, with sales especially strong in the U.S.

A decline in Honda's vehicle sales in Thailand and Indonesia was offset by rising sales in China.

For the full fiscal year through March, Honda is projecting a 960 billion yen (\$6.5 billion) profit, up from an earlier forecast for a 930 billion yen (\$6.3 billion), and surpassing the 651 billion yen earned the year before.

A federal study report released

Puerto Rico can fully shift to 'clean' energy by 2050

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico, Feb 8, (AP): As Puerto Rico struggles with chronic power outages and a decaying electric grid, federal officials believe the U.S. territory can fully shift from fossil fuels to clean energy by 2050, according to a report Wednesday that has been two years in the making.

The report by the U.S. Department of Energy and the Federal Emergency Management Agency surprised those who thought that a recent law requiring Puerto Rico to reach 40% of clean energy by next year and 100% by 2050 was unrealistic.

"This transition will be a substantial effort and won't happen overnight, but 100% clean energy is 100% possible," said Agustín Carbó, Puerto Rico's grid modernization director within the U.S. Department of Energy.

The department's secretary, Jennifer Granholm, who traveled to Puerto Rico to help present the study, echoed Carbó's comments, saying it was a "big, hairy audacious goal" that she believes can be accomplished.

Power plants that rely on coal, petroleum and natural gas currently generate about 97% of Puerto Rico's electricity, with renewables accounting for only 3%, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

The U.S. Department of Energy and the Federal Emergency Management Agency aim to change that.

As part of the push, officials on Wednesday announced a new federally funded program that will subsidize residential rooftop solar and battery storage systems for up to 30,000 low-income households on the island. Homeowners who qualify can start applying by Feb. 22.

Currently, some 110,000 individual solar systems are connected to Puerto Rico's electric system, which serves around 1.2 million customers, and an average of 4,000 new solar systems are joining each month, said Gov. Pedro Pierluisi.

The two-year study found that Puerto Rico has more than tenfold the renewable energy resources required to meet the island's demands through 2050, but that new infrastructure capable of generating hundreds of megawatts is needed.

Officials warned that such an investment could lead to additional rate increases on an island that already has a much higher electric rate compared with the U.S. mainland. Residential

rates are 24 cents per kilowatt-hour, compared with an average of 16 cents in the U.S. mainland. Meanwhile, industrial rates are 25 cents per kWh, compared with 8 cents in the mainland.

"A strategic plan to control rate impacts while achieving better reliability over the near term is needed," the report stated.

Rate increases are particularly concerning in Puerto Rico, which has the highest poverty rate compared with any U.S. state at more than 40% and has struggled to attract new investors as it emerges from the biggest U.S. municipal bankruptcy in history.

The report studying the shift to clean energy comes at a critical time.

"Puerto Rico's current electricity system is complex, isolated, reliant on imported fuels, and vulnerable to extreme weather events and other natural hazards," according to the report.

While ongoing power outages are partly blamed on Hurricane Maria razing the grid as a powerful Category 4 storm in September 2017, the problems began much earlier.

"Decades of operational, maintenance, and financial challenges have resulted in a system that lags far behind accepted reliability levels," the report found.

The frequency and duration of power outages in Puerto Rico has worsened in recent years, with clients spending an average of 22 hours without power last year, according to a report submitted to the island's Energy Bureau in late January.

The generational capacity of Puerto Rico's power plants also has dropped from 52% to 42%, which officials with Genera PR, the company that operates and maintains such units, said was a result of temporarily taking them offline for maintenance.

The company said it expects ongoing projects to boost capacity to up to 60% sometime in the future.

Puerto Rico's fragile power grid already depends on temporary generators installed last year to lessen the number of outages and allow crews to do maintenance. In a deal reached earlier this month with FEMA, the island's government will operate the generators through the end of 2025.

The grid also will soon be backed by a battery energy storage system as part of a recently approved \$648 million project funded with federal money.

Alibaba's revenue growth has slowed even as its e-commerce rivals have gained market share. The firm's New York-listed stock has plunged nearly 26% over the past year.

Alibaba restructured its businesses in March, splitting them into six units that would eventually raise their own capital and go public.

Its cloud unit had been expected to be among the first to hold an initial public offering, but Alibaba has since scrapped plans to spin-off the business, citing uncertainties over U.S. export curbs on advanced chips used for artificial intelligence.

Alibaba 'okays' additional \$25 billion share buyback

SINGAPORE, Feb 8, (AP): Chinese e-commerce firm Alibaba Group Holding has approved an additional \$25 billion authorization to its share buyback program, amid lower-than-expected sales revenue for the last quarter of 2023.

Alibaba posted a 5% increase in sales to 260.3 billion yuan (\$36.67 billion) for its quarter ended December, slightly missing analyst estimates.

Net income sank to 14.4 billion yuan (\$2 billion), down 77% compared to the same time last year. The Hangzhou-based firm attributed the drastic drop in net income to the decrease in value of its equity investments and a decrease in income from operations due to that.

Alibaba's New York-listed stock price fell about 4% in premarket trading following the report.

"Our top priority is to reignite the growth of our core businesses, e-commerce and cloud computing," said Alibaba CEO Eddie Wu in a statement.

He pledged to step up investment to improve user experience and drive growth for its e-commerce platforms Taobao and Tmall, as well as strengthen market leadership.

The company, once a leader in China's e-commerce industry, has

Mexico 'overtakes' China as leading source of goods imported by the US

Value of goods imported from Mexico rose to \$475b in 2023

WASHINGTON, Feb 8, (AP): For the first time in more than two decades, Mexico last year surpassed China as the leading source of goods imported by the United States. The shift reflects the growing tensions between Washington and Beijing as well as U.S. efforts to import from countries closer to home.

Figures released Wednesday by the U.S. Commerce Department show that the value of goods imported by the United States from Mexico rose nearly 5% from 2022 to 2023, to more than \$475 billion. At the same time, the value of Chinese imports tumbled 20% to \$427 billion.

The last time that Mexican goods imported by the United States exceeded the value of China's imports was in 2002.

Economic relations between the United States and China have severely deteriorated in recent years as Beijing has fought aggressively on trade and made ominous military gestures in the Far East.

The Trump administration began imposing tariffs on Chinese imports in 2018, arguing that Beijing's trade practices violated global trade rules.

President Joe Biden retained those tariffs after taking office in 2021, making clear that antagonism toward China would be a rare area of common ground for Democrats and Republicans.

As an alternative to offshoring production to China, which U.S. corporations had long engaged in, the Biden administration has urged companies to seek suppliers in allied countries ("friendshoring") or to return manufacturing to the United States ("reshoring").

Supply-chain disruptions related to the COVID-19 pandemic also led U.S. companies to seek supplies closer to the United States ("near-shoring").

Mexico has been among the beneficiaries of the growing shift away from reliance on Chinese factories.

But the picture is more complicated than it might seem. Some Chinese manufacturers have established factories in Mexico to exploit the benefits of the 3-year-old U.S.-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement, which allows for duty-free trade in North America for many products.

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said this week that the trade status gives Mexico new leverage, saying it would make it hard for the U.S. to close the two countries' border to limit immigration, as suggested in negotiations on a border bill in the U.S. Senate.

"The negotiation is proposing closing the border," he said.



A woman works in a shoe maquiladora or factory in Leon, Mexico, Feb. 7, 2023. For the first time in more than two decades, Mexico last year overtook China as America's top supplier of goods - a shift that reflects political tensions between Washington and Beijing and U.S. efforts to import from countries that are friendlier and closer to home. (AP)

China replaces securities regulator, moving to reassure investors, end a market slump

BEIJING, Feb 8, (AP): China replaced the head of its market watchdog in an apparent attempt to restore confidence in financial markets following a prolonged downturn.

Official media said Wu Qing, a former chairman of the Shanghai Stock Exchange, would replace Yi Huiman as chairman and Communist Party chief of the China Securities Regulatory Commission.

Chinese stocks have been trading near 5-year lows despite various measures to stabilize the markets.

The official Xinhua News Agency gave no reason for Yi's departure but Chinese media said Wu was nicknamed "Broker Butcher" for his tough stance on enforcing rules against various abuses.

Wu, a banking industry veteran, is also a former vice mayor of Shanghai.

Markets in Shanghai and Shenzhen have languished, partly due to heavy selling of property shares following a crackdown on excessive borrowing by developers.

Earlier this week, the CSRC said it was cracking down on in-

sider trading, market manipulation and other crimes and would protect small investors.

The appointment came during a week that has seen wild swings in share prices and despair among investors who have seen their investments evaporate.

Thousands have vented their frustrations on the U.S. Embassy's blog, lamenting about the stock market's woes in a seemingly unrelated post about protection of giraffes - a tactic reflecting the narrow scope for expression in China's Communist Party-controlled media environment.

"Buying Chinese equities feels like catching a falling knife," Ipek Ozkardeska of Swissquote said in a commentary.

The efforts so far "have been inefficient to trigger a sustained recovery and they will hardly bring investors back on board," Ozkardeska said of measures that included a pledge by a state investment fund to step up purchases of exchange-traded funds.

"Throwing money into the mix is a clumsy quick fix, it won't fix confidence."

China faces both short and lon-

ger-term challenges that economists say will require substantial reforms to keep its economy growing at a robust pace.

The property market, a major driver provider of jobs and consumer demand, fell into crisis when developers defaulted on debts and became unable to deliver apartments to buyers who had already paid for them with their life savings.

By removing Yi, China's leaders may be hoping to turn a new page with the beginning of the Lunar New Year. The country will close down for a week-long holiday from Friday, leaving time for markets to settle.

The effort to calm the markets has gained urgency as top officials prepare to gather in Beijing for the annual meeting of the national congress, a time when the Communist Party seeks to showcase its leadership and set new financial targets.

That image has been tarnished in recent years by an erratic and often heavy-handed approach to COVID-19, including monthslong lockdowns that drastically restricted travel and work for tens of millions of people.

- all politically sensitive categories.

"I don't see the U.S. being comfortable with a rebound in those areas in 2024 and 2025," Scissors said, predicting that the China-Mexico reversal on imports to the United States likely "is not a one-year blip."

that depend on each for a steady supply of parts.

Derek Scissors, a China specialist at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, noted that the biggest drops in Chinese imports were in computers and electronics and chemicals and pharmaceuticals

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Xi Focus-Profile: Xi Jinping, man of culture

BEIJING, Feb 8, (Xinhua): Since the introduction of Xi Jinping Thought on Culture in October 2023, "culture" has become a buzzword throughout China.

Ahead of the Chinese Lunar New Year, the country has been busy organizing various cultural events to embrace this new trend.

In the eastern province of Zhejiang, a museum has been captivating tourists with AR technology, reviving scenes of daily life and work from 8,000 years ago. In the northwestern Shaanxi Province, museum visitors have the chance to savor traditional culinary delights depicted in ancient Chinese poems.

Meanwhile, in Beijing, members of a newly established science-fiction film committee are making preparations for the next blockbuster, following the phenomenal success of "The Wandering Earth," to offer the audience an alternative to Hollywood sci-fi films.

In January, a key policy meeting on public communication hailed Xi's cultural thought, stating that it "provides solid ideological guarantees, powerful inspiration, and favorable cultural conditions to make China a stronger country and rejuvenate the Chinese nation on all fronts."

The Communist Party of China (CPC), born over a century ago following the New Culture Movement and the spread of Marxism in the country, has always been proud of its cultural essence. Now, under Xi's leadership, the Party is drawing on culture to enhance its governance and drive China's modernization.

A CULTURE ENTHUSIAST

Xi was born in 1953 into a family of revolutionaries. As a child, he was greatly inspired by China's traditional culture. He said he would never forget the story of Yue Fei, as told by his mother. Yue was a patriotic military commander from the 12th century whose mother tattooed "serve the country with the utmost devotion" on his back, a phrase that embodies "Zhong," or loyalty, in Confucian philosophy. Xi made it his life's goal to follow this motto.

Xi has mentioned that reading is his favorite hobby. His school teachers remember him as an exceptional student with a passion for reading classical literature, particularly as a fan of Du Fu, a renowned realist poet from the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

In the late 1960s, Xi was dispatched from Beijing to Liangjiahe, a small village in Shaanxi Province on the Loess Plateau, as an "educated youth" to engage in arduous farm labor. Hauling a whole box of books to the village, Xi immersed himself in a diverse reading journey, exploring works from Chinese literary masterpieces to those of Shakespeare and Tolstoy, and from Chairman Mao's "Serve the People" to Karl Marx's "Das Kapital."

