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## Opinion

# Other GCC countries celebrated with joy while we celebrated with negative phenomena laws

By Ahmed Al-Jarallah  
Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times



Al-Jarallah

IS Kuwait destined to be discordant, not only in the Gulf Cooperation Council, but also in the world. Is it meant to be a repellent of joy, creativity, culture and arts?

Yesterday, the world celebrated New Year's Day. Joy spread among all people of all diversities, and the entertainment industry flourished.

Indeed, many countries, especially certain Gulf ones, have achieved greater financial success by recognizing from the start that entertainment is an industry, in stark contrast to the more restrictive approach seen in Kuwait.

Here, individuals appear confined, as if they are in a prison cell where smiling is prohibited because they violated the "negative phenomena" law, leading to a surge in drug abuse among other consequences.

People were happy to usher in the new year because it is a moment of joy in a world that is dominated by wars and crises. However, the scenario in Kuwait was gloomy because of the presence of a parliamentary force that

opposes any manifestation of joy and happiness.

This force has been given full reign by weak governments to determine what is permissible and what is forbidden.

There are the many prohibitions that the Kuwaiti people have been enduring for nearly two decades to this day, to the extent that restaurants are prevented from playing music at the end of the year to celebrate the New Year.

During the time of holidays, more than half a million people leave Kuwait, and neighboring countries benefit from them. For example, in the Emirates, hotels are crowded with Kuwaitis during the current holidays. Same is the case in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the Sultanate of Oman. On the other hand, it is forbidden for any visitor to come to us.

This is due to the fact that the deep state and the MPs have erected high walls to prevent anyone from entering, except with special

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## HH Amir exchanges New Year greetings with world leaders

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Sunday exchanged cables of congratulations and best wishes with leaders of Arab and friendly countries on the advent of 2024.

His Highness the Amir wished all world countries and peoples a happy New Year of security, peace, stability and prosperity, as well as good health and wellness.

Information minister conveys condolences

## Kuwait cultural council mourns Al-Zaid

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1, (KUNA): The General Secretariat of Kuwait National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature (NCCAL) mourned Dr. Najji Al-Zaid who passed away on Monday.

In a statement released on Monday, the secretariat conveyed condolences of the Minister of Information, Minister of Endowments and Islamic Affairs and NCCAL Chairman Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi to the family of the deceased.

Najji Al-Zaid is considered to be one of the most prominent men of culture and literature in the Kuwaiti and Arab cultural scenes, and has worked as a faculty member at the College of Medicine in Kuwait University for many years.

Moreover, he had been a member of the editorial staff of the Kuwaiti cultural magazine, "Alam Al-Maarefa," for many years, marked with contributions to the editions.

## NewsWatch

**KUWAIT CITY:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable on Sunday to UAE President Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, expressing deepest condolences over the death of Sheikhha Muhra Bint Khalid Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent a cable on Sunday to UAE President Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, expressing deepest condolences over the death of Sheikhha Muhra Bint Khalid Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan. (KUNA)

**CAIRO:** The Egyptian cabinet on Sunday dismissed recent reports about the alleged detection of a case of a new swine flu (H1N1) virus variant in the country.

The Ministry of Health's preventive medicine sector has not monitored any new variant of swine flu, urging mass media and social media users to obtain relevant information from official sources, the cabinet's media center said in a press release. (KUNA)

**BEIRUT:** The U.S. military said Sunday that its forces opened fire on Houthi rebels after they attacked a cargo ship in the Red Sea, killing several of them in an escalation of the maritime conflict linked to the war in Gaza. "We're going to act in a self-defense going forward," a White House official said.

In a series of statements, the U.S. Central Command said the crew of the USS Gravely destroyer first shot down two anti-ship ballistic missiles fired at the Singapore-flagged Maersk Hangzhou late Saturday, after the vessel reported getting hit by a missile earlier that evening as it sailed through the Southern Red Sea. (AP)

**BEIRUT:** U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has closed an international tribunal that was created to investigate the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, the U.N. chief's spokesperson said Sunday.

Over the years, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon held in absentia proceedings and found three members of the militant Hezbollah group guilty in connection with Hariri's death in a massive Feb. 14, 2005 truck bombing. (AP)

**BAGHDAD:** Three overnight airstrikes on eastern Syria near a strategic border crossing with Iraq killed six Iran-backed militants Saturday, two members of Iraqi militia groups told The Associated Press.

The strikes on the border region of Boukamal came hours after an umbrella group of Iran-backed Iraqi militants known as the Islamic Resistance claimed an attack on a U.S. military base in northern Iraq's city of Irbil. (AP)

**TEHRAN:** In response to the joint statement of the United States and three European countries regarding Iran's program, Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nasser Kanani reiterated that Iran's nuclear program has always been and will be peaceful.

"It is very ridiculous that the countries that are responsible for the current situation regarding Iran's nuclear program, with the heart of reality, seek to change the culprit and the victim," he said in a press release on Friday. (KUNA)

**TEHRAN:** Iran executed on Friday four people and sentenced several others to prison for having alleged links with Israel's Mossad security service, local media reported.

Mizan, the news website affiliated with the country's judiciary, said three men and one woman were executed Friday morning. (AP)

# Kuwait records 159 emergency cases in first 12 hours of 2024



Lights illuminate at the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, during the New Year's Eve celebration, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Monday, Jan. 1, 2024. (AP)

## Snapshots of joy as New Year welcomed with optimism

# World's ongoing conflicts cast shadow on 2024

NEW YORK, Jan 1, (AP): New Year's Day arrived to cheers from thousands in New York's Times Square where a sparkling crystal ball descended to start 2024 with hope for some, even as the world's ongoing conflicts subdued celebrations and raised security concerns across the globe.

"It's beautiful," Corin Christian of Charlotte, North Carolina, said of the scene seconds past midnight as Frank Sinatra's "New York, New York" blared from speakers in the square and many in the crowd held cell phones in the air, trying to capture the spectacle.

"It's going very well so far," said Jacob Eriksson of Salt Lake City, Utah, with the earliest assessment of the New Year.

The march of midnight from time zone to time zone brought 2024 first to places like Australia, where more than 1 million people watched a pyrotechnic display centered around Sydney's famous Opera House and harbor bridge - a number of spectators equivalent to 1 in 5 of the city's residents. It would be another 16 hours before New York finished 2023.

There were snapshots of joy from country to country as the new year was welcomed with optimism that its days will bring more joy than sorrow.

Before midnight arrived in Times Square, December 31, 2023, and Shadayay Lawrence, 25, of Columbus, Ohio, said their New York visit highlighted four years of traveling the globe.

"It is a good way to bring in the new year," Lee said.

Also in Times Square, Tyrell Jacobs, 27, and Sarah Crayton, 26, arrived from New Orleans 15 hours before midnight and got engaged in streets packed with tens of thousands of people counting first the hours and then the minutes until midnight.

"It's definitely a must-see," Crayton



Photo by Rezk Tawfik

Children pray inside a church on Dec 31, 2023. Security personnel were strategically deployed at churches, chalets, desert areas, commercial complexes, and crowded places, with patrols actively monitoring the security situation in anticipation of New Year's Day. — See Page 2

said of the colorful cast of strangers nearby in tall hats and blowing noisemakers even before the ball dropped. "At least go once, you know, just to experience the magic."

A small army of thousands of police officers worked to keep New York City safe, just as heightened security had done in the cities midnight hit first. New York has seen near-daily protests sparked by the Israel-Hamas war.

Some 90,000 police and security officers were deployed around France including along Champs-Elysees Avenue, where large crowds took in a multidimensional light show projected

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## Kuwait's lawmakers reaffirm support to Palestinian cause

CAIRO, Jan 1, (Agencies): Kuwaiti MPs reiterated recently supportive position to the Palestinian cause and Palestinians' rights to defend their territories and live in peace.

This came in separate speeches by MPs Khaled Al-Monis, Ahmad Lari, Hamdan Al-Azmi and Mohammad Al-Huwaila before the Arab Parliament's special session held upon Kuwait's call on "backing Palestine and Gaza."

Al-Monis, who is also an AP lawmaker, affirmed Kuwait's honorable unwavering stance in support of the Palestinian cause on all levels, referring to the humanitarian disaster facing Palestinian people some 90 days due to the brutal Israeli occupation aggression.

He noted that there is a conflict with an enemy, which seeking to

remove Palestinians' right and steal their will, destroy their territories and change their identity.

Despite their crimes, the Israeli occupation forces have become in trouble by the steadfastness and courage of Palestinians, he stressed.

He underlined the importance of any endeavors aiming to back the issue of Palestine, calling for mobilizing collective efforts to expose the Israeli occupation's practices.

Meanwhile, MP Lari fully rejected displacing the Gazans from their homes, extolling Egypt and Jordan's efforts for their opposition to the displacement of Palestinian people from the Gaza Strip.

He stressed an action by the AP to the International Criminal Court and bringing the perpetrators, topped with Zionist entity's Prime Minister, to justice.

Free people around the world demand stopping the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, he said, affirming support to all Palestinians' actions overseas in defending their issue and ensuring their right to return.

Additionally, Al-Azmi emphasized that Kuwait has been among the first Arab and Islamic countries that hastily provided support to Palestine's issue via offering humanitarian and relief aid to the Gaza Strip.

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## Collision results in death

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

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1: Dr. Ahmed Al Shatti, Director of the Medical Emergency Department at the Ministry of Health, reported the first fatality in 2024 as a result of a collision with an all-terrain vehicle (buggy).**

He explained that the department received 159 calls within the first 12 hours of 2024. These included four instances of fighting, two suicide attempts involving jumping from high buildings, 2 cases of poisoning due to drug overdose, and two incidents of burns. The Control Room of the Medical Emergency Department referred all these cases to various hospitals, of which 11 cases were referred to Farwaniya Hospital, ten to Jahra Hospital, nine each to Adan Hospital and Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital, four each to Jaber Hospital and Al-Sabah Hospital, eight cases to Amiri Hospital, in addition to other hospitals and clinics.

Dr. Al-Shatti affirmed that accidents are still occurring in the desert camping areas due to lack of respect for the relevant instructions and regulations, indicating that the first few hours of the new year witnessed clear misuse of buggies, electricity generators, and other equipment.

He emphasized that the department aims to promote a safety culture by issuing warnings and emphasizing the consequences of neglecting them.

Dr. Al-Shatti reiterated the importance of avoiding high-pressure areas, refraining from driving buggies on driveways and highways, and ensuring that kitchens and electricity generators are away from the areas intended for gathering and sitting.

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## KNPC to sell assets

## MPs propose student union, certificate bill

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1:** MPs Abdulkareem Al-Kandari, Bader Nashmi Al-Anzi, Abdulaziz Al-Sagaabi, Muhammad Al-Sayer and Mehalhal Al-Mudhaf have submitted a bill consisting of 43 Articles on organizing the election and formation of student unions in Kuwait and abroad.

The MPs pointed out that the bill is a necessary step due to the growing number of students and student unions, indicating that the number of such unions has reached seven so far. He emphasized the importance of student unions, especially during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

According to the bill, the Minister of Higher Education will lay down the executive regulations for the election of student unions, and the official declaration of relevant societies and committees. The Minister of Higher Education is authorized to dissolve the students union if it commits major violations.

The first students union was that of Kuwaitis who studied in Cairo, Egypt in 1964. In 1969, the first students union in Kuwait was formed.

In addition, MPs Bader Nashmi Al-Anzi, Dawoud Maarafi, Fares Al-Otaibi, Shuaib Shaaban and Bader Sayyar submitted a bill on banning public institutions; including ministries, their subsidiaries and independent-budget institutions, from hiring individuals who hold unaccredited academic certificates.

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Palestinians wounded in the Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip receive treatment at the Nasser hospital in Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip, Sunday, Dec. 31, 2023. (AP)

## Prayer Timings

Fajr ..... 05:18 Asr ..... 14:42  
Sunrise .. 06:42 Maghrib .. 17:01  
Zohr ..... 11:51 Isha ..... 18:23

# Local

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

## Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

**By Day:** Mild and clouds will increase gradually with light to moderate northwesterly wind, to light variable wind, with speed of 06-28 km/h.

**By Night:** Rather cold to cold

## Weather

and partly cloudy to cloudy with light variable wind to light to moderate northwesterly wind, with speed of 06-26 km/h with a chance for scattered rain and a chance for light fog forming.

**Station Max Exp Min Rec**

Kuwait City	22	17
Kuwait Airport	21	12
Abdaly	22	13
Jahra	21	14
Salmiyah	21	17
Nuwaisib	21	14
Wafra	21	12

## 11 new martyrs registered; total now reaches 1,329

# 'Kuwaiti, non-Kuwaiti martyrs' kin to get govt, private medical care'

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1: Assistant Undersecretary at the Amiri Diwan and Director General of the Martyrs Office Salah Al-Oufan said 11 new martyrs were registered in the office as per the recommendation of the Nomination Committee in the Board of Trustees and with the approval of the board chairman; raising the total number of registered martyrs to 1,329, reports Al-Anba daily.



Salah Al-Oufan

Al-Oufan made the statement to the daily on the sidelines of his participation in the workshop that the Office organized for the widows and mothers of martyrs, which included a symposium on psychological pressures presented by Dr Ayoub Al-Ayoub.

Regarding the symposium, Al-Oufan said that its aim is to hone the talents of widows and mothers to help them deal with psychological pressures in the family and in their social lives.

As for the services, he talked about the amendments in the health, educational and housing regulations for the benefit of the families of the martyrs as the previous regulations were laid down 30 years ago; hence, the need to amend them in accordance with the developments concerning families and the ages of their members.

He explained that according to the amendments in terms of housing, all of a martyr's heirs shall enjoy a share in his home, even if he has a non-Kuwaiti widow and this is in coordination with the Public Authority for Housing Welfare.

As for the health aspect, he pointed out that the amendment will allow Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis among the families of martyrs to undergo treatment in government and private hospitals; including the families of 1,329 martyrs. He said the officials of the Office will soon hold a meeting with the health minister to work on canceling fees in hospitals and dispensaries for the families of martyrs who hold non-Kuwaiti nationality — 14 nationalities.

As for the educational regulations, he pointed

ed out that the amendments include raising the age allowed to complete university studies with a bachelor's degree, in order to allow the largest possible number of children of martyrs to complete their education in cooperation with the concerned authorities in the Ministry of Education.

He announced that after the end of mourning and in celebration of the national holidays, in cooperation with the Public Authority for Applied Education, the College of Basic Education, and the Department of Art Education; the Art Education Department will establish the martyrs mural in the martyrs garden, designed by the college's female students. He added a similar mural will be established in front of the Office in memory of the martyrs.

On the other hand, Director of the Family Guidance and Care Department in the Martyrs Office, Muhammad Al-Mutairi stressed this is the first course for the martyrs' widows. "We witnessed a wonderful interaction between the participants, as they were keen on benefiting from the symposium in terms of dealing with psychological pressures," he concluded.



KUNA photo  
Kuwaiti Ambassador to Chile Ziyad Al-Anbaei presents his credentials to President of Chile Gabriel Boric.

## Envoy presents credentials

Kuwaiti Ambassador to Chile Ziyad Al-Anbaei presented his credentials to President of Chile Gabriel Boric in the capital Santiago on Friday.

In a statement received by KUNA, Kuwait Embassy said the Ambassador conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to President Boric.

Al-Anbaei said he was eager to continue enhancing the two countries' relations that were forged over 60 years ago.

He quoted the president of Chile as saying that he would seek to further promote relations with all world countries and to create more economic bonds for the common interest of everyone. (KUNA)

# 'JN.1' mild, recovery quick

Doctors allay fears on new Corona variant



Photo by Rizk Taufiq  
Metropolitan Antonius, Metropolitan of the See of Jerusalem, Kuwait, and all the Near East leads the New Year prayer at the Coptic Church in Kuwait.

## Kuwaiti, Saudi death probe on

## Muted festivities in Amir mourning

By Munaif Nayef

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1: Major General Abdullah Al-Rujaib, the Assistant Undersecretary for Public Security, Operations, and Traffic Affairs at the Ministry of Interior, conducted a comprehensive tour of security checkpoints from Mubarakiya, Jaber Causeway, and Subbiya in the northern areas to the southern areas in Khairan chalets.

This visit by Major General Abdullah Al-Rujaib was in line with New Year celebrations and was carried out based on directives issued by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Khalid Al-Ahmad Al Sabah, and Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Sheikh Salim Al-Nawaf.

Security vehicles patrolled different parts of Kuwait where the usual celebrations witnessed in previous years were not held in compliance with individuals observing mourning due to the passing of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmad Al Sabah.

Meanwhile, the Jahra Security Commander Brigadier Saleh Aqla Al-Azmi explained that the extensive deployment of security campaigns, particularly in Subbiya Desert and camping sites, is aimed at bolstering security and addressing any negative phenomena or violations.

Simultaneously, special security forces and women police were stationed at the security checkpoint in Jaber Causeway, under the command of Brigadier Muhammad Taher Al-Ebrahim, alongside the traffic awareness officer Major Abdullah Bu Hassan.

In another development, Foreign Affairs

Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah offered his deep condolences to the families of the deceased Kuwaiti citizen and his Saudi companion -- Faisal Al-Mutairi and Anwar Al-Dhufairi respectively -- whose bodies were transported from Iraq and buried in Kuwait last Thursday, reports Al-Qabas daily.

The minister thanked the Iraqi government for its quick response in terms of revealing the scene of the accident, finding the bodies of the two deceased, and facilitating their transfer to Kuwait.

He added: "On Tuesday, when the two bodies were found, we officially requested the Iraqi government through our embassy in Baghdad to conduct an extensive investigation into the incident. Last Wednesday, the Iraqi Prime Minister issued a directive to conduct an investigation into the incident and ordered the formation of a committee to follow up this investigation. The information we have today is that the committee visited the scene of the accident. We are waiting for the official report on this accident. Let us review the report first and then see the results."

Asked about the presence of nine cars in the entire trip, Sheikh Salem disclosed: "We have not reached them yet. We are currently focusing on the two victims -- Faisal Al-Mutairi and Anwar Al-Dhufairi."

He asked all media outlets to be patient and refrain from publishing false news. "I hope everyone will adhere to this directive. I urge everyone not to circulate information that is not confirmed or incorrect, or not issued by official sources, because this will lead to more confusion, as well as incite people's anger and sadness. We are all affected as something extremely sad happened."

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1: Doctors specializing in preventive health reassured that the emergence of the new coronavirus variant -- 'JN.1' -- is normal and it does not pose any danger as the symptoms are mild, the hospitalization rate is low and those infected usually recover quickly, reports Al-Qabas daily.

These doctors told the daily that the medical teams in the country have vast experience and are efficiently dealing with any health development. They pointed out that the whole world has obtained immunity and the vaccines in Kuwait are good. They advised those with serious diseases to take precautionary health measures, such as reducing contact if symptoms similar to seasonal influenza and others appear.

Preventive health physician and general practitioner at Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) Dr Khaled Al-Hajri affirmed that "the health situation in Kuwait is under control and does not cause concern, according to the latest reports issued by the Ministry of Health."

He reiterated that the virus, despite its mutations, remains under the supervision of specialized medical teams, indicating that preliminary studies have shown the new variant is not as dangerous as some expect.

He advised everyone to take the necessary precautions, especially among groups most at risk such as the elderly and people with immune diseases, calling on them in particular to continue wearing masks in gathering places and closed areas as a preventive measure.

While he underscored the importance of getting winter vaccinations, which are the primary line of defense against the virus and its variants; he confirmed the continuous monitoring of the health situation in the country. He said the Health Ministry is working side by side international bodies to ensure an effective response to any development.

Another public health doctor -- Ahmad Al-Otaibi -- said the new variant is derived from Omicron that has been spreading for some time now. He added the symptoms of most cases are mild and the rate of hospitalization is very low.

He told the daily that vaccination works efficiently and the only thing required is to monitor the symptoms if they develop into difficulty breathing. He also emphasized the importance of taking the influenza vaccine as a preventive measure.

He disclosed that the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a statement, indicating that "JN.1" is the reason behind the increasing number of infections in the United States and that the variant is either more contagious or better at evading the immune systems in our bodies than other variants."

He then pointed out that there is no evidence JN.1 causes more serious symptoms than other variants, asserting there are no symptoms specific to JN.1. He said the initial symptoms are the same as the other newer variants, such as sore or itchy throat, fatigue, headache and cough.

## Co-ops shelves empty of eggs; prices spiral

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1: Kuwait Society for Consumer Protection Chairman Khaled Al-Subaie said the price of table eggs is rising, because some merchants sell only a small quantity of their products to cooperative societies and large quantities are sold to parallel markets, reports Al-Anba daily.

Al-Subaie informed the daily that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry set the price of a tray of eggs in cooperative societies at KD1.210, affirming the prices in cooperatives are closely monitored. He revealed that in other sales outlets like parallel markets, the price of a tray of eggs ranges from KD1.400 to KD1.5 and more.

He said the cooperatives must submit complaints to the concerned authorities against companies that reduce the quantities of eggs they supply to the cooperative societies.

He added he was surprised when the concerned authorities decided to prohibit the export of eggs within a certain period, except the licensed national farms and chicken and egg production companies. He asserted such decisions are contradictory, because the authorities prohibited the export of eggs while allowing certain companies to do so.

**32 citations issued:** The inspection team at the Hawally Governorate Inspection Department in the Public Authority for Food and Nutrition (PAFN) recently issued 32 citations against several food establishments in the governorate, reports Al-Anba daily.

Inspector Muhammad Al-Kandari told the daily that the violations included selling food unfit for human consumption as the natural properties changed like the color, shape and smell. He also confirmed the destruction of food items weighing 240 kilograms; indicating other violations were non-compliance with public sanitation rules and regulations as a large number of live insects were found in the food establishments.

He added 12 citations were issued regarding employees who did not obtain a health certificate and 12 arrest reports concerning employers who hired workers without a health certificate.

## KFF cautions camp-goers

# 'Take lit coal out of tent, turn off generators to avoid fire'

By Abdullah Al-Mesri

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1. (KUNA): Kuwait Fire Force called on desert-goers to take safety measures during the camping season.

In a statement to KUNA on Friday, the force's head of public relations and media Brigadier Mohammad Al-Ghareeb said that it is necessary to take lit coal out of the tent and turn off generators before sleeping, to avoid fire or suffocation by carbon monoxide.

He also called on people to avoid any cracks or holes in the ground, since they can be sheltering insects, rodents and poisonous reptiles. Moreover, he underlined the need to keep the camping site clean and without dry grass that could easily catch fire.

Al-Ghareeb said that desert-goers must refrain from using exposed wires to avoid electric shocks, and should also keep gas cylinders out of the kitchen tent.

Meanwhile, he called for setting tents opposite of the wind direction to avoid flying waste, choosing a higher floor for the camp site to avoid landslides during rain and leave a space of no less than six meters between each tent to prevent fire from spreading, should it break out.

The Brigadier added that in case of any emergency, people should immediately call the emergency hotline 112.

Meanwhile, the Public Relations Department at Kuwait Municipality has announced that the Camps Committee, headed by Faisal Al-Otaibi, approved a recommendation to cancel the camping site's license and impose fines once violations are uncovered, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to the department, the committee uncovered a number of violations



KUNA photo  
Brig Al-Ghareeb

against the terms and conditions for establishing camping sites; such as unlicensed motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) rentals and mobile grocery stores.

The department affirmed that the Municipality is keen on curbing the spread of negative phenomena or anything that contravenes Islamic teachings and the conservative customs and traditions of the country. It then warned that all the necessary legal measures will be taken against anyone proven to have committed violations, including the cancellation of the camp license.

## 'MENA suffering from water dearth'

# 'Hike investment in water projects'

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1: MEED magazine reported that the increasing scarcity of water in most parts of the Middle East and North Africa region reinforces trends to increase investments in the field of water and its sources in order to enhance the capacity and efficiency of this sector, reports Al-Anba daily.

The magazine pointed out that water scarcity may constitute an obstacle to spending on major projects aimed at improving economic performance in the region instead of increasing water desalination and treatment capacity to meet the growing demand in a more sustainable manner, as well as water transportation pipeline projects to reduce water loss and improve sanitation.

Other projects, such as reservoirs and district cooling, are also emerging as national and municipal governments work to improve water security and reduce the carbon footprint of buildings.

Contracts worth about \$22 billion were awarded between January and November 2023, about double the value of the previous year's awards, according to Med Projects data that tracks regional projects. Saudi Arabia accounted for 43% of the total contracts awarded, followed by the United Arab Emirates with 23%.

In terms of non-awarded contracts in the field of water transportation projects, the UAE and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia ranked first and second with \$10.75 billion and \$9.986 billion, respectively, and Oman and Qatar ranked third and fourth with projects worth \$1.823 billion and \$1.35 billion respectively. Kuwait came in fifth place with \$660 million, and finally Bahrain with projects worth \$240 million.

Water transmission and pipeline projects represent about 35% of the planned and non-awarded projects, followed by water desalination and wastewater treatment plant projects, each with a share of about 25%.

## 575 'aliens' held

### Fake cash in market

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1: The Criminal Investigation and Licensing Department, under the General Department of Criminal Investigation, successfully apprehended two individuals of African descent on allegations of orchestrating fraudulent schemes involving the creation and distribution of counterfeit banknotes, reports Al-Rai daily.

According to the Ministry of Interior, during the arrest, law enforcement agencies discovered in the suspects' possession an electric apparatus, colored papers resembling genuine banknotes in size, forged currency, and synthetic materials used to deceive unsuspecting victims into parting with their money.

**575 illegals nabbed:** Inspection campaigns by the General Administration of Residency Affairs Investigations, represented by the Research and Investigation Department, the Control and Coordination Department, the Violators Follow-up Department, and the Financial and Administrative Services Department, resulted in the arrest of 575 people of various nationalities -- violators of Residency and Labor Law.

## Hoarding in ports, stores denied

# 'No onion crisis in local market'

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has confirmed the availability of imported vegetables and onions in the local market, while vehemently denying the alleged hoarding of vegetables and other goods in Kuwaiti ports or warehouses, reports Al-Anba daily quoting sources.

