



LAWMAKERS EXPRESS SUPPORT AND OPTIMISM FOR NEW P.M.

Amir appoints Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem as new Prime Minister



HH the PM Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah

Call for comprehensive reforms

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah signed an Amiri Decree Thursday appointing Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah as Prime Minister.

The Amiri Decree, issued following traditional consultations, also assigned him to form a government and submit the line-up to His Highness the Amir to issue a decree of their appointment.

Born in 1955, Sheikh Dr. Mohammad had a bachelor's degree in economics from Claremont Graduate University and a PhD from Harvard University, and was appointed as professor at Kuwait University in 1985.

He worked at Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research in 1987-88.

Sheikh Dr. Mohammad was appointed Ambassador to the US in 1993 and stayed there until his appointment as Minister of State for Foreign Affairs on February 14, 2001.

He was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs and Acting Minister of Social Affairs and Labor on July 14, 2003.

On February 9, 2006, Sheikh Dr. Mohammad was named Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. He was reappointed in the same post in July 2006 and March 2007, as well as in cabinet reshuffles in October 2007 and May 2008.

He held the same position in the governments formed on May 29, 2009, and May 8, 2011.

Lawmakers congratulated His Highness Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah on his appointment as Prime Minister.

MP Muhammad Al-Sayer congratulated HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem for obtaining the leadership's trust. He affirmed that the people of Kuwait have been fully supporting the

Continued on Page 5

Assembly to address residency, price hikes in Jan 9-10 sessions

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: National Assembly Speaker Ahmed Al-Saadoun has invited the government and MPs to the parliamentary sessions scheduled for Jan 9-10, 2024.

Following are the items in the agenda of both sessions:

- Vote on the minutes of the previous session; - Parliamentary queries; - Amir Speech delivered on Oct 31, 2023; - Reports of the Legal and Legislative Affairs Committee about the bills on reforming the constituencies, and amending the National Assembly Law and Penal Code

- number 16/1960; - Report of the Interior and Defense Affairs Committee on the proposed amendment of the Foreigners Residency Law; - Report of the fact-finding committee tasked to investigate the armament deals (Eurofighter and Caracal helicopters); - Report of the Oil and Energy Committee on the proposal to establish a national shareholding company for advanced petrochemical industries; - Reports of the Financial and Economic Affairs Committee on these proposals — amend the law on establishing the Public Institution for Social Security in order to

Continued on Page 5

Toll revised lower

Kuwait deplores Iran bomb blasts

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4, (Agencies): The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has expressed Kuwait's condemnation and denunciation of the two blasts that hit Iran's Kerman Governorate, killing and wounding dozens of people.

In a statement, the Ministry voiced Kuwait's heartfelt condolences to Iran and the families of the victims, wishing a rapid recovery to those wounded.

Two bombs exploded and killed at least 84 people at a commemoration for a prominent Iranian general slain by the U.S. in a 2020 drone strike, Iranian officials said, as the Middle East remains on edge over Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for what appeared to be the deadliest militant attack to target Iran since its 1979 Islamic Revolution. Iran's leaders vowed to punish those responsible for the blasts, which wounded at least 284 people.

The explosions struck minutes apart on Wednesday, shaking the city of Kerman, about 820 kilometers (510 miles) southeast of the capital, Tehran. The second blast sprayed shrapnel into a screaming crowd fleeing the first explosion.

An earlier death toll of 103 was twice revised lower after officials realized that some names had been repeated on a list of victims and due to the severity of wounds suffered by some of the dead, health authorities said. Many of the wounded were in critical condition, however, so the death toll could rise.

The gathering marked the fourth anniversary of the killing of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of the Revolutionary Guard's elite Quds Force, in a U.S. drone strike in Iraq. The explosions occurred near his grave site as long lines of people gathered for the event.

Iranian state television and officials described the attacks as bombings, without immediately giving clear details of what happened. The attacks came a day after a deputy head of the Palestinian militant group Hamas was killed in a suspected Israeli strike in Beirut.