Some 40 years later, the man who used to read late into the night under the dim glow of a kerosene lamp in a cave dwelling stood at a podium in the UNESCO headquarters as the president of China, sharing his views on culture and civilization. "He drew on famous poets and writers to highlight his country's long history and the importance of cultural diversity," according to media reports.

Xi refers to Liangjiahe as his "university" where he learned China's traditional virtues. Throughout his seven years in this village, Xi endured a challenging life, and shared work and meals with the poor locals. He vividly remembers the villagers' generosity, as they imparted valuable lessons about life and work and shared whatever little they had.

In return, Xi extended the same kindness. He shared his rations to help those in need, offered his spare shoes to a younger villager without any, gave his hat to someone lacking one in cold weather, and generously gifted books and notebooks to those who cherished reading and learning. The villagers used "Ren Yi," or benevolence and righteousness, the highest standards of traditional moral uprightness, to praise the young man.

Farmer Liang Yujin, now in his 70s, reminisced about making unannounced visits to Xi on four occasions after Xi had left Liangjiahe. Already a high-ranking official, Xi welcomed Liang into his home, and they ate meals prepared by his wife, Peng Liyuan. Liang brought millet, pumpkins, and sweet potatoes for Xi, and in return, Xi offered him tea and pastries. "He asked about every fam-



Xi Jinping visits the Jiayu Pass, a famed part of the Great Wall built in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), during his inspection tour to northwest China's Gansu Province, Aug. 20, 2019. Xi also listened to an introduction of the historical and cultural background of the Great Wall and the passes in the Hexi Corridor, part of the ancient Silk Road in northwest China. (Xinhua/Xie Huanchi)

ily in the village," Liang said.

In 1982, Xi started working in Zhengding, a historical county in Hebei Province, first as deputy Party chief and then as Party chief. After discovering two ancient locust trees in his workplace, he had them verified for age and fenced off for protection. He also initiated a comprehensive survey of cultural relics throughout the county, and holistic conservation efforts began.

Xi's profound passion for history and culture was so intense that, at one point, he considered pursuing archaeology; however, this interest extended beyond mere personal fascination.

He often shares an ancient Chinese proverb with officials and foreign friends, advocating the use of history as a compass for present and future endeavors. He believes that drawing lessons from tradition is instrumental in formulating policy decisions.

Situated in Zhejiang Province, the archaeological ruins of Liangzhu, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, were surrounded by mining fields in the early 2000s. The excessive industrial dust and noise pollution transformed the entire area into what Jiang Weidong, an official from the site's management committee, described as "something like a war zone."

Upon learning about this situation in July 2003, Xi, then Party chief of Zhejiang, promptly ordered the closure of the mines. His dedication toward Liangzhu endured throughout the subsequent decades. As archaeologists confirmed the significance of Liangzhu as a testament to 5,000 years of Chinese civilization, he gave meticulous instructions for its protection. In his congratulatory message to the inaugural Liangzhu Forum last year, Xi hailed the site as a treasure of world civilizations.

Since taking on the Party's leading role -- general secretary of the CPC Central Committee -- in 2012, Xi has issued over 170 significant instructions regarding cultural relics, archaeology, and intangible cultural heritage. He has also conducted over 100 on-site inspections of historical and cultural sites.

Xi also harbors a deep love for "Red Cul-

ture." Over the years, he has visited almost every significant historical site related to critical chapters of the revolutionary past. These locations include a lake in Zhejiang, where the first CPC National Congress was held in 1921, and Fragrant Hills in suburban Beijing, where elder Party leaders laid the foundation for the establishment of New China.

"While journeying toward success, remember where we came from," Xi said.

He is a fan of rich human cultures. Speaking about his extensive travels across the world, Xi said, "Delving into the diverse civilizations across the five continents brings me the utmost joy."

Since assuming the presidency, Xi has visited over 70 countries. In Greece, he discussed an ancient Chinese phrase about stopping wars and Athena's contemplation of war and peace. He drew parallels between Chinese tea and Belgian beer in Belgium, highlighting the value of appreciating different cultures. In Mexico, he showed keen interest in the similarities between elements of the Maya civilization and Chinese elements like the dragon. In the Luxor Temple in Egypt, he spoke about the origins and developments of ancient civilizations.

Xi also shared personal reflections on literature, such as his impressions of Ernest Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea" and his experiences visiting places associated with Hemingway in Cuba.

People familiar with Xi say that his cultural upbringing has profoundly influenced his strong sense of idealism and his pragmatic approach to work. He often refers to the philosophy of "Zhi Xing He Yi," or "unity of knowledge and action," advocated by the ancient Chinese philosopher Wang Yangming (1472-1529), and considers it an essence of traditional Chinese culture.

ART OF GOVERNANCE

In 2012, Xi incorporated the concept of "cultural confidence" into the report to the 18th CPC National Congress. He later integrated this concept into the "Four Confidences" of socialism with Chinese char-

acteristics, describing cultural confidence as a "more fundamental, deeper, and more enduring force."

"Without full confidence in our culture, without a rich and prosperous culture, the Chinese nation will not be able to rejuvenate itself," he said.

While the world is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century, Xi has led China into a new era.

Theorists believe that the severe challenges the country faces in the 21st century demand a cultural renaissance to rebuild national identity in the post-Cold War world, where various civilizations and value systems compete and coexist. They even say that the rise and fall of major countries over the past 500 years is the result of the force of cultures.

Xi has cultivated confidence in the Chinese culture in service of the nation's rejuvenation, and established an impenetrable barrier against negative elements in Western culture, according to observers.

On July 1, 2021, when the Party celebrated its centenary, Xi proposed "two integrations," emphasizing the need to "integrate the basic tenets of Marxism with China's specific realities and fine traditional culture." The "second integration" -- one with fine traditional culture -- represents a profound "chemical reaction" and the emancipation of the mind, Xi said.

In June 2023, at a key meeting on cultural inheritance and development in Beijing, Xi summarized five distinctive features of Chinese civilization, emphasizing its outstanding continuity, innovation, unity, inclusiveness, and peaceful nature.

Over a month after the meeting, Xi visited the Sanxingdui archaeological site in Sichuan Province. During his visit, he took his time to examine details of the artifacts dating back thousands of years.

"Where do they come from?" he asked.

"They originated from the cradle of the Yangtze River and Yellow River civilizations, and were born out of the innovative creations of the ancient local people," the docent replied.

At the end of 2023, when Xi delivered his

New Year message from his office in central Beijing, a photograph of him observing the Sanxingdui artifacts with great attention was displayed on his bookshelf.

Xi Jinping Thought on Culture, formally put forward in October 2023, encompasses several key aspects, including strengthening the Party's leadership over public communication and culture and promoting the creative transformation and innovative development of China's fine traditional culture.

Theorists state that the establishment of the thought shows that the Party's historical and cultural confidence have reached new heights.

"If there were no 5,000 years of Chinese civilization, where would the 'Chinese characteristics' come from? And if it were not for these Chinese characteristics, how could we have today's successful path of socialism with Chinese characteristics?" Xi once said.

Theorists say that Xi pioneers a new way of governing the country by leveraging culture.

Xi firmly believes in Marxist historical materialism, which views the masses as the creators of history. He elevates the ancient belief of "Min Wei Bang Ben" -- meaning "the people are the foundation of the country; with a solid foundation, the country is at peace" -- to the Party principle of "putting people first."

After leading China to eliminate absolute poverty, Xi strives for the next goal: common prosperity.

"Common prosperity is a fundamental goal of Marxism and has also been a basic pursuit of the Chinese people since ancient times," Xi told Party officials, quoting ancient philosophers. Confucius said, "The trouble lies not in scarcity but in uneven distribution; not in poverty but insecurity," and Mencius called on people to "care for the elderly and the children of others as they care for their own."

"Our goal is both inspiring and simple. Ultimately, it is about delivering a better life for the people," Xi said.

Continued on Page 11



Xi Jinping inspects Lizu Village in Jinhua, east China's Zhejiang Province, Sept. 20, 2023. (Xinhua/Xie Huanchi)



Xi Jinping visits the new building of the Sanxingdui Museum in Deyang, southwest China's Sichuan Province, July 26, 2023. (Xinhua/Ju Peng)

Xi Focus-Profile:

Continued from Page 10

He blends the Party's governing philosophy of "the country belongs to the people, and the people are the foundation of the country" with the traditional idea that "the rise or fall of a political power depends on whether it accommodates the people's will."

On his first day in office as the Party's top official, Xi cited a Chinese proverb to call for "ironclad self-discipline" and launched the most extensive anti-corruption campaign in CPC history. Xi often shares stories about ancient figures known for their integrity with Party officials, demanding that they practice self-discipline. He uses a Chinese proverb to warn the entire Party, "Many worms will disintegrate wood, and a big enough crack will lead to the collapse of a wall."

In March 2018, Xi became the first Chinese president to take the oath of office in front of the Constitution. He mentioned the ancient saying, "When those who uphold the law are strong, the state is strong; when they are weak, the state is weak," emphasizing the need to advance reforms under the rule of law and enhance the rule of law in the process of reform.

"The issue of the rule of law versus the rule of man is a fundamental question in the history of politics and a significant problem that all countries must face and solve in the process of achieving modernization," he declared.

Xi has constructed and perfected the "spiritual lineage of the CPC," highlighting the tremendous mental strength the Party has demonstrated in key moments or chapters of its history. He is a staunch opponent of "historical nihilism." When some people online defamed revolutionary martyrs like Qiu Shaoyun, hundreds of thousands of Communist Youth League of China members posted rebuttals. Xi commended their response, "Righteousness has overwhelmed misconduct, well done!"

Xi introduced the concept of "profound changes unseen in a century," incorporating insights from a Marxist view of history and the ancient Chinese philosophy of "changes." In his report to the 20th CPC National Congress, he included "discarding the outdated in favor of the new" from the "Book of Changes," driving reforms in key areas.

Xi, a proven change-maker, draws upon his transformative experiences in Liangjiahe, where he defied skeptics and proceeded with the construction of the first methane-generating pit in the entire Shaanxi Province.

Now, he advocates for embracing the enterprising and innovative spirit of the Chinese nation to propel China into an era of innovation.

In a discussion with academicians, he mentioned how, during the 18th century, under the direction of the Qing government, Western missionaries spent 10 years creating the unprecedentedly advanced "The Map of Imperial China." This map was kept secret within the imperial court while the missionaries took the data back to the West, organized and published it, resulting in the West having a better understanding of China's geography.

Xi uses this example to emphasize that scientific and technological development must be integrated with social progress. He stresses the need to deepen reforms in the management of science and technology, allowing all sources of innovation to flow freely.

Infusing both the principles of Marxist development theory and traditional Chinese dialectics, Xi has introduced a new philosophy advocating innovative, coordinated, green, and open development accessible to all. He urges an approach of "consolidating stability through progress and establishing the new before abolishing the old," employing Chinese philosophical perspectives to guide the nation's economic endeavors.

As an ardent fan of literature and art, he has vigorously promoted the flourishing of Chinese culture. In 2014, 72 years after the first such event, Xi chaired the second seminar on literature and art in CPC history, proposing concepts like "using literature to convey morality" and "cultivating people through culture." Attendees recalled that Xi spoke "like talking among friends and family," and he shook hands with everyone after the three-hour-long seminar.

He is enthusiastic about folk culture and arts, such as myths, epics, storytelling, and local operas. He encourages contemporary young novelists, poets, and painters to innovate, and extends support to the domestic science fiction film industry. This reflects his deep commitment to nurturing and promoting diverse aspects of Chinese cultural heritage and contemporary artistic expressions.

He emphasized the treasures passed down in Chinese culture -- the indivisibility of the territory, the order of the state, the unity of the nation, and the continuity of civilization -- asserting, "Our country must be reunified, and will surely be reunified."