Sources quoted the ministry as saying that there are multiple sources of imported vegetables and onions.

In a related development, Chairman of Kuwait Society for Consumer Protection Khaled Al-Subaie affirmed that Turkish, Iranian and Jordanian onions are being sold at prices ranging from 240 to 250 fils per kilo in Shubrat Al-Khadar Vegetable Market.

He stressed there is no onion crisis in the local market; indicating that he contacted some onion traders or importers in Kuwait and they assured him that Yemeni, Indian and Egyptian onions will be available in the next few days.

**3 shops without license:** Kuwait Municipality teams have intensified their inspection efforts in compliance with the instruction of Municipality Director General Eng Saud Al-Dabbous who stressed the need to strictly enforce the Municipal Law, bylaws and regulations, reports Al-Anba daily.

In a press statement, the Public Relations Department at the Municipality confirmed that the inspection teams from the branch in Farwaniya Governorate carried out an inspection tour in Farwaniya and Khaitan to ensure that the markets and stores are following the Municipality's rules and regulations.

Meanwhile, Deputy Director General of the Control and Inspection Sector and Director of the Audit and Follow-up Department at the Municipal Services Sector in the Farwaniya Governorate branch Dr Nasser Al-Rashidi disclosed that the inspection campaign resulted in the closure of three shops found to have started their operations without the approval of the Municipality.

## Other Voices

## Is Israel mortal or permanent entity?

By Ahmad alsarraf

Many tweeted and cheered an article that was recently published in the social media dating back many years ago, by Israeli writer Ari Shavit, in which he said that the Israelis had passed the point of no return, and that they could no longer end the occupation, stop settlement, and achieve peace, and that it was no longer possible to reform Zionism and save democracy.

If the situation is like this, then there is no taste for living in this country, no taste for writing in "Haaretz," and no taste for reading it, and you must leave the country. If Israeliness and Jewishness are not a vital factor in identity, and if every Israeli citizen has a foreign passport, not only in the technical sense, but also in the psychological sense, then the matter is over.

We must bid farewell to friends and move to San Francisco, Berlin, or Paris, and from there we can watch Israel breathe its last breath, and the myth of its democracy come to an end.

On the other hand, left-wing Israeli writer Gideon Lavie says that the Israelis realize that they have no future in Palestine, as it is not a land without a people as they lied to.

Lavie not only acknowledged the existence of the Palestinian people, but also their superiority over the Israelis, and that the Palestinians, as it seems, have a different nature from the rest of humanity.

We occupied their land, and called their youth prostitutes and drug addicts. We said that a few years would pass, and they would forget their homeland and their land, and then their young generation would explode.

One uprising after another; we also put them in prisons and said, "We will raise them inside them." Years later, after we thought they had learned their lesson, they returned to us with another armed uprising that burned a lot.

So we demolished their homes and besieged them for many years, and suddenly they extracted missiles from almost nothing to attack us with, despite the siege and destruction. So we took them. We build walls and put up barbed wire.

And lo and behold, they came to us from underground and through tunnels, until they intensified the killing of our youth. We fought them with our minds, and then they took control of the Israeli satellite, and brought terror to every home in Israel, by broadcasting threats and intimidation, as happened when their youth were able to seize control of the Israeli Channel 2!

In summary, it seems that we are facing the most difficult people in history, and there is no solution for them but to recognize their rights and end the occupation.

In 1970, the Israeli writer Shlomo Sand, a professor of history at Tel Aviv University, published a book entitled "The Invention of the Jewish People." It was very popular and remained on the list of best books for weeks, and was translated into many languages.

## Documents

Sand says that there are no historical documents proving the expulsion of the Jewish people by the Romans at any time, as it was impossible, at least logistically, at that time to deport hundreds of thousands from one place to another, and that modern Jews do not descend from the origins of the ancient Jews who lived in the land of ancient Israel, there is no such thing as a Jewish "race." The Jews do not belong to a single source, and they were not deported out of the country by the Romans during the 12th century.

Most of them continued to live there until the advent of Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries, when many of them converted to Islam, which means that many of the ancestors of today's Palestinians were Jews.

Sand believes that the myth of the Jewish "diaspora" began with the first eras of Christianity, to attract Jews to the new religion, and a group of Jewish intellectuals appeared in Germany who were influenced by the ardent enthusiasm for German nationalism, and they took upon themselves the task of "inventing" Jewish nationalism and the idea of promising the return of the Jewish nation to the land.

The promised one is an idea completely foreign to "Judaism," and it only appeared with the birth of "Zionism," as the Jews had previously dealt with the Holy Lands as places to be glorified, and it was not necessary to live within them -- just as Muslims deal with their holy places!

Sand, a professor of history at Tel Aviv University, reviews valuable information about the emergence of the idea of Judaism and the national homeland, reviewing the entirety of Jewish history, criticizing the traditional Jewish historical discourse in its various stages and trends.

He wonders: How and why was the Torah transformed from a book of religious laws into a history book that narrates the emergence of the "Jewish nation," knowing that no one knows with accuracy when the Torah was written?! Who wrote it?! What path did the Jews expelled from Egypt take?!

Sand concluded that the Jews had always formed important religious groups that had a foothold in various regions of the world, and were not a people of one origin.

Shabit's article and Sand's book, and dozens of other similar articles and books, which were published before Hamas's latest attack on Israel, on October 7, have become nothing compared to the flood of articles, interviews, speeches and demonstrations in free capitals, and the accompanying major change in the position on the Palestinian issue, which is a momentum that could not have been achieved without the sudden Hamas attack, which was denounced by the world, but which awakened the global conscience towards the cause of a people who had suffered for more than a century from the oppression of the English occupier and subsequently from the occupation and oppression of the Israeli occupier, such that it became criminal to think about the continuation of the situation as it was before that date.

In order to be as energetic and just as the Jews who stood with our causes, we must immediately respect their positions and appreciate them as they deserve, and reduce the trait of ingratitude in our societies, for we are not... the best of nations!

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



Some of the cables and tools used to steal wires.

## Copper cable thieves arrested

As part of an extensive security initiative involving rigorous search and investigation operations into copper cable thefts across various regions of the country, both the Criminal Security and Public Security sectors of the Ministry of Interior have taken into custody four Asians in two separate incidents, reports Al-Anba daily.

The arrests came after one of the sus-

pects was caught in the act of cutting the cables, and the stolen items were discovered stored in the Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh area along with all the tools used in the cable-cutting process.

The accused parties and the confiscated items have been handed over to the concerned authorities for the necessary legal actions to be taken against them.

## Fluctuation seen in house rents in Q3, '23, says KFH

'Capital accommodation expensive'

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1: The Kuwait Finance House "KFH" report said that the rental values among residential areas in Kuwait vary according to distinct factors and different areas, indicating that the third quarter of 2023 witnessed an uneven change in most areas on an annual basis, and in light of the limited decline in private housing prices, a decrease is observed. A slight increase in the rental value of some locations in this category of properties, reports Al-Anba daily.**

The report indicated stability in prices elsewhere in private housing areas, and that waiting for the allocation of housing requests encouraged the tendency of a large segment of citizens to rent private housing, which led to an increase in its supply, in light of the demand for areas close to workplaces and shopping, which stimulated tenants' demand for renting private housing.

The average rental value for the second floor, 3 rooms and a living room, with an area of 135 square meters, at the governorate level, in a private housing building with an area of 400 square meters, stabilized at 482 dinars at the end of the third quarter, without change from the second quarter, while it decreased by 0.4% on an annual basis.

The average in the Capital Governorate reached 570 dinars, a decrease of about 0.8% at the end of the third quarter, after recording an increase last year, reaching 11% in the third quarter of 2022, and in the Ha-

walli Governorate it reached 516 dinars, an annual decrease of 0.7%.

In the Farwaniya Governorate, there was no quarterly change, recording 397 dinars, while it is higher by 1.9% on an annual basis, and in Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate, the average rental value is 437 dinars for the same area, with an annual increase of 0.8%. The average rental value in Al Ahmadi is 375 dinars, unchanged on a quarterly or annual basis.

The rental value for the entire ground floor of a private residential property reached an area of 400 square meters. The average rental value for this category at the governorate level was 890 dinars, with a slight annual increase of 0.1% at the end of the third quarter of 2023.

In the Capital Governorate, it reached around 1,045 dinars, without change on an annual basis. While the average rental value in the governorate reaches 953 dinars, an increase of 1.4% on an annual basis, and in the Farwaniya governorate it is 736 dinars, an annual decrease of 2.3%.

The average rental value for the first full floor or the second floor in private housing properties with an area of 400 square meters at the governorate level was 790 dinars, without a quarterly change, while it is considered a slight decrease of 0.6% on an annual basis.

In the Capital Governorate, the rental value was around 945 dinars, down 1% on an annual basis.

Rents were recorded in the highest areas, as in Adailiya, at 1,100 dinars and in Al Rawdah at 1,000 dinars, while rents in the lowest areas of the governorate, as in Granada, reached 800 dinars, and in Sulaybiyah, the average rental value reached 600 dinars, with no annual change, and in Hawalli Governorate, the average rental value reached 853 dinars, an annual decrease of 0.6%.

## Bootleggers nabbed in Khaitan

## Drugs worth over KD 0.5m seized

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1:** "In a relentless pursuit of enforcing the law and safeguarding public safety, the Directorate-General for Drug Control has made a significant breakthrough by meticulously following the trail of drugs and the illicit substances traffickers after obtaining crucial information about a narcotics smuggling operation through one of the country's border crossings, reports Al-Anba daily.

By ramping up surveillance, gathering essential intelligence, and strategically deploying forces to the border area, the DGDC personnel have arrested two individuals for attempting to smuggle into the country approximately 35 kilograms of shabu and around 300,000 Captagon pills cleverly concealed in various compartments of the vehicle.

The seized contraband -- with a street value of more than half a million Kuwaiti dinars -- and the suspects have been referred to the concerned authority. The Ministry urges the public to collaborate with security forces, encouraging them to report any suspicious activities through the emergency phone (112) and DGDC hotline 1884141."

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Packets of drugs seized by the police.

Mol photo

## diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

## 'Major parties failed to stop crimes of war and genocide'

"If we read through the pages of our long history, we find that wars have always raged between two sects, Muslims and Christians, and armies may have met and battles have taken place, and fellow Muslims and Christians traversed, visited, and engaged in trade without objection from any quarters," columnist **Dr Abdul Rahman Al-Jeeran** wrote for Al-Rai daily.

"In the year 1187 AD, Commander Al-Muzaffar Saladin embarked with Muslim forces to confront the formidable Karak Fort in the Battle of Hattin -- an eminent Christian stronghold. Positioned directly on the Hijaz road for both the "winter and summer journey," Karak Fort lies within a day and night's travel from Jerusalem, possessing the expanse of Palestinian land with a commanding view. Saladin initiated a prolonged and challenging siege.

"However, amidst these hostilities, caravans continued their journeys from Egypt to Damascus, from Damascus to Acre, and vice versa.

"Trade routes crisscrossed from Hijaz to the Levant and Yemen, unhindered by any disruptions. Christian and Jewish merchants traversed their paths without hindrance, adhering to the agreed-upon taxes. Christians paid taxes in Muslim lands, reciprocated by Christian merchants in Muslim territories -- marked by moderation in all circumstances.

"Amidst the tumult of war, the people were resilient and sought their livelihood like a "beehive." This reflects the life of the common people in Islam, emphasizing securing a decent living over concerns about ruling dynamics among Muslim leaders. Strife between Muslim princes and kings did not affect subjects or merchants, as their paramount concern, in all circumstances, remained security.

"This peaceful coexistence and understanding of the role of the state are attributed, first and foremost, to gratitude towards God.

"Furthermore, it reflects an awareness of the state's role in fostering harmonious relations between governments, individuals, and groups. In the Arab world, unlike Crusader Europe, internal disputes over royal succession or inheritances rarely led to inter-country conflicts.

"Arab Islamic civilization, rooted in a robust understanding of the state, precedes Crusader Europe in international education. Al-Shaybani's "Al-Sir Al-Kabir," written in 189 AH, stands as a significant jurisprudential work, guiding global transactions to maintain international stability.

"This contrasts with the contemporary failures of major countries and international institutions in preventing crimes and wars, as witnessed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, against the Hutu tribes in Africa, Myanmar, and the ongoing events in Gaza."

## Also:

"When the scientists of the French campaign led by Napoleon Bonaparte against Egypt in 1798 unearthed the Rosetta Stone, containing inscriptions in hieroglyphics, Greek, and Demotic texts, it was more than just a stone with information," columnist **Dr. Abdulaziz Yousef Al-Ahmad**, wrote for Al-Anba daily.

"The ancients used stones to record significant events, and the Rosetta Stone is a prime example. Before this, early humans turned to animal skins and bones for recording, until the Pharaohs introduced papyrus, a plant abundant along the Nile River. Despite its continued manufacture

in Egypt with Pharaonic drawings for tourists, papyrus has a rough texture.

"Known as 'Papyrus' in Latin, derived from the Pharaonic name, it eventually evolved into the term 'Paper', maintaining its Pharaonic origin. Cai Lun, a Chinese inventor, created paper from bamboo pulp, silk tissue waste, and fishing nets, unknowingly sparking a revolution. In 751, during the siege of Samarkand, Chinese paper was discovered on captured soldiers. The Arab leader learned the craft from the prisoners, marking a pivotal moment in human history.

"Islamic scholars, aiming to spread the Holy Qur'an, adapted Chinese paper-making techniques. They substituted cotton for silk, utilizing affordable materials from their surroundings.

"The first paper factory emerged in Baghdad in 791 under Harun al-Rashid's rule. Jabir bin Hayyan, a renowned chemist, enhanced the industry, inventing fire-resistant paper. Paper-making thrived, giving rise to paper-makers and ink specialists known as 'squirrels'.

"The paper industry expanded across the Islamic world. Fez, Morocco, housed around four hundred paper factories, exporting to both the Islamic world and Europe.

"Europe's first paper factory in Friano, Italy, was established in 1276, centuries after Muslim advancements. Today, we recognize that paper, preserving the world's memory, originated in China, developed by Arab and Muslim scholars. Despite technological advancements, the value of paper as a life memory persists."

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"Reforms are necessary for the advancement of Kuwait! The real reform process, which follows painful stages of financial, administrative and political corruption requires the following: first, a thoughtful vision, second, national competencies that are creative and capable of implementation, and third, firm decisions -- not flattering, preferential or lax," columnist **Abdulrahman Al-Mesfer** wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"It is very natural for reform and development movements to encounter obstacles of confusion, skepticism and obstinacy, because the forces of corruption that benefit from the deteriorating conditions will fight to keep the bad conditions in place, as it is their means of survival and strength.

"The real approaches to tangible reform begin with fundamental amendments to the Constitution or the introduction of another one. Constitutions are not the revealed Qur'an or sacred texts. The United States of America, France and a long list of countries throughout the world have amended their constitutions several times to keep pace with the developments of the times, and the needs of peoples and nations.

"Screening the government system administratively, technically and productively is an extremely important issue. It is realistic and practical. There is an explicit reference to what we are aiming for. It is expressed in the Kuwaiti Constitution, specifically Article 123: 'The Cabinet shall exercise control and supervision over the interests of the State. It shall lay down the public policy of the Government, shall follow its execution and shall control the operations in Government departments.'

"The organization of political action and its practices should take its share of serious studies. What makes us anxious about reconsidering the National Assembly, and thinking about creating an advanced and effective alternative that pushes towards construction, addressing thorny issues, improving political and social life, and preserving human, civil and legal gains without detracting from any of them?"

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes

## SPIN &amp; WIN

HAPPY NEW YEAR 2024  
JANUARY REWARDS  
FOR LOYAL GUESTDON'T FORGET  
TO SPIN THE WHEEL

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HH Prime Minister sends greetings

# HH Amir congratulates Cuba and Sudan on national days

## 'KFAED supported dev projects worldwide for over 6 decades'

Fund also supports development efforts in Kuwait: Al-Bahar

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1:** The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development on the occasion of the 62nd anniversary of its founding announced it contributed to financing projects in about 105 countries around the world over the past more than six decades, including 16 Arab countries, 42 African countries, and 19 countries in East and South Asia and the Pacific, 17 countries in Central Asia and Europe, and 13 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, through 1,012 soft loans provided to the governments of these countries, worth about 6.8 billion dinars, reports Al-Anba daily.



Al-Bahar

KFAED Acting Director General Walid Shamlan Al-Bahar, stated today that the Fund was and continues to be, since its establishment, as the first develop-

### MoH limits panel meetings over treatment abroad

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1:** The Ministry of Health recently issued a circular on limiting the meetings of the committee tasked to review overseas treatment applications in public hospitals and clinics, such that it should focus on urgent and critical cases as per the reports of the attending physicians.

The circular stressed that the committee should meet only when the head of the department and the doctors dealing with the relevant case present reports on the urgen-

ment operating institution in the Mideast region, a unique case that contributed to placing Kuwait on the map of countries that serve the global effort for development with a clear strategy that includes financing development projects and contribute to achieve sustainable goals.

He said that in addition to its development efforts, the Fund was present in major international crises, and refugee issues in particular in the Arab countries which has received great attention from the Fund, most notably the Syrian refugee crisis given the magnitude of the humanitarian tragedy that the Syrian people are experienc-

cy of the case with the approval of the manager of the hospital. These reports will be referred to the higher committee to assess and approve them.

**Plot for new market:** Kuwait Municipality has approved the request of the Ministry of Social Affairs to allocate a plot measuring 2,500 square meters for the establishment of a central market in Block Nine, Firdous; in addition to a parking area measuring 3,200 square meters.

The Fund was also strongly present in the reconstruction crises of Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq. The Fund cooperated with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society to support Rohingya refugees in the Republic of Bangladesh.

Al-Bahr added that the Kuwaiti Fund also supports development efforts inside Kuwait, without prejudice to its basic mission, and one of the most important and prominent of these contributions is its support for the housing issue, as the Fund has been deducting no more than 25% of its annual net profits and transferring it to the Public Authority for Housing

Director General of the Municipality Saud Al-Dabbous advised the ministry to fulfill all the requirements specified by the Public Facilities and Services Committee during its meeting on Oct 24, 2023. He added the ministry must also coordinate with the committee during the construction period and to remove all debris resulting from the demolition of existing buildings, indicating that Firdous Cooperative Society will shoulder the cost of these works.

Affairs since 2003. The fund also contributes to financing the Wafra station project in cooperation with the Gulf Interconnection Authority for the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council countries, at a value amounting to 70 million Kuwaiti dinars, in order to strengthen the national electrical networks and ensure the sustainability of electrical energy at all times and circumstances.

It is noteworthy that the Kuwaiti Fund self-finances itself from its own profits from loan interest and its investments around the world without forming a burden on the state's general budget.

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1, (KUNA):** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Monday a cable to the President of Cuba Miguel Diaz-Canel, congratulating him on his country's National Day.

His Highness wished the President Diaz-Canel and the Cuban people further success and progress.

Also, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable to the President of Cuba Miguel Diaz-Canel, congratulating him on his country's National Day.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad sent on Monday a cable of congratulations to the Chairman of the Sudanese Transitional Sovereignty Council Abdulfattah Al-Burhan on Sudan's National Day.

His Highness the Amir wished Al-Burhan and the Sudanese people evermore progress and welfare.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf also sent a cable to the Chairman of the Sudanese Transitional Sovereignty Council Abdulfattah Al-Burhan, congratulating him on his country's National Day.

### New Year Message

Message from Indian Ambassador to Kuwait H.E. Dr Ardash Swaika on New Year

On the occasion of the New Year 2024, I extend my warm greetings and best wishes to the leadership and people of Kuwait, especially the large and vibrant Indian community in Kuwait. I believe with the advent of 2024, Kuwait will enter a new era of development and prosperity under the visionary leadership of the Amir His Highness Sheikh Mishal

Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the prospective new government. I am also confident the bilateral relations between India and Kuwait will achieve new heights during this year. As we start a new year with a new hope, I wish good health, success and happiness to all.



Dr Swaika



KUNA photo

Kuwait contributes to aid campaign.

### Kuwait contributes to aid campaign in Palestine

Backed by the Secretariat of Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation, Al-Tadamon (solidarity) - a Palestinian charity, distributed 650 food parcels to Palestinian families in the West Bank city of Nablus.

The food assistance, supervised by Kuwait Society for Relief, cost more than USD 31,000; it is part of an aid project launched by Al-Tadamon on December 13 in Nablus governorate, the charity said in a press release on Saturday.

The project covered the needs of as many vulnerable people as possible,

particularly those who were affected by the onslaught of Israeli occupation forces on Gaza and the West Bank, the statement noted.

Chairman of the charity Alaa Maqboul noted that there are a large number of families who are still in constant need of aid as they lost their living due to the current aggression on Gaza.

Appreciating Kuwait's supportive stance towards the Palestinian people, Maqboul thanked the Awqaf Public Foundation and KSR for funding and supervising the aid project. (KUNA)

### GDP expected to decrease to 27.7 pc in 2024

## Kuwait tops MEED list of financial performance of countries in MENA

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1:** Kuwait topped the MEED list of financial performance of countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) with 30.3 percent gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023, while it is expected to decrease to 27.7 percent in 2024, reports Al-Anba daily.

Kuwait ranked first in the Gulf and regionally in terms of the fiscal balance as a percentage of the GDP, reaching 14 percent in 2023; while the magazine estimated that the percentage will decline to 9.5 in 2024. In terms of nominal domestic product, it reached \$159.9 billion in 2023 and it is expected to rise to \$167 billion in 2024.

Kuwait is the only one among the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to record negative growth in GDP for the year 2023, albeit a small percentage of 0.6 and MEED estimated that this percentage will increase to 3.6 in 2024.

MEED also reported that the economies of MENA countries are going through a dangerous stage, as geopolitical tensions and natural disasters weighed heavily on the region's economies in 2023, and that these economies are heading towards 2024 in a state of continuous change.

While most of these countries are considered in a good position to continue their growth path after the end of the Corona epidemic, but in the context of weak oil sector growth; some countries, most notably Egypt and Tunisia, are under strong pressure with the aim of carrying out painful reforms in order to obtain financing packages from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

"In general, there are high hopes that growth in the MENA region will exceed, at least, the sluggish performance recorded last year," MEED said, and policymakers across the region will also look to double the dynamism of the private sector, which has witnessed non-oil growth outpacing the performance of the private sector in 2023.

The IMF's regional economic forecasts

### 'Education' obtains budget's top share

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1:** An official report on the budget surplus for fiscal 2022/2023 revealed that the State saved KD 35.145 million due to the vacancies in different public institutions, indicating this amount constitutes 0.4 percent of the KD8.537 billion budget allocated for the salaries and allowances of public sector workers.

The report is based on the final account of the Ministry of Finance, as well as the reports of monitoring institutions and the Civil Services Commission (CSC).

According to the report, the Ministry of Education obtained the largest share of the budget allocated for salaries, wages and allowances - 24.8 percent of the total budget allocated for this purpose.

indicate that real GDP in the MENA region will decline to two percent in 2023 compared 5.6 percent in 2022 due to the impact of lower oil production and tightening monetary policy conditions in emerging markets and middle-income economies. Geopolitical tensions, especially the war in Gaza and natural disasters in Morocco and Libya, also affected the economies of the region.

The World Bank estimates that GDP growth across the region, in per capita terms, fell from 4.3 percent in 2022 to just 0.4 percent in 2023. By the end of 2023, only eight of the MENA economies will return to pre-pandemic growth levels. It added that much of the growth depends on developments in the oil market and the OPEC+'s decision on Nov 30 to agree to voluntary production cuts in order to support prices, but it will not be without cost.

### 20 pc rise seen in cosmetics imports

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1:** A recent government statistics showed an increase in Kuwait's import of cosmetics by 20 percent, reports Al-Qabas daily.

The statistics revealed that the total amount of imported cosmetics from January to November 2023 reached KD89.5 million, compared to KD74.9 million in the same period last year.

Experts in selling cosmetics disclosed that this industry has recorded remarkable growth in recent years, becoming one of the successful and popular in-

dustries. They explained the cosmetics market is one of the largest markets, and it is growing rapidly due to the continuous introduction of new products with many features, in addition to the multiplicity of attractive advertising methods that played a major role in raising sales. They added: "Self-care and health have become more important to consumers; hence, the cosmetics industry has become more valuable and trends show that this industry will continue to expand.

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# January

## Room Promotion

Weekdays (Saturday - Wednesday)	
Queen Cabana (2 persons inclusive of breakfast) per night.	2 Bedroom Chalet (4 persons inclusive of breakfast) per night.
<b>NOW</b>	<b>NOW</b>
<b>BHD 53.361/-net</b>	<b>BHD 119.173/-net</b>
Weekends (Thursday & Friday)	
Queen Cabana (2 persons inclusive of breakfast) per night.	2 Bedroom Chalet (4 persons inclusive of breakfast) per night.
<b>NOW</b>	<b>NOW</b>
<b>BHD 61.000/-net</b>	<b>BHD 136.198/-net</b>

Promo period from 1<sup>st</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024 Terms & conditions apply\*

## LOCAL

## 'Temperatures to drop at night and in open areas'

## Murabbaniyah season nearing its end with appearance of 'Shoula Star' Jan 2: Al-Ujairi

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1: Al-Ujairi Scientific Center has announced that the Murabbaniyah season is nearing its end with the appearance of the third star, known as 'Shoula', on Jan 2, 2024, reports Al-Qabas daily.

The center explained that during the Shoula Star days, temperatures drop at night and in open areas, and the cold is observed to intensify at dawn. It added the number of days of the Shoula Star is 13, and it is considered the third and last star of the

square. Sunrise on the first day of Shoula is at 6:43 am and the sunset is at 5:10 pm. Night continues to be longer than the daylight hours, with the average number of hours reaching approximately 13 hours and 42 minutes.



Photos by Mohammed Morsi

A large number of people seen during the fish auction at Sharq Fish Market. Inset: a large number of fish available.

## Other GCC

## Continued from Page 1

bizarre specifications, including the possibility of being miserable.

When you look at neighboring countries and their national output, and compare it with Kuwait, you find that we are more like a grocery store, and not a country seeking to diversify sources of its income.