The first bomb Wednesday was detonated around 3 p.m., and the other went off some 20 minutes later, the Iranian interior minister, Ahmad Vahidi, told state television. He said the second blast killed and wounded the most people.

Images and video shared on social media appeared to correspond with the accounts of officials, who said the first blast happened about 700 meters (765 yards) from Soleimani's grave in the Kerman Martyrs Cemetery near a parking lot. The crowd then rushed west along Shohada Street, where the second blast struck about 1 kilometer (0.62 miles) from the grave.

A delayed second explosion is often used by militants to inflict more casualties by targeting emergency personnel responding to an attack.

Iranian state TV and state-run IRNA news agency quoted emergency officials for the casualty figures. Authorities said Thursday would be a national day of mourning.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the attackers will face "a harsh response," though he didn't name any possible suspect. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi added: "Undoubtedly, the perpetrators and leaders of this cowardly act will soon be identified and punished."

Iran has multiple foes who could be behind the assault, including exile groups, militant organizations and state actors.



The Kuwait Red Crescent Society affirmed its ongoing efforts to collect donations in support of the people in Gaza. Donations can be made through the society's website or in person at its Shuwaikh headquarters. Dr. Hilal Al-Sayer, the president of KRCS, stated to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the campaign is dedicated to aiding our brothers in Gaza and mitigating the severity of the crisis, especially given the onset of winter, challenging climatic conditions, and the increasing number of displaced and injured individuals in the Strip due to the continuous Israeli occupation aggression.

Central Bank implements automated alerts

Kuwait tightens anti-money laundering measures

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: The Central Bank of Kuwait has issued directives to banks and supervised entities, including exchange companies, instructing them to develop advanced technical programs and systems capable of automatically issuing alerts for operations and transactions conducted on customer accounts under various scenarios, reports Al-Rai daily quoting informed sources.

This measure, the CBK said, aims to monitor and ensure the alignment of these transactions with available client information as part of the Central Bank's ongoing efforts to combat money laundering and terrorist financing.

The sources emphasized the Central Bank's emphasis on banks promptly notifying the Kuwaiti Financial Investigation Unit of any transaction or attempted transaction as soon as sufficient evidence arises for suspicion.

The Central Bank's instructions underline the importance of continuously updating the procedures and systems to ensure compliance with the latest international requirements, aligning with issued recommendations in this regard.

Within the framework of its responsibilities defined in Law No. 106 of 2013 on combating money laundering and terrorist financing, the Central Bank conducts field inspection missions to assess banks' adherence to the law, its executive regulations, related decisions, and the instructions issued by the Central Bank in this context.

Continued on Page 5

Kuwait tops GCC peers with lowest fuel prices

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Kuwait boasts the lowest fuel prices among Gulf states and ranks second in the Arab world, according to a research paper by the International Monetary Fund which focused on inflation rate shifts in Gulf countries from 2019 to 2022, reports Al-Anba daily.

The paper attributed the global rise in inflation to heavy reliance on imports and heightened consumer

Continued on Page 5

NewsWatch

KUWAIT CITY: The State of Kuwait categorically rejects and denounces remarks of Israeli occupation officials on the forced displacement of Gazans, reported the Foreign Ministry on Thursday.

The Ministry, in a statement, reiterated its warning of the Israeli occupation's intentions of evicting Palestinians, specifically Gazans, from their homeland, reaffirming that these remarks violate international laws and UN resolutions. (KUNA)

KUWAIT CITY: The State of Kuwait is keen on leading an effective role during its membership in the UN Human Rights Council, said the country's top diplomat on Thursday.

Being a member in this "significant" organization reflects the "illustrious" status that the State of Kuwait enjoys, as well as the trust of the international community, said Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. (KUNA)

VIENNA: The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said on Thursday its experts were not allowed to inspect the reactor halls of three units of Ukraine's Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP).