Xi has adopted the traditional philosophy of "Tian Ren He Yi," or "unity of nature and man," to initiate an unprecedented campaign for ecological restoration and protection. This included a 10-year fishing ban on the Yangtze River to protect aquatic life. He likened the protection of the Yangtze River to traditional Chinese medicine treatment, stressing efforts to treat existing illnesses and prevent future ones. Under his leadership, China has witnessed historic changes in its environment, resulting in bluer skies, greener mountains, and clearer waters.

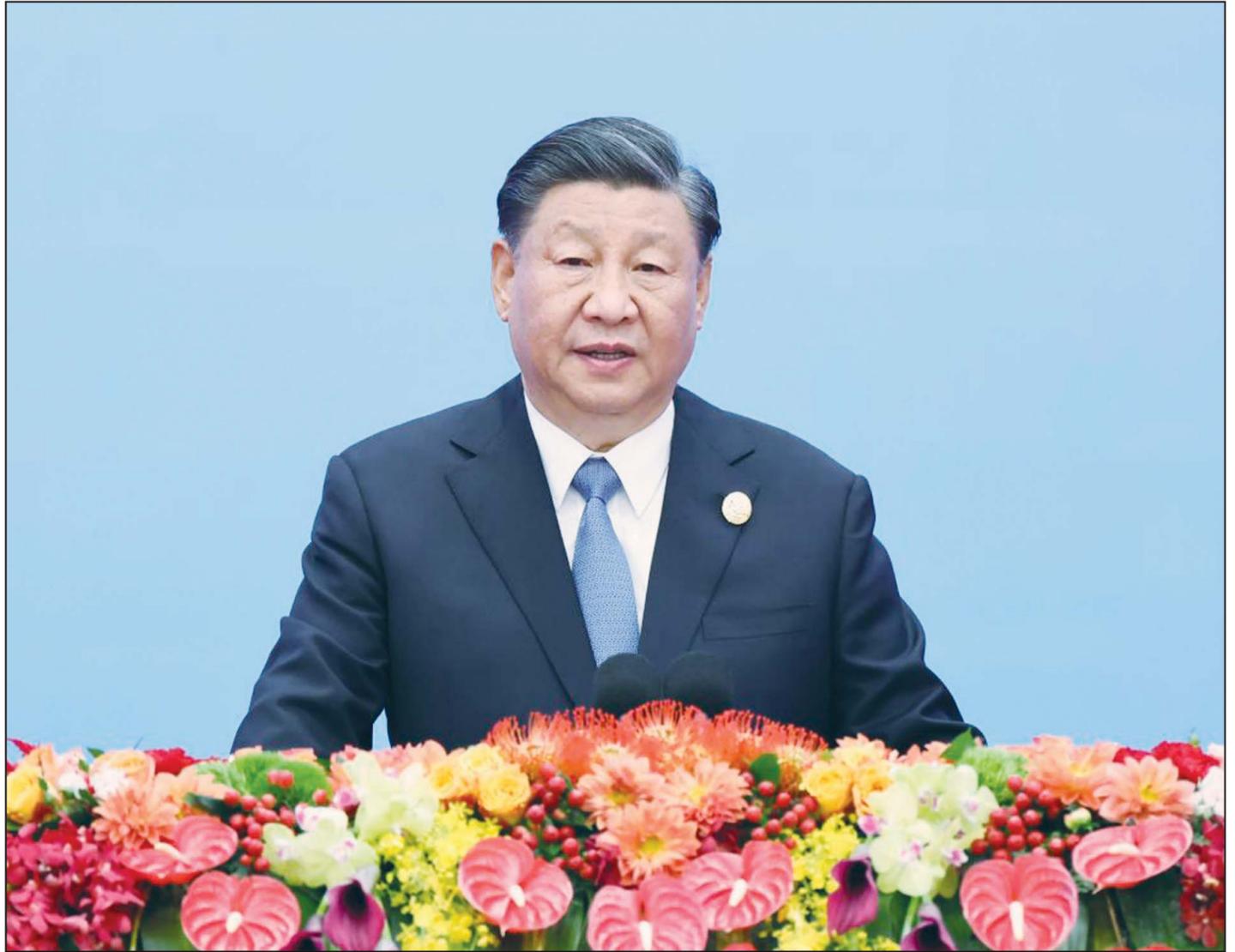
Xi tapped the ancient philosophy of favoring peace and harmonious coexistence in formulating foreign policy, proposing the concept of building a community with a shared future for humanity. He once told foreign leaders that China does not intend to only develop its backyard but rather a garden shared by all countries.

NEW PATH OF CIVILIZATION

A U.S.-based research institute observed that Xi is no longer considered merely an inheritor or protector of a great civilization but the creator of one, too.

China's cultural traditions and national conditions determine that Chinese modernization, a new form of human civilization led by Xi, will take a path distinct from the West.

Covering nearly 20 percent of the world's population, it aims to reduce the wealth gap, achieve harmony between material and spiritual aspects, pursue development without



Xi Jinping attends the opening ceremony of the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation and delivers a keynote speech titled "Building an Open, Inclusive and Interconnected World For Common Development" at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, capital of China, Oct. 18, 2023. (Xinhua/Wang Ye)



Xi Jinping visits an exhibition hall of the China National Archives of Publications and Culture, and learns about the preservation of classic publications in its collection in Beijing, capital of China, June 1, 2023. (Xinhua/Ju Peng)



Xi Jinping takes a walk with his mother Qi Xin. (Xinhua)

sacrificing the environment, and never seek expansion or dominance abroad.

In his youth, Xi read "One-Dimensional Man" by Herbert Marcuse. Seeing the drawbacks of a "one-dimensional" human existence caused by the encroachment of capital in Western modernization, Xi has always hoped to address the imbalances between material and spiritual needs, and between humans and nature. China is committed to the coordinated development of material, political, spiritual, social, and ecological civilizations. Xi refers to this as the distinctive characteristic of the "modern civilization of the Chinese nation."

Xi metaphorically describes the uniqueness of China's modernization using physics terminology: Developed Western countries followed a "series" development process. China, seeking to recover the "lost 200 years," must take a development path comparable to a "parallel" process involving the simultaneous development of industrialization, informatization, urbanization, and agricultural modernization.

He designated Shenzhen as the Pilot Demonstration Area of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. Adjacent to Hong Kong, Shenzhen is a special economic zone established over 40 years ago by Deng Xiaoping. Often referred to as the "city of innovation," Shenzhen, with a population twice that of New York City, offers a glimpse into the future of China's modernization.

Upon arrival in the city, visitors are greeted at the airport by a welcoming quote from Jules Verne: "Anything one man can imagine, other men can make real." Another prominent slogan stands tall in the city's landmark area, Shekou, proclaiming the traditional Chinese wisdom, "Empty talk will do nothing for our country; only solid work will make it flourish."

From electric cars to cutting-edge drones, from low-carbon initiatives to smart-city projects, the city continues to nurture innovation. Parks and libraries can be found every few hundred meters. With a convenient public service system, various social organizations, and a people-serving and business-friendly official team, Shenzhen is a model of the future.

Far north, the Xiong'an New Area near Beijing is a new city of socialist modernization planned by Xi. In May last year, Xi visited this "city of the future" under construction, paying particular attention to the ecological conditions of Baiyangdian Lake. Highlighting water source conservation and green development, its construction embodies the ancient ecological wisdom of "using what nature has to offer and taking it in moderation."

Xi designated Zhejiang as a demonstration area of common prosperity. During his

visit to Lizu Village last year, he witnessed the transformation of this once dirty, chaotic, and impoverished village into a clean and beautiful demonstration village of common prosperity. The villagers' income has exceeded the national rural average, and the village is renowned for its rich cultural atmosphere. Xi has engaged in discussions with young entrepreneurs who returned from cities across the country and expressed satisfaction with the part they have played in rural development.

The new type of modern socialist country led by Xi has effectively debunked the linear historical view that all nations should converge toward a Western model.

On the world stage, Xi has proposed a series of new concepts regarding civilizational exchange and international relations, demonstrating China's commitment to being a builder of world peace, a contributor to global development, and a defender of the international order.

Xi's proposition of building a community with a shared future for humanity reflects the country's commitment to peace and stability. Introduced in 2013, this idea resonates with the Chinese nation's time-honored vision that "the whole world is one big family," envisioning a world where universal harmony prevails. It marks a fresh trajectory for advancing global civilizations, and paves the way for the ultimate realization of the full and free development of every individual, as envisioned by Karl Marx.

Nevertheless, concerns exist that an assertive China could challenge the existing world order. But Xi is optimistic that Chinese civilization's inclusive nature can fos-

ter coexistence with other nations marked by "harmony in diversity."

When speaking about "The Art of War" by Sun Tzu with foreign guests, Xi emphasizes that the fundamental message of this classic ancient Chinese military book is the importance of exerting all efforts to avoid war and exercising great caution if conflict becomes inevitable. In line with the Chinese nation's deep-rooted commitment to peace, Xi proposed the Global Security Initiative in a call for joint efforts to maintain world peace and stability.

Since last October, the escalation of the Palestine-Israel conflict has led to a humanitarian disaster. During his interaction with foreign leaders and participation in multilateral events, Xi has repeatedly called for a ceasefire, emphasizing that the fundamental solution to the conflict lies in implementing the two-state solution.

In efforts to de-escalate conflicts and restore peace in the region, China convened and chaired a high-level UN Security Council meeting on the Palestinian-Israeli issue, facilitating the adoption of the first UN Security Council resolution since the outbreak of the conflict. China has sent its special envoy to promote peace talks, increased humanitarian assistance, and extended a helping hand to the people in Gaza at a difficult time.

China also served as a mediator, successfully facilitating the restoration of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran last year. Daniel A. Bell, chair professor of political theory at the University of Hong Kong, commended China's efforts, describing it as "an inspiring example." Large and influen-

tial countries can play the role of peacemakers as they have more power and influence to bring warring sides to the table, he said.

One Chinese maxim that Xi frequently mentions during his overseas trips is, "Building people-to-people friendships is crucial for fostering positive state-to-state relations." Under his leadership, China has strengthened and broadened its global partnerships based on principles of equality, openness, and cooperation.

A champion of humanity's shared values, Xi launched the Global Civilization Initiative, urging collaborative efforts to respect the diversity of civilizations and tap into the profound significance of their histories and cultures in the contemporary world. This initiative stands as a robust response to concepts supporting the estrangement, clash, or superiority of civilizations.

Xi's Global Development Initiative emphasizes the importance of prioritizing development and adopting a people-centered philosophy to ensure that "no country is left behind in the process of global modernization."

To explain the values and sentiments that underpin the Chinese people's dedication to win-win cooperation, Xi draws on ancient Chinese sayings promoting actions for the greater good. The Belt and Road Initiative is a prime example. Sometimes referred to as the modern Silk Road, the initiative has garnered collaboration from more than 150 countries and over 30 international organizations, with nearly a trillion U.S. dollars in investment.

When he was young, Xi once expounded on the Confucian idea of "Ping Tian Xia," or bringing peace and order to the world, which represents the ultimate stage of one's four-level personal pursuit. The other three are cultivating the moral self, managing the family, and governing the state.

Xi said, "Ping Tian Xia" doesn't involve conquering or ruling the world. Instead, it aims to uplift ordinary people from poverty, enabling them to live peacefully with sufficient food and clothing. He said that if all countries pursue peaceful development and strive for unity and harmony, it will bring the world closer to the goal.

When leading his colleagues in paying respects to Mao Zedong's remains to mark the 130th anniversary of Mao's birth last December, Xi underscored that the best way to commemorate the late Chinese leader is to continue to advance the cause he pioneered. Xi cited Mao's words: "We must always strive! We must always forge ahead! Our golden world, bright and splendid, lies ahead!"

"The best inheritance of history is to create a new history, and the greatest tribute to human civilization is to create a new form of human civilization," Xi said.



Xi Jinping, who was elected general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee at the first plenary session of the 18th CPC Central Committee, meets the press at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, capital of China, Nov. 15, 2012. (Xinhua/Xie Huanchi)



Xi Jinping delivers a speech at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris, France, March 27, 2014. (Xinhua/Yao Dawei)

People & Places

Music

'What Now' diverse

Howard offers musical memoir in solo album

NEW YORK, Feb 8, (AP) — When the pandemic hit, **Brittany Howard** found herself hunkering down in Nashville with two dogs, two cats and one album on repeat — "Songs in the Key of Life" by Stevie Wonder.

"Every day. Every single day," she says, laughing.