In the Emirates, the tourism industry generated more than USD 25 billion in 2022. The share of Dubai alone was about USD 10 billion. On the other hand, Kuwait's share of tourists was less than one percent compared to the tourists in the Gulf countries, and most of them were from neighboring countries.

It is important to shed light on this resource, which constitutes a waste of about ten billion dollars annually, as a result of Kuwaitis fleeing abroad on vacation, in addition to preventing visitors from entering the country, which adds about ten billion or more to the losses.

There is no doubt that the first dilemma facing the tourism industry in Kuwait is not only the lack of tourist facilities, but also the backward laws that contradict the nature of the social culture on which the state was founded nearly 400 years ago.

In fact, there is an effort to tighten it further, and impose other restrictions that contribute to the closure of the country.

This impacts the national income, which urgently requires diversification rather than the squandering of human resources. What might be deemed as bribing citizens through salary increments and bonuses does little to alleviate hunger amid rising inflation. Moreover, limited job opportunities persist due to the intricate and numerous considerations surrounding the establishment of new projects.

Perhaps the coming days will bring good tidings, based on what we heard from our new Amir. In his speeches, he had heralded a more prosperous era for Kuwait, especially with regard to correcting the relationship between the two authorities, and not having one overpower the other.

Nevertheless, it remains to be said that we must thank the MPs of extremism and weak governments, as they refrained from enacting a law that would prohibit citizens and residents from exchanging congratulations on holidays and special occasions, particularly at the onset of each new year. Otherwise, a circle of restriction would have been fully realized.

## MPs propose

## Continued from Page 1

The bill mandates the Minister of Higher Education to form a committee chaired by the Undersecretary of the Higher Education Ministry; while the members include representatives of the academic staff at Kuwait University and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), as well as the National Bureau for Academic Accreditation and the Directorate of Academic Certificates Accreditation at the Higher Education Ministry. The committee's tasks include the evaluation of academic certificates to determine if they are qualified for accreditation or not. The Minister of Higher Education shall specify the total number of committee members, the system for holding meetings and the executive regulations.

The bill also stipulates the formation of another committee to receive complaints regarding the decisions of the abovementioned committee and issue its decision within 30 days of receiving the complaint.

Meanwhile, MP Muhammad Hayef commented on the recent traffic accident along Abdally Road; urging

Minister of Electricity and Water and acting Minister of Public Works Jassem Al-Ostad to immediately instruct the concerned technical teams to repair damaged roads as the deteriorating conditions of roads expose the public to fatal dangers.

On the other hand, Chairman of the Parliamentary Coordination Committee MP Saud Al-Asfour disclosed that Minister of Social Affairs and State Minister for Family, Women and Children Affairs Sheikh Feras Al-Sabah said the government returned the Disabled Affairs Bill to the National Assembly after its ratification. He clarified that the committee has yet to receive the official reply of the government. He then affirmed that once the committee receives the government's reply, it will take the necessary measures as per the Constitution.

Furthermore, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil and Energy Saad Al-Barrak has responded to the queries of MP Mehalhal Al-Mudhaf regarding Kuwait National Petroleum Corporation (KNPC). He revealed the corporation will sell some of its assets and obtain loans as per the Islamic rules in order to cover the budget deficit. He stressed that the assets that the corporation intends to sell do not include strategic assets, adding such assets are no longer profitable.

## Kuwait records

## Continued from Page 1

Additionally, he stressed the importance of not using coal stoves in enclosed spaces to prevent suffocation from carbon monoxide gas or combustion.

In another development, Dr. Ahmed Al-Shatti announced the launch of the paperless system (digital simulation) from the midnight of January 1, 2024, indicating that reports will be received through a local electronic program designed for this purpose.

Dr. Al-Shatti expressed appreciation for the efforts of the designers, implementers, and followers of the program.

He highlighted that the activation of the first phase would be succeeded by additional phases in the current year.

Emphasizing the system's importance in tracking cumulative numbers and managing cases transparently, Dr. Al-Shatti noted its role in benefiting patients and enhancing the development of the health services that are provided.

## Kuwait's lawmakers

## Continued from Page 1

Kuwait's National Assembly allocated a special session to discuss the Palestinian cause, he noted.

Since its independence, Kuwait has been supporting the Palestinian cause and Palestinians at all international arenas, Al-Huwaila said in his speech.

He pointed to the sufferings of Palestine and its people from genocides and war crimes committed by the Israeli occupation forces.

Al-Huwaila, on his part, slammed the US and UK's veto to hinder any resolution regarding stopping the on-going war in Gaza, calling on parliamentarians to take a serious and sincere action towards the fair Islamic issue.

He finally affirmed the importance of holding such meetings to document the crimes and violations committed by the "Zionist" entity, and to defend the rights of Palestinians.

Elsewhere, thousands of Israeli soldiers are being shifted out of the Gaza Strip, the military said Monday, in the first significant drawdown of troops since the war began as forces continued to bear down on the main city in the southern half of the enclave.

The troop movement could signal that fighting is being scaled back in

some areas of Gaza, particularly in the northern half where the military has said it is close to assuming operational control. Israel has been under pressure from its chief ally, the United States, to begin to switch to lower-intensity fighting.

Word of the drawdown came ahead of a visit by Secretary of State Antony Blinken to the region and after the Biden administration bypassed Congress for the second time this month to approve an emergency weapons sale to Israel.

But fierce fighting continued in other areas of Gaza, especially the southern city Khan Younis and central areas of the territory. Israel has pledged to charge ahead until its war aims have been achieved, including dismantling Hamas, which has ruled Gaza for 16 years.

The military said in a statement Monday that five brigades, or several thousand troops, were being taken out of Gaza in the coming weeks for training and rest.

In a briefing Sunday that first announced the troop withdrawal without specifying how many forces were leaving, army spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari did not say whether the decision meant Israel was launching a new phase of the war.

"The objectives of the war require prolonged fighting, and we are preparing accordingly," he said.

Israel has vowed to crush Hamas' military and governing capabilities in its war, which was sparked by the militant group's Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel, which killed 1,200 people. Roughly 240 people were taken hostage.

Israel responded with a blistering air, ground and sea offensive that has killed more than 21,900 people in Gaza, two-thirds of them women and children, according to the Health Ministry in Gaza, which does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count.

Israel says more than 8,000 militants have been killed, without providing evidence. It blames Hamas for the high civilian death toll, saying the militants embed within residential areas, including schools and hospitals.

## World's ongoing

## Continued from Page 1

onto the Arc de Triomphe showcasing the history of Paris and sports on the menu for next year's Summer Olympics in the city.

While New Year's Eve concerts were plentiful across America on Sunday night, CNN news personality Anderson Cooper followed a tribute to entertainers who died in 2023 by acknowledging the network's jocular New Year's Eve program with co-host Andy Cohen might also be a sad occasion for some viewers.

"There's a lot of people who feel like they can't celebrate," he said in the final minutes of a year that claimed the lives of Tina Turner, Tony Bennett, Harry Belafonte, Sinéad O'Connor, Jimmy Buffett, Burt Bacharach and David Crosby, among others.

Stunning fireworks displays bloomed at iconic locations like the Acropolis in Athens, Greece; reflected in the sleek glass walls of the world's tallest building, the Burj Khalifa, in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates; and accompanied a collective cheer filling the air in Nairobi, Kenya.

China celebrated relatively quietly, with most major cities banning fireworks over safety and pollution concerns. Still, people gathered and performers danced in colorful costumes in Beijing, while a crowd released wish balloons in Chongqing. During his New Year address, President Xi Jinping said the country would focus on building momentum for economic recovery in 2024 and pledged China would "surely be reunified" with Taiwan.

## 19.6pc of citizens wish to have more money, salary hike in '24

## 'Majority of Kuwaitis wish to marry again'

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1: The year 2023 ends in a bittersweet manner while the beginning of the year 2024 comes with hopes and aspirations at the public and private levels; as a wide segment of Kuwaiti citizens expressed various New Year wishes, but it is remarkable and funny that a large number of them wish to marry again, and others want to witness the repair of roads and streets or to buy a new car, reports Al-Qabas daily.

The Happiness Survey conducted by Salah Al-Jassim Systems Program revealed that 19.6 percent of citizens wish to have more money, get salary increment and pay debts. They stressed that they will be happier if these goals are achieved. Around 18.8 percent of those who participated in the survey confirmed that satisfaction, health, comfort, contentment and success are among the most important reasons for feeling happy.

Stability, security and safety constitute 13.3 percent of the wishes of those surveyed; while other wishes were distributed among personal matters, such as obtaining a leadership position and promotion, having children, combining study and work, parental satisfaction, graduation and then obtaining a suitable job.

As for the wishes regarding public affairs, they centered on developing Kuwait, solving the housing problem, developing education, taking care of retirees, controlling prices, women obtaining their rights, achieving justice and equality, and accelerating transactions.

A segment of the participants also expressed hope for the provision of tourist and entertainment facilities, applying the law on everyone, solving the Bedouin problem, improving the performance of the Parliament and liberating the sisterly Palestine.

The survey revealed that 99 percent of the participants are satisfied with their lives and 98 percent consider themselves happy.

## General wishes:

1. Women getting their full rights,
2. Developing education and solving the housing problem,
3. Achieving justice and equality among Kuwaitis,
4. Providing tourist and entertainment facilities,
5. Applying the law on everyone.

## Personal wishes:

1. Obtaining a leadership position and promotion,
2. Having children and combining study and work,
3. Parental satisfaction and graduation from school,
4. Get a good job,
5. Procreation and achieving family stability.

## Major events in Kuwait for 2023

July 10: Kuwait cabinet of ministers decided on printing 100,000 copies of Quran in the Swedish language and handing the copies out in Sweden to reaffirm the tolerance of the Islamic religion.

July 10: The council of ministers approved the government work plan for the 17th legislative term and referred it to the National Assembly.

July 12: Kuwait's council of civil service approved allowing Kuwaiti employees to both study and work within the country.

July 30: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah overturned timeframe condition for those who wish to return voluntarily to military service.

Aug 14: Cabinet approved social allowance and children allowance for private minuscule business owners.

Aug 20: Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Essa Al-Kandari announced that His Highness the Crown Prince approved several decisions on health insurance for retirees, amending constitutional courts laws, law on residential areas and on National Assembly elections.

Sept 3: Dr. Adel Al-Mane was appointed by decree as Minister of Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research while Fahad Al-Jarallah was appointed Minister of Finance.

Sept 20: Amer Al-Ajmy was named head of local affairs sector and government spokesperson at the Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs office.

Sept 21: Civil service commission announced adopting flexible working hours Sunday to Thursday with seven working hours per day.

Sept 21: Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah gave Kuwait's speech to the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Sept 24: Trial run for suggestions, questions and complaints feature within Sahel mobile was launched.

Oct 12: All celebratory manifestations in the country halted in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Oct 16: Cabinet decided to postpone loan payments for small and medium enterprises for six months.

Oct 23: Social support allotment for nationals traveling to receive treatment abroad has been approved.

Oct 24: Social allowance for private sectors workers studying for higher studies has been approved by cabinet.

Oct 25: Cabinet approved Kuwaitization of contracts draft decision.

Oct 26: Cabinet permitted children allowance for Kuwaiti women working in private sector under certain regulations.

Oct 30: Resignation of Minister of public works, Dr. Amani Bugammaz has been approved and Minister of electricity, water and renewable energy Dr. Jassem Al-Ostad had been assigned the portfolio.

Oct 31: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah gave Amiri speech at the inauguration of the second session

of the 17th legislative term.

Nov 5: Social support allotment for intermediate school graduates and less has been permitted by cabinet.

Nov 15: CGC announced approval of social support allotments for nationals contracted to work in the divided zone.

Nov 20: Health Ministry issued decision allowing 30-week pregnant women a sick leave for the rest of her pregnancy without the need for a specialized committee.

Dec 16: Kuwait government mourned Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and named Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah 17th Amir.

**National Assembly:**  
Jan 8: The State of Kuwait's delegation headed by MP Mohammad Al-Mahan took part in Asian Parliamentary Assembly 13th session and the executive meeting.

Jan 10: National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun received a request from MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf to grill Finance Minister Abdulwahab Al-Rushaid.

Jan 16: MP Jenan Bushehri submitted to Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun a grilling motion against Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Barak Al-Shaitan.

Jan 18: The National Assembly's bureau approved several decisions scarping exceptional allowances for the secretary general and assistant secretaries.

Jan 27: Kuwait parliament caucus presented to Organization of Islamic Cooperation member states councils union meeting in Algeria rejection of human rights council decision on sexual orientation and identity.

Feb 9: National Assembly bureau reshuffled administrative organizational structure.

Feb 15: Top Lawmaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun hosted Saudi Audit Bureau chief Husam Al-Angari and Kuwaiti counterpart Faisal Al-Shaya.

March 11: Kuwait Parliament caucus participates in Asian and Islamic coordination meetings for the 146th Inter-Parliamentary Union conference.

March 12: National Assembly bureau approved appointing Khaled Buslaib as the assembly's Secretary General.

March 15: Chief of the parliamentary caucus Dr. Mohammad Al-Mahan was voted by acclamation to be member of committee for United Nations affairs in the inter-parliamentary union.

March 19: The constitutional court annulled the 2022 national assembly and reinstated the 2020 formation.

March 20: The national assembly bureau held a meeting headed by speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanim.

March 21: Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanim affirmed respect to all the jurisdictions of His Highness the Amir in a joint press conference held at the national assembly along with deputy speaker Ahmad Al-Shahoumi and chief of parliamentary legislation committee, Dr. Obaid Al-Wasmi.

May 5: Ministry of Interior started receiving applications for citizens wishing to run for the June 6 elections.

June 20: The parliament elected MP Ahmad Al-Saadoun as speaker.

## To be continued



## JOINT OPERATIONS WAFRA

SAUDI ARABIAN CHEVRON INC. (SAC) - KUWAIT GULF OIL COMPANY



Joint Operations (Saudi Arabian Chevron Inc. / Kuwait Gulf Oil Company), announces the under-mentioned Public Tender for procurement of material.

Kuwaiti and Saudi Merchants, registered with either Company wishing to participate in the under-mentioned Tender are invited to collect the Tender documents from Blanket Purchasing Section, Purchasing & Logistic Division, Administration Building, Ground Floor, Joint Operations, Wafra, during the official working hours from 2 January 2024 up to 25 January 2024 for a non-refundable fee mentioned against tender.

Tender Fees to be deposited in the National bank of Kuwait (NBK) Account No. 1001132057. Saudi Suppliers can collect the tender documents from Saudi Arabian Chevron office in Al-Khobar Telephone No.: (013) 8645104 - Fax No.: (013) 8985436

The closing date for the following Tender will be on Monday, 19 February 2024 @ 09:00 A.M.

S.NO.	TENDER NO.	MATERIALS	CONTRACT PERIOD	FEES (IN KD)
1	BPT#248/23	Blanket Purchase Tender for Tubing & Accessories Consignment Agreement	5 YRS	250

## Notes:

Gate Passes are required for Suppliers entering JO-Wafra Administrative Offices to collect the tender document and gate pass processing time is 48 hours. Please send request for gate pass along with legible copies of Authorization letter, Civil ID, Car Registration, Supplier Registration (KGOC or SAC) to e-mail CBMS@chevron.com or MYDG@chevron.com at least 48 hours prior to arrival.

For additional information, you may contact:

Telephone No.: 23983639 - Ext : 3157 - 3190

## World News Roundup

## Year-ender

## Diplomacy key

## Int'l ties dominate world events in '23

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1, (KUNA): The world witnessed many events in numerous areas in 2023. The following are the main events:

## International Relations:

Jan 1: Sweden took the rotating presidency of the European Union Council for a six-month period.

Jan 6: The US and Japan signed a Memorandum of Cooperation to launch a Task Force on the Promotion of Human Rights and International Labor Standards in Supply Chains.

Jan 10: The Two Chinese Embassies in Japan and South Korea suspended visa issuance for both countries' citizens, as a retaliation to the restrictions imposed by Tokyo and Seoul on Chinese travelers over COVID-19 spread.

Jan 10: EU and NATO signed the third Joint Declaration to deepen and strengthen their strategic partnership.

Jan 12: Türkiye summoned Sweden ambassador to Ankara and informed him of its rejection of the propaganda of supporters of the "PKK" organization in Stockholm that targeted President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Jan 13: The US and Japan signed an agreement that will build on decades of cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space.

Jan 16: India and the UK agreed to boost cooperation on bilateral, regional and global issues within the framework of the 15th consultations between them.

Jan 17: The US imposed visa restrictions on 25 individuals from Belarus for their alleged involvement in undermining democracy in their country.

Jan 17: The Russian Federation imposed new sanctions on more European officials, banning them from entering Russian territory.

Jan 19: Romania returns its ambassador to his position in Vienna, after a dispute between the two countries.

Jan 19: France and Spain signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation to deepen cooperation between the two countries.

Jan 20: Türkiye summoned Sweden ambassador to Ankara and condemned in the strongest terms of his country's authorities allowing burning a copy of the Holy Quran in front of the Ankara embassy in Stockholm.

Jan 23: Russia announced it ordered Estonian Ambassador to leave the country and decided to downgrade diplomatic representation with it.

Jan 24: Türkiye summoned the Dutch ambassador to Ankara to protest against the attack on the Holy Quran in The Hague.

Jan 27: Türkiye summoned Danish ambassador to Ankara to protest against the permission to attack the Holy Quran in front of the Turkish embassy in Copenhagen.

Feb 1: Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced the appointment of Louis Bono as the United States new senior advisor for Myanmar and Rohingya refugees and their host communities in Bangladesh.

Feb 1: The EU has released EUR 43 million (USD 46 million) in humanitarian aid for Myanmar and Rohingya refugees and their host communities in Bangladesh.

Feb 1: The Treaty between the Italian Republic and the French Republic for Enhanced Bilateral Cooperation, known as the Quirinal Treaty, officially enters into force.

Feb 2: Austria expelled four Russian diplomats based in Vienna, engaged in acts incompatible with their diplomatic status.

Feb 3: The EU held first summit Ukraine and since the start of the special Russian operation in Ukraine, to discuss its continuous support for Kyiv.

Feb 3: China said that the unmanned Chinese "airship" that was spotted over US airspace for meteorological research, stressing that it entered the US "by force majeure".

Feb 4: The Pentagon detected another Chinese spy balloon, hovering over Latin America.

Feb 4: Austrian and Slovakia agreed to put an end to the internal border controls.

Feb 4: US military shot down the suspected Chinese surveillance balloon over the Atlantic Ocean.

Feb 7: Greece and UK signed a new defense and security agreement, targeting closer collaboration to benefit each country's military.

Feb 9: The US and UK imposed sanctions against seven Russian members of Trickbot, a notorious hacking group based in Russia.

Feb 10: South Korea announced its first independent sanctions on North Korea in response to Pyongyang's cryptocurrency theft and other illicit cyber activities.

Feb 12: Canada shot down an unidentified flying object that violated Canadian airspace.

Feb 14: EU Council adopted a decision authorizing EU member states to ratify the Second Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime (Budapest Convention).

Feb 15: Ukraine decided not to take part in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly winter session, to be held in Vienna, due to Russian parliamentary delegation participation.

Feb 16: Russia expelled four Austrian diplomats in a tit-for-tat move.

Feb 16: UK announced the launch of a new fund in cooperation with non-governmental organizations to support humanitarian work in the African Sahel region, and allocated an initial budget of GBP 33 million (around USD 40 million).

Feb 20: EU added 32 individuals and 2 entities in Iran to its new sanctions list.

Feb 21: Italy began supplying electrical equipment to Ukraine to help ensure stable access to electricity for three million people in areas affected by bombing.

Feb 22: The International Federation of Journalists suspended Russian Union of Journalists (RUJ) membership, due to Russia's formation of RUJ branches in annexed Ukrainian territories.

Feb 23: European Commission decided to suspend the use of TikTok application on its corporate devices and on personal devices enrolled in the Commission mobile device service.

Feb 25: India and Germany agreed on boosting security and defense cooperation.

Feb 25: EU imposed additional sanctions against individuals and entities linked to Russian Wagner Group in view of the international dimension and gravity of the group's activities.

Feb 27: US Agency for International Development (USAID) announced it is providing more than USD 126 million in additional food assistance to the people of Kenya.

March 9: EU Council gave the green light on visa-free travel for holders of passports issued by Kosovo.

March 10: India and the US agreed to enhance cooperation in several trade and investment areas.

March 10: India and Australian agreed to boost cooperation in fields of security, defense, trade and investment.

Continued on Page 7



Times Square Alliance volunteers throw confetti as the clock strikes midnight as seen from the New York Marriott Marquis during the New Year's Eve celebration in Times Square, early Monday, Jan. 1, 2024, in New York. (AP)



In this photo provided by Karen Lopez, she and her husband, Jerry Lopez, pose in December 2023. Jerry Lopez, 39, was killed in Las Vegas two days after Christmas while on his way to work in what Las Vegas police say was the final carjacking in a crime spree. (AP)



Johnson



Roberts

## America

**Former rep Johnson dies:** Trailblazing longtime U.S. Rep. **Eddie Bernice Johnson**, a nurse from Texas who helped bring hundreds of millions of federal dollars to the Dallas area as the region's most powerful Democrat, died Sunday. She was 88.

President Joe Biden, Dallas Mayor Eric Johnson and many other leaders issued statements about her death after her son posted about it on Facebook. The Dallas Morning News also confirmed her death with an unnamed source close to the family. No cause of death was given.

Biden hailed her "immense courage" and called her "an icon and mentor to generations of public servants, through whom her legacy of resilience and purpose will endure."

"She was the single most effective legislator Dallas has ever had," the mayor said in a statement. "Nobody brought more federal infrastructure money home to our city. Nobody fought harder for our communities and our residents' interests and safety. And nobody knew how to navigate Washington better for the people of Dallas."

Eddie Bernice Johnson served in the House for three decades after becoming the first registered nurse elected to Congress and first Black chief psychiatric nurse at Dallas' Veterans Affairs hospital. (AP)

**Chief Justice examines AI impact:** Chief Justice **John Roberts** on Sunday turned his focus to the promise, and shortcomings, of artificial intelligence in the federal courts, in an annual report that made no mention of Supreme Court ethics or legal controversies involving Donald Trump.

Describing artificial intelligence as the "latest technological frontier," Roberts discussed the pros and cons of computer-generated content in the legal profession. His remarks come just a few days after the latest instance of AI-generated fake legal citations making their way into official court records, in a case involving ex-Trump lawyer Michael Cohen.

"Always a bad idea," Roberts wrote in his year-end report, noting that "any use of AI requires caution and humility."

At the same time, though, the chief justice acknowledged that AI can make it much easier for people without much money to access the courts. "These tools have the welcome potential to smooth out any mismatch between available resources and urgent needs in our court system," Roberts wrote.

The report came at the end of a year in which a series of stories questioned the ethical practices of the justices and the

## Politics

## DeSantis urges crowd to defy odds

## Trump force frustrates some in Iowa

DES MOINES, Iowa, Jan 1, (AP): The Iowa frenzy is typically in full force by now.

With less than three weeks until the Iowa caucuses formally usher in the presidential nomination process, White House hopefuls are usually in a heated competition. They fan out across the state and pack as many events into a single day as is humanly possible - all in a bid to appeal to undecided voters and lock down support that could lift them to victory in Iowa and keep them in the race for months to come.

But as the campaign intensifies ahead of the Jan. 15 caucuses, the normal frenzy is subdued. While the schedule is filling up, former President Donald Trump is such a commanding force in the party that some voters worry the contest that normally transforms Iowa into the center of the political world may turn out to be something of a snooze.

"It's kind of frustrating," said Jenna Maifeld, a 19-year-old student at the University of Iowa who is eager to participate in her first caucus but is disappointed with the campaign cycle's lack of competition. "I feel like a lot of people's voices aren't being heard."

There's still time for the dynamics of the race to shift. And Trump's rivals are hardly ceding the state to him, working to convince voters that his victory isn't inevitable. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has effectively centered his campaign on Iowa, pumping it with advertising and crafting a robust travel schedule of events and media availabilities. Former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley is also campaigning throughout Iowa, stepping up criticism of Trump while laying the groundwork for a potentially stronger showing in New Hampshire, where the Jan. 23 primary includes more independent voters.

The question is whether any of those efforts will notably erode Trump's standing, a prospect some voters find unlikely at this point.

"A lot of candidates are hoping that one of these spears in his back will finally take him down, but I doubt it," said Nick Peters, a 31-year-old from Prairie City who is also among the Iowa Republicans frustrated by Trump's dominance.

court responded to critics by adopting its first code of conduct. Many of those stories focused on Justice Clarence Thomas and his failure to disclose travel, other

Trump enters the final stretch before the caucuses facing a host of challenges. He's the subject of 91 criminal charges related to everything from his handling of classified information to efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election. The Colorado Supreme Court and Maine's top election official have recently declared Trump ineligible to appear on their states' ballots, decisions the former president is likely to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

And Trump is embroiled in controversy over his harsh rhetoric toward immigrants, repeatedly using language that extremism experts say echoes writings from Adolf Hitler about the "purity" of Aryan blood, which underpinned Nazi Germany's systematic murder of millions of Jews and other "undesirables" before and during World War II.

## Vulnerabilities

For now, however, Trump's baggage appears to be doing little to deter a majority of Republican voters. In fact, Trump has sought to turn his vulnerabilities into something of an advantage, arguing that he's been indicted on behalf of his supporters. He's also aimed to turn around concerns that he poses a threat to democracy by accusing President Joe Biden of harnessing the power of government against a political rival. There's no evidence that Biden or the White House had any influence on the Justice Department's decision to criminally charge Trump.

It's Trump's impenetrable base of support that has left many feeling resigned to seeing his name on the ballot in November.

"If democracy is working fairly and if the country wants him, then it's going to be him," said Dylan Koorman, a 21-year-old student at Dordt University in Sioux Center, Iowa, who said it would be hard for him to support Trump given his legal battles. "It doesn't always fall the way everyone wants it."