"The IAEA experts remain unable to gain access to all parts of the site, and for the past two weeks they have not been allowed to access the reactor halls of units 1, 2 and 6," IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi said in a press statement. (KUNA)

'Smart recruitment'

Technical workers set to undergo skill assessment for work permits

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: The Public Authority for Manpower announced that it will soon conduct a test for skilled technical workers as a condition for issuing a work permit in cooperation with the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, reports Al-Jarida daily.

PAM said in a press statement, this comes under the directives of the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled, and out of his keenness to begin implementing the professional system project for smart recruitment, which is

among the projects of the development plan.

The press statement added, PAAET and PAM are preparing a memorandum of understanding, which will be signed early next week, regarding holding practical and technical tests for skilled workers in the State of Kuwait to be a condition for issuing a work permit.

The statement indicated that the MoU will include launching these tests in gradual stages regarding the professions subject to the test or not according to standards and conditions

Continued on Page 5



Members of an Iraqi Shiite militant group stand outside the headquarters of the Popular Mobilization Force after it was hit by an airstrike in Baghdad, Iraq, Jan. 4, 2024. The Popular Mobilization Force — a coalition of militias that is nominally under the control of the Iraqi military — announced in a statement that its deputy head of operations in Baghdad, Mushtaq Taleb al-Saidi, or 'Abu Taqwa,' had been killed in the strike. (AP)

Prayer Timings

Fajr 05:19 Asr 14:44
 Sunrise .. 06:43 Maghrib .. 17:03
 Zohr 11:53 Isha 18:25

Local

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

Weather

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:
By Day: Mild with light to moderate northwesterly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of 08-32 km/h.

By Night: Rather cold to cold with light to moderate northwest-

erly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of 06-30 km/h with a chance for fog forming over some areas.

Station
Kuwait City

Max Exp
21

Min Rec
15

Kuwait Airport	21	11
Abdaly	22	09
Jahra	21	12
Salimiyah	20	16
Nuwaisib	22	13
Wafra	20	12

Five Kuwaitis among Forbes list of 100 most powerful Mideast CEOs

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Forbes Middle East has announced its annual list of 100 most powerful chief executive officers (CEOs) in the Middle East for the year 2023 (third edition), reports Al-Anba daily.

The list includes five CEOs from Kuwait -- Vice Chairman and Group CEO of the National Bank of Kuwait Isam Al-Sager, Chairman of the Board of Directors and CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation Sheikh Nawaf Al-Saud, Vice Chairman and CEO of Zain Group Badr Nasser Al-Kharafi, CEO of Kuwait Projects Holding Group (KIPCO) Sheikh Adana Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad and CEO of Boursa Kuwait Mohammad Al-Osaimi.

Forbes said that the leaders on the list were able to achieve combined revenues exceeding one \$1 trillion in 2022, while the combined market value of the companies they manage amounted to more than \$5 trillion.

Forbes based its selection on the achievements and performance of CEOs last year; as well as the innovations and initiatives they implemented, their influence on the region, the countries in which they work, the markets they oversee and the size of the companies they head.

1. Isam Al-Sager

Kuwaiti Vice Chairman and Group CEO of the National Bank of Kuwait Isam Al-Sager topped the Kuwait list, while he ranked fifth on the Forbes list. He joined the National Bank of Kuwait Group in 1978 and assumed his current position as CEO of the group in 2014.

The bank's assets amounted to \$119.2 billion at the end of the third quarter of 2023. Al-Sager also chairs the Board of Directors of several companies affiliated with the National Bank of Kuwait Group, such as NBK International and he is a member of the Board of Directors of the National Wealth Management Company.

2. Sheikh Nawaf Al-Saud

In second place in Kuwait and sixth on the Forbes list, Vice Chairman and CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation Sheikh Nawaf Al-Saud joined the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation in 1999 and assumed his current position in March 2022.

The companies affiliated with Kuwait Petroleum Corporation includes Kuwait Oil Company, Kuwait National Petroleum Company, and Petrochemical Indus-

try Company. Al-Saud previously served as President and CEO of Key Holdings (Europe), CEO of Kuwait Foreign Petroleum Exploration Company (KUPPEC) and head of the corporation's office in Washington.