Making her own music naturally followed, and the result is the Alabama Shakes frontwoman's second solo album, the 12-track "What Now," out Friday. Not unlike Wonder's epic album, it's also a guided tour through a wide range of musical styles and feelings.



Howard

"At the time, I didn't know I was writing an album. I just needed an outlet and I just needed a way to get all these feelings out," she says. "So it wasn't as if I was like chasing one central idea. It was just like journal keeping."

"What Now" is a thrilling mix of songs that lean into jazz, R&B, soul, house and metal. There's "Power to Undo" that seems to be a gleeful nod to Prince and "Every Color in Blue" that has a Radiohead vibe. As a whole, it's more experimental than her 2019 debut, "Jaime." There's even an interlude with a poem read by the late Dr. Maya Angelou.

"It was just like what I was going through at the time," she says. "What's the best way to get this emotion out? What is the bedrock of how I'm feeling? And then I'll build it from there."

Styling

Take "Red Flags," for which Howard mixed the doo-wop styling of groups like The Ink Spots with a metal guitar riff. "Those things shouldn't go together, right? And maybe it doesn't. But to me, it makes sense because it's this feeling of deep sadness, but also that's just the way it goes. And that's pretty metal - heartbreak."

Shawn Everett, a producer, engineer and mixer who has worked with SZA, Hozier and Miley Cyrus, says working on "What Now" was a blast because Howard was so collaborative.

"I genuinely cherish all the time that I've been able to spend with her because I think she's just such an open book as far as her creativity goes," he says. "She'll explore any avenue that excites her, and she has no blockage whatsoever or no fear. This is the best person to do anything creative with."

Howard fans may be intrigued that she made a full-on dance song, "Prove It to You," born of messing around with the music software Reason and marrying house music with dark lyrics like "I've never been any good at falling in love/I fall so I hard I never get up."

"I just started making a beat. And it was this like fun club beat. And I was having fun. So I just rolled with it, and I started singing about starting a new relationship and being really fearful about messing it up and going down the same road," she says. "And I was like, 'Oh, this is kind of like buoyant and happy and dancey. But the lyrics are so scared and kind of dark.'"

If each of the songs is different — "They all come out of left field," Howard says — then there's a connective tissue: The soulful sound of crystal singing bowls between songs, a calming beauty between the waves.

"They always bring you down to the ground so that I could take off again somewhere else somewhat different. Kind of like palate cleansers in that way," she says.

"I just wanted to experiment and see what happens if you put that on an album and let people kind of relax into your music and listen to the whole thing as one."

Howard discovered the healing power of sound bowls and crystal healing drums at the Nashville Center for Alternative Therapies, where she has enjoyed immersive sound baths.

"I just thought like, 'Man, I feel so good afterwards. I would love to incorporate this in my next project.' And that's kind of where I got the idea from," she says.

Complex

The crystal bowls help calm when the personal and the political get mixed, as in the complex tune "Another Day," with a skittering beat as Howard sings "I am in love while the world is on fire."

She explains that the song was inspired by the chaos going on in the world while so many were trapped inside, watching the Black Lives Matter movement and the pushback it inspired.

"I was horrified at the things I was seeing and feeling. And at the same time, I was falling in love. And I was like, 'How can I feel all of these things at once?'" she said.

"And so a song like that sounds like an explosion and chaos because that's what it was," she adds. "I just wanted to put that in one song, a song like I've never heard the likes of before."

The album closes with the ambitious "Every Color in Blue," a tune that's open-ended and has the lyric "I'm all out of rainbows." It ends with a trumpet note that feels like a question mark.

"It doesn't end on a happy note. It doesn't end like everything's OK. It doesn't wrap up. That's not how life works. It leaves you questioning. And I feel like this whole album was me questioning myself."

When asked what she wants to do next, Howard is very sure: "I feel like starting a metal band next," she says. "Something where I don't have to sing pretty. I just want to scream. That's what I feel like."



This image released by IFC Films shows Juliette Binoche in a scene from 'The Taste of Things.' (AP)

Film

Hùng explores the intersection of food and film

'Taste of Things' serves up visual feast

NEW YORK, Feb 8, (AP) — Think of food and movies and your mind could quickly whip up a five-course meal. Maybe a few hard-boiled eggs, to start, from "Cool Hand Luke." A side order of toast from "Five Easy Pieces," followed by the soup from "Ratatouille." A main course of octopus from "Oldboy." And let's wash all that down with a \$5 shake from "Pulp Fiction."

Since before Charlie Chaplin made bread rolls dance in "The Gold Rush," cinema and cuisine have been as intertwined as the spaghetti of "The Lady and the Tramp." But a real food movie — one that doesn't just stop for noodles ("In the Mood for Love") or take a trip to Katz's ("When Harry Met Sally...") — is a rarer delicacy.

Those movies that fully invest themselves in the making and consuming food are more all-your-eyes-can-eat buffets. Films like "Tampono," that wildly erotic ode to ramen; "Babette's Feast," with its sumptuous banquet; and "Eat Drink Man Woman," Ang Lee's nourishing family meal.

It's a rich and savory tradition that gets a delicious new serving in Tran Anh Hùng's "The Taste of Things." If ever a film was a feast, it's Hùng's. The movie, starring Juliette Binoche and Benoît Magimel, opens with a glorious 40-minute scene set in a late 19th century French country kitchen where a meal is being prepared.

Butter is sizzling. Loins of veal are roasting. Fresh crawfish are peeled. A fish is gutted. Soup bubbles. Few words are said but the kitchen hums. Utensils clank. Meringue burns. Steam rises.

There's no music but it's a symphony. Eugénie (Binoche), the right-hand woman of top chef Dodin Bouffant (Magimel), works with quiet, assured mastery. It's as riveting as any action-movie set piece.

"I told my crew: This is my chase scene," says Hùng.

Hùng, the 61-year-old French-Vietnamese filmmaker, traces his love of cinema to his father, who would come home in South Vietnam with detailed descriptions of movies he had seen at the cinema, riveting Hùng. But his mother's kitchen, he says, "gave me my first feeling of beauty."

"The Taste of Things," which opens in select theaters Friday, isn't just about cooking. Like most movies about food, its appreciation of cuisine has as much to do with love and art as recipes and ingredients. Loosely inspired by Marcel Rouff's classic 1924 novel "The Passionate Epicure," "The Taste of Things" unfolds as a later-in-life love story, one with added poignance since Binoche and Magimel were, themselves, a couple 20 years earlier.

To Hùng, who recently spoke by phone during a trip to Vietnam (he lives in Paris), says his mouthwatering opening scene, in all its sensory pleasures, is a paean to cinema.

Harmony

"In musicals, it's about harmony and the expression of love and pleasure," says Hùng. "All of this was inside of me and I wanted to express it in this first scene in the kitchen where people move a lot. The level of gesture is enormous. How they move combined with complex camera movement, that came from musicals for me."

France selected "The Taste of Things" as the country's Oscar submission over the much-celebrated "Anatomy of a Fall." At last year's Cannes Film Festival, it won best director for Hùng.

Hùng's 1993 Oscar-nominated breakthrough "The Scent of Green Papaya" was likewise lush in atmosphere

and sensuality. But while he admires some of the classic food movies — "Eat Drink Man Woman" especially — he doesn't often feel they express what he wanted to accomplish with "The Taste of Things."

"Today, I think films are really poor in cinema. Most of the time, it's a theme of an important topic of the world today and then wrapped in very poor cinema. It looks like an illustration of a story," he says. "To me, there is nothing to eat in that. I don't feel full when I watch that type of film. There are too many like this. You can win the Palme d'Or with a very poor quality of cinema in the movie."

Many reviews of "The Taste of Things" have come with a warning: Do not see this film on an empty stomach. But Hùng supplies no such caution.

"No, I think it's interesting to be hungry, and waiting for the next meal," he says, chuckling. "I never get panicked when I get hungry. I like to listen to it and wait so that what I have later is more delicious."

Foodie photographs of a perfect plate have long been popular fodder for Instagram — the kind of gastronomy lampooned in the 2022 haute cuisine satire "The Menu." But "The Taste of Things" is earthy and grubby. The food — none of which was artificially enhanced to look better — was all real. Famed French chef Pierre Gagnaire designed the dishes that were cooked on location by Michel Nave. For the film's final meal, in which a triumphant pot-au-feu is prepared, some 90 pounds (40 kilograms) of meat were used.

Suffice to say, the cast and crew of "The Taste of Things" ate well.

"Everything we did was real," says Hùng. "So at the end of the day, we had to eat everything. No waste at all."



Andrew Lincoln, (left), and Danai Gurira, cast members and executive producers of 'The Walking Dead: The Ones Who Live,' pose together at the premiere of the AMC series, Wednesday, Feb. 7, in Los Angeles. (AP)



Fambrough



Putin

Variety

PALMDALE, Calif.: Christian Bale broke ground Wednesday on a project he's been pursuing for 16 years — the building of a dozen homes and a community center in Los Angeles County intended to keep siblings in foster care together.

The Oscar winner stood with a grin and a shovel full of dirt alongside local politicians and donors in the decidedly non-Hollywood city of Palmdale, 60 miles (80 kilometers) north and across the San Gabriel Mountains from Los Angeles.

But Bale, who was Batman in director Christopher Nolan's "Dark Knight" trilogy, wasn't just playing Bruce Wayne and lending his name and money to a charitable cause.

The project was his brainchild and one he's long lent his labor to, getting his hands dirty and on Wednesday standing in actual mud after a historic storm on a hard-won site he'd visited many times before.

"I would have done it all if it was just me by myself here," Bale told The Associated Press in an interview on the large vacant lot between a public park and a bowling alley.

The British-born Bale has lived in California since the early 1990s and sought to build the community after hearing about the huge number of foster children in LA County, and learning how many brothers and sisters had to be separated in the system.

That was around 2008, the time of "The Dark Knight," when his now college-age daughter was 3 years old.

"I didn't think it was going to take that long," he said. "I had a very naive idea about kind of getting a piece of land and then, bringing kids in and the brothers and sisters living together and sort of singing songs like the Von Trapp family in 'The Sound of Music.'"

But he then learned "it's way more complex. These are people's lives. And we need to be able to have them land on their feet when they age out. There's so much involved in this." (AP)

DETROIT: Henry Fambrough, the last surviving original member of the iconic R&B group The Spinners, whose hits included "It's a Shame," "Could It Be I'm Falling in Love" and "The Rubberband Man," died Wednesday, a spokesperson for the group said. He was 85.

Fambrough died peacefully of natural

causes in his northern Virginia home, spokesperson **Tanisha Jackson** said in a statement.

The group was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in November. Along with Fambrough, **Billy Henderson, Pervis Jackson, Bobby Smith, Philippé Wynne** and **John Edwards** were listed as inductees.

Last May, Fambrough took a tour of Motown's Studio A in Detroit as part of a ceremony that included the donation to the Motown Museum of 375 outfits worn by the group during performances.

It "was a long time ago," Fambrough said at the time of the 1960s, when he first walked into the studio. "I used to dream

about this place."

He told reporters that he had to convince his wife that the studio was where he was going for 3 a.m. rehearsals and recording sessions with other members of the group. Their first big hit for Motown was "It's a Shame," which peaked at No. 14 on Billboard's Hot 100 chart in 1970.

The Spinners would later sign with Atlantic Records and turn out a string of hits that included "Then Came You," which featured singer **Dionne Warwick** and reached No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 in 1974. (AP)

MOSCOW: Russian President **Vladimir Putin** has been interviewed by former Fox



Taylor Swift performs as part of the 'Eras Tour' at the Tokyo Dome, Wednesday, Feb. 7, in Tokyo. (AP)

News host **Tucker Carlson**, the Kremlin confirmed Wednesday. It is Putin's first interview to a Western media figure since his full-scale invasion of Ukraine two years ago.

Carlson had released a video from Moscow on Tuesday in which he said he would be interviewing Putin. Carlson claimed that Western journalists had interviewed Ukrainian President **Volodymyr Zelenskyy** multiple times but could not be "battered" to interview the Russian president.

The interview will be posted Thursday, according to **Justin Wells**, head of programming at Carlson's streaming network. It's not known what was said in the interview.