Iowans are historically proud of the role they play at the beginning of the presidential election calendar every four years. Voters are accustomed to intimate exchanges with candidates, who pay visits to living rooms, neighborhood centers and county fair-

grounds in an effort to connect and persuade.

## Also:

**WEST DES MOINES:** To underscore how much Iowa means to **Ron DeSantis**, the Florida governor was unwilling to put his campaigning there on hold even in the waning hours of 2023.

At a New Year's Eve event in a Sheraton Hotel ballroom in West Des Moines, jeans and cowboy boots outnumbered tuxedos and cocktail dresses, and Miller Lite seemed more popular than champagne.

But the modesty of the affair, where roughly 200 people turned out for the last campaign event of the busy year in Iowa, belied its importance to the host, who has wagered the future of his Republican bid for president on the leadoff Iowa caucuses, just two weeks away.

"Are you ready to work hard over these next two weeks and win the Iowa caucuses?" DeSantis asked supporters who turned out at the suburban hotel Sunday evening.

While **Donald Trump** prepares to return this week for a series of rallies, DeSantis did not leave Iowa alone during the week between Christmas and New Year's. He campaigned in the suburbs of Des Moines, Cedar Rapids and Davenport, revisiting spots he had gone to in 2023 as part of his drive to touch all 99 of Iowa's counties as a gesture of commitment to the leadoff nominating contests.

But Trump holds a large advantage in Iowa polls as well as a sophisticated campaign organization in the state, threatening to deny DeSantis the win he needs to justify his claim to be the leading alternative to the former president.

Appearing Sunday night with his wife, Casey, and their young children, DeSantis urged his audience to defy the odds. "I think we have an opportunity to just make a statement that in this country it's we the people that ultimately decide these things," he said. "Because I think you have a lot of media, they don't think you even matter."

DeSantis wasn't alone in Iowa between Christmas and New Year's, a period typically free from politics.

tomayor also have been under scrutiny. (AP)

**Firearms legal fight continues:** A California law that bans people from carrying firearms in most public places will take effect on New Year's Day, even as a court case continues to challenge the law. A U.S. district judge issued a ruling Dec. 20 to block the law from taking effect, saying it violates the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and deprives people of their ability to defend themselves and their loved ones.

But on Saturday, a federal appeals court put a temporary hold on the district judge's ruling. The appeals court decision allows the law to go into effect as the legal fight continues. Attorneys are scheduled to file arguments to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in January and in February.

The law, signed by Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, prohibits people from carrying concealed guns in 26 places including public parks and playgrounds, churches, banks and zoos.

The ban applies regardless of whether the person has a permit to carry a concealed weapon. One exception is for privately owned businesses that put up signs saying people are allowed to bring guns on their premises. (AP)



Republican presidential candidate Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, right, waves to supporters as he stands with Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds during a New Year's Eve campaign event, Sunday, Dec. 31, 2023, in West Des Moines, Iowa. (AP)

## Year-ender

## Int'l ties

Continued from Page 6

March 10: The UK announced new funding of GBP 5.26 million for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

March 12: Saudi Arabia and Iran reached an agreement to resume diplomatic relations between them and re-open their embassies.

March 13: Russia agreed to extend Black Sea grain deal for 60 days.

March 13: The EU decided to prolong sanctions targeting those responsible for undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine for another six months.

March 14: The US called in the Russian ambassador in Washington after two Russian aircraft intercepted a US surveillance aircraft during flying in international airspace over the Black Sea.

March 15: The US imposed sanctions on three individuals who pose a threat to the law, regional stability, and democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

March 15: The US announced more than USD 331 million in new humanitarian aid for Ethiopia, to provide life-saving support to those displaced and affected by conflict, drought and food insecurity.

March 16: The US announced USD 150 million in humanitarian aid to countries in West and Central Africa and the Sahel region including Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

March 16: UK banned social media app TikTok from work phones and computers used by ministers and civil employees for security reasons.

March 17: The International Criminal Court in the Hague issued an arrest warrant against Russian President Vladimir Putin.

March 17: The US announced more than USD 140 million in additional humanitarian assistance and more than USD 31 million in development assistance to respond to the needs of vulnerable Venezuelans.

March 17: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared Ankara's approval of Finland's joining NATO.

March 17: Japan expanded its sanctions on North Korea in response to Pyongyang's test-firing an intercontinental ballistic missile.

March 19: EU High Representative Josep Borrell announced that the leaders of Serbia and Kosovo have agreed on how to implement an EU-mediated deal to normalize their relations.

March 20: UK banned far-right Danish politician Rasmus Paludan from entering its territory after he declared intention to burn a copy of the Holy Quran in the country.

March 23: The European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Interior Affairs endorsed a short-stay visa freedom agreement with Kosovo.

March 24: The US Justice Department announced arresting the founder of one of the World's largest hacker forums and disruption of forum's operation.

March 24: The US sanctioned three entities and nine Belarusian individuals and identified one presidential aircraft as blocked property.

March 27: Hungary ratified Finland's membership of NATO.

March 29: British King Charles III arrived in the German capital Berlin for his first foreign visit since assuming the throne.

March 30: The US sanctioned one individual of Slovakian nationality for attempting to facilitate arms deals between Russia and North Korea.

April 6: Iran and Saudi Arabia agree in the Chinese capital Beijing to officially resume diplomatic relations and enhance economic and trade cooperation between the two countries.

April 11: Germany announced that it had given Chad's ambassador to Germany, Mariam Moussa, 48 hours to leave German territory, in response to the Chadian government's request for German Ambassador Jan Christian Gordon Kricke to leave the Chadian capital N'Djamena.

April 17: Britain summons Russia's ambassador to the United Kingdom, Andrey Kelin, following Moscow court ruling that a prominent dissident has been imprisoned on charges including high treason.

April 20: The European Commission announces its agreement to allow Kosovo citizens to travel to EU countries without a visa, starting in January 2024.

April 22: The Russian Federation decides to expel more than 20 German diplomats in response to a similar move from Berlin against Russian diplomats.

April 26: Austria rejects Slovenia's request to open the common border between the two countries.

April 26: Russia expels 10 Norwegian diplomats from its territory considering them persona non grata, in response to a similar Norwegian action against Russian diplomats.

April 28: Britain and Croatia signed a joint declaration to enhance cooperation between their countries in the fields of security, trade, immigration and climate change.

## Major world events for 2023

July 2: Iran refrained from sending a new ambassador to Sweden in protest over the burning a copy of the Quran outside a mosque in Stockholm.

July 3: European Commission announced that the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine started its operations in the Hague, the Netherlands.

July 5: German Parliament (Bundestag) gave the green light to buy 60 military aircrafts to transport soldiers.

July 6: UK expelled nine Finnish diplomats in retaliation for a similar move by Finland.

July 6: UK unveiled new sanctions regime for Iranian individuals and entities.

July 6: Iran summoned the British chargé d'affaires Elizabeth Marsh of the British Embassy in Tehran over the interventionist remarks made by the UK authorities.

July 7: US provided cluster munitions to Ukraine in an additional military aid package of USD 800 million.

July 7: US announced launching the Global Coalition to combat Synthetic Drugs threats.

July 7: India and the UK renewed strategic partnership and boost security cooperation.

July 7: EU reached a provisional deal with European Parliament to speed up ammunition production to support Ukraine.

July 7: US President Joe Biden announced that the US has "safely destroyed" the final munition in the nation's stockpile of chemical weapons.

July 7: Belgium adopted Integrated Strategy for the Sahel Region.

July 17: UK imposed 14 new sanctions against Russia in response to the latter's attempts to destroy Ukrainian national identity, after the deportation of Ukrainian children.

July 19: US announced USD 1.3 billion additional assistance aid for Ukraine.

July 20: EU imposed sanctions against 18 individuals and 5 entities due to serious human rights violations and abuses in Afghanistan, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Ukraine and Russia.

July 20: US imposed new sanctions on 120 individuals and entities over violating the imposed sanctions on Russia.

To be continued



Cracks are seen on the ground in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Monday, Jan. 1, 2024, following an earthquake. Japan issued tsunami alerts Monday after a series of strong quakes in the Sea of Japan. (AP)

## Japan issues tsunami warnings after strong quakes

Japan issued tsunami alerts and ordered evacuations following a series of earthquakes on Monday that started a fire and trapped people under rubble on the west coast of its main island.

The Japan Meteorological Agency reported more than a dozen quakes off the coast of Ishikawa and nearby prefectures shortly after 4 p.m., one of them with a preliminary magnitude of 7.6.

The agency issued a major tsunami warning for Ishikawa and lower-level tsunami warnings or advisories for the rest of the western coast of the island of Honshu, as well as the northernmost of its main islands,

Hokkaido.

Japanese public broadcaster NHK TV warned torrents of water could reach as high as 5 meters (16.5 feet) and urged people to flee to high land or the top of a nearby building as quickly as possible.

NHK said the tsunami waves could keep returning, and warnings were continuing to be aired hours after the initial alert. Several aftershocks also rocked the region.

Government spokesman Yoshimasa Hayashi said it was critical for people in coastal areas to get away from the oncoming tsunami.

"Every minute counts. Please evacuate to a safe area immediately," he

said.

A tsunami of about 3 meters (about 10 feet) high was expected to hit Niigata and other prefectures on the western coast of Japan, and the waves were confirmed to have reached parts of the coastline.

At least six homes were damaged by the quakes, with people trapped inside. A fire has broken out in Wajima city, Ishikawa Prefecture, and electricity is out for more than 30,000 households, Hayashi said.

He said no reports of deaths or injuries had been confirmed, saying the situation was still unclear. Japan's military was taking part in the rescue efforts, he said. (AP)



In this photo provided by the Ukrainian Emergency Service, firefighters work on the site of a burning building after a Russian drone attack in Dublyany, Lviv region, Ukraine, Monday, Jan. 1, 2024. (AP)

## Retaliatory attack wounds 28 people

## Russia launches strikes in Ukraine

KYIV, Jan 1, (AP) — Russia launched a fresh drone assault on Ukraine after promising that strikes on the Russian border city of Belgorod that killed 24 people Saturday "would not go unpunished."

The Ukrainian Air Force said Sunday that it had shot down 21 of 49 drones launched by Russian forces overnight.

The retaliatory Russian attack wounded 28 people in the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, regional Gov. Oleh Synyehubov said. A hotel, kindergarten, apartment buildings, shops and administrative buildings sustained damage, according to the regional prosecutor's office.

Russia's Defense Ministry said it had targeted "decision-making centers and military facilities" in Kharkiv. The ministry said the hit on the Kharkiv Palace Hotel had "destroyed representatives of the Main Intelligence Directorate and Ukrainian Armed Forces" involved in the "terrorist attack" in Belgorod.

Ukrainian Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko said a British journalist was among the wounded, while public German broadcaster ZDF said Sunday that one of its television crews had been in the hotel. A Ukrainian translator was hit by debris and seriously wounded, and one of the team's security guards also was injured, ZDF said in a statement.

"This is another attack by Russia on the free press," ZDF Editor-in-Chief Bettina Schausten said.

In the Kyiv region that surrounds Ukraine's capital, a Russian drone attack caused a fire at a critical infrastructure facility, local officials said. They did not

identify the nature of the facility.

Russian troops additionally shelled the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson on Sunday, killing a 14-year-old boy and leaving a 9-year-old boy hospitalized in critical condition with a brain injury, according to regional Gov. Oleksandr Prokudin.

On Saturday, shelling in the center of Belgorod killed two dozen people, including three children. Another 108 people were wounded in the strike, regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said Sunday, making the attack one with the most casualties on Russian soil since the start of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine 22 months ago.

Russian authorities accused Ukraine of carrying out the attack, which took place a day after an 18-hour Russian aerial bombardment across Ukraine killed at least 41 civilians.

Russia's Defense Ministry said it identified the ammunition used in the strike as Czech-made Vampire rockets and Olkha missiles fitted with cluster-munition warheads. It provided no additional information, and The Associated Press was unable to verify its claims.

"This crime will not go unpunished," the ministry said in a statement on social media.

In an emergency Saturday night meeting of the U.N. Security Council demanded by Russia, envoy Vasily Nebenzya accused Kyiv of a "terrorist attack." In comments carried by Russian state media, Nebenzya claimed Ukraine had launched "a deliberate act of terrorism directed against civilians."

ner William Lai as a "destroyer of peace" following a televised debate on Saturday in which he defended Taiwan's right to rule itself as a democracy.



Kim



Lai

**China slams Lai's discourse:** China has slammed Taiwan presidential front-run-

## Europe

## Legacy and future

## Queen Margrethe II to step down from throne

STOCKHOLM, Sweden, Jan 1, (AP) — Denmark's Queen Margrethe II announced Sunday that she plans to abdicate after 52 years and hand over the throne to her son, Crown Prince Frederik.

The queen, who is Europe's longest-reigning living monarch, announced during her New Year's speech that she would step down on Jan. 14th, which is the anniversary of her own accession to the throne at age 31 following the death of her father, King Frederik IX.

Margrethe, 83, said the back surgery she underwent in early 2023 led to "thoughts about the future" and when to pass on the responsibilities of the crown to her son. "I have decided that now is the right time," she said in her speech.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen paid tribute to her in a statement, offering a "heartfelt thank you to Her Majesty the Queen for her lifelong dedication and tireless efforts for the Kingdom."

Margrethe is the "epitome of Denmark," Frederiksen's statement read, and "throughout the years has put words and feelings into who we are as a people and as a nation."

The 6-foot-tall (1.82-meters-tall), chain-smoking Margrethe has been one of the most popular public figures in Denmark, where the monarch's role is largely ceremonial. She often walked the streets of Copenhagen virtually unescorted and won the admiration of Danes for her warm manners and for her talents as a linguist and designer.

A keen skier, she was a member of a Danish women's air force unit as a princess, taking part in judo courses and endurance tests in the snow. Margrethe remained tough even as she grew older. In 2011, at age 70, she visited Danish troops in southern Afghanistan wearing a military jumpsuit.

As monarch, she crisscrossed the country and regularly visited Greenland and the Faeroe Islands, the two semi-independent territories which are part of the Danish Realm, and was met everywhere by cheering crowds.

Denmark has Europe's oldest ruling monarchy, which traces its line back to the Viking king Gorm the Old, who died in 958. Although Margrethe is head of state, the Danish Constitution strictly ruled out her involvement in party politics.

Yet the queen was clearly well-versed in law and knew the contents of the legislation she was called upon to sign.

She received training in French and English from her earliest years, as well as Swedish from her mother. In addition to archaeology, she studied philosophy, political science and economics at universities in Copenhagen, Aarhus and Cambridge along with the London School of Economics and the Sorbonne in Paris.

Ever since his birth on May 26, 1968, Frederik André Henrik Christian has been the heir to the Danish throne.

He is the oldest son of Queen Margrethe and her late French-born husband, Prince Henrik, who died February 2018. Frederik, 55, has a younger brother, Prince Joachim.

Since the age of 18, he has served as regent whenever his mother was outside the kingdom and carried out official duties, shaking hands with thousands and receiving foreign dignitaries.

The queen's announcement made up only a few sentences at the end of her wide-ranging New Year's speech which reflected on the "turbulence and upheaval in the world" amid the wars in the Middle East and Ukraine, and the climate crisis.

**Putin lauds Russian unity:** Russian President Vladimir Putin praised Russia's "united society" in his prerecorded New Year's address to the nation, the country's state news agencies reported Sunday.

Putin addressed Russians in a video that ran under four minutes long, significantly shorter than the New Year's speech he gave last year, according to state news agency RIA Novosti. Millions of people were expected to watch the new address when it airs on TV as each Russian time zone region counts down the final minutes of 2023 on Sunday.

The first to see it were residents of the Kamchatka Peninsula and the Chukotka region in Russia's Far East, some nine hours ahead of Moscow.

Returning to tradition after speaking flanked by soldiers last year, Putin delivered his address to the nation against the backdrop of a snowy Kremlin. In remarks carried by RIA Novosti, he described 2023 as a year marked by high levels of unity in Russian society. (AP)

**Fire in Austria kills 1:** One person died and 21 people were severely injured when fire broke out at a bar in the southeastern Austrian city of Graz in the early hours of the New Year.

Austrian police said that the fire broke out around 4 a.m. at a bar in the city center where people were attending a New Year's party.

One person, who has not yet been identified, suffered fatal injuries, Styrian state police said in a statement. At least a further three people are still in critical condition at a hospital's intensive care unit.

The cause of the fire, which broke out at the entrance of the bar, was not immediately known but investigators were looking into a technical defect. (AP)



Margrethe II

## no need for a second trial of FTX founder

A second trial of FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried on charges not in the cryptocurrency fraud case presented to a jury that convicted him in November is not necessary, prosecutors told a judge Friday.

Prosecutors told U.S. District Judge Lewis A. Kaplan in a letter that evidence at a second trial would duplicate evidence already shown to a jury. They also said it would ignore the "strong public interest in a prompt resolution" of the case, particularly

because victims would not benefit from forfeiture or restitution orders if sentencing is delayed.

They said the judge can consider the evidence that would be used at a second trial when he sentences Bankman-Fried on March 28 for defrauding customers and investors of at least \$10 billion.

Bankman-Fried, 31, who has been incarcerated since several weeks before his trial, was convicted in early November of seven

counts, including wire fraud, wire fraud conspiracy and three conspiracy charges. He could face decades in prison.

Last spring, prosecutors withdrew some charges they had brought against Bankman-Fried because the charges had not been approved as part of his extradition from the Bahamas in December 2022. They said the charges could be brought at a second trial to occur sometime in 2024. (AP)

## Google settles \$5 billion privacy lawsuit

Google has agreed to settle a \$5 billion privacy lawsuit alleging that it spied on people who used the "incognito" mode in its Chrome browser - along with similar "private" modes in other browsers - to track their internet use.

The class-action lawsuit filed in 2020 said Google misled users into believing that it wouldn't track their internet activities while using incognito

mode. It argued that Google's advertising technologies and other techniques continued to catalog details of users' site visits and activities despite their use of supposedly "private" browsing.

Plaintiffs also charged that Google's activities yielded an "unaccountable trove of information" about users who thought they'd taken steps to protect their privacy.

The settlement, reached Thursday, must still be approved by a federal judge. Terms weren't disclosed, but the suit originally sought \$5 billion on behalf of users; lawyers for the plaintiffs said they expect to present the court with a final settlement agreement by Feb. 24.

Google did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the settlement. (AP)

## Market Movements

01-01-2024

UAE	-DFM	Change	Closing pts
PAKISTAN	-KSE 100	+0.254	059.80
SAUDI	-Tadawul	+3.75	64,718.88
EGYPT	-EGX 30	+0.58	12,037.04
		+0.82	24,894.26

JAPAN	-Nikkei	Change	Closing pts
PHILIPPINES	-PSEI	-0.22	33,464.17
		-1.06	6,450.04

# Business

## Impact on GCC economies expected to be largely positive

# Bond market rallies on aggressive rate cut expectations

By Kamco Invest

Bond market rallies on aggressive rate cut expectations...

Global bonds and government securities witnessed gains recently backed by a faster-than-expected rate cut expectations, although a number of economists said that the market is being overly optimistic. Traders are now pricing in disinflationary pressure over the next few months resulting in an accelerated rate cut approach. This was reflected in yield on treasury bonds that swung from a 16-year high to multi-month lows. Yield on US 10-year treasury bonds declined from 5.02% in October-2023 to around 4.3% by the third week of December-2023. The yield on Bund and gilts also dropped to multi-month lows reflecting latest data on inflation that came in lower than market expectations. Swap traders priced in almost six 25 bps cuts next year, that many believed to be overly aggressive. Cuts from ECB were even more steeper, with traders pricing in 162 bps decline next year led by softer economic data and slowing inflation. Market is now expecting ECB to be the first to implement rate cuts next year, although the ECB vehemently denied the forecast in a recent statement. The EU is also implementing new rules on the fiscal front related to breaches to budget deficits and debt-to-GDP ratio in order to realign policies more in line with new economic realities.

The impact on GCC economies is expected to be largely positive as global economic slowdown in now expected to be softer-than-expected, with soft landing in economic growth. This coupled with lower inflation rates in the GCC should augur well for the region in terms of GDP growth backed by thriving non-oil GDP, a strong project pipeline and elevated oil price above the USD 70/b mark. In addition, the strong credit profile of most countries in the GCC with recent upgrades this year also provides stability to currency and the fixed income funding market.

In the primary market, GCC bonds and sukuk issuances exceeded our and market expectations with several big-ticket issuances during the second half of the year. Sukuk issuances in Saudi Arabia coupled with bond issuances in the UAE during 2H-2023 pushed aggregate issuances in the GCC to over USD 100 Bn at USD 107.8 Bn by mid-December-2023. This compares with USD 90.0 Bn in total bond and sukuk issuances in the GCC during full year 2022. However, despite the growth, issuances in the GCC remained well below the issuances seen during the preceding five years (2017-2022) that averaged at USD 136.2 Bn.

### Inflation and interest rate hikes

The slowing inflation seen over the last few months have drastically altered investor and trader's expectation for the fixed income market. The last meeting of the year was instrumental in changing the rate cut/pause forecasts for 2024. From a scattered expectation of one or two hikes in 2024 during the later half of 2023 just a few months ago, the consensus forecast now shows at least 150 bps cuts during 2024. Some economists also see earlier rate cuts in the US as against 2H-2024 cuts as per previous expectations.

In its most recent meeting, the US Fed kept the rates unchanged in the range of 5.25% - 5.5% after consistent hikes until July-2023. The rate pause was expected by the market as inflation is seen cooling in the near term and economic growth is expected to remain subdued. The most recent reading of headline inflation came in at 3.1% y-o-y growth during November-2023 after showing a gradual decline since the start of the year. Excluding volatile food and energy prices, the core CPI increased 0.3% as compared to the previous month and 4% y-o-y. Prices for a broad range of goods and services were higher in November-2023, but were in line with expectations. In terms of forecast, the US

Fed expects inflation to fall to 2.4% in 2024, lower than its previous forecast of 2.6%. The Fed forecasted core personal consumption expenditures price index to decline to 2.2% by 2025 (2.3% expected previously) and finally reach its 2.0% target in 2026.

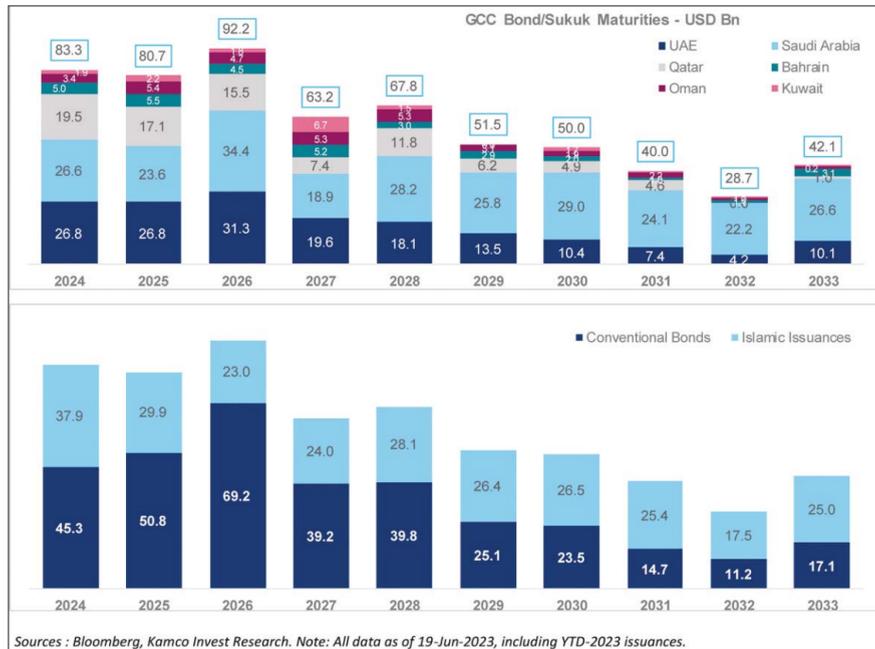
Rates hikes by the ECB also took a pause after 10 consecutive rate hikes until September-2022. The bank raised its rate for refinancing operations to a record 4.5% and deposit rate also to a record 4.0% in September-2023 after the most aggressive tightening of monetary policy in the ECB's 25-year existence. The uncertainty related to economic growth and inflation trend was significantly high at the time of the rate hike and as a result analysts and traders were expecting a rate cut only during the third quarter of 2024 at the earliest. However, after a steep fall in inflation that dropped to 2.4% last month from 10% a year earlier put the EU's 2% inflation target in sight and proved the group's earlier forecast which said that inflation would remain stubborn for the next two years. Even the most influential and hawkish policymakers in the EU changed their stance to an earlier and steeper rate cut next year.

Meanwhile, in the GCC, economic growth was revised lower after the decision by the OPEC+ to slash oil productions until next year and added voluntary cuts until the first quarter of 2024. Crude oil prices also provided volatility to forecasts after a wild swing in prices that reached multi-month lows during the second half of the year. Nevertheless, inflation in the region remained under control as a result of proactive policies of the regional governments and mostly trended lower over the last few months. The trend in interest rates in the GCC was almost in line with that by the US Fed. Most GCC central banks raised rates by 100 bps while

some implemented lower rate hikes depending on the existing rates and the pressure on the currency pegs. The rating actions in the GCC were largely positive during this year with most upgrades to Oman after the country successfully steered the economy from deficits to a much more manageable finances, including earlier than maturity repayment of debt. The sultanate was upgraded by all the three ratings agencies and the most recent upgrade from Moody's cited improvement in debt affordability matrix as the rationale for the upgrade.