3. Badr Al-Kharafi

Vice Chairman and CEO of Zain Group Badr Nasser Al-Kharafi ranked third in Kuwait and 33rd on the Forbes list. He joined the Board of Directors of Zain Group in 2011, was appointed Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors in 2014, and then became CEO of the group in 2017.

Al-Kharafi supervises about 7,400 employees, and Zain Group operates in seven countries in the Middle East and Africa, and its assets amounted to about \$16.5 billion. Al-Kharafi also holds the position of Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of Zain Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Cables and Electrical Industries Group Company based in Kuwait, and Mitsubishi Motors in Egypt.

4. Sheikh Adana Al-Nasser

In fourth place in Kuwait, and 60th on the Forbes list is Sheikh Adana Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad, CEO of Kuwait Projects Group (KIPCO). She assumed her current position in January 2022. KIPCO owns investment projects in the Middle East and North Africa region in the financial services, media, real estate and industry sectors.

She previously served as CEO of Al-Futouh Holding Company, the founder and chair of the Board of Trustees of the American University of Kuwait, chair of the Board of Directors of the United Education Company, and a member of the boards of Gulf Insurance Group, Kamco Invest and OSN.

5. Mohammad Al-Osaimi

CEO of Boursa Kuwait, Mohammad Al-Osaimi, ranked fifth in Kuwait and 96th on the Forbes list. He was appointed CEO of Boursa Kuwait in 2019, after joining the Board of Directors in 2015.

During the first nine months of 2023, Boursa Kuwait recorded a net profit of \$56.5 million, as well as operating revenues of \$73 million. In 2022, it witnessed an increase in total foreign trading activity by 29 percent, as the total value of trades that reached international investors amounted to \$2 billion.



Isam J. Al-Sager



Sheikh Nawaf Al-Saud



Badr Al-Kharafi



Sheikha Adana Al-Nasser



Mohammad Al-Osaimi

140 kidney transplants in '23

Al-Adan Hospital new buildings handed over: Dr Al-Sanad

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff



One of the graduates receives a shield.

1,472 graduate for police force

Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences recently organized a graduation ceremony for 1,472 deputy officers and 336 sergeants, reports Al-Anba daily.

Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Lieutenant General Sheikh Salem Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, assistant undersecretaries at the ministry, and officials of the Education and Training Affairs Sector attended the event.

Sheikh Salem Nawaf congratulated the graduates on joining their brothers in the Police Force. He conveyed

to them the greetings of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled, wishing them success in serving the nation.

He also urged them to keep the oath they took to be role models in discipline and commitment to the implementation of the law. He added that the lessons and trainings they completed should be translated into their practical lives to achieve the highest level of vigilance and readiness in maintaining the security and safety of citizens and residents.

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Director of the Health Communication Center and the official spokesman for the Ministry of Health Dr. Abdullah Al-Sanad says last year witnessed a number of achievements in the Ministry of Health, including the launch of the handing over of new buildings for the Al-Adan Hospital expansion project, several successful and unprecedented surgeries including 140 kidney transplants in the Hamad Al-Essa Center, and launch of a comprehensive dental treatment service for children and adolescents under 15 years of age with special needs.

In a press statement yesterday, Dr. Al-Sanad explained that the Adan expansion project consists of nine buildings, including the maternity and pediatric building, which contains 637 beds, 21 operating theatres, 16 facilities and technical departments, general and specialized surgery buildings, physiotherapy and rehabilitation buildings, parking building for physiotherapy patients with a capacity of 580 cars, and another building with parking capacity of 1,983 cars.

The expansion also includes a storage space of 12,000 square meters, a building for power generators, a building for medical gases, and a parking building with capacity of 1,083 cars, as well as about 200 parking spaces for the cars of people with special needs.

Dr. Al-Sanad indicated that the ministry started receiving the buildings from December 24, 2023, and the process of handing over the rest of the buildings will continue in