Putin has heavily limited his contact with international media since he launched the war in Ukraine in February 2022. Russian authorities have cracked down on media, forcing some independent Russian outlets to close, blocking others and ordering a number of foreign reporters to leave the country. Two journalists working for U.S. news organizations — The Wall Street Journal's **Evan Gershkovich** and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's **Alsu Kurmasheva** — are in jail on charges they reject.

Western journalists were invited to Putin's annual press conference in December — the first since the war began — but only two were given the chance to ask a question.

Putin's spokesperson, **Dmitry Peskov**, told reporters that Carlson was chosen for the interview because "he has a position which differs" from other English-language media.

Before his exit from Fox, Carlson repeatedly questioned the validity of US support for Ukraine following the Russian invasion, and he's wondered why Americans are told to hate Putin so much. His commentaries were frequently circulated on Russian state-run media. (AP)

Int'l Epilepsy Day aims to raise awareness and close treatment gaps

People with epilepsy can lead full, regular lives: expert

CLEVELAND, Feb 8: Individuals with epilepsy can lead full, regular lives, including having children, an active social life and a rewarding career, although it is important for their health that they seek and receive appropriate care on a timely basis, says an expert from global health system Cleveland Clinic. His message reflects the focus of International Epilepsy Day organizers to support efforts by the World Health Organization to close existing inclusion and treatment gaps.

Around 50 million people worldwide have epilepsy, making it one of the most common neurological diseases globally, according to the World Health Organization. The condition is characterized by periodic and involuntary seizures, ranging from mild to severe, and if these are diagnosed and controlled, epilepsy patients can lead a full, healthy life, says Imad Najm, MD, Director of the Epilepsy Center at the Cleveland Clinic Neurological Institute.

Misconceptions

"It is important to dispel the myths and misconceptions surrounding epilepsy as these could cause individuals with the condition to face prejudice at school, work and in social environments, and it could even prevent them from seeking the care that they need, or discourage them from taking prescribed medications," said Dr. Najm. "This is concerning as uncontrolled seizures impact negatively on a person's health and damage the affected neurons in the brain. In addition, without treatment, people who have seizures could fall, drown, have accidental burns, or even suffer sudden unexpected and early deaths."

Dr. Najm adds that misperceptions about what a seizure looks like could also lead to individuals dismissing mild seizures or being misdiagnosed when seeking help.

"While people might expect someone with epilepsy to have convulsions and foam from the mouth, most seizures are subtle. For example, a seizure might present as prolonged staring and rapid eye blinking; unusual behavior with chewing movements or hand-picking movements; a strong feeling of déjà vu; or having either rigid or overly relaxed muscles. It is much rarer to see jerking of the arms, legs, or head, falling down or loss of consciousness," he says.

Fortunately, diagnosing epilepsy can be quick and easy, Dr. Najm says. The diagnosis can be done through an electroencephalogram (EEG) test that records the brain's electrical activity, and the possible cause of the disease may be assessed through a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan.

Dr. Najm adds that treatments have advanced considerably over the past decades, particularly for patients who have been unresponsive to traditional medications. "The majority of patients can successfully control their seizures with affordable medications that have been around for many years and proven safe. However, in cases where two or more traditional medications have failed, we now have more options to consider," he explains.

Medication (cross head)

A medication with the generic name cenobamate, which was approved by the FDA in the US in 2019, has shown to be effective in 20-30% of those patients for whom multiple other medications have failed, says Dr. Najm.

If patients' seizures cannot be controlled by medications, the solution might lie in surgery, with many more patients now regarded as surgical candidates than in decades past, Dr. Najm adds.

"Thanks to improved imaging techniques, as well as software that leverages machine learning and other AI technologies to analyze images, we can more easily identify the small part of the brain from where the seizures are emanating, so that it may be removed. In around 50% of cases, this surgery can be curative, meaning the patient lives a seizure-free life. In addition, we are offering surgery to patients in higher age groups than ever before as older people are generally healthier than previously, and the safety of surgery has improved over the years."

Dr. Najm says he salutes global efforts by the joint organizers of International Epilepsy Day – the International Bureau for Epilepsy and the International League Against Epilepsy – to address what they term 'low levels of health literacy and high levels of misunderstanding and misconceptions' about epilepsy.

"It is very important that common misconceptions do not put a patient off seeking or sticking to a treatment plan. If their seizures are controlled, these individuals can live completely regular lives and it is important for employers and society to recognise this fact," Dr. Najm concludes.

Paxlovid underused despite proven efficacy

Thousands die from COVID-19 every month

NEW YORK, Feb 8, (AP): Tens of thousands of Americans are hospitalized with COVID-19 every week. Thousands die from it every month. And yet, an antiviral treatment proven to lessen the chances of severe outcomes is going underused.

The drug, Paxlovid, is lauded by experts as a powerful tool that can prevent hospitalization and death from COVID-19. But the high price and doctors' hesitation to prescribe the pills mean the five-day treatment isn't getting to everyone who would benefit from it.

"When you read in your local newspaper that in this hospital, they've got this many COVID patients, most of those are preventable hospitalizations," said Dr. Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar at Johns Hopkins University who sees Paxlovid as a useful tool to treat COVID-19.

One Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study found that Paxlovid can decrease hospitalization risks among adults by 51%. The drug is recommended for older people and other adults with certain underlying conditions and can be prescribed for kids as young as 12.

When Paxlovid was first authorized for emergency use in the US in December 2021, it was free for anyone who needed it. Once the government stopped funding the treatment, Pfizer set a list price of \$1,390.

Insurance

The drug remains free for people on federal insurance programs like Medicaid and Medicare through the end of this year, and uninsured people also can get it for free. But many of those people must go through a patient assistance program run by Pfizer to get the discounts. People on commercial insurance with high out-of-pocket costs can also get



Doses of the anti-viral drug Paxlovid are displayed in New York, Aug. 1, 2022. (AP)

financial help through a separate co-pay assistance program.

Independent pharmacy owners find Paxlovid is expensive to carry because of reimbursement rates from commercial insurers, said Kurt Proctor, a senior vice president at the National Community Pharmacists Association.

"If you're losing 5% on a \$10 prescription, it's very different than losing 5% on a \$1,400 prescription product," he said.

The high list price also is turning off some patients.

When Celise Ballow, of Junction, Utah, got COVID-19 recently, she never got the medication.

Ballow said her doctor declined to write her a prescription after telling her it wouldn't be covered by her insurance. Now she wonders if she could have

avoided some of the infection's worst effects if she had been able to get the medication.

"I'm going on a month and a half and I'm still having nebulizer treatments. ... I'm still exhausted," Ballow said.

Another factor hurting uptake appears to be the long list of medications that shouldn't be taken with Paxlovid. Many doctors may simply decide the risk of drug interactions isn't worth it.

"If people are on four or five different medications, it does tend to be a pain to double check 'is there an interaction here?'" said Dr. Sarah George, an infectious diseases professor at St. Louis University. Seeing a possible significant drug interaction "tends to put a physician off from prescribing a drug, even if there is a workaround," she said.

Gastrointestinal sickness

WHO warns over cholera cases in Southern Africa

GENEVA, Feb 8, (Agencies): The World Health Organization (WHO) warned on Tuesday of the alarming situation of the cholera disease spreading in the East Southern African countries.

In a press release, the Emergency Operations Manager for WHO's Regional Office in Africa Fiona Braka announced that in the past four weeks, 10 African countries reported 26,000 Cholera cases and more than 700 deaths.

Braka stated that the most affected countries by this wave of Cholera are Zambia and Zimbabwe, explaining that climate change, lack of food and clean water have worsened the situation.

She added that more than 1.7 million people have been vaccinated against this virus, noting that the process of vaccination is in progress for three million people in Zimbabwe.

WHO called for investments and funding for the treatment of Cholera, adding that the organization already provided USD 10.5 million, however funding is still needed.

Also:

SAN FRANCISCO: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is investigating an outbreak on a luxury cruise ship where more than 150 people have reported gastrointestinal illness, including diarrhea and vomiting.

The **Queen Victoria**, operated by **Cunard Cruise Line**, departed San Francisco Wednesday on its way from Florida to Hawaii. The ship is carrying 1,800 passengers and 970 crew members.

The cause is unknown. Cunard told the CDC that the ship increased cleaning and disinfection, and isolated ill passengers and crew.

The reported cases are totals for the entire voyage and do not represent how many people are actively sick at any one time, the CDC said.

The company did not immediately respond to an email from The Associated Press seeking more details.

Major advance in hair regeneration

Innovative tech offers hope for hair loss

SAN DIEGO, Feb 8, (Agencies): Stemson Therapeutics today announced a major technological advance that clears the path for its proprietary hair rejuvenation solution to advance toward human clinical trials. Stemson is developing an iPSC-derived autologous cell therapy to regenerate healthy hair follicles and has successfully created human hair follicles in humanized mice using engineered follicular units. The engineered follicular units are designed to provide an unlimited source of hair follicle replacements capable of treating a range of hair loss indications, including Androgenetic Alopecia, Scarring Alopecia, and Chemo-Induced Alopecia.

An estimated 80 million people in the United States experience hair loss, which is often associated with emotional distress leading to reduced quality of life, anxiety, and depression. Despite the \$10 billion market for hair loss today, there are no existing therapeutic solutions capable of rejuvenating shrinking follicles, nor any that generate new hair follicles to replace lost hair.

"Stemson's engineered follicular units will be the first therapeutic solution capable of replacing lost hair follicles, a breakthrough sorely needed to treat people suffering from many forms of hair loss," says Geoff Hamilton, Chief Executive Officer of Stemson. "The recent demonstration of robust and reproducible all-human hair growth in humanized mice is a strong indicator of potential success in human trials."

Engineered follicular units are constructed through a proprietary bioprinting process which combines hair follicle cells and biomaterials into a three dimensional biomimetic design resembling the hair follicle shape. Upon transplantation, the engineered follicular units will engraft with the host skin and develop into mature natural hair follicles replacing those that have been lost. The design of the engineered follicular units enables handling and precision delivery into the skin using common hair transplantation tools and techniques available in the field today. In addition, the design facilitates healthy follicle development

with proper directionality and emergence of a hair shaft out of the skin.

To support the company's growth and advancement toward human clinical trials, Stemson has promoted Meghan Samberg, PhD, to Chief Development Officer, and Nick Wisniewski, PhD, to Vice President of Data Science & Bioinformatics. The promotions move Stemson firmly into the final stages of product development with an emphasis on leveraging bioengineering, big data, and machine learning approaches to create a highly controlled and reproducible therapeutic outcome for hair growth.

Solution

"Stemson is poised to deliver truly novel and effective hair growth treatments to hair loss patients. Our recent results in mice engrafted with human skin show a therapeutic solution to hair loss is within our sights," stated Dr. Samberg. "In 2019, Stemson founder Alexey Terskikh, PhD, demonstrated functional hair follicle cells grown from human stem cells can grow hair when combined with mouse cells and transplanted in mouse skin. Since then, Stemson's development team has focused on demonstrating that an all-human bioengineered cell solution can generate brand new human hair follicles in human skin, which gives us much higher confidence the product may work in human patients. Now that we have achieved that milestone, I am excited to move us forward into the final development before testing in human trials."

"Engineering follicular units derived from Induced Pluripotent Stem Cells is a highly promising but complex approach to solve hair loss," added Dr. Wisniewski. "As a core part of our product development strategy at Stemson, we are investing in big data generation and cutting-edge analytics, using machine learning algorithms to manage the biological complexity and generate consistent high quality results."



Dr. Najm

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Mitchell scores 40, Cavs beat Wizards



Cleveland Cavaliers guard Donovan Mitchell (45) goes to the basket against Washington Wizards forward Eugene Omoruyi (97) and guard Landry Shamet (20) during the second half of an NBA basketball game, Wednesday, Feb 7, 2024, in Washington. (AP)

Another dominant performance on world stage

China wins two more diving golds

DOHA, Qatar, Feb 8, (AP): With its sights on the Paris Olympics, China is turning in another dominant diving performance on the world stage.

Wang Zongyuan and Xie Siyi finished 1-2 in the men's 3-meter Wednesday, while Chen Yiwen and Chang Yani captured their third straight gold medal in women's synchronized springboard at the World Aquatics Championships.

China didn't enter the first two events of the meet, which comes just five months ahead of the Summer Games, but the country

has been nearly unbeatable since then.