### Bond/Sukuk Maturities

GCC governments are expected to see elevated levels of maturities over the next five years. According to data from Bloomberg, GCC sovereign maturities stands at USD 209.3 Bn over the next five years (2024-2028), whereas corporate maturities stand significantly lower at USD 177.9 Bn. Both bond and sukuk maturities are expected to remain elevated starting from 2024 until 2028 and then gradually taper for the rest of the tenor. The higher maturities during the next five years reflects a number of short-term (less than 5-year maturity) issuances in 2020 and 2021 as governments raised funds to plug-in deficits during the pandemic. A majority of these maturities are denominated in USD at 59.7% followed by local currency issuances in SAR and QAR at 16.3% and 7.6%, respectively. In addition, due to the credit rating profile of the GCC governments, a majority of these maturities are in the high investment grade or A rated instruments. In terms of type of instruments, conventional bonds dominate with USD 244.3 Bn in maturities over the next five years, whereas sukuk maturities are expected to be at USD 142.9 Bn. In terms of country split, Saudi Arabia continues to see the biggest maturities during 2024-2028. The Kingdom is



Sources : Bloomberg, Kamco Invest Research. Note: All data as of 19-Jun-2023, including YTD-2023 issuances.

expected to see maturities of USD 131.9 Bn until 2028 followed by UAE and Qatari issuers at USD 122.5 Bn and USD 71.4 Bn, respectively. Kuwait has the smallest maturities in five years at USD 14.1 Bn due to lack of government issuances.

In terms of sector maturities, Banks and other Financial Services sector have USD 130.9 Bn in maturities in the next five years, accounting for around 73.6% of the total corporate maturities and 33.8% of the total maturities in the GCC until 2028, respectively. The Energy sector was next with maturities of USD 17.9 Bn or 10.0% of GCC corporate maturities until 2028 followed by Utilities and Communications at USD 11.4 Bn and USD 6.1 Bn, respectively. Banks in UAE have the biggest maturities over the next five years at USD 60.2 Bn followed by Qatari banks with maturities of USD 26.3 Bn. Banks in the two countries accounted for 22.3% of total bond/sukuk maturities over the next five years in the GCC. Real Estate maturities are concentrated mainly in the UAE and Saudi Arabia at USD 6.3 Bn and USD 2.9 Bn, respectively, until 2028. The structure of maturities saw perpetual instruments seeing consistent growth until 2022. However, 2023 witnessed a steep decline in issuances of perpetual instruments. According to data from Bloomberg, aggregate issuances declined from USD 11.5 Bn in 2023 to merely USD 2.0 Bn during 2023.

### Issuances in 2023

Aggregate issuances from 1-January-2023 until the third week of December-2023 stood at USD 107.8 Bn as compared to USD 90.0 Bn during 2022, resulting in an increase of USD 17.8 Bn or 19.7%. The increase was mainly led by higher corporate issuances that went up from USD 40.5 Bn in 2022 to USD 66.2 Bn in 2023. On the other hand, government issuances dropped by 15.9% or USD 7.9 Bn in 2023 to reach USD 41.6 Bn as compared to USD 49.5 Bn in 2022. In terms of type of issuance, both bond and sukuk issuances witnessed growth during the year. Aggregate GCC bond issues went up by 43.7% or USD 17.6 Bn to reach USD 58.0 Bn as compared to USD 40.4 Bn in 2022. Sukuk issuances, on the other hand, witnessed marginal growth during the year to reach USD 49.8 Bn. At the country level, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman reported declines in issuances in 2023 vs. 2022 while the rest of the GCC countries witnessed growth. UAE issuers reported the biggest absolute growth in fixed income issuances this year with an increase of USD 18.4 Bn or 77.4% to reach USD 42.2 Bn in issuances. Saudi Arabia reported a small growth of USD 0.8 Bn or 1.5% but remained the biggest issuer this year with aggregate bonds and sukuk issuances reaching USD 52.1 Bn in 2023.

### Outlook - Fed vs. GCC rate moves

The consensus estimates on policy rates by major central banks shows cuts across the globe in 2024 ranging from over 200 bps to 50 bps. According to Bloomberg consensus estimates, the US Fed is forecasted to lower rates by 156 bps in 2024 and end of year rates are forecasted to be at 3.82%. The Eurozone is forecasted to make more aggressive rate cuts next year slashing policy rates by 219 bps with end of year rates reaching 2.31%. Similarly, the UK, Canada and New Zealand are forecasted to lower rates by around 100 bps next year. For the GCC, we have forecasted rates based on US Fed rate cuts. As a result, most central banks in the GCC would slash rates in line with the US Fed due to the pegged currencies. However, Kuwait has its currency pegged to a basket of currencies. As such, we've forecasted a 100 bps cut by the Kuwait Central Bank in its discount rate. This is lower than the cuts in the rest of the GCC countries as Kuwait has made the smallest aggregate rate hike in the GCC since 2022 (275 bps) and since the start of the year (75 bps) and we believe that the roll back of rates would also be smaller than the rest of the GCC.

# KSE outlook bright in 2023 despite economic, geopolitical challenges

10.2 bln dinars attracted during the year

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1: The Kuwait Stock Exchange attracted liquidity of about 10.2 billion dinars during 2023, in clear evidence of the continued attractiveness of the Kuwaiti market, despite the economic and geopolitical challenges that the world witnessed during the past year, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to indicators the Kuwait Stock Exchange will welcome the new year 2024 amid 6 main stimuli that are expected to support its performance in terms of positive growth rates in market value and trading activity, the most prominent of which are the following:

■ The change in monetary tightening policy by the US Federal Reserve and central banks around the world, which will put stocks at the top of the list of investors' options.

■ Continuation of attractive prices to build new investment positions on many listed stocks, including leading and operating stocks.

■ Expectations of exceptional performance for the banking sector, whose financial results for the first 9 months of 2023 showed a remarkable jump, which is expected to continue.

■ Interim distributions (exceptional) from leading banks and companies, as 8 companies distributed about 320 million dinars for the first 6 months of

2023, and cash dividends are among the most important drivers of the stock market.

■ The Capital Markets Authority, within the framework of completing the development process that has strengthened the state of optimism in the Kuwait Stock Exchange, intends to activate financial and investment tools that contribute significantly to increasing the volumes of liquidity flowing to the market, as the Capital Markets Authority intends to activate financial technologies related to securities-

based crowdfunding and the automated investment advisor, effective from next January 2.

■ The stability of Kuwaiti oil prices at \$80 per barrel supports the economic situation through increased spending on capital projects, the effects of which extend to the stock market as a reflecting mirror of this economy.

Measuring the annual performance of stock market indices, the primary market index declined 7.9% by the end of this year, losing 638 points to close at 7,477 points, down from 8,115

## MEED magazine issues report

# Kuwait 3rd largest Gulf market in the field of energy transmission

ed between January and November 2023, and this momentum is expected to continue during the coming period.

Although this number is small when compared to the record value of projects awarded in 2015, which amounted to \$37.7 billion, at the same time, it is 38% more than the awards for the entire year of 2022, according to data issued by MEED Projects, which tracks regional project activity.

On an annual basis, the value of power generation contracts awarded increased by 40% to \$19 billion, outpacing the transmission subsector growth by approximately 9%.

Contrary to what was the situation in the past two years, Kuwait, the Emirates, and Oman were awarded huge power generation contracts in 2023, after Saudi Arabia, which in the same year concluded 60% of power generation contracts in the region, according to Med Projects data.

The magazine inferred, by analogy with contracts for the last quarter of 2023, that the energy sector in the region is expected to maintain its momentum in 2024, and revealed that tender documents are being prepared for two power generation projects in Riyadh and Khafji with a capacity of 3.6 gigawatts.

points last year, and the main market index lost 27 points, or 0.5%, to close at 5,569 points, down from 5,596 points last year.

The general index rose 475 points, or 6.5%, to close at 6,817 points, down from 7,292 points at the end of 2022.

The market value of the KSE decreased by about 6.4 billion dinars, or by approximately 14%, as 2023 trading closed at a market value of 40,259 billion dinars, compared to 46.7 billion dinars.

## Other Voices

# KPC to borrow \$45 bn in the coming five yrs

By Kamel Al-Harami  
Independent Oil Analyst

Last month, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) had announced its decision to borrow about KD 14 billion (\$45 billion) in the coming five years, which is about KD 3 billion per year, in order to meet its strategic long-term investment plans mainly for exploration, and for developing and enhancing old crude oil fields.

It must borrow internationally, and try to privatize some of its non-core activities that impose more burden upon it. However, it necessitates a form of consensus with the parliament, ensuring non-intrusiveness and alignment with the state's interests, in accordance with approved regulations, mirroring practices adopted in neighboring countries. A clear example is the sale of five percent of the formidable Aramco. However, it's noteworthy that KPC is neither pursuing nor considering such a daring move.

KPC has outlined its main investment strategies, allocating 60 percent toward the development and exploration of new oil discoveries, as well as enhancing and optimizing production from existing fields. This includes a focus on increasing free gas production, which is not independent and unrelated to oil production. Hence, the core of its future

investments relies on boosting crude oil production, which has experienced a decline since 2016.

International oil companies decline to engage with our friends and develop their production potential unless some form of agreement guarantees a specified volume for each barrel produced through their expertise and technology.

Working on a rental basis is a thing of the past. However, our Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) either rejects acknowledging such arrangements or struggles to address concerns raised by parliament members to avoid complications. This is despite the fact that many neighboring countries have established similar production-sharing arrangements within the agreed-upon rules and conditions of sovereign states.

Indeed, it is imperative for both KPC and KOC to play a proactive role in advocating for inviting oil companies. It is crucial to openly acknowledge our limitations in increasing crude oil production to nearly three million barrels per day or beyond. As the weakest link in oil production management and output, Kuwait must rely on the expertise and technology of international oil companies.

Simultaneously, KPC is not obligated to borrow the entire \$45 billion in one go. It has the option to generate a portion of the required funds by selling and privatizing certain companies, initially created and developed by the private sector. This includes entities such as tanker and petrochemical companies. Notably, our refining company had a 40% ownership by the private sector when first established in 1962.

Email: nafikuwait@yahoo.com



Al-Harami

## BUSINESS

## Spain names economy minister

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez Friday appointed Carlos Cuerpo, the head of the treasury department, new economy minister, replacing Nadia Calvino who was named head of the European Investment Bank as of January 1.

In a statement issued from the presidential palace, Sanchez said minister of finance Maria Montero would be First Deputy Prime Minister, thus having three deputies instead of four.

Spain's socialist coalition government, which was formed on November 21 after the July poll, includes 22 ministers.

Calvino was appointed early December new head of the EIB upon the approval of the EU's finance ministers. (KUNA)

## Iberia cancels 444 flights

Spain's flag carrier said Friday it is cancelling 444 flights scheduled for January 5-8 after the unions of ground service staff postponed their strike from the New Year holiday to that period.

The strike will affect 45,641 passengers, Iberia noted in a statement posted to its website.

The ground worker unions of the International Airlines Group (IAG) - the parent company of British Airways, Iberia, Vueling, Aer Lingus, LEVEL, IAG Loyalty and IAG Cargo, originally slated the walkout for December 29 until January 1 due to dispute over new contract.

The walkout forced cancellation of 270 Iberia-operated flights, 64 Iberia Express flights and 110 Air Nostrum flights. (KUNA)

## Eurostar cancels train services

The holiday travel plans of hundreds of people were upended Saturday after Eurostar canceled train services to and from London because a tunnel under the River Thames became flooded.

Large crowds of travelers trying to get across the English Channel were stranded at London's St. Pancras International station and the Gare du Nord station in Paris. Eurostar, which runs services from London to Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam, said

it canceled all 41 trains scheduled for Saturday because of the flooding.

Engineers working on the tunnel said water levels were reducing. The volume of water in the tunnel was "unprecedented," they said.

The U.K. has been battered by strong, gusty winds and heavy rain brought by Storm Gerrit throughout the holiday period. More stormy weather and travel disruption is expected during the last weekend of the year. (AP)

## Economic resilience or warning signs?

## China's manufacturing contraction worsens in Dec as demand weakens



A container vessel sails by tourists enjoying sea scenery in Xiamen in southeast China's Fujian province on Dec. 26, 2023. A survey of factory managers in China shows manufacturing contracted in December in the latest sign the world's second-largest economy remains sluggish. (AP)

BANGKOK, Jan 1, (AP) - A survey of factory managers in China shows manufacturing contracted in December in the latest sign the world's second-largest economy remains sluggish.

The official purchasing managers index, or PMI, fell to 49 last month in what officials said was evidence of weak demand, the National Bureau of Statistics reported on Sunday. It was the third straight month of contraction. The PMI is on a scale up to 100 where 50 marks the cutoff between expansion and contraction.

The index has fallen in eight of the past nine months, with an increase only in September. In November, the index was at 49.4, down from 49.5 the month before.

Despite unexpectedly prolonged weakness after the pandemic, China's economy grew at a 5.2% pace in the first three quarters of the year and showed signs of improvement in November, with factory output and retail sales rising.

In recent months, the government has raised spending on construction

of ports and other infrastructure, cut interest rates and eased curbs on home-buying to try to stimulate the domestic demand that economists say is needed to sustain growth.

## Smooth transition

In his New Year speech, leader Xi Jinping said China had achieved a "smooth transition" from the country's response to the pandemic, which at times involved the shut downs of factories and parts of or entire cities.

China's economy has become "more resilient and dynamic than before," Xi said in remarks carried by the official Xinhua News Agency.

Global demand for manufactured goods has suffered as central banks around the world have raised interest rates to battle decades-high rates of inflation. Price pressures have eased in recent months, but demand has yet to rebound to prepandemic levels. That has ramifications across the region since supply chains linked to China are scattered across many

Asian countries.

Reliance on exports to fuel growth in China means more competition as the government invests in still more industrial construction. Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management said in a commentary. He noted that "the biggest constraint on the manufacturing sector hasn't been access to capital but rather weak demand, so expanding manufacturing investment mostly means expanding excess capacity."

China's non-manufacturing PMI rose in December to 50.4, the statistics bureau reported. The service sector PMI sub-index was 49.3, however, unchanged from November's reading.

Despite a slump in the housing market brought about by a crackdown on excess borrowing by property developers, the construction industry is thriving: the sub-index for that sector climbed to 56.9 in December, well into expansionary territory, from 55 in November, the report said.

## Milei's latest policy shift

## Argentina formally announces it won't join the BRICS alliance

BUENOS AIRES, Jan 1, (AP) - Argentina formally announced Friday that it won't join the BRICS bloc of developing economies, the latest in a dramatic shift in foreign and economic policy by Argentina's new far-right populist President Javier Milei.

In a letter addressed to the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa - all members of the alliance - Milei said the moment was not "opportune" for Argentina to join as a full member. The letter was dated a week ago, Dec. 22, but released by the Argentine government on Friday, the last working day of 2023.

Argentina was among six countries invited in August to join the bloc made up of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa to make an 11-nation bloc. Argentina was set to join Jan. 1, 2024.

The move comes as Argentina has been left reeling by deepening economic crisis.

Milei's predecessor, former center-left president Alberto Fernandez, endorsed joining the alliance as an opportunity to reach new markets. The BRICS currently account for about 40% of the world's population and more than a quarter of the world's GDP.

But economic turmoil left many in Argentina eager for change, ushering

chainsaw-wielding political outsider Milei into the presidency.

Milei, who defines himself as an "anarcho-capitalist" - a current within liberalism that aspires to eliminate the state - has implemented a series of measures to deregulate the economy, which in recent decades has been marked by strong state interventionism.

In foreign policy, he has proclaimed full alignment with the "free nations of the West," especially the United States and Israel.

Throughout the campaign for the presidency, Milei also disparaged countries ruled "by communism" and announced that he would not maintain diplomatic relations with them despite growing Chinese investment in South America.

However, in the letter addressed to his counterpart Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva in neighboring Brazil and the rest of the leaders of full BRICS members - Xi Jinping of China, Narendra Modi of India, Vladimir Putin of Russia and Matamela Ramaphosa of South Africa - Milei proposed to "intensify bilateral ties" and increase "trade and investment flows."

Milei also expressed his readiness to hold meetings with each of the five leaders.

## Resilient economy energizes investors as financial markets end 2023 up 24%

Prospect of lower interest rates buoyed investors

NEW YORK, Jan 1, (AP) - The S&P 500 closed out 2023 with a gain of more than 24% and the Dow finished near a record high, as easing inflation, a resilient economy and the prospect of lower interest rates buoyed investors, particularly in the last two months of the year.

Stocks closed Friday with modest losses.

The S&P 500 slipped 13.52 points, or 0.3%, to 4,769.83. The benchmark index still posted a rare ninth consecutive week of gains and is just 0.6% shy of an all-time high set in January of 2022.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 20.56 points, or 0.1%, to 37,689.54 after setting a record Thursday.

The Nasdaq slipped 83.78 points, or 0.6%, to 15,011.35, but that was barely a blemish on an annual gain of more than 43%, its best performance since 2020.

## Driven

For most of the year, gains in the broader market were driven largely by seven stocks - Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet, Amazon, Nvidia, Meta Platforms and Tesla. Dubbed the Magnificent 7, they accounted for about two-thirds of the gains in the S&P 500 this year, according to S&P Dow Jones Indices. Nvidia lead the group with a gain of about 239%, driven by the mania surrounding artificial intelligence.

A strong rally in November and December marked a big psychological shift for investors, said Quincy Krosby, chief global strategist at LPL Financial, because it went beyond the big technology companies. The Russell 2000 index of smaller companies jumped more than 20% over the two months and finished 2023 with a 15.1% gain after falling 21.6% in 2022.



Hiromi Yamaji, CEO of Japan Exchange Group (JPX) delivers a speech at the end of a ceremony to conclude the year's trading on the Tokyo Stock Exchange Friday, Dec. 29, 2023, in Tokyo. (AP)

"It was broad participation in the market that reinforced and confirmed gains for smaller company stocks that were particularly important," Krosby said.

Investors in the U.S. came into this year bearing the bruises of sharp losses for both stocks and bonds in 2022. They expected inflation to ease further as the Federal Reserve pushed interest rates higher. The trade-off would be a weaker economy and possibly a recession. But while inflation has come down to around 3%, the economy has chugged along thanks to solid consumer spending and a healthy job market.

The stock market is now betting the Fed can achieve a "soft landing," where the economy slows just

enough to snuff out high inflation, but not so much that it falls into a recession. As a result, investors now expect the Fed to begin cutting rates as early as March.

The Fed has signaled three quarter-point cuts to its benchmark interest rate next year. That rate is currently sitting between 5.25% and 5.50%, its highest level in two decades.

Lower rates could add more fuel to the broader market's momentum in 2024. Wall Street is forecasting stronger earnings growth for companies next year after a largely lackluster 2023, when companies wrestled with higher input and labor costs and a shift in consumer spending.

Bond market investors appeared headed for a third losing year in a row until things turned around

starting in late October. Excitement about potential cuts to interest rates sent bond prices soaring and yields dropping. The yield on the 10-year Treasury, which hit 5% in October, stood at 3.88% Friday, up from 3.85% on Thursday.

The yield on the two-year Treasury, which more closely tracks expectations for the Fed, fell to 4.25% from 4.28% from late Thursday. It also surpassed 5% in October.

Many global markets also saw solid gains this year. Indexes in France and Germany made double-digit advances, while Britain's has climbed just under 4%.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 gained 27% in 2023, its best year in a decade as the Japanese central bank inched toward ending its longstanding ultra-lax monetary policy after inflation finally exceeded its target of about 2%.

The Shanghai Composite index lost about 3% this year and the Hang Seng index in Hong Kong fell nearly 14%. Weakness in the property sector and in global demand for China's exports, as well as high debt levels and wavering consumer confidence have weighed on the country's economy and the stock market.

U.S. and international crude oil prices were relatively stable on Friday. The price of oil tumbled by more than 10% this year, defying predictions from some experts that it could cross \$100 per barrel.

Despite production cuts from OPEC, a war involving energy exporter Russia and another in the Middle East, U.S. benchmark crude dropped nearly 11% in 2023, and a whopping 21% in the final three months of the year.

Increased production in the U.S., now the top oil producer in the world, as well as Canada, Brazil and Guyana offset the reduced output from OPEC. Not all OPEC members participated in the cuts and some countries like Iran and Venezuela are pumping more oil, energy analysts say.



An anti-government protester wearing a dog mask holds up a sign that reads in Spanish "You cloned poverty" during a rally outside the Supreme Court against the economic reforms of President Javier Milei, as labor unions legally challenge the measures in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Wednesday, Dec. 27, 2023. (AP)

## Minimum-wage workers now earn up to \$16

## Empire State rings in the new year with a pay bump

ALBANY, N.Y., Jan 1, (AP) - New York's minimum-wage workers had more than just the new year to celebrate Monday, with a pay bump kicking in as the clock ticked over to 2024.

In the first of a series of annual increases slated for the Empire State, the minimum wage increased to \$16 in New York City and some of its suburbs, up from \$15. In the rest of the state, the new minimum wage is \$15, up from \$14.20.

The state's minimum wage is expected to increase every year until it reaches \$17 in New York City and its suburbs, and \$16 in the rest of the state by 2026. Future hikes will be tied to the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers, a measurement of inflation.

New York is one of 22 states getting minimum wage rises in the

new year, according to a recent report by the Economic Policy Institute.

In California, the minimum wage increased to \$16, up from \$15.50, while in Connecticut it increased to \$15.69 from the previous rate of \$15.

This most recent pay bump in New York is part of an agreement made last year between Democratic Gov. Kathy Hochul and the state Legislature. The deal came over the objections of some employers, as well as some liberal Democrats who said it didn't go high enough.

The federal minimum wage in the United States has stayed at \$7.25 per hour since 2009, but states and some localities are free to set higher amounts. Thirty states, including New Mexico and Washington, have done so.



The New York state Capitol in Albany, N.Y., is pictured on Dec. 14, 2020. New York's minimum-wage workers had more than just the new year to celebrate Jan. 1, 2024, with a pay bump kicking in as the clock ticked over to 2024. (AP)

## Global engagement centers under LuLu Financial Holdings bring to 314 total number

## LuLu Exchange marks milestone with grand opening of the 100th customer engagement centre in the UAE

DUBAI, Jan 1: LuLu Exchange, a leading financial services provider, proudly commemorates its growth and success with the inauguration of the 100th customer engagement centre at Q1 Mall, Al Warqa, Dubai. This historic achievement reinstates the company's commitment to enhancing customer experience and expanding its reach in the region. The newly opened customer engagement centre takes the tally of global engagement centres under LuLu Financial Holdings to 314.

The milestone 100th Customer Engagement Centre was inaugurated by H.E. Satish Kumar Sivan, Consul General of India, Dubai, alongside Mr. Adeb Ahamed, Managing Director of LuLu Financial Holdings and Mr. Richard Wason, CEO, LuLu Financial Holdings in the esteemed presence of the company's senior management and key dignitaries from the financial industry.

Speaking at the event, H.E. Satish Kumar Sivan expressed, "LuLu Exchange's remarkable growth is a testament to its dedication to providing essential financial services. This 100th Customer Engagement Centre is a significant step forward, reflecting the company's commitment to the community."

Mr. Adeb Ahamed remarked, "Our commitment to a value-driven approach is evident in every aspect of our operations, ensuring that integrity and customer satisfaction guide our actions. We actively work towards financial inclusion, recognizing the importance of accessible financial services for all. This commitment aligns with our broader vision of making a positive impact on the communities and environment with a focus on sustainability. The persistent support from the leadership and governance of the UAE has been instrumental in our growth journey. Their strategic vision and commitment to excellence have provided a solid foundation for our success. As we celebrate this milestone, LuLu Exchange remains dedicated to upholding high standards in financial services, with gratitude for the trust placed in us by millions."

Since its establishment in 2009, marked by the inau-



The branch was inaugurated by H.E. Satish Kumar Sivan, Consul General of India, Dubai, alongside Mr. Adeb Ahamed, Managing Director of LuLu Financial Holdings in the esteemed presence of other dignitaries.

guration of the first Customer Engagement Centre in Abu Dhabi, LuLu Exchange has undergone a significant transformation, evolving into a diversified leader within

the global payments industry. Over the past 15 years, the company has expanded its presence across all seven emirates of the UAE, making a substantial impact on the

financial landscape.

LuLu Exchange has consistently demonstrated remarkable growth over the last decade, aligning with the growing demand for remittance services, and established itself as a trusted global financial service provider. The 2023 World Bank report validates this upward trajectory, revealing a substantial surge in global remittances to an impressive \$860 billion. Amidst this growth, the resilience exhibited by labour markets in advanced economies and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries has played a vital role in supporting migrants and facilitating crucial fund transfers back to their home countries. In 2023, India topped the charts in remittances, and LuLu Exchange, with its extensive global operations, played a pivotal role as a major facilitator of cross-border payments into India. LuLu Exchange processed \$9.4 billion in the year 2023, leveraging its global payout network covering over 100 countries. This underscores LuLu Exchange's integral part in the global financial landscape and further reinforces its unwavering dedication to providing secure and transparent cross-border payment solutions.

LuLu Exchange's strategic focus on digital transformation and platform-based innovations has positioned it as a key player in cross-border payments, foreign exchange, WPS payroll solutions, and wholesale banknotes. With a customer base spanning millions of individuals from diverse nationalities each year, LuLu Exchange has consistently delivered prompt, transparent, and reliable services.

This accomplishment is made possible through its extensive network of customer engagement centres throughout the UAE and the proprietary LuLu Money digital payments app, reflecting the company's unwavering commitment to excellence in financial services. As LuLu Exchange continues to evolve and grow, its legacy of innovation and customer-centric initiatives remains a driving force in the dynamic landscape of global financial services.

For more details, visit – [www.luluexchange.com](http://www.luluexchange.com)

## Founder announces AI integration

## Rhetorics Academy holds 1st graduation

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1: Rhetorics – Public Speaking Academy for Kids based in Kuwait organized its inaugural graduation ceremony on 29th December 2023.

Raajesh Venugopal – Founder & CEO of Rhetorics quoted "Graduation ceremonies are memorable not just for the students who are graduating, but also for the institution, since they represent growth, progress, and the successful development of its academic programs. We had an excellent year, and we are optimistic about continuing the momentum

in 2024 by introducing AI tools and collaborating closely with Kuwaiti schools and institutions. This is a proud moment for all of us in Rhetorics."

Rhetorics has a comprehensive public speaking curriculum with five levels with a mix of theoretical concepts, practical exercises, and real-world applications to ensure a well-rounded education in public speaking. The graduation ceremony consists of a Capstone project showcasing the skills learned by the student throughout

the curriculum.

"A total of 10 students graduated at the inaugural graduation ceremony held at Abwab Institute Salmiya. We are proud of our graduates, and we wish them all the best in their future. All graduates will be given an opportunity to work as mentors for new batch students" mentioned Alina Bano – Operations Head for Rhetorics Academy.

Congratulations to the graduates, faculty, and everyone involved in making this first graduation ceremony a reality.



Photo during the Public Speaking Academy for Kids based in Kuwait's inaugural graduation ceremony.

## Warba announces winners of Al Sunbula weekly draw

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1: Warba Bank - the best bank in corporate and investment banking services in Kuwait - announced the winners of the weekly Al Sunbula draws. Warba Bank will continue to hold weekly draws for ten winners of Al Sunbula account, in the presence of a representative of Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Warba Bank employees.

Each of the 10 lucky winners of the Sunbula weekly draw Warba Bank received KD 1,000, and the winners are: Saud Awaad Ali Awaad, Mohammed Rashid Khanfar Al-Otaibi, Yousef Abdul Nasser Al-Abdullah, Mohammed Essa Saleh Al-Anezi, Jamal Mohammed Rashid Al Bin Ali, Nasser Bader Ali Al-Blushi, Noura Faleh Mohammed Al-Dosari, Mithqal Ismaeil Al-Falah, Mohammed Abdullah Muhanna Al-Subaie, and Hamad Bandar Obaid Al-Shemmari.

As for the Sunbula account, it is the ideal choice for all those wishing to save money and achieve appropriate financial returns on their accounts at the same time, in addition to the opportunity to win cash prizes throughout the year.

Regarding the conditions, Mr. Ahmed M. Al-Mutawa, Area Manager Retail Banking Group said: "KD 100 is now required to enter the weekly Sunbula draws and major draws, and the client still gets one chance for every KD

10 in the account, and the chances are counted according to the lowest balance in the account during the month. Therefore, a full month must have passed in the account to qualify for the weekly draw, and two full months for the major draws to count the chances. There are no restrictions or limits for withdrawal and deposit, the higher the deposited amount, the greater the client's chances to win."

Notably Warba Bank launched its latest banking solutions service, "Customer Onboarding", in accordance with the terms of its ambitious five-year strategy, which enables non-Warba Bank clients to apply for opening a Sunbula account in an easy digital way via the Bank's website without the need to visit any of the Bank's branches, and within only five minutes - through the new and unique automated system used to enable this service - new clients will be able to complete the request to open an account at any time and any place.

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, in addition Warba Bank is considered among the 50 largest banks in the Middle East in terms of market value for the year 2023 - Forbes Middle East classification.



Ahmed M. Al-Mutawa

## Other Voices

## What's new about the New Year

By Nazneen Ali

Everything in this universe has a beginning and an end. Be it human life which is a journey from a beginning to an end, or the rotation of the Earth on its axis which decides the beginning and end of a day, or the Earth's revolution around the sun that marks the beginning of a New Year and an end of the existing revolution cycle, the existing year. So within our bigger journey of life, we witness these smaller trips of day and night, seasons and climate, each marking a new beginning and culminating the existing one.

All these beginnings are important. Life quotes teaches us to consider each day as a new beginning and live it to the fullest. Then what's so special about celebrating the New Year, what's so "new" about the New Year?

Before we explore and try to find answers to these "Whats" and "Whys", let's unveil some numerological and historical facts about the New Year. The New Year was considered to be celebrated on the First of January subsequent to the reign of Roman dictator Julius Caesar. He instituted January 1st as the beginning of the New Year, for the name January, that comes from Janus, the Roman god of beginning, whose two faces allowed him to look back into the past and forward into the future.

Prior to this the calendar year was from March to February and so that's where December got its name from. The meaning of December roots to the Latin word with the meaning "ten". The old Roman calendar was the starting March, thus making December the tenth month of the year. However with the change in the beginning of the New Year from March to January, December too got promoted to the twelfth month of the year and not tenth anymore. Well, is this a promotion or a demotion??

Despite being a month of festive celebrations,

December's destiny is only as the last lap to finish the current year's race and look forward to a new year. With the start of the month of December starts the discussion about the next year. People start talking about New Year celebrations, New Year plans and resolutions and businesses start planning and budgeting for the year that is yet to come. So December is more like an exit door just meant to await the entry of the New Year.

Coming back to our question – "if life is and ongoing process then why so much hype so much discussion about the New Year?"

Well, to me, this is because every journey however small or big, has two important identifiers. They are – "the road map" and the

"milestones". While the road map gives us the direction in which we have to go, the milestones allow us to evaluate, judge and understand how far and how successfully we have moved towards our destination. Our life is also a similar journey of day and night year after year. So the beginning of a new year serves as a milestone to

help us analyze where we have reached, so that we can revisit the roadmap of our life and revise our path in the right direction ensuring that we reach where we are destined to and capable of reaching.

This destination may be different for different people. In today's fast pace world, most of the people consider a professional growth as an achievement and as the final goal. However that is just a part of our journey. A bigger aspect and a more important and valuable angle to our existence is the value system, the humanitarian aspect of our life.



Ali

In the past few years we have seen human-

ity failing on various fronts. Be it human values failing during the challenging years of Corona or Russia-Ukraine war or Israel-Palestine war or other controversies. While some one would have succeeded, it's humanity that has failed every time.

So the New Year is a time and important milestone in our life where we have to take a pause and check ourselves, check our choices and understand where we are heading towards. It's a time to rebuild our value base, it's a time to do introspection, a time to show ourselves the mirror so that we can see our truth, identify the weakness in our value system and our behavior and make the necessary changes our life.

This is because our life does not belong only to us but it belongs to and impact everyone around us on a smaller level and the society and the world at large.

The "new" about New Year is to bring the change in ourselves so that we are able to create a better world.

The new in the New Year is about rebuilding humanitarian relationships, the new in the New Year is about respecting others, becoming a little selfless and doing justice to every role that we play in our life. The New Year is about creating a new and better world, it's about small acts of kindness, it's about being polite and humble, it's about breaking the old shackles of inappropriate behavior and evolving our new self. It's about standing for the right, it's about raising our voice for justice, it's about nothing new but being good in all old and new what we do in the New Year and the years to come.

□ □ □

The author is the General Secretary of the Writers' Forum Kuwait. She has a novel published in two languages. She is a poet and writer and a regular contributor to leading newspapers in Kuwait and India. She is a banker by profession.



KFH AlRabeh Campaign visual.

Regarding the terms and conditions of the prizes and draws, a customer is able to deposit 3 salaries during the 3 months prior to the draw, and the minimum balance of the account should not be less than KD 50 at the end of each month during the 3 months prior to the draw. Ten draws take place on a weekly basis for amount of K.D 1,500 for 10 winners each, 1 KG of KFH gold will be drawn monthly for one winner and K.D 25,000 for one winner every quarter, reaching a total number of 536 winners during the year.

KFH is keen to further meet customers' requirements and aspirations and their increasing needs as well as offer innovative and modern services, therefore achieving customer satisfaction, which is one of the fundamentals at KFH. The Bank has achieved a qualitative shift in the level of financial services by utilizing technology.

'There's something very liberating about a fresh start'

# The New Year gives a clean slate for long-elusive resolutions

NEW YORK, Jan 1, (AP) — It's an annual end-of-year exercise in futility for many. But a clean slate awaits at the stroke of midnight for the next round of resolutions.

From the first spray of fireworks to the closing chorus of "Auld Lang Syne" 366 days into the future - 2024 is a leap year - it could be the year for finally achieving long-elusive goals, fulfilling aspirations and being resolute on all those New Year resolutions.

"As humans, we are creatures that aspire," said Omid Fotuhi, a social psychologist who is a motivation and performance researcher.

"The fact that we have goals, the fact that we want to set goals is just a manifestation of that internal and almost universal desire to want to stretch, to want to reach, to want to expand and grow," said Fotuhi, the director of learning innovation at Western Governors University Labs and a research associate at the University of Pittsburgh.

"New Year's resolutions are one of those ways in which we do that," he said. "There's something very liberating about a fresh start. Imagine starting on a blank canvas. Anything is possible."

If so, could this be the year to run a marathon, vanquish (or make peace with) old foes such as the bathroom scale and a thickening waist? Maybe learn Mandarin or register to vote, and actually vote? So many questions, and so much time to delay.

Tim Williams used to issue himself a panoply of resolutions: lose weight, drink less, exercise more and yada yada.

Now, he doesn't bother.

"In the past, I would make them, and I would fail or give up on them or whatever," said Williams, a part-time resident of Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Carla Valeria Silva de Santos, a Florida transplant from Brazil, wants to learn to play the guitar. A native Portuguese speaker, she wants to learn Spanish and improve her English.

With any resolution, she said, the ultimate goal is "to improve your life and be in peace with yourself."

Josh Moore, another Fort Lauderdale resident, sees things in line with the natural philosopher Sir Isaac Newton and physics. For every action there must be an equal reaction.

## Holiday

"If you do something like eat a bunch of candy or a bunch of desserts at a holiday party, go run," he said while interrupting a jog with his dog. "Maybe you went out drinking too much and you might have a hangover. But then next day when you're feeling better, go to the gym."

Too many people are too soft on themselves, he posited. "You've got to actually hold yourself accountable."

Resolutions don't have to be big, grandiose or overly ambitious, Fotuhi said.

Even if they are, he said value should not exclusively be derived from the achievement but also be measured by what you become by trying to better yourself.

"Goals are only there to serve a function to get you started," Fotuhi said. "If they don't do that, then maybe that's not the appropriate goal for you."

In other words, it is a time to recalibrate goals and expectations, he said, adding that some people hang on to outdated goals for way too long.

## Also:

**NEW YORK:** The confetti has been tested for airiness. The giant numerals - 2 0 2 4 - are in place. And the luminous ball, bedazzled with 2,688 crystal triangles, is fixed to the pole from which it makes its 60-second descent at 11:59 p.m.

With throngs of revelers set to usher in the new year under the bright lights of Times Square, officials and organizers say they are prepared to welcome the crowds and ensure their safety.

At a security briefing Friday, New York City Mayor **Eric Adams** said there were "no specific threats" to the annual New Year's Eve bash, which is expected to draw tens of thousands of people to the heart of midtown **Manhattan** on Sunday.

The celebrity-filled event will include live performances from **Flo Rida**, **Megan Thee Stallion** and **LL Cool J**, as well as televised appearances from **Cardi B** and others. Organizers said in-person attendance is expected to return to pre-COVID levels, even as foot traffic around Times Square remains down slightly since the pandemic.

Amid near-daily protests in New York sparked by fighting between **Israel** and Hamas militants in **Gaza**, police said they would expand the security perimeter around the party, creating a "buffer zone" that will allow them to head off potential demonstrations.

## Variety



This image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows Taraji P. Henson (from left), Fantasia Barrino and Danielle Brooks in a scene from 'The Color Purple.' (AP)

## Film

Soul-stirring adaptation shines with stellar cast

# 'Color Purple' unleashes musical magic

By Jake Coyle

Exuberant performances from a cast led by Fantasia Barrino, Taraji P. Henson and Danielle Brooks breathe life into Blitz Bazawule's stirring "The Color Purple," adapted from the Tony-winning Broadway production.

Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning 1982 novel, which Steven Spielberg turned into the 1985 film, may be an unlikely book for such bright adaptations. Walker's novel, told through Celie's letters penned to God, is harrowingly bleak in its tale of trauma, poverty, abuse and rape. Much of Walker's "The Color Purple" doesn't scream song and dance.

But the emotional triumphs of Walker's novel and its soul-stirring tribute to the power of Black women lend themselves to the kind of maximalist spectacle of Bazawule's razzle-dazzle adaptation. The tragedy found in "The Color Purple" makes its final release all the more rousing.

It can still be an awkward mix, and, like Spielberg's movie, not all of the tonal changes work in this version of "The Color Purple." What the payoff is immense, as are the thrilling performances at the movie's center.

Barrino, who in 2007 took over the role on Broadway, plays Celie with a raw soulfulness. In the film's opening scenes, she's picked by Mister (Colman Domingo) to be his wife, though her role at his messy, ramshackle home is much closer to servant.

Life with Mister, who regularly beats her, is a nightmare. That Domingo is able to play such a loathsome, cruel character and yet still find subtle notes of woundedness and ultimately redemption in Mister is a testament to his dynamism as an actor. The roots of Mister's barbarism are traced to his own brutal father (Louis Gossett Jr.), one of the numerous ways in which "The Color Purple" contemplates cycles of abuse and inherited pain.

Celie, separated from her beloved sister Nettie (Halle Bailey), has little to look forward to. But after

years go by, signs of possibility begin entering the orbit of her savage rural corner of early 20th century Georgia.

First there's Sofia (Brooks), the wife of Mister's more sensitive son Harpo (Corey Hawkins), who builds a juke joint on a pier above a swamp. Brooks, reprising the role she played in the 2015 stage revival, is a revelation as the strong-willed, admirably reckless Sofia. Her forceful and funny entry (and her thundering song "Hell No!") announce a female empowerment Celie hasn't ever dared to imagine.

Bazawule's film, penned by playwright Marcus Gardley, wavers most in the balance of its first half. The musical scenes, with kinetic choreography from Fatima Robinson, perhaps come too fast and furious, distracting from our connection with the meek Celie.

## Affection

The numbers are richly conceived — the juke joint (part of the excellent production design of Paul Denham Austerberry) is pierced with light shining through wooden planks. But some flights of fancy, like one number in which Celie is transported onto a giant turntable, make for a herky-jerky flow. The jumbled book-to-movie-to-musical-to-movie-musical path of "The Color Purple" sometimes shows.

But the film takes off when Shug (Henson) makes her show-stopping entrance. Shug, a glamorous singer who breezes in and out of their country lives, is whom Mister most pines for — and whom Celie has great affection for, as well.

Henson, outfitted sumptuously by costumer Francine Jamison-Tanchuck, gives "The Color Purple" a vivid, movie-star splash. Celie and Shug's romance has often been downplayed — it was almost totally absent Spielberg's film. This version, while still falling short, does a little better thanks to their tender duet "What About Love?"

In this lengthy and star-packed musical (Ciara, Jon Batiste, H.E.R. and Anjanette Ellis-Taylor are just some of the cameos), there are more dramatic ups

and downs to go. But the movie builds irresistibly toward the hard-earned emancipation of Celie, and Barrino's climactic, impassioned performance of "I'm Here."

Bazawule, the Ghana-born filmmaker, has made one previous feature ("The Burial of Kojo"). But he also performs as the hip-hop artist Blitz the Ambassador and directed Beyoncé's "Black Is King" visual album. And his adroitness in capturing musical performance is easy to see in "The Color Purple," produced by a trio of heavyweights from the first film: Oprah Winfrey, Spielberg and Quincy Jones.

But it's the movie's own power trio of Barrino, Brooks and Henson that makes "The Color Purple" one of the most moving big-screen musicals in recent years. Each in their own way transforms suffering into exhilarating portraits of survival and strength.

"The Color Purple," a Warner Bros. release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for mature thematic content, sexual content, violence and language. Running time: 140 minutes. Three and a half stars out of four.

## Also:

**LOS ANGELES:** Director **J.A. Bayona** knows his way around an agonizing survival story. In 2012, he gave audiences a harrowing look at a family's experience during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and now he's back with "Society of the Snow," about the Uruguayan Air Force Flight that crashed in the Andes mountains in 1972. The disaster has been recounted and studied in many books and movies over the years, including **Frank Marshall's** 1993 film "Alive." But Bayona was inspired to take another look after reading **Pablo Vierci's** "Society of the Snow." Bayona has said that he wanted to tell the stories not only of the survivors but of those who didn't, in a "documentary style." The Spanish-language film was selected to represent Spain in the Oscars and has been shortlisted for best international film. "Society of the Snow" begins streaming on Netflix on Jan. 4. (AP)

**NEW YORK:** Hollywood closed out an up and down 2023 with "Wonka" regaining No. 1 at the box office, strong sales for "The Color Purple" and an overall \$9 billion in ticket sales that improved on 2022's grosses but fell about \$2 billion shy of pre-pandemic norms.

The New Year's weekend box office this year lacked a true blockbuster. Instead, a wide array of films — among them "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom," "The Boys in the Boat," "Migration," "Ferrari," "The Iron Claw" and "Anyone But You" — sought to break out over the year's most lucrative box-office corridor.

The top choice, though, remained "Wonka," **Paul King's** musical starring **Timothée Chalamet** as a young **Willy Wonka**. In its third weekend, the Warner Bros. release collected an estimated \$24 million Friday through Sunday and \$31.8 million factoring in estimates for the Monday holiday. That brings the film's domestic total to \$142.5 million.

That bested Warner Bros.' own "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom," which, like previous DC superhero films, is struggling. **James Wan's** "Aquaman" sequel starring **Jason Momoa** took in \$19.5 million in its second weekend to bring its two-week haul to a modest \$84.7 million including New Year's Day estimates.

The original "Aquaman," which ultimately surpassed \$1.1 billion worldwide, had grossed \$215.4 million over a similar period in 2018 — more than double that of the sequel. Internationally, "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom" added \$50.5 million.

Weekend sales only tell part of the story this time of year. From Christmas through New Year's, when kids are out of school and many adults aren't working, every day is like Saturday to film distributors.

"The Color Purple," Blitz Bazawule's adaptation of the 2005 stage musical from **Alice Walker's** novel, debuted on Monday and led all movies on Christmas with \$18 million. Through the week, the Warner Bros. release has grossed \$50 million, including \$13 million Friday through Sunday. That's a strong start for the crowd-pleaser starring **Fantasia Barrino**, **Taraji P. Henson** and **Danielle Brooks**. Audiences gave

it an "A" CinemaScore.

The roughly \$100 million production, which boasts **Oprah Winfrey**, **Steven Spielberg** and **Quincy Jones** (all from the 1985 film) as producers, should play well through awards season. It's nominated for several Golden Globes and expected to be in the Oscar mix.

"We saw this opportunity to



Chalamet



Momoa

go wide at Christmas since there were so few movies and we were confident the movie would be well received," said **Jeffrey Goldstein**, distribution chief for Warner Bros. "Going into the competitive landscape that's so thin in January and February, the excitement of awards season could really help ignite a bigger box office."

Despite a blockbuster-less holiday frame, the last weekend of the year pushed the industry past \$9 billion in box office for the year in US and Canadian theaters for the first time since before the pandemic. Ticket sales on the year were up 21% from 2022, according to data firm Comscore.

Still, it was a mark that seemed

more easily within reach during the summer highs of **Barbenheimer** when both "Barbie" and "Oppenheimer" were breaking box-office records.

The enormous success of those two films changed the trajectory of Hollywood's 2023, but so did the monthslong actors and writers strikes. (AP)

# Features

ARABO TIMES

TUESDAY, JANUARY 2, 2024

New Year

## People &amp; Places

## Obits

## Shecky Greene dead

## 'Full Monty' star Tom Wilkinson dies at 75

LONDON, Jan 1, (AP) — **Tom Wilkinson**, the Oscar-nominated British actor known for his roles in "The Full Monty," "Michael Clayton" and "The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel," has died, his family said. He was 75.

A statement shared by his agent on behalf of the family said Wilkinson died suddenly at home on Saturday. It didn't provide further details.

Wilkinson was nominated for a best actor Academy Award for his work in 2001's family drama "In The Bedroom" and in the best supporting actor category for his role in "Michael Clayton," a 2007 legal thriller that starred George Clooney.

He is remembered by many in Britain and beyond for playing former steel mill foreman Gerald Cooper in the 1997 comedy "The Full Monty," about a group of unemployed steel workers who formed an unlikely male stripping act.

Wilkinson was born in Yorkshire in northern England in 1948 and spent part of his childhood in Canada. He attended the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in the 1970s.

He starred in dozens of other TV dramas and movies, from "Rush Hour" and "Batman Begins" to "Shakespeare in Love," "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind" and "Valkyrie."

He most recently reunited with his "Full Monty" co-stars, Robert Carlyle and Mark Addy in a Disney+ series of the same name.

"He'll be sorely missed by everyone who had the pleasure of working with him," Carlyle said in a statement. "Such a huge performer, a real titan of an actor, one of the greats of not only his, but of any generation."

Wilkinson was recognized for his services to drama in 2005 when he was appointed a member of the Order of the British Empire.

He also won a 2009 Golden Globe and 2008 Emmy for his role as Benjamin Franklin in the HBO series "John Adams."

Wilkinson married actress Diana Hardcastle in 1988. The couple had two daughters.

**Shecky Greene**, the gifted comic and master improviser who became the consummate Las Vegas lounge headliner and was revered by his peers and live audiences as one of the greatest standup acts of his generation, has died. He was 97.

His widow, **Marie Musso Green**, told the Las Vegas Review-Journal that her husband died early Sunday at their home. She said her husband of 41 years died of natural causes.

Those who saw Greene in his decades of comedy dominance on the Vegas Strip in the 1950s, '60s and '70s said that with a mic in his hand he could roam a room and work a crowd like no other.

He couldn't wait to abandon written jokes for the shared thrill of improv.

"I've never had an act," Greene told the Las Vegas Sun in 2009. "I make it up as I go along."

Greene made huge fans of his fellow entertainers including **Bob Hope**, **Johnny Carson**, and, most famously, **Frank Sinatra**, who hand-picked him as his opening act for a stretch. Greene couldn't resist the gig with the biggest star in America at the time, but the two big personalities butted heads frequently, and the relationship ended with the comic taking a beating from the singer's cronies at the Fontainebleau hotel in Miami Beach.

It led to his most famous joke:

"Frank Sinatra once saved my life," Greene would say. "A bunch of guys were beating on me and Frank said, 'OK that's enough.'"

Sinatra wasn't actually there, Greene later said, but the beatdown was real. Also true was the oft-repeated story of Greene driving his Oldsmobile into the fountains at Caesars Palace in 1968, a consequence of what he conceded was a serious alcohol problem and a dangerous desire to go for a drive when he was a few drinks in.

He got a famous joke out of that moment too, later saying that when the cops arrived at his submerged car, whose windshield wipers were running, he told them, "No spray wax please!"

With a body like a linebacker's, a wit as quick as lightning and a voice that suggested he could've been a lounge singer instead of a lounge comic, Greene in the course of a night would plow through dozens of impressions, do extended riffs at audience members' tables and turn musical standards into parody songs on the spot.

**Tony Zoppi**, who for decades was entertainment director of the Riviera Hotel, said Greene was the finest comic mind he ever saw.

"He'll walk out on a stage and do an hour off the top of his head," Zoppi told the Los Angeles Times. "A waitress dropped a glass - he did 15 minutes."

## Appearances

He made appearances in films including 1967's "Tony Rome" with Sinatra, 1981's "History of the World Part I" with **Mel Brooks**, and 1984's "Splash" with **Tom Hanks**, showed-up on network sitcoms including "Laverne & Shirley" and "Mad About You," and was a constant guest on talk and variety shows.

But he never really clicked on the screen. He needed a crowd he could interact with, and a whole night to woo them. That meant never becoming as famous as comic contemporaries like **Don Rickles**, **Buddy Hackett** or **Carson**. But he pulled the same six-figure-a-week paychecks as they did for live shows.

Born **Fred Sheldon Greenfield**, Greene took to singing, acting, making jokes and doing mock accents while growing up on the North Side of Chicago.

He served in the Navy in World War II in the Pacific. On returning to Chicago, he went to community college and thought he might become a gym teacher, but started doing comedy nightclub gigs for money.

An offer of a two-week gig at the Prevue Lounge in New Orleans turned into a six-years stint.

He did his first show in Las Vegas in 1953. He found he and the Strip were a perfect match, and within a few years he owned the town. In 1956, he opened for a young Elvis Presley at the New Frontier.

Greene would remain a Vegas mainstay, his playgrounds places like the Riviera and the Tropicana, for the next 30 years.

From 1972 to 1982 Greene was married to Nalani Kele, a dancer whose show, the Nalani Kele Polynesian Revue, was a long-running nightclub hit. And in 1985, he married **Marie Musso**, daughter of jazz saxophonist **Vido Musso**.

Greene gained his share of national fame eventually. He could fill Carnegie Hall, and guest-hosted both Carson's "Tonight Show" and "The Merv Griffin Show."



Wilkinson



Bollywood actors Deepika Padukone, (left), and Shah Rukh Khan, (right), dance at an event to celebrate the success of their movie 'Jawan' in Mumbai, India, on Sept. 15, 2023. (AP)

## Film

## A surge of action, masculinity and controversy

## Bollywood celebrates rocking year

NEW DELHI, Jan 1, (AP) — Bollywood has made a financial comeback this year worthy of one of its traditional singing-on-top-of-the-hills moments.

India's Hindi language movie industry made an impressive recovery after a pandemic-driven slowdown, audience fatigue with big studio productions and Bollywood megastars, and streaming platforms taking away a large chunk of viewership.

According to consultancy firm Ormax Media, the cumulative box office in 2023 pulled in \$1.3 billion, making it one of the best-grossing years of all time.

Indian moviegoers - both the masses and niche film lovers - are back in theaters and the massive commercial success of big-budget Bollywood films has set at ease fears that Mumbai's glitzy dream factory was losing its shine.

As one of the largest film producers in the world, India rolls out more than 1,500 movies yearly, its diverse storytelling traditions reflected in its prolific cinematic entertainers.

The films that made the cut this year were a mixed bag of visual delights. Some portrayed the classic Bollywood larger-than-life spectacles, others were action-filled spy thrillers with top-billing movie stars. Many included stylized special effects, slickly choreographed romantic songs filmed in stunning locales, and pulsating music that had fans cheering and dancing in cinema halls.

More than anything, the year belonged to India's beloved superstar, Shah Rukh Khan, whose son was jailed amid controversy in a narcotics case in 2021 and subsequently cleared of the charges. Khan's global fandom welcomed him back like never before, with his movies pumping the box office numbers.

The year began with his movie "Pathaan," which made more than \$100 million worldwide, according to The Numbers website. Then came "Jawan," which raked in nearly \$136 million worldwide. And the year is ending with yet another, titled "Dunki."