Other than an 11th-place showing in men's 1-meter springboard, a non-Olympic event in which China entered only one athlete, the diving superpower has taken gold in the other six disciplines. Most of them have been runaway victories.

Meanwhile, Sharon van Rouwendaal of the Netherlands completed a sweep of the women's individual open water races by taking gold in the 5-kilometer at Old Doha Port. In a thrilling finish, Logan Fontaine of France claimed the men's title in the

non-Olympic event.

In the men's solo free of artistic swimming, Giorgio Minisini of Italy added a gold medal to the silver he captured in the solo technical event.

Xie led the preliminaries and semifinals at Hamad Aquatic Centre, but it was Wang who took control in the final. He ripped off one stellar dive after another on the way to a total score of 538.70, relegating Xie to the silver in 516.10.

"I told myself that I was winning the gold today and becoming a world champion once again," Wang said.

It was the second gold of the championships for Wang, who teamed with Long Daoyi to capture the synchronized springboard title.

Wang and Xie have dominated the springboard in international competition and will head to Paris as huge favorites. Xie was world champion in 2017 and '19, and the Tokyo Olympic champion as well.

But Wang has captured the last two world titles while Xie took an extended break. "After Tokyo, I didn't compete in any big events for two years, so I'm happy

to be back," Xie said. "I see my colleague Wang both as a friend and as an opponent, and this pushes me to train harder."

Osmar Olvera of Mexico grabbed his second medal of the championships, adding to his gold in 1-meter springboards with a bronze at 498.40. No one else was even close to the three medalists.

Chen and Chang totaled 323.43 points in the synchro event, leaving Anabelle Smith and Maddison Keeney of Australia with the silver at 300.45. Scarlet Mew Jensen and Yasmin Harper of Britain claimed bronze at 281.70, edging out the American duo of Krysta Palmer and Alison Gibson by a mere 2.4 points.

Chen and Chang also will be the heavy favorites in the 3-meter individual event on Friday.

The 24-year-old Chen is the two-time reigning world champion off the springboard, while the 22-year-old Chang claimed the silver last summer in Fukuoka, Japan, and the bronze two years ago in Budapest, Hungary.

Chang has now won four synchronized 3-meter world titles, also taking the 2017 championship while partnered with Shi Tingmao.

Overall, China has earned 13 straight golds in the event since finishing second when

it debuted at the 1998 worlds in Perth, Australia.

Van Rouwendaal added to her victory in the 10K by touching first in 57 minutes, 33.90 seconds. The 30-year-old now has three world championships over her illustrious career, along with gold and silver medals at the Olympics.

The silver went to Chelsea Gubecka of Australia in 57:35.00, while Ana Marcela Cunha of Brazil settled for bronze in 57:36.80. It was the 16th world medal for Cunha, who has reached the podium in eight straight championships going back to 2011.

"This race was very tough," Cunha said. "You have yellow and red cards, but you cannot see anything under the water."

In the men's race, Fontaine won a furious sprint to the touch pad among five swimmers. He finished in 51:29.30, beating teammate Marc-Antoine Olivier by just 0.30 seconds in a 1-2 finish for France.

Fontaine was especially motivated after a fourth-place finish in the 10K.

Pelicans fly past Clippers

WASHINGTON, Feb 8, (AP): Donovan Mitchell scored 40 points, including 14 in the fourth quarter, and the Cleveland Cavaliers overcame an uneven performance for their 15th victory in 16 games, a 114-106 victory over the Washington Wizards on Wednesday night.

Evan Mobley added 22 points on 9-of-10 shooting to help the Cavaliers extend their current NBA-best win streak to seven games and move a game ahead of Milwaukee and New York in second place in the Eastern Conference.

Mitchell and Mobley also had eight rebounds apiece as Cleveland survived a game with nine ties and 17 lead changes against the Wizards, who are second-to-last in the East.

Kyle Kuzma scored 28 points for Washington, which closed a four-game home stand without a victory after winning two of its first three games under interim coach Brian Keefe.

Warriors 127, 76ers 104

In Philadelphia, Andrew Wiggins had 21 points and 10 rebounds and Jonathan Kuminga scored 18 points to lead Golden State past a Philadelphia team sagging without Joel Embiid.

Stephen Curry scored two points in the first half and finished with nine, just two games after he dropped 60 points on Atlanta. Klay Thompson scored 18 points in 28 minutes after he was benched the final seven minutes in Monday's win against Brooklyn.

With the NBA trade deadline set for Thursday, coach Steve Kerr said he didn't expect the Warriors to make a major move. The Warriors moved to 23-25 and are still stuck in 11th in the Western Conference -- just outside a spot for the Western Conference play-in tournament.

Ricky Council IV scored 17 points for the 76ers, who may slog through the rest of the season with Embiid out significant time following knee surgery. Without Embiid, the 76ers are an ugly 4-12, and a team just two weeks ago that played like an East contender, now faces a play-in possibility.

Pelicans 117, Clippers 106

In Los Angeles, C.J. McCollum scored 13 of his 25 points in the fourth quarter, Zion Williamson added 21 points and 10 assists, and New Orleans slowed Los Angeles' recent roll.

Brandon Ingram had 15 points and eight rebounds for the Pelicans, who opened a four-game road trip with their fourth consecutive victory to match their longest winning streak of the season. Herb Jones and Trey Murphy III added 13 points apiece.

James Harden scored 19 points and Norman Powell had 18 for the Clippers, whose four-game winning streak ended in their first game back from an impressive 6-1 road trip during which they moved to the top of the Western Conference standings. Los Angeles was playing its eighth game in 13 days, and New Orleans capitalized.

Kawhi Leonard scored 15 points and Paul George finished with seven after missing his first nine shots as Los Angeles lost for only the sixth time in 32 games since the start of December.

Celtics 125, Hawks 117

In Boston, Kristaps Porzingis scored 31 points, Derrick White scored 12 of his 21 points in the fourth quarter and Boston beat Atlanta.

Jayson Tatum finished with 20 points, nine rebounds and seven assists as the Celtics improved to 24-3 at home and won their seventh straight over the Hawks. Al Horford added 14 points with eight rebounds and eight assists and Jaylen Brown finished with 15 points.

Brown was the only Boston starter not to hit a 3-pointer as the Celtics went 17 for 49 from beyond the arc, making 9 of 16 in the fourth quarter to put away the pesky Hawks.

Saddiq Bey led Atlanta with 25 points. Trae Young had 20 points and 10 assists and Jalen Johnson and Onyeka Okongwu added 19 points apiece for the Hawks.

Heat 116, Spurs 104

In Miami, Jimmy Butler recorded his first triple-double in more than two years, Tyler Herro led the way with 24 points and Miami pulled away in the fourth quarter to beat San Antonio.

BASKETBALL

Butler whose most recent triple-double was Jan. 29, 2022 -- finished with 17 points, 11 rebounds and 13 assists for the Heat, who led by as many as 19 in the fourth. Bam Adebayo added 20 points for Miami.

Tre Jones and Devin Vassell each scored 19 points and Victor Wembanyama finished with 18 points and 13 rebounds for the Spurs. San Antonio started its day with a shootaround practice at a Miami Beach school, surprising the boys and girls varsity teams there by letting them watch the last few minutes.

Wembanyama got his 25th double-double of the season, by far the most among this season's rookie class -- Oklahoma City's Chet Holmgren has 13 for No. 2 on the list -- and the most by a first-year player since Deandre Ayton had 39 and Trae Young had 30 in the 2018-19 campaign.

Pistons 133, Kings 120

In Sacramento, Jaden Ivey scored a career-high 37 points and Detroit, playing without its two top scorers, stunned Sacramento.

Ivey added seven assists and six rebounds as Detroit (7-43) improved to 3-20 on the road this season.

Alec Burks had 25 points and seven rebounds off the bench, and Jalen Duren had 20 points, 15 rebounds and six assists.

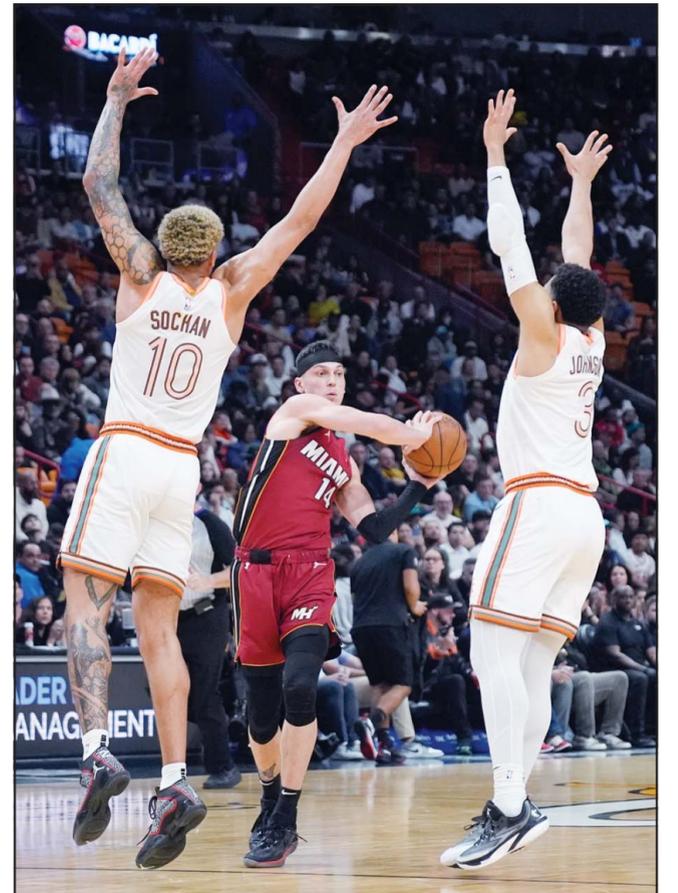
The Pistons were without Cade Cunningham (left knee injury management) and Bojan Bogdanovic (left calf soreness), who both average more than 20 points per game.

Domantas Sabonis led Sacramento with 30 points and 12 rebounds for his 33rd consecutive double-double.

Raptors 123, Hornets 117

In Charlotte, RJ Barrett scored 23 points, Jakob Poeltl had two big plays in the final minute and Toronto overcame a career-high 45 points from Miles Bridges to hand Charlotte its ninth straight loss.

Scottie Barnes, who will play in his first All-Star Game after being chosen as an alternate, finished with 18 points for the Raptors. Immanuel Quickley also scored 18, and Poeltl finished with 12 points and 12 rebounds.



Miami Heat guard Tyler Herro (14) looks to pass while defended by San Antonio Spurs forward Jeremy Sochan (10) and forward Keldon Johnson (3) during the first half of an NBA basketball game Wednesday, Feb. 7, 2024, in Miami. (AP)

Change Name

I, FIRDOSH, (as mentioned in current passport No. M 5454730) having permanent address BHANPUR, HARINARPUR, RAIPARI, BAHRAICH, LUCKNOW; and residing in Kuwait declared that henceforth my name will be read as FIROJ. I henceforth will be known in the name FIROJ.

Change Name

I, MOHAMMAD FAROOQUE MOHAMMAD USMAN HOLDER OF INDIAN PASSPORT NO. S3693860 HAVING PERMANENT ADDRESS 201 A8 PREMKIRAN SECTOR 2 SHANTINAGAR MIRA ROAD 40107 DISTRIKANE MAHARASHTRA INDIA, RESIDING IN KUWAIT AT PRESENT, HEREBY DECLARE THAT HENCEFORTH MY NAME WILL BE READ AS UNDER GIVEN NAME. MOHAMMAD FAROOQUE MOHAMMAD USMAN, AND SURNAME, SHAIKH

Djokovic to return to Indian Wells

INDIAN WELLS, Calif., Feb 8, (AP): Novak Djokovic is returning to the BNP Paribas Open for the first time in five years in pursuit of a record sixth title in the Southern California desert.

The world's top-ranked male player last competed at Indian Wells in 2019, when he lost in the third round. Djokovic didn't play here the last four years because he wasn't vaccinated against COVID-19. The U.S. required noncitizen visitors to be vaccinated through last spring.

Djokovic won the tournament in 2008, 2011, 2014, 2015 and 2016. Three-time winner Rafael Nadal will return after missing last year's event because of injury. He missed the Australian Open in January because of injury as well.

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Magpies are 13 points off top four as they head to Forest

Newcastle slump gives club bosses a tough decision to make over Howe

Bilbao end Atletico 28-match unbeaten streak at home in 1st leg of Copa semis

Berenguer scores lone goal

MADRID, Feb 8, (AP): Athletic Bilbao ended Atletico Madrid's 28-match unbeaten streak at home with a 1-0 win in the first leg of the Copa del Rey semifinals.

Alex Berenguer converted a first-half penalty kick to give Athletic the tight victory at the Metropolitan Stadium.

Atletico hadn't lost at the Metropolitan since a 1-0 defeat against Barcelona in January last year in the Spanish league. Diego Simeone's team had only two draws since then, both against Getafe in the Spanish league.

"It's always tough to win in this stadium, they are always pressing forward and putting you on the defensive," Athletic coach Ernesto Valverde said. "It was a typical Copa match and we came through in the end."

Atletico thought it had a chance for a late equalizer when the referee called a penalty kick on Alvaro Morata in stop-



Chelsea's Noni Madueke, (top), challenges for the ball with Aston Villa's Douglas Luiz during the English FA Cup fourth round soccer match between Aston Villa and Chelsea at the Villa Park Stadium in Birmingham, England. (AP)

SOCCER

page time, but video review determined that the Atletico striker was offside and reversed the call.

The hosts had almost evened the match in the 85th when Ángel Correa's shot was blocked by Athletic defender Inigo Lekue at the goal line.

Berenguer scored the winner by converting a 25th-minute penalty after a hard sliding tackle by Atletico defender Reinildo on Athletic midfielder Beñat Prados.

Leverkusen face Bavarians in ultimate test of their title bid

DUESSELDORF, Germany, Feb 8, (AP): It's now or "Neverkusen."

Xabi Alonso has coached Bayer Leverkusen to its best chance in years of finally winning the Bundesliga. The ultimate test comes on Saturday when Leverkusen hosts 11-time defending champion Bayern Munich.

Leverkusen has not lost any of its 30 games in all competitions this season - the only unbeaten team in any of Europe's top five leagues - and leads Bayern by two points in the standings.

Alonso and his players refuse to even talk about the title race - it's still early, they're taking things game by game.

Bayern's long reign in German soccer has seen plenty of would-be challengers fall short, not least Borussia Dortmund throwing away its chance on the last day of last season.

And Leverkusen is Germany's great "nearly" team. Five times a Bundesliga runner-up and never a champion, and Champions League runner-up to Real Madrid in 2002. Shaking off the "Neverkusen" nickname will take something special.

Alonso has transformed Leverkusen since taking over what was then a relegation-threatened team in October 2022. His achievements have seen him linked with his old club Liverpool as a potential successor to Jürgen

Klopp when the German leaves at the end of the season after nine years in charge. Klopp remains the last non-Bayern coach to win the Bundesliga, with Borussia Dortmund in 2012.

"What Jurgen has done at Liverpool, I have great respect, great admiration for him ... but my focus is here at Bayer Leverkusen," Alonso said last month after Klopp made his plans public. He's spoken before about how his playing career under some of the best coaches of recent years - Pep Guardiola, Jose Mourinho, Carlo Ancelotti - gave him a wealth of examples to draw on when coaching his own games.

Alonso's team plays a calm, possession-based style which can quickly turn lethal. Full-backs Alejandro Grimaldo and Jeremie Frimpong bring skill and pace to both flanks, and with seven goals and 10 assists in 20 Bundesliga games, Grimaldo is arguably the most influential left back in European soccer this season.

The one big question mark is over the striker position. Victor Boniface has been out for the last month after he was injured while training for the Africa Cup of Nations. In Leverkusen's five games since in the league and cup, neither backup striker Patrik Schick nor new loan signing Borja Iglesias have scored.

Kazma continue preparation for Arab Club Volleyball Championship

Kuwaiti derby as Kuwait Club and Al-Qadisiya clash in West Asian Club Champ'ship quarters

By Khaled El Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

MUSCAT, Feb 8: Al-Kuwait Club and Al-Qadisiya are set to clash in the quarter-finals of the ongoing

Second West Asian Club Volleyball Championship at 2:00 pm. The tournament, taking place at the main hall of the Omani Sohar Club, will culminate on the 11th of this month.

Simultaneously, other exciting

matchups are scheduled for today, featuring Al-Rayyan of Qatar against Sohar of Oman, Al-Ahly of Bahrain against Al-Seeb of Oman, and Baniyas of the Emirates against Al-Arabi of Qatar. Additionally, Al-Ibtisam of Saudi Arabia and Shabab Al-Hussein of Jordan will meet to determine ninth and tenth places.

In the preliminary round, Al-Rayyan claimed the top spot in Group Two, followed by Al-Qadisiyah in second place, Al-Seeb in third, Baniyas in fourth,

VOLLEYBALL

and Al-Ibtisam in fifth. Meanwhile, in the second group, Al-Arabi of Qatar secured the first position, with Al-Ahly of Bahrain in second, Al-Kuwait in third, Sohar in fourth, and Shabab Al-Hussein in fifth. As per the tournament format, the fifth-placed teams from both groups will be ranked ninth and tenth, while the top four teams from each group will advance to the quarter-finals.

During the preliminary round, "Al-Abyad" triumphed over Shabab Al-Hussein and Sohar but suffered defeats against Al-Arabi and Al-Ahly. On the other hand, Al-Qadisiya secured victories against Al-Ibtisam, Bani Yas, and Al-Rayyan, with a loss to Al-Seeb.

In a friendly match held during the current "camp in Istanbul, the Kazma experienced a 1-3 loss to their Turkish counterpart Sport. This preparation is crucial as "Sons of Adailiya" gear up for the 42nd Arab Club Volleyball Championship scheduled in the Kingdom during the Jordanian Hashemite Festival from February 17-29. The technical staff, led by Iranian coach Javad Shamami, is striving for full readiness as the "Orange" team includes Bulgarian professionals Fino and German Igor Bogachev.



Kuwait Club players defend as an opponent spikes the ball.

Liga lead at stake

Girona and historic season roll up at Real

BARCELONA, Spain, Feb 8, (AP): Little importance was given to Girona's away game at Real Madrid when the Spanish league published its calendar.

But six months and 23 rounds later and Saturday's game at the Santiago Bernabeu promises to decide which side will be in pole position to win the title come May.

It is a clash of the league's most trophied club against a minnow that is enjoying an historic season.

Both teams have lost only once in the league, and Madrid is just two points ahead of second-placed Girona.

Girona's stunning campaign has drawn it comparisons to Leicester City defying all the odds to win the English Premier League in 2016.

For now, Girona coach Michel Sánchez has repeatedly said he hopes his team can keep up its strong play long enough to finish in the top four, which would earn it a Champions League berth.

"A win at the Bernabeu would be heard around the world," Michel said on Thursday. "To leave there as leaders would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience. But even if we win at the Bernabeu it does not mean we would be candidates to win the title. There would still be a long way to go and each game is difficult."

This Girona does not sit back in its area and grind out wins. It goes after rivals, regardless of reputation. It has pulled off comebacks and leads the

league with 52 goals, four more than Madrid. Just ask Atletico Madrid, which Girona beat 4-3, or Barcelona, which fell 4-2 to its fellow Catalan club.

Girona's only loss came at the hands of Madrid when Jude Bellingham scored once and set up another for a 3-0 result in September.

Despite Madrid outscoring Girona by 727 to 52 million euros (\$782 to \$56 million), they are producing similar results and individual numbers by their top players.

Bellingham and Girona striker Artem Dovbyk each has a league-high

14 goals, a mark also shared with Getafe's Borja Mayoral.

Girona winger Sávio and Madrid midfielder Toni Kroos have delivered a league-high seven assists.

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Girona midfielder Aleix Garcia has completed the second-most passes, just behind Las Palmas midfielder Kirian Rodríguez, with Kroos in third.

Girona is hoping it will have Dovbyk ready to go after he missed last weekend's 0-0 draw with Real

Sociedad due to knee pain.

If not, then veteran Cristián Stuani will likely see more time in attack. The 37-year-old Stuani has seven goals in this campaign.

The visitors will also be missing starting defender Daley Blind and midfielder Yánel Herrera. Both will serve suspensions for accumulation of yellow cards.

Also, Michel will be in the stands serving the first of a two-game suspension for protesting during the Sociedad game.

"We will see if Dovbyk makes it," Michel said. "We will be missing important players, but we will be ready to compete Saturday. To arrive to the Bernabeu in these circumstances is a dream come true."

Madrid has doubts in defense where Carlo Ancelotti will have to patch together a backline possibly without any central defenders. David Alaba and Éder Militão ruptured leg ligaments near the start of the season, and Nacho Fernández and Antonio Rudiger are doubtful with minor complaints.

If none of the four are available, then Madrid may again shift right back Dani Carvajal into the middle of the defense and perhaps use midfielder Aurélien Tchouaméni as a makeshift defender.

Barcelona is eight points adrift of Madrid before it hosts the relegation-threatened Granada on Sunday, when fourth-placed Atletico Madrid is at Sevilla.



Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior, (left) is chased by Girona's Toni Villa during a Spanish La Liga soccer match between Real Madrid and Girona at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid, Spain. (AP)

LONDON, Feb 8, (AP): Saudi Arabia's entry into the world of English soccer had been going so well.

Newcastle's first full season following the takeover by the kingdom's Public Investment Fund in 2021 saw a recently relegation-threatened club soar, first reaching a cup final and then surpassing expectations by finishing fourth in the Premier League last May to qualify for the lucrative Champions League. The club's recruitment appeared

shrewd. The manager hired in the first weeks of the new era - Eddie Howe - was proving to be a hit. Newcastle's passionate fans fell back in love with the team, creating a raucous atmosphere at their St. James' Park home.

Now, a reality check. For the club with the world's richest owners has been struck by blow after blow in a turbulent and increasingly disappointing season.

First there was the 10-month suspension handed to its star offseason signing, Sandro Tonali, for gambling. Howe was soon hit by an extraordinary injury list that, at one stage, reached 11 members of the first-team squad.

And then there was the setback of failing to advance from the Champions League group stage, despite a statement 4-1 home win over Kylian Mbappe's Paris Saint-Germain, and, indeed, getting knocked out of Europe completely because of a last-place finish.

Adding to that is a slump in form that has dropped Newcastle to ninth place in the 20-team Premier League, on the back of a nine-game streak containing two wins, six losses

and most recently a draw, 4-4 at home to lowly Luton on Saturday.

What happens next is a hard question to answer, because it's tough to know what the PIF is thinking and there's no precedent to its decision-making in soccer.

However, even though those in charge of the sovereign wealth fund might have been busy lately trying to secure a deal with the PGA Tour elsewhere in its portfolio of sporting

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assets, they cannot have failed to notice the downturn under Howe these last couple of months.

"No amount of credit in the bank is big enough," a downbeat Howe said after a surprising recent 3-1 home loss to Nottingham Forest, maybe hinting at the pressure he could come under if results continue to disappoint.

The general feeling is that fielding the same players again and again during the injury-hit squad's intense run of games late last year has caught up with them. Newcastle has typically been defensively solid under Howe, yet the team has conceded 10 goals in its last three home games and another four at Liverpool on Jan. 1. Howe's failure to buy an out-and-out defensive midfielder to protect the defense looks to be a big oversight.

Brazil midfielder Bruno Guimarães is arguably Newcastle's best player but he has been overworked. Howe's two strikers, Callum Wilson and Alexander Isak, cannot stay fit.

Meanwhile, the Premier League is clamping down harder on teams' overspending - Everton has already been deducted points, and is facing another charge along with Forest - so Newcastle cannot just keep on spending big every transfer window. Indeed, in January, Newcastle didn't make a single signing of note, despite an injury list that contains important players such as goalkeeper Nick Pope and Brazil midfielder Joelinton.

Howe has done a fine job and is well respected, but might be running out of time considering Newcastle is 13 points off the top four. Even if England gets five spots in next season's expanded Champions League, fifth-placed Aston Villa still has 11 points more than Newcastle with 15 games remaining.

Newcastle heads to Forest on Saturday eager to avenge that surprise result at St. James' on Dec. 26 that was an indication of the team's current direction of travel down the standings.