"Very grateful to all the people around the world who have given me sooooo much love as an entertainer," Khan recently posted on social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter.

"This year Shah Rukh Khan has almost single-handedly revived cinema, very similar to what Tom Cruise did in Hollywood with his 'Top Gun' last year," said Nikhil Taneja, co-founder of the youth-centered media organization Yuva and host of the popular YouTube show, "Be A Man, Yaar."

Other blockbusters of the year include the heavily criticized "Animal" featuring actor Ranbir Kapoor, "Gadar 2" with actor Sunny Deol, and Salman Khan's "Tiger 3."

It was also a year when hyper-masculinity overwhelmed Bollywood, often wrapped in misogyny and aggressive nationalism. Angry young men have always been a staple of Indian movies but the excessive, fantasized screen violence this year took it to another level. Almost all 2023 Bollywood hits were filled with anger and violence, and led by alpha male protagonists with rippling muscles and blazing guns brandished on screen as they went on a bone-crunching rampage to vanquish their enemies.

## Injustices

Even Shah Rukh Khan, known as the king of romance, embraced the gun and gore while playing a spy fighting a militant outfit in "Pathaan" and a vigilante battling institutional injustices in "Jawan."

While Khan's soft machismo remained nurturing and women-friendly even in his action flicks, many critics slammed the superhit movie "Animal" directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga for glorifying the toxic masculinity and misogyny of its twisted leading man. The film is moving toward a \$100-million run at box offices worldwide, its production company, Bhadrakali Pictures, said.

"Violent men do exist in the real world and a violent man can certainly be the central character in a film - the issue here, as always, is the manner of the portrayal, the script's indulgence towards him, the humour and coolth written into his fictional character, and

the various means used to give him an allure despite his violent ways," film critic and author Anna MM Vetticad wrote in a blog post.

India has the world's largest young population, who also make up the majority of movie watchers. In a country where movie stars have a cult-like following, and movies reflect as well as shape mass behavior, making dehumanizing violence and casual sexism aspirational can be damaging, observers said.

The country's National Crime Records Bureau reported more than 445,000 cases of crimes against women in 2022, an increase of 4%. "Cruelty by Husband or Relatives" accounted for more than 31% of such crimes, the report said.

"Today what we see is the detachment of violence from emotional purpose," in the movies, wrote social commentator Santosh Desai in the Times of India newspaper. "Given that politically, there is great comfort with maintaining more traditional gender roles, this emphatic assertion of masculinity might take us back in time."

Taneja, the Yuva organization co-founder, has been holding roadshows to reach out to young Indians about what he calls "positive masculinity." He said some films "feed into every single bias" of the viewer, whether it was misogyny or a villain of a different religion.

"When they see such films, they can relate to what they see in their homes where their fathers are misogynistic. They are patriarchal to their mothers. They see a certain kind of gender imbalance and they start believing it," he said.

However, other successful films this year showcased a less angry, more accommodative masculinity, said Taneja.

Karan Johar's "Rocky aur Rani kii Prem Kahaani," or "Rocky and Rani's love story," won praise from most critics for its gender politics and for challenging male stereotypes and prejudices. The film went on to make nearly \$45 million at box offices worldwide, according to the Bollywood Hungama website.



Journalist, John Pilger, a supporter of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange arrives at the City of Westminster Magistrates Court in London where Julian Assange is in court for his bail hearing, Dec. 14, 2010. John Pilger, the Australia-born journalist and documentary maker known for his coverage of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, has died. He was 84. (AP)



Griffin



Abdul

## Variety

LONDON: John Pilger, an Australia-born journalist and documentary filmmaker known for his coverage of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, has died, his family said Sunday. He was 84.

A statement from his family, posted on X, formerly Twitter, said Pilger died on Saturday in London.

"His journalism and documentaries were celebrated around the world, but to his family he was simply the most amazing and loved dad, granddad and partner," the statement said.

Pilger, who has been based in Britain since 1962, worked for Britain's left-leaning Daily Mirror newspaper, broadcaster ITV's investigative program "World In Action" and for the Reuters news agency.

He won an International Academy of Television Arts and Sciences award for his 1979 film "Year Zero: The Silent Death Of Cambodia," which revealed the extent of the Khmer Rouge's atrocities. He followed that with a 1990 documentary titled "Cambodia: The Betrayal," which examined international complicity in the Khmer Rouge remaining a threat.

He also won acclaim for a 1974 documentary looking into the campaign for compensation for children after concerns were raised about birth defects when expectant mothers took the drug Thalidomide.

Pilger was known for his opposition to American and British foreign policy, and he was also highly critical of Australia's treatment of its Indigenous population. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Paula Abdul has accused former "American Idol" producer Nigel Lythgoe of sexually assaulting her in the early 2000s when she was a judge on the reality competition show, according to a new lawsuit.

The lawsuit filed Friday in Los Angeles also accuses Lythgoe of sexually assaulting Abdul after she left "American Idol" and became a judge on Lythgoe's other competition show "So You Think You Can Dance."

The Associated Press generally does not identify alleged victims of sexual assault unless they come forward publicly, as Abdul has done.

In a statement Saturday, Abdul's lawyer Douglas Johnson applauded the singer and dancer for speaking out publicly.

"It was clearly a difficult decision to make, but Ms. Abdul knows that she stands both in the shoes and on the shoulders of many other similarly situated survivors, and she is determined to see that justice is done," Johnson said.

Lythgoe said in a statement that he was "shocked and saddened" to hear of the allegations made by Abdul, who he said he considered a "dear" and "entirely platonic" friend.

"While Paula's history of erratic behav-



Rapper LL Cool J performs at the New Year's Eve celebration in Times Square in New York, Sunday, Dec. 31, 2023. (AP)

ior is well known, I can't pretend to understand exactly why she would file a lawsuit that she must know is untrue," Lythgoe said in the statement. "But I can promise that I will fight this appalling smear with everything I have."

The lawsuit states Abdul remained silent for years about the alleged assaults out of fear of retaliation by "one of the most well-known producers of television competition shows."

Before "American Idol" and "So You Think You Can Dance," on which Lythgoe served as a judge for 16 seasons, he was a producer on the British show "Pop Idol," which became a global franchise that includes the US iteration starring Abdul. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Comedian Kathy Griffin has filed for divorce from longtime partner Randy Bick just shy of the couple's fourth wedding anniversary.

Los Angeles Superior Court records show Griffin filed for divorce Thursday, citing irreconcilable differences.

The pair dated for several years before marrying on New Year's Day 2020. They have no children together, and Griffin's filing says a prenuptial agreement dictates how their assets should be divided.

Griffin, 63, was a star of the NBC series "Suddenly Susan" and poked fun at her celebrity on "My Life on the D-List." (AP)

## 1 in 10 American teens use vaping products

## US battles influx of illegal e-cigarettes as seizures escalate

WASHINGTON, Jan 1, (AP): Federal officials are seizing more shipments of unauthorized electronic cigarettes at US ports, but thousands of new flavored products continue pouring into the country from China, according to government and industry data reviewed by The Associated Press.

The figures underscore the chaotic state of the nation's \$7 billion vaping market and raise questions about how the US government can stop the flow of fruit-flavored disposable e-cigarettes used by 1 in 10 American teens and adolescents.

More than 11,500 unique vaping products are being sold in US stores, up 27% from 9,000 products in June, according to tightly held industry data from analytics firm Circana.

"FDA whacks one product and then the manufacturers get around it and the kids get around it," said Bonnie Halpern-Felsher, a Stanford University psychologist who develops anti-vaping educational materials. "It's too easy to change your product a little bit and just relaunch it."

Halpern-Felsher says she is "constantly" updating her curriculum to keep pace with new vaping brands and trends.

Nearly all the new products are disposable e-cigarettes, according to the sales data gathered from gas stations, convenience stores and other shops. The products generated \$3.2 billion in the first 11 months of this year.

The FDA has authorized a handful of e-cigarettes for adult smokers and is still reviewing products from several major companies, including Juul. Regulators consider nearly all other e-cigarettes to be illegal.

"Those committing illegal acts don't advertise their crimes, and those trying to import illegal tobacco products into the United States are no different," said FDA's tobacco director, Brian King, in a written response to AP questions. "The FDA and our federal partners are using tools, like import alerts, to stop these illegal tobacco products at the border and to deter countless others."

## Destroyed

The rise in e-cigarettes sold continues despite a record number of products detained.

An FDA database shows officials "refused" entry to 148 containers or pallets of "tobacco" goods last month, consisting almost entirely of vaping products from China. Refused imports are typically destroyed.

Through the end of November, US officials had refused 374 such shipments this year, more than double the 118 refused in 2022.

This year's items included \$400,000 worth of Esco Bars, a disposable brand placed on a list of banned imports in May. The agency's posted data is often preliminary because it takes time to finalize refusals.

But recent history shows how easily companies can maneuver around import bans.

In July 2022, the FDA barred dozens

of e-cigarettes from Chinese manufacturer Fume, including flavors Pineapple Ice and Blue Razz.

Fume sales dipped after the ban, but the company launched a slew of new products, posting \$42 million in US sales in the third quarter of 2023, the data shows. Roughly 98% of sales came from products not on the FDA's "red list" of products that can be detained.

Industry shipping tactics are also challenging the usefulness of import restrictions.

In July, FDA and customs officials intercepted \$18 million worth of illegal vapes, including leading brand Elf Bar. But the shipments were mislabeled as shoes, toys and other items - not e-cigarettes - requiring officials to individually open and verify the contents of more than two dozen containers.

Circana, formerly IRI, restricts access to its data, which it sells to companies and researchers. A person not authorized to share it gave the AP access on condition of anonymity.

## Health

The FDA has no schedule for updating its import lists but said it is "closely monitoring" instances where companies try to avoid detection.

"The FDA has a variety of tools at our disposal to take action against these tactics," FDA's King said.

The agency has limited powers to penalize foreign companies. Instead, regulators have sent hundreds of warning letters to US stores selling their products, but those are not legally binding.

Even as the FDA attempts to work with customs officials, it is struggling to complete a yearlong review of applications submitted by manufacturers hoping to market their products to adults.

The few tobacco-flavored products currently authorized by FDA are deeply unpopular. Their combined sales were just \$174 million, or 2.4% of the vaping marketplace this year, according to Circana.

"Nobody wants them," says Marc Silas, owner of 906 Vapor shop in Michigan. "If people wanted them, they'd be on the shelves and they're not."

Deeply frustrated with the pace of FDA's review, public health groups have successfully sued the agency to speed up the process. The agency aimed to complete all major outstanding applications this year, but it recently said the process would stretch into next year.

The delays have raised questions about the viability of the current regulatory framework for e-cigarettes.

"FDA is trying to operate with an old model when the whole environment has changed," said Scott Ballin, a health policy consultant who previously worked for the American Heart Association. "They have this long line of products that have to be reviewed one by one and now they're in a giant hole."



Varieties of disposable flavored electronic cigarette devices manufactured by EB Design, formerly known as Elf Bar, are displayed at a store in Pinecrest, Fla., Monday, June 26, 2023. US officials are seizing more shipments of unauthorized electronic cigarettes. (AP)

Algeria records 4 new cases of novel coronavirus

## India reports 743 new COVID-19 cases, 7 deaths



Workers stand inside a 'mega-pharmacy' warehouse on its inauguration day in Huehuetoca, Mexico, Friday, Dec. 29. (AP)

## Bid to centralize drug supply

## Mexico launches super pharmacy to address medication shortages

MEXICO CITY, Jan 1, (AP): Mexico's president inaugurated a huge "super pharmacy" Friday in a bid to end the woes of patients throughout the country who are often told they need a specific medicine - but the hospital in question doesn't have it.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's solution was to outfit a big warehouse on the outskirts of Mexico City to centralize a supply and send it to hospitals throughout the country.

"The pharmacy is going to be big, big, big, and it is going to have all the medications that are used in the health system," López Obrador said Friday.

The pharmacy is intended to complement local health facilities. If a patient can't get needed medications at a local hospital, the patient, the patient's doctor or the pharmacist would be able to call up the warehouse and get it delivered from the huge 40,000 square meter (430,000 square foot) Mexico City warehouse.

The armed forces, or the government-run pharmaceutical company Birmex, will ship the drugs out by land or air "within 24 to 48 hours," López Obrador pledged.

The question is whether Mexico can overcome its history of being bad at regulating the pharmaceutical industry, bad at buying medicines, bad at storing them, and bad at distributing them. Extreme centralization also hasn't helped Mexico much in the past in many areas.

The most visible face of this problem are the parents of children with cancer, who frequently stage protests because they say that in recent years chemotherapy and other drugs have been impossible to obtain.

Desperate parents blocked traffic at the Mexico City airport last year, holding up a banner reading: "There isn't any chemotherapy, treatment or medicines, have some empathy and sensitivity."

The problems have killed otherwise

healthy people. Because Mexico has had problems in obtaining enough morphine, anesthesiologists in Mexico have had to carry around their own vials of the sedative, drawing multiple doses out of a single vial for routine procedures like spinal blocks during births.

In the United States, where there is no shortage of morphine, doctors are advised to draw a single dose from a vial and throw the remainder out.

## Contamination

But in Mexico, that has led to contamination of the vials, triggering outbreaks of injection-induced meningitis in two Mexican states that have killed dozens of people - including some Americans who sought treatment at clinics in the border city of Matamoros, across from Brownsville, Texas.

López Obrador mounted a major effort to obtain COVID-19 vaccines in 2021, using the armed forces to distribute them and volunteers to help apply them, and by the end of that year just about anybody in Mexico who wanted a vaccine got one, for free.

But trying to replicate that model of centralized government purchasing and army distribution on a national scale for thousands of medications is not the same, according to Mauricio Rodríguez, a professor at the School of Medicine at Mexico's National Autonomous University.

"This is crazy," said Rodríguez, noting the government is opening the centralized warehouse without answering how the system will operate, especially for urgently-needed medications. He noted that concentrating all the drugs at one site increases risks, and could sideline some already-existing distribution systems.

Many of the problems pre-date López Obrador, who took office in late 2018. For decades, there have been scandals involving millions of dollars worth of medicines going out

of-date at warehouses while hospitals couldn't get them.

The country's medicine regulatory agency, known by its Spanish acronym as Cofepris, was already so riddled with corruption prior to López Obrador that regulators would hide applications for approval of new medicines for years, and demand bribes to approve them.

And with alarming frequency, regulators in Mexico send out alerts about falsified or knock-off medications being sold for treating everything from cancer to heart disease. Boxes, labels, vials and certifications are copied with amazing accuracy, but the bottles often contain little or none of the medication.

The fake medicine trade is so common, and so lucrative in Mexico because patients or their relatives are often told by doctors to buy medications at private drug stores when they are unavailable at government hospitals.

The civic group "Zero Shortages" said there was an increase of 142% in the number of alerts about falsified medicines between 2021 and 2022.

But part of the problems are of López Obrador's own making. Angry at what he claimed were inflated profits made by drug distributors and importers, the president simply cut the private companies out and decided the government should directly buy all medications.

Because the government did not have much infrastructure, contacts or experience in such a massive effort, López Obrador signed an agreement with the World Health Organization to help Mexico in purchasing. But even with that help, Mexico was unable to obtain some specialized medication, something López Obrador blamed on sabotage by pharmaceutical firms.

Rafael Gual, the director of the National Pharmaceutical Industry Chamber, said the government's own actions created "bottlenecks" in distribution.

NEW DELHI, Jan 1, (KUNA): India on Saturday reported 743 new COVID-19 infections and seven deaths in the last 24 hours as fear of yet another massive corona virus spread loomed.

The data from the Indian Ministry of Health and Family Welfare showed that there were 743 new cases, taking the total active cases in the country to 3,997 while seven deaths were also reported due to the virus from different parts of the country.

Total coronavirus cases in India since its outbreak in January 2020 now stood at 4.5 million with an increase of 743 cases in the last 24 hours. With the seven more deaths in the last 24 hours, total death toll due to COVID-19 in the country rose to, 533,358.

## Variant

Southern Indian states of Kerala and Karnataka reported three and two deaths respectively, while Chhattisgarh and Tamil Nadu reported one death each.

Several other states including Delhi, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal have seen spike in COVID-19 cases and deaths. The development came as India reported several cases of COVID-19 Omicron sub-variant JN.1, which the World Health Organization has labelled as a variant of interest.

Meanwhile, the Algerian Ministry of Health announced, Sunday, the registration of four new cases of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in the last 24 hours. The ministry added in a statement that no deaths from COVID-19 were recorded in the past 24 hours, nor were there any cases in intensive care during that period. Instead, two cases were reported to have recovered. The ministry urged the "necessity of respecting the necessary preventive measures to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and avoid its spread, which may lead to the creation of new outbreaks of the pandemic."

## Also:

**NEW DELHI:** Air pollution in the Indian capital New Delhi rose to severe category amid strong cold wave and dense fog across north India, said Indian authorities on Sunday.

Several areas in the capital recorded Air Quality Index above 400 on a scale of 500 mark, according to the Central Pollution Control Board under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

**Munirka, R K Puram, Nehru Nagar, Dwaraka, Pusa and Anand Vihar** were the worst affected regions in the capital as air quality index registered above 400. Any reading above 400 is considered dangerous even for the healthy people.

Delhi is considered one of the most polluted cities in the world according to several studies on global air quality. The deteriorating air quality is attributed to industrial and vehicular pollution, construction related pollution and burning of stubbles in neighboring states.

The authorities had imposed restrictions on construction and demolition, vehicle movement and running of polluting industries.

The air quality deteriorated for several weeks as the Indian capital came under dense fog that affected train and aircraft services. Several north Indian states including Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab and Uttarakhand also came under intense cold wave.

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## Virginia Tech overwhelms Pittsburgh

Fair scores 27, Syracuse women edge Notre Dame in thrilling ACC opener

## NBA-leading Celtics cruise to 6th consecutive victory

Pelicans rout Lakers

SAN ANTONIO, Jan 1, (AP): Jayson Tatum scored 25 points, Jaylen Brown added 24 and the Boston Celtics extended their winning streak to six games with a 134-101 win over the San Antonio Spurs on Sunday night.

Derrick White scored 17 points against his former team, and Kristaps Porzingis added 14 points and nine rebounds in his return after missing one game due to a calf injury.

"We got stops," Boston coach Joe Mazzulla said. "I thought we were really good at doing both, protecting the paint and getting out to contest, which allowed us to get out in transition. I think our secondary transition, we did a good job of recognizing where the mismatch was and getting to it fast and playing together as a team through it."

Devin Vassell scored 22 points and Victor Wembanyama had 21 points and seven rebounds for San Antonio. The



Brooklyn Nets forward Royce O'Neale (00) tries to get to a rebound before Oklahoma City Thunder guard Aaron Wiggins (21) in the second half of an NBA basketball game, Sunday, Dec. 31, 2023, in Oklahoma City. (AP)

SYRACUSE, N.Y., Jan 1, (AP): Dyai-sha Fair scored 27 points and hit three huge 3-pointers in the fourth quarter, leading Syracuse to an 86-81 victory over No. 13 Notre Dame in a thrilling ACC opener on Sunday.

Syracuse's Alyssa Latham added 21 points and 12 rebounds for her fifth double-double of the season.

Fair's 3-pointer gave Syracuse a 71-67 lead with 3:41 remaining in the fourth quarter. The clutch bucket came after the Orange (11-1) had forced six turnovers and allowed only five shot attempts by Notre Dame in the first five-plus minutes of the period.

Hannah Hidalgo, a freshman, led Notre Dame with a season-high 32 points. She added six assists and seven steals. Maddy Westfeld had 16 points and 10 rebounds and Anna DeWolfe scored 15 for Notre Dame (9-2).

## Virginia Tech 91, Pittsburgh 41

In Blacksburg, Georgia Amoor scored 20 points, Olivia Summiel had a double-double and Virginia Tech coasted to a win over Pitt in an Atlantic Coast Conference opener.

Matilda Ekh scored 16 points for the Hokies (10-2), Cayla King and

Harris had 13 points and 12 rebounds, and Louisville beat Miami in a sloppy and disjointed Atlantic Coast Conference opener for both teams.

Merissah Russell scored 11 of her 12 points in the fourth quarter for Louisville (12-2).

Lemayah Hylton led Miami (10-2) with 12 points and Jaleah Williams scored eight of her 11 in the fourth quarter. Shayann Day-Wilson, Lashae Dwyer and Jasmyne Roberts added 10 points apiece.

## Florida State 73, Wake Forest 61

In Tallahassee, Ta'Niya Latson scored 30 points, half of them in the fourth quarter, and Florida State used a late surge to break away from Wake Forest.

Latson was joined in double figures for the game by O'Mariah Gordon with 12 points and Makayla Timpson with 11. Timpson grabbed 12 rebounds to complete her fourth double-double of the season. She also had three steals and blocked three shots for the Seminoles (10-3, 2-0 ACC).

Malaya Cowles scored 16 points and Alexandria Scruggs had 10 points and eight rebounds for Wake Forest (4-9, 0-1).

## North Carolina 82, Clemson 76

In Chapel Hill, Lexi Donarski made six 3-pointers and scored 23, Alyssa Ustby finished with 21 points and 11 rebounds and North Carolina began Atlantic Coast Conference play with a victory over Clemson.

The Tar Heels (9-4) beat the Tigers for an eighth straight time. Ustby made 8 of 10 shots and 5 of 7 free throws, notching her sixth double-double of the season. Deja Kelly pitched in with 15 points and eight assists.

Amari Robinson led Clemson (8-6, 1-1) with 21 points on 8-for-11 shooting. Dayshante Harris had 19 points, five rebounds and five assists. Ruby Whitehorn had 14 points.

## BASKETBALL

Carleigh Wenzel had 11 points and Elizabeth Kitley and Summiel scored 10. Summiel, who was 4-for-4 shooting, had 11 rebounds.

Liatu King scored 19 points on 7-of-10 shooting for the Panthers (6-8), but her teammates shot just 8 of 41 (19.5%). Pitt was outrebounded 40-28 and had 18 turnovers that were turned into 24 points.

## UConn 95, Marquette 64

In Hartford, Paige Bueckers scored 25 points, Aaliyah Edwards had 19 points and 12 rebounds and UConn ended Marquette's best start ever with a dominating win.

The Huskies (10-3, 2-0 Big East) closed the first quarter with a 13-0 run and then outscored the Golden Eagles (12-1, 1-1) 54-26 in the middle two quarters.

KK Arnold had 13 points for UConn and Ashlynn Shade added 12.

Jordan King had 16 points for Marquette, Liza Karlen added 13, Mackenzie Hare 12 and Skylar Forbes 10.

## Indiana 77, Illinois 71

In Bloomington, Mackenzie Holmes scored 30 points, Yarden Garzon was clutch in the closing seconds and Indiana ran its winning streak to 10 with a win over Illinois.

Chloe Moore-McNeil scored 19 points for Indiana (11-1, 2-0 Big Ten Conference) and Garzon had 12. Holmes gave the Hoosiers a 30-point scorer for the third straight game, a first in program history.

Makira Cook scored 24 points for the Illini (6-6, 0-2), with 13 in the fourth quarter. Kendall Bostic had 18 and 11 rebounds and Genesis Bryant added 12 points.

## Louisville 77, Miami 72

In Coral Gables, Jayda Curry scored 19 points on 7-of-12 shooting, Nyla



Brooklyn Nets center Nic Claxton (33) shoots the ball over Oklahoma City Thunder forwards Chet Holmgren, left, and Jalen Williams, middle, in the second half of an NBA basketball game, Sunday, Dec. 31, 2023, in Oklahoma City. (AP)

## BASKETBALL

Spurs have lost seven of eight.

"They are a championship-caliber team, that's what they are out there for, that's their goal, and they proved it once again," San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich said. "Joe does a great job with them. They've got good talent, obviously, all-star talent, and they've got the grit. They've got the execution and getting better all the time. That's a tough challenge at this particular time for our group."

Boston closed out the month of December with a 12-2 record.

The matchup between the top team in the Eastern Conference and the last-place team in the West played out as expected.

"I can feel that compared to the past years, they have something extra

this year," Wembanyama said. "And, of course, it's difficult to play against them and it is a good challenge. But I think we learned today."

Boston led by as many as 37 points and sat its starters for most of the fourth quarter.

San Antonio never led while trailing by 35 points or more in a game for the sixth time this season.

Zach Collins sat out with a sprained ankle and lower back spasms kept Keldon Johnson out of the game. The Spurs' offense struggled without the duo.

Wembanyama and Vassell scored San Antonio's first 17 points. The pair combined to shoot 5 for 20 from the field in the opening quarter. The rest of

the Spurs went 2 for 14. San Antonio finished 12 for 44 from 3-point range.

Wembanyama provided some of the few highlights for Spurs fans. The 7-foot-3 rookie followed up a reverse slam off an alley-oop pass from Tre Jones with a 3-pointer that cut Boston's lead to 38-29 in the second quarter.

Wembanyama also took off from the free throw line while holding the ball over his head for a one-handed dunk against White.

"I'm not an idiot," White said, chuckling afterwards. "I was hoping he would take another dribble, and then I could try to do that (strip or steal), but he picked it up and I never saw it again. So, I was just trying to get out of the way. That was crazy."

Boston limited San Antonio to one offensive rebound in the first half, and held a 23-14 advantage in total rebounds.

The Celtics had six players score in double figures.

Spurs second-year player Malaki Branham (11 points) was the only player, aside from Wembanyama and Vassell, to score in double figures.

## Pelicans 129, Lakers 109

In New Orleans, Zion Williamson and Brandon Ingram each scored 26 points and New Orleans beat road-weary Los Angeles.

Los Angeles was coming off a 108-106 loss at Minnesota on Saturday night, while New Orleans was off two days after beating Utah at home Thursday night.

LeBron James scored 34 points and former Pelican Anthony Davis added 20 points and 10 rebounds, but they didn't get enough help as the Lakers lost for the seventh time in nine games.

The meeting was the first since the Lakers dismantled New Orleans 133-89 in the In-Season Tournament semifinal in Las Vegas on Dec. 7.

## Suns 112, Magic 107

In Phoenix, Kevin Durant scored 31 points, Bradley Beal added a season-high 25 and Phoenix beat Orlando for its third victory.

Beal was playing in just his eighth game this season because of back and ankle injuries.

The three-time All-Star - acquired in an offseason trade with Washington - shot 10 of 13 from the field, including a powerful dunk in the third quarter. Durant shot 12 of 21 from the field and added five rebounds and five assists.

Devin Booker scored 21 points and Jusuf Nurkic had 19 points and 13 rebounds. The Suns' backups scored only six points, all by Chimezie Metu.

Paolo led Orlando with 28 points. Franz Wagner added 27.

## Thunder 124, Nets 108

In Oklahoma City, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 24 points and six assists and Oklahoma City beat Brooklyn for its fourth straight victory.

Josh Giddey had 20 points, six rebounds and five assists, and rookie Chet Holmgren added 18 points, 10 rebounds and two blocked shots. Oklahoma City improved to 22-9, good for second place in the Western Conference. Mikal Bridges had 22 points - 15 in the first quarter - to go with seven rebounds and seven assists for Brooklyn. The Nets have lost three straight.

## Kings 123, Grizzlies 92

In Memphis, Malik Monk scored 27 points, Domantas Sabonis added 13 points, 21 rebounds and 12 assists for a triple-double and Sacramento routed Memphis.

Monk was 10 of 13 from the field and missed just one of his five 3-point shots. Sabonis had his sixth triple-double of the season.

Jaren Jackson led Memphis with 18 points. Desmond Bane, Ja Morant and Luke Kennard had with 17 points apiece. The Grizzlies have lost three in a row.

## Hawks 130, Wizards 126

In Washington, Trae Young had 40 points and 13 assists, Dejounte Murray scored 32 points and Atlanta overcame a slow start to beat Washington.

Jalen Johnson added a career-high 24 points and had 13 rebounds.

Kyle Kuzma scored 38 points and hit seven 3-pointers for Washington.

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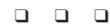
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## Manchester City dominate the sports 'arena' in 2023

KUNA's year-end report issued on local, Gulf, Arab and international sport.



KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1, (KUNA) Following are important events that took place in the sports arena: Jan. 28: Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus won the women's singles title in the Grand Four Tennis Tournaments at the Australian Open.

Jan 29: Serbian Novak Djokovic won a 10th Australian Open title.

Feb 25: The 2nd Winter Children of Asia International Sports Games kicked off in Kemerovo Region.

Feb 26: Manchester United won the English Football League Cup, their first title since 2017.

Feb 27: Argentinian Lionel Messi crowned the Best FIFA Men's Player 2022

March 10: Spanish prosecutors filed corruption charges against FC Barcelona and two of its former presidents.

May 4: Napoli won the Italian Football League title for the current season after 33 years of waiting.

May 6: Real Madrid wins the Spanish King's Cup for the 20th time in his history

May 20: Manchester City wins the English Premier League title.

May 23: The Spanish Football Federation announced that it had punished the Valencia club due to the racist insults directed at Real Madrid player Vinicius Junior by its fans, and canceled the red card that the player received in the match played in the Spanish League.

May 27: Bayern Munich crowned champion of the German Football League (Bundesliga) for the 11th time in its history.

May 28: Manchester City crowned champion for the third consecutive season in the English Premier League.

May 30: Galatasaray officially wins the Turkish Premier League title for the 23rd time.

May 31: Spanish club Sevilla crowned champion of the European Football League for the seventh time in his history.

June 3: Manchester City wins the

FA Cup after defeating Manchester United.

June 3: Paris Saint-Germain officially wins the French Football League title for the eleventh time in its history.

June 10: Manchester City won the Champions League title for the first time in its history after defeating Inter Milan.

July 16: Spanish player Carlos Alcaraz won the Wimbledon Open Men's Singles Tennis Championship.

Aug 6: Arsenal beat City 4-1 in a penalty shootout, to win the Community Shield at Wembley Stadium.

Aug 10: Asian Football Confederation (AFC) unveiled official match ball of the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023, which is set to take place from 12 January to 10 February 2024 in Qatar.

Aug 10: FC Bayern Munich settled deal to include England captain Harry Kane of Tottenham Hotspur.

Aug 20: Spain National Football team won the FIFA Women's World Cup by defeating England 1-0 in the final held in Sydney, Australia.

Aug 24: Chelsea completed signing Brazilian Deivid Washington in a seven-year contract, for USD 21.6 million.

Sept 1: Portuguese Joao Felix and Joao Cancelo officially unveiled as newly signed FC Barcelona players, until the end of the season.

Sept 8: World Rugby cup 2023 launched in 9 French cities.

Sept 15: Premier League club Everton announced owner Farhad Moshiri agreed to sell his 94% stake to American investment fund 777 Partners. Oct 4: FIFA said Morocco, Spain and Portugal would host the World Cup 2030, while Uruguay and Argentina would host the opening matches to commemorate the World Cup centenary.

Nov 17: FA slashed 10 points from premier league Everton because of violations.

Dec 22: Manchester City FC beat Brazil's Fluminense 4-0 in the Club World Cup final, held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

## SPORTS

# NZ 'share' series with Bangladesh

Neesham provides the cool heads Kiwis needed

**MOUNT MAUNGANUI, New Zealand, Jan 1, (AP): Mitchell Santner and Jimmy Neesham combined in a 46-run partnership which steered New Zealand to a 17 run win over Bangladesh under the Duckworth-Lewis system in the third Twenty20 international on Sunday, dashing the Tigers' hopes of their first series win in New Zealand.**



Shanto

Captain Santner and Neesham provided the cool heads New Zealand needed to overcome another top-order collapse and chase down Bangladesh's inadequate total of only 110 in a race against encroaching dark clouds and rain.

New Zealand was in desperate trouble at 49-5 in the ninth over, trailing under the Duckworth-Lewis system when Neesham and Santner came together. They stayed together and guided New Zealand to 95-5 in the 15th over when the forecast rain arrived torrentially and brought the match to an abrupt end.

"I think we always knew there was going to be a bit of rain around whether it came at the end of half way through that second innings," Santner said. "The bowlers did the job up front and it was good to get across the line in a pretty hard-fought series."

In extraordinary scenes, spectators dashed for the exits of Bay Oval as the rain pelted down, driven by strong winds. New Zealand needed 78 runs to be ahead on the Duckworth-Lewis calculation.

Sunday's win leveled the three-match series at 1-1 after Bangladesh won the first

match by five wickets and after the second match at Bay Oval was washed out after 11 overs.

But New Zealand can no longer turn a blind eye to the failings of its top order in the ongoing absence of Kane Williamson and Devon Conway. Bangladesh may have lost the three-match one-day international series and shared the T20 series, but it achieved its first wins in New Zealand in both formats.

In the third ODI, New Zealand was reduced to 70-6 and in the first T20 it was 50-5 as its top batters failed to master the Bangladesh attack. The latest collapse seemed both inevitable and at times comical.

## CRICKET

Santner excelled as New Zealand bowled out Bangladesh for only 110 in 19.2 overs after winning the toss. Bangladesh lost three wickets for 45 runs in the power play then was bogged down in the middle overs, scoring only 32 between the seventh and 16th overs.

Najmul Hossain Shanto's 17 from 15 balls was the top score. Four other batsmen reached double figures, including Towhid Hridoy who made 16 from 18 balls.

Santner was particularly effective in the middle stages and there was enough grass on the pitch at Bay Oval for the ball to grip and turn a little. Santner took 4-16 from his four overs while the seamers Tim Southee, Adam Mile and Ben Sears shared six wickets.

"Bowling into the wind can be challenging at times but I was thinking of changing the pace and trying to get a bit of bounce out of the wicket," Santner said. "As a whole the seamers bowled extremely well as well to keep them to 110 on a pretty good pitch."

Santner surprised a little when he chose to field on winning the toss. Bay Oval usually is a bat-first pitch with an average first innings score of 190. But with rain forecast, bowling gave New Zealand some control. In the end it was decisive and New Zealand became the first team to win a T20 at Bay Oval when batting second.

## Al-Dhafiri, Al-Mutairi & Al-Enezi clinch gold

# Al-Nasr stars shine in taekwondo tournament



Al-Nasr Sports Club Taekwondo champions celebrate on the podium.

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1: The Taekwondo champions from Al-Nasr Sports Club continue to add to the club's achievements, securing the first-place trophy in the inaugural tournament held under the new Olympic system for the men's category. The Annabi champions excelled, clinching 3 gold medals, a silver medal, and 5 bronze medals.

The outstanding accomplish-

ments were spearheaded by the following stars:

Muhammad Al-Dhafiri, who claimed gold in the 58kg category

Osama Al-Mutairi, securing gold in the 68kg category

Bandar Al-Enezi, earning gold in the 80kg category

Ali Bourahma, winning silver in the 58kg category

Yahya Al-Enezi, achieving bronze in the 58kg category

Mishaal Al-Mutairi, attaining bronze in the 80kg category

Saud Al-Anazi, capturing bronze in the 80kg category

Badr Al-Mutairi, securing bronze in the +80kg category

Jaber Al-Fadhli, claiming bronze in the +80kg category

Expressing his congratulations, Sultan Al Musallat commended the club's board of directors, players, and the entire technical and administrative staff for their dedication in securing the Annabi Taekwondo Cup. This triumph, the first championship under the new Olympic system, underscores the club's prowess in the sport and sets the stage for future victories in upcoming competitions.

## TAEKWONDO

## Osaka makes triumphant return

# Poland into the United Cup quarterfinals

SYDNEY, Jan 1, (AP): No. 1-ranked Iga Swiatek led Poland into the quarterfinals of the United Cup mixed teams tennis tournament on Monday, winning both her singles and doubles matches.

Swiatek took the court under pressure, needing to win her singles match against Spain's Sara Sorribes Tormo to keep the tie alive. Alejandro Davidovich Fokina had given Spain a 1-0 lead with a 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 comeback victory over No. 9-ranked Hubert Hurkacz.

But Swiatek beat Sorribes Tormo 6-2, 6-1 to force a deciding mixed doubles match. Swiatek, a four-time Grand Slam singles champion, and Hurkacz then needed little more than half an hour to wrap up the tie with a 6-0, 6-0 win to make Poland the first country through to the quarterfinals.

In Sydney, three-time Grand Slam singles finalist Casper Ruud kept Norway's quarterfinal chances alive with similar victories in the singles and mixed doubles against Croatia.

## TENNIS

Donna Vekic gave Croatia an early 1-0 lead with a 7-5, 3-6, 6-3 win over unheralded Malene Helgo. But Ruud then beat Borna Coric 6-4, 6-1 to send the tie to a decisive mixed encounter, which Norway claimed in a match tiebreaker.

The 6-2, 3-6, 10-7 victory for Ruud and Ulrikke Eikeri over Vekic and Ivan Dodig leaves Norway (1-1) awaiting the outcome of the last remaining Group F match between Croatia (0-1) and the Netherlands (1-0) on Tuesday.

In later matches Monday, the United States played Britain in Perth and France played Germany in Sydney.

Two quarterfinals from the Perth group games will be played Wednesday. The Sydney quarterfinals will be played Thursday and Friday, with the semifinals and final set for Saturday and Sunday, also at Sydney's Ken Rosewall Arena.

Motherhood has helped give Naomi Osaka a new mindset when things are getting tough on court.

In her first competitive match since September 2022, the four-time major winner was broken while serving for the match and needed three match points in the tiebreaker before converting a 6-3, 7-6

## Clubs embark on training camp in Turkey

# Al-Kuwait and Al-Qadsia volleyball 'teams' gear up for West Asian Club Championship

By Khaled El Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1: The volleyball teams of Al-Kuwait Club and Al-Qadsia Club are set to embark on an overseas training camp in Turkey, commencing in the middle of this month. This initiative is part of their preparations for the upcoming second edition of the West Asian Club Championship, scheduled to take place from February 2 to 11 in the Sultanate of Oman. The training camps for both the "White" and "Yellow" teams will extend over a period of 15 days.

## VOLLEYBALL

As the reigning champion of the Premier League last season, Al-Kuwait aims to make a mark in the continental arena. Under the guidance of Turkish coach Taner Atik, the team will engage in a series of challenging trial matches during the Turkish camp, striving to elevate their performance and clinch the championship title. The first edition of the championship was won by the Qatari Al Rayyan Club in March last year in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

On the other hand, Al-Qadsia, the Premier League runner-up from the previous season, led by Bahraini coach Reda Ali, is gearing up for the tournament with four trial matches lined up during their Turkish training camp.

(9) victory over Tamara Korpatsch on Monday at the Brisbane International.

Osaka didn't play the Australian Open last year and later revealed she was

pregnant. She and her partner, rapper Cordae, became parents to daughter Shai in

Los Angeles in July.

Every time she missed an opportunity to win the match on Monday, she composed herself and focused on giving herself another chance.

Before Monday, the first day of 2024, Osaka had only played one competitive match since her first-round exit at the 2022 U.S. Open.

But she has spent many months preparing for her return, including a renewed focus on living in the moment.

"The last couple years that I played before I had my daughter, I didn't return as much love as I was given," she told the crowd at Pat Rafter Arena. "So I really feel like that's what I want to do in this chapter."

And, of course, she's paying more attention to the younger people in the crowd.



A file photo of Kuwait and Al-Qadsia players in action.

Both Al-Kuwait and Al-Qadsia are currently active participants in the general league championship that commenced on November 20. After 10 rounds, "Al-Abyad" (White) stands at the top of the standings with a perfect 28 points, while Al-Qadsia holds the second spot with 25 points, having played two matches less. Al-Arabi follows closely in third place with 22 points, sharing the same score as

Burgan in fourth position. As per the league system for this season, the top four teams will qualify for the semi-finals, with a playoff system determining the finalists through a series of three matches.

The league's format ensures an exciting journey towards the ultimate goal, with the top-performing teams eyeing a spot in the coveted final match, contested in the same playoff system.



James Neesham of New Zealand (right), bats in front of Bangladesh's Rony Talukdar during their T20 cricket match between in Mount Maunganui, New Zealand. (AP)

## Real Madrid host

# Girona start new year with another chance to show they are 'genuine' title contenders

MADRID, Jan 1, (AP): The new year brings Girona another chance to show they are a genuine title contenders in the Spanish league.

Girona's first match of 2024 is a tough challenge against third-place Atletico Madrid at home on Wednesday.

Girona have been the surprise team in Spain so far this season, with statement wins such as the one they earned at defending champions Barcelona last month.

## SOCCER

Now they have a shot at taking down an Atletico team that finished the year with a win against Sevilla.

Girona, partly owned by Manchester City's Abu Dhabi ownership, are tied with Real Madrid on 45 points, but trail the Spanish powerhouse on a tiebreaker.

"We finished the first half of the season on the same level as the top clubs," Girona coach Michel Sanchez said. "Our fans are



Real Madrid's head coach Carlo Ancelotti kicks a ball into the crowd during an open day training session, the last of the year, in Madrid, Spain, Saturday, Dec. 30, 2023. Real Madrid have extended Carlo Ancelotti's contract until 2026, seemingly ending Brazil's hopes of hiring him as the new national coach. (AP)

proud of what we have achieved so far."

The game against Atletico should help give an idea about whether Girona have what it takes to keep competing at the top.

Girona lost 3-0 to Madrid at home in September in their first big challenge of the season, but it recovered and showed their strength in a convincing 4-2 win at Barcelona in December.

Girona went on a 12-match unbeaten streak in all competitions since the loss to Madrid, with draws against fifth-place Athletic Bilbao in November and at Real Betis in their last match of the year, when it was winning until conceding an 88th-minute equalizer.

The team coached by Michel has 14 wins in 18 matches, and have the league's best attack with 42 goals, three more than Madrid's high-profile offense.

Atletico Madrid forward Antoine Griezmann enters the game against Girona tied with Luis Aragonés as the club's all-time top scorer with 173 goals.

The France international has his second chance to break the record after going scoreless in the team's win against Sevilla on Dec. 23.

Atletico won only two of their five league matches in December in a run that included a loss at Barcelona and a 3-3 draw against Getafe that ended the club's record-tying 20-game home winning streak in all competitions.

Diego Simeone's team trail leaders Madrid and Girona by seven points.

Real Madrid could enjoy the return of Vinicius Junior when it hosts Mallorca on Wednesday.

Vinicius hasn't played since November, when he injured a leg muscle while playing a World Cup qualifier with Brazil's national team.

"I'm fine, doing very well," Vinicius said. "Now it's up to the coach to decide whether I'll play."

Also possibly returning from injury for coach Carlo Ancelotti - who last week renewed his contract with the club until 2026 - are defender Dani Carvajal and midfielders Eduardo Camavinga and Arda Guler.

Madrid start the year still without several key players because of knee ligament injuries, including goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and defenders David Alaba and Eder Militao.

Madrid are unbeaten in 17 games across all competitions, since a 3-1 league loss at Atletico in September. They have three draws since then.



Arsenal's Ben White (left) and Fulham's Antonee Robinson reach for a header during the English Premier League soccer match between Arsenal and Fulham at Craven Cottage stadium in London. (AP)

# Sports

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Speculation set to intensify

## Countdown begins on Mbappé's future; Real, Liverpool possible destinations

PARIS, Jan 1, (AP) — As the New Year begins, so does the countdown on Kylian Mbappé's future.

It promises to be a nervous start to 2024 for Paris Saint-Germain and its fans with speculation set to intensify about their prolific striker, one of only two players in soccer history to score a hat trick in a World Cup final.

Mbappé began this season in a transfer standoff with his club after not taking up the option of a 12-month extension into 2025. It means that, starting Jan. 1, he can openly talk to other clubs or even sign a pre-contract agreement with long-time suitor Real Madrid or Premier League leader Liverpool.

Mbappé can do so because his contract runs out in June, when he can leave the defending French champion for free, having joined from Monaco — initially on loan in 2017 — for 180 million euros (now \$199 million).

The France star is PSG's all-time leading scorer with 233 goals despite only recently turning 25, and has al-

ready netted some 46 goals for Les Bleus.

But it has been frustrating at times for Mbappé at PSG, which failed to reach the quarterfinals of the Champions League in the last two seasons and has scraped through to the last 16 in second place this season.

Despite having scored 21 goals in 22 games in all competitions so far this season, Mbappé failed to make his mark when PSG lost 4-1 at Newcastle and 2-1 at AC Milan.

His frustration has been seen in some of PSG's league games over the past three seasons, when bad defending and a lack of teamwork has led to soft goals being conceded.

Mbappé has said he wants to win the Ballon d'Or — soccer's most prestigious individual prize — and the Champions League. But whether he can win either with PSG remains to be seen and, at age 25, the time could be right for him to leave PSG as he enters his peak years.

Here's a look at where Mbappé might go:

### Real Madrid

Will it be third time lucky for the Spanish powerhouse with a record 14 European Cup titles?

PSG rejected an offer of 180 million euros for Mbappé in 2021 and Madrid missed out a year later when Mbappé — amid frenzied speculation that Madrid would finally get him to join — signed a new deal with PSG in May 2022.

### SOCCER

Mbappé held aloft the PSG jersey that day with 2025 on the back. But he was reportedly annoyed because the actual deal only took him to 2024 and, while good PR for the club, it was also seen as somewhat presumptuous to expect he would sign the extension given his world renown.

Mbappé has spoken about his affection for Madrid but, if he does not join

this time, then the move may never happen. Coach Carlo Ancelotti has re-shaped the attack since Karim Benzema left and it is functioning well.

Jude Bellingham has made a stunning start to his career there since joining from Borussia Dortmund in a big-money deal, and the 20-year-old attacking midfielder has netted 17 goals in 21 games. Wearing his idol Zinedine Zidane's No. 5 jersey, Bellingham pulls the strings brilliantly behind forwards Vinícius Júnior — who has signed a new long-term deal — and Rodrygo.

Neither are as prolific as Mbappé but the Brazilians are younger — Vinícius is 23 and Rodrygo is 22 — and it raises the question whether Madrid really needs Mbappé now the void left by Benzema, and Cristiano Ronaldo before him, has clearly been filled.

### Liverpool

Mbappé's English is near-fluent and he's at ease conducting interviews after Champions League games with

British broadcasters.

It would make his transition to the Premier League even easier, for his speed, strength on the ball, dribbling and lethal finishing are all attributes that would serve him well.

The six-time European champions are trying to hold onto prolific forward Mohamed Salah amid growing interest in the Egypt star from the even richer Saudi Arabian league.

Salah recently reached the 200-goal mark for Liverpool and enjoys hero-like status at Liverpool's famed Anfield stadium, but he is 31 and his prime years could almost be over.

Mbappé is entering his prime and appears the ideal replacement.

### Chelsea

With no transfer fee to pay, any club signing Mbappé for free would have to play massive wages.

Chelsea can do that, and the west London club is languishing in midtable, desperately in need of a goalscorer

of Mbappé's caliber.

Whether Mbappé feels up to the challenge of rebuilding is doubtful, considering he could walk into any leading club.

### Saudi Arabia

Al-Hilal failed with a record \$332 million bid for Mbappé last July and, given his ambitions to win the Ballon d'Or numerous times, even the lure of massive wages seems unlikely to tempt him.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabian soccer intends to be around for the long-term.

If so, it means there's no pressure for Mbappé to go there now when he could easily do so in his 30s.

### Staying at PSG

Mbappé previously said he wanted to see out his last season at PSG and then leave.

Should he stay, the club would need to strengthen its midfield and defense.

Should he go, there will still be a Mbappé playing at PSG — younger brother Ethan, who just turned 17.

## Arsenal 'limp' into 2024 after worst performance of season

Tottenham close in on top four

LONDON, Jan 1, (AP) — Arsenal are limping into 2024 after a damaging stretch that culminated in what coach Mikel Arteta called "the worst performance of the season" on the final day of the year.

A toothless Arsenal side lost 2-1 at Fulham despite taking the lead in the fifth minute, a second straight defeat that means the team stayed in fourth place in the Premier League — when a victory would have lifted it into first.

"It's a really sad day because today we didn't deserve to win the game," Arteta said. "That was the worst performance of the season."

It continued a worrying run that has seen Arsenal end 2023 with just one win in their last five league games, including their first home loss of the season to West Ham on Thursday.

Arsenal stayed in fourth — having been top of the table at Christmas — and are now just one point ahead of fifth-place Tottenham after their north London rivals beat Bournemouth 3-1 at home.

### SOCCER

This latest setback came despite Bukayo Saka putting Arsenal ahead after just five minutes as he turned in the rebound from a shot by Gabriel Martinelli, who had made a marauding run from inside his own area.

There was little in the way of attacking threat from the visitors after that, though, and bad defending helped Raul Jimenez equalize in the first half and Bobby De Cordova-Reid poke in the winner after a corner in the 59th.

"Not good enough from us again today," Arsenal midfielder Declan Rice said. "The game against West Ham we had 30 shots, so many touches in the box but couldn't put it away. Today when (we) go one up we have to have more control. We need to demand more from each other. We had to push on again and go for more. In this league there is no room to mess up. It is a tough one to take."

Fulham had lost their last three league games by a combined score of 8-0 but was boosted by the return of Jimenez from a suspension. The striker has now scored four goals in his last four league games — equaling his tally from his previous 50.

Don't count Tottenham out of the title race just yet. Ange Postecoglou's team is three points behind Liverpool after bouncing back from a 4-2 defeat at Brighton on Thursday with a convincing win against Bournemouth.

Tottenham were boosted by the early return of Rodrigo Bentancur from an injury at a time when Postecoglou is without a handful of starters. But the win was marred by Senegal international Pape Sarr leaving the field in tears with an injury in the first half — just two weeks before the start of the African Cup of Nations — after he had scored the opening goal in the ninth minute.

Tottenham had to wait until the 71st minute for another goal, but Son Heung-min and Richarlison scored late to make the game safe before Alex Scott pulled one back for Bournemouth.

After a great start to the season under Postecoglou, Tottenham fell out



Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with the winner and runner up.

of the top four after a five-game winless run but could soon be back in the Champions League places.

"We're still in there and fighting," Postecoglou said. "We're three points off the top so if that is the difference between having a great season and where we are I'll take it."

Meanwhile, Luton captain Tom Lockyer will meet with heart specialists before deciding his future after suffering cardiac arrest in a Premier League game at Bournemouth on Dec. 16.

The 29-year-old defender collapsed in the 59th minute at Vitality Stadium, resulting in the game being abandoned. Lockyer was discharged from the hospital five days later following a successful procedure to fit an implantable cardioverter defibrillator.

The Welshman made his first comments since the incident via his Instagram account on Sunday, thanking the doctors and paramedics who treated him and indicating that he hasn't given up on resuming his playing career.

Lockyer also collapsed during May's Championship playoff final victory over Coventry at Wembley, leading him to undergo surgery to correct an atrial fibrillation.

Manchester United midfielder Christian Eriksen successfully resumed playing after being fitted with an ICD following his collapse at the European Championship in 2021 while playing for Denmark.

## Kuwaiti shooters achieved remarkable results in 2023

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 1, (KUNA) — Kuwaiti shooters achieved remarkable results in the annual qualification competitions of the Asian Shooting Confederation (ASC) in 2023, as highlighted by Duaij Al-Otaibi, the Chairperson of the Kuwait Shooting Club.

Al-Otaibi, in a statement to KUNA on Monday, announced that Olympic

shooter Abdullah Al-Taraqi secured the top position in the skeet competition, outperforming participants from across the Asian continent.

### SHOOTING

Additionally, Talal Al-Taraqi, an-

other Kuwaiti shooter, claimed the second spot in the same category.

Attributing the success of Kuwaiti shooters to their outstanding achievements in the past year, particularly at the latest Asian Games in China, Al-Otaibi emphasized their commitment to showcasing stellar performances as Kuwaiti representatives in significant

international sports events.

He expressed confidence that Kuwaiti shooters would continue to deliver excellent results in the upcoming years, extending thanks to all supporters of the sport and expressing gratitude, especially to the political leadership, led by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



The Kuwaiti shooter Abdullah Al-Taraqi waves the national flag.



Kuwaiti shooter Talal Al-Taraqi

KUNA photos