Howe has to hope that a calmer fixture schedule, owing to Newcastle being out of Europe, allows his team to get back its intensity and work on more things on the training ground. While the absence of Joelinton - perhaps for the rest of the season - is a huge blow, the injured players are slowly coming back.

There's still time for Newcastle to secure a respectable league finish and even reach another cup final, this time in the FA Cup where it is scheduled to play second-tier Blackburn away in the last 16 on Feb. 27.

Best of the Rest

PSG advance to quarters: Kylian Mbappé scored his 30th goal of the season Wednesday as Paris Saint-Germain advanced to the French Cup quarterfinals with a 3-1 win over Brest that extended its unbeaten run to 15 matches.

Amid persistent rumors he will leave PSG to join Real Madrid after his contract runs out at the end of June, Mbappé has been in tremendous form this season.

Last weekend, the France captain scored his 20th league goal in just 19 matches.

According to data by Opta, Mbappé has been involved in 50 goals in 28 French Cup games - 35 goals and 15 assists - scoring 11 goals in his last four matches in the competition.

But while Mbappé continues to impress, PSG remains fragile ahead of next week's match against Real Sociedad in the first leg of their Champions League round of 16 tie. (AP)

Pacers trade Hield to 76ers: The slumping Philadelphia 76ers have acquired guard Buddy Hield from the Indiana Pacers for Marcus Morris Jr., Furkan Korkmaz and three second-round draft picks, a person familiar with the decision told The Associated Press on Thursday.

The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because the trade was not yet official. (AP)



Al-Fatah Club player out jumps Ahly player to score during a basketball game at the Arab Women's Club Games.

Sports

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Al-Fatah Club suffers defeat in basketball

14 clubs vie for glory

Salwa Al-Sabah & Sporting underline title credentials

By Suzan Nasser

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

SHARJAH, Feb 8: Salwa Al-Sabah and Sporting Clubs, have solidified their positions as top contenders for the volleyball title at the ongoing seventh edition of the Arab Women's Club Games. The prestigious tournament, held under the patronage of Sheikhha Jawaher Al Qasimi, the wife of the Ruler of Sharjah and President of the Sharjah Women's Sports Foundation, is set to continue until February 12th.

Today, at the conclusion of the group tournament, both the Salwa Al-Sabah and "Sporting" teams demonstrated their prowess with impressive victories, each securing a resounding 3-0 result. These wins served as crucial final rehearsals before their entry into the quarter-finals. The Kuwaiti team, Salwa Al-Sabah, emerged victorious against, Dorra Al-Souri, in a match for the second group. Simultaneously, the Egyptian women achieved a triumph against Akad Ankawi in a match concluding the first group matches.

Salwa Al-Sabah dominated 25-17, 25-21, and 25-15, while the Egyptian



Salwa Al-Sabah Club player scores a point against Dorra Al-Souri.

Sporting team encountered little resistance in their 25-8, 25-8, and 25-12 victory. In the third match, Byblos players showcased clear Lebanese superiority with 25-17, 25-11, 25-12 win.

Switching to basketball competitions, the Al-Fatah Club team suffered a narrow defeat against their Bahraini counterpart, Al-Ahly, with a final score of 72-79. Despite the loss leading to their exit from contention for top

positions, the girl's players displayed commendable performance.

Despite an initial advantage for the Kuwaitis in the first quarter (20-15), the Bahraini players managed to turn the tide in their favor during the second and third quarters (24-16 and 19-15). The fourth quarter ended in a tie (21-21).

In the realm of table tennis, the team experienced a setback, suffering a loss to the Jordanian Hamada team.

Eagerly awaited Handball League set for Saturday

By Khaled El Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 8: The eagerly awaited 57th edition of the Handball League for the 2023-2024 sports season is set to kick off tomorrow, featuring 14 participating clubs after the withdrawal of Al-Jahra and Al-Shabab from this season. The inaugural matches, introduced under the league's new

HANDBALL

system known as "The Merger," will witness Al-Tadamon and Al-Fahaheel teams opening the proceedings at 4:30 pm. Following this, Al-Nasr will face Sulaibkhat at 6 pm, with Al-Salmiya concluding Saturday's matches against Yarmouk at the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex.

The novel tournament system dictates that the 14 teams engage in a single-round league, culminating in the qualification of the top six teams, based on points earned from the first division, for the Premier League. The Premier League, played in a "home



An official displays a picked team during the draw.

and away" format, will determine the champion. The remaining eight teams will compete in the first division, playing a single round according to their ranking from seventh to fourteenth.

Handball Federation Secretary Qayed Al-Adwani expressed his best

wishes for success to the participating teams, emphasizing the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the upcoming league season. Al-Adwani highlighted the strengthened competition due to the clubs' strategic deals, including the recruitment of foreign and local coaches and professionals, anticipating a positive impact on the development of national teams through enhanced player interaction.

Recent team deals showcase a commitment to excellence, with clubs renewing contracts and signing new professionals. Notable renewals include Al-Kuwait with coach Haitham Al-Rashidi and Kazma with Serbian coach Bozo Rodic. Al-Arabi extended agreements with Dr. Ahmed Foulad, Al-Qadisiya secured Macedonian coach Zoran Katsratovic, and Al Salmiya renewed with Tunisian coach Monji El Bennani.

The Handball League, steeped in history since its launch in the 1966-1967 season, has witnessed Kuwait emerge as the most successful team with 13 titles. Al-Salmiya follows with 11 titles, Al-Arabi with 10, and Kazma with 6. The league promises a competitive season, and notable professionals will contribute to the teams' quest for success.

Haller fires Ivory Coast into Africa Cup final against old foes the Super Eagles

No heroics this time from South Africa goalkeeper Williams

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast, Feb 8, (AP): Sébastien Haller fired host nation Ivory Coast into an Africa Cup of Nations final against old foe Nigeria with a 1-0 win over Congo.

Haller scored when his volley from Max Gradel's cross bounced before going in under the crossbar in the 65th minute, setting off wild celebrations in the 60,000-capacity Alassane Ouattara Stadium.

Haller was making his first start of the tournament after recovering fully from an ankle injury, further good news for Ivorians who are convinced of winning their third Africa Cup title.

Progress seemed unlikely after a 4-0 loss to Equatorial Guinea left the team on the verge of a group-stage exit. But Ivory Coast has bounced back since firing its coach by overcoming one setback after another.

"It's like a dream," said interim coach Emese Faé, who had to do without four players who were sus-

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pected for the semifinal following the dramatic quarterfinal win over Mali.

Kelechi Iheanacho scored the winning penalty earlier to send Nigeria to the final with a 4-2 shootout victory over South Africa after their semifinal ended 1-1 after extra time.

"It has been with me since growing up, I need to win something with the Super Eagles," Nigeria star Victor Osimhen said.

Congo had made a good start against the home team. Cédric Bakambu thought he'd put the Leopards ahead but his celebrations were cut short and the goal ruled out as goalkeeper Yahia Fofana was deemed to have had the ball.

"It could have been another match," Congo coach Sébastien Desabre said of the disallowed goal. "But we can't re-write history. It is how it is."

Simon Adingra headed a good chance wide and Franck Kessié struck the post for Ivory Coast, while Yoane Wissa had a big chance saved by Fofana at the other end.

Fan favorite Haller headed the best chance of the first half wide in the 41st and went on to miss other good chances. All were forgiven when he scored the winner.

Congo's players and Desabre protested by holding their right hands in front of their mouths and two fingers to their temples during the country's anthem to spotlight the armed violence taking part in the east of the country. The players also wore black armbands for the game.

There were no heroics this time in the penalty shootout from South Africa goalkeeper Ronwen Williams, who saved four in the quarterfinal win over Cape Verde.

Nigeria counterpart Stanley Nwabali made two penalty saves to deny the Bafana Bafana a place in the final - diving to the bottom left corner to thwart Teboho Mokoena, then Evidance Makgopa's centrally placed effort.

The game in Bouaké had barely



DR Congo's Samuel Moutoussamy (left) and Ivory Coast's Jean-Thierry Lazare Amani battle for the ball during the African Cup of Nations semifinal soccer match between Ivory Coast and DR Congo, at the Olympic Stadium of Ebimpe in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. (AP)



South Africa's Percy Tau (right), challenges for the ball with Nigeria's Ola Aina during the African Cup of Nations semifinal soccer match between Nigeria and South Africa, at the Peace of Bouake stadium in Bouake Bouake, Ivory Coast. (AP)

started when Osimhen doubled over in apparent pain. Osimhen was an injury worry before the game because of abdominal pain, but he was able to resume after a brief pause.

Nwabali was busy early on as South Africa dominated possession and created more chances in the first half.

Nigeria got its break midway through the second when Mothobi Mvula conceded a penalty for a foul on Osimhen.

Pressure on Pochettino eases

Chelsea win at Aston Villa in FA Cup replay

LONDON, Feb 8, (AP): So much for Chelsea being in crisis.

A 3-1 win at Aston Villa in an FA Cup fourth-round replay extended Chelsea's strong run of results in the domestic cup competitions this season, just as critics were getting on manager Mauricio Pochettino's back for the team's many dismal displays in the Premier League.

Chelsea arrived at Villa Park having been routed 4-1 at Liverpool and then overrun in a 4-2 home loss to Wolverhampton, both in the league.

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The pressure on Pochettino had ramped up, with even the wife of defender Thiago Silva appearing to call out the Argentine when she posted on X, formerly Twitter, at the end of the Wolves game: "It's time to change. If you wait any longer it will be too late."

Chelsea's players delivered a performance to make their manager proud, with first-half goals by Conor Gallagher and Nicolas Jackson coming before an exquisite free kick

from Enzo Fernandez in the 54th that curled beyond his fellow World Cup winner from Argentina, Emi Martinez.



Chelsea's Nicolas Jackson (left), celebrates with his teammate Enzo Fernandez after scoring his side's second goal during the English FA Cup fourth round soccer match between Aston Villa and Chelsea at the Villa Park Stadium in Birmingham, England. (AP)

Fernandez celebrated by taking off his shirt and pointing to his name on the back of it.

"It wasn't just the manager - everyone associated with the club needed that today," Chelsea defender Ben Chilwell said.

Villa has been virtually impregnable at its own stadium this season but the hosts couldn't live with Chelsea's intensity. Their consolation came in the first minute of stoppage time through substitute Moussa Diaby.

Chelsea, which has reached the English League Cup final against Liverpool on Feb. 25, will host second-tier Leeds in the fifth round - or last 16 - of the FA Cup three days later.

Nottingham Forest also advanced in a replay - and was rewarded with a home match against Manchester United - after beating second-tier Bristol City 5-3 in a penalty shootout. The game finished 1-1 at the end of extra time.

American goalkeeper Matt Turner made the only save of the shootout, keeping out Sam Bell's shot. Taiwo Awoniyi converted the clinching spot kick.

Ceferin 'says' he will leave in 2027

PARIS, Feb 8, (AP): UEFA president Aleksander Čeferin will not stand as a candidate in 2027, announcing the news in a testy statement on Thursday one hour after steering through a controversial change of legal rules that would have let him stay.

Ceferin has led UEFA since 2016 and said he was "tired of COVID, tired of two wars" and of plans for a rival Super League that he called a "nonsense project."



Ceferin

He made the surprise announcement by opening a brief news conference with a statement in which he called perceived opponents "clowns" and said people who questioned UEFA's unity in recent weeks should be "a bit embarrassed now."

Yet UEFA has gone through unprecedented inner turmoil that damaged its reputation in recent weeks since the Slovenian law-

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yer moved to amend its rules that would have let him extend his presidency to 15 years until 2031.

UEFA has had a presidential term limit of 12 years since 2017 in anti-corruption reforms passed in fallout from American and Swiss federal investigations of international soccer that directly led to Čeferin being elected.

Soccer bodies came under pressure during the American federal investigation to prevent networks of self-serving patronage and influence, and Čeferin himself promised seven years ago he would not stay beyond 2027 in a job that pays him about \$3.5 million annually.

The apparent power grab on term limits provoked a confrontation at a Dec. 2 closed-doors meeting with UEFA's longest-standing board member, former Manchester United CEO David Gill.

It also pushed one of Čeferin's closest allies, Croatia soccer great Zvonimir Boban, to resign two weeks ago as UEFA chief of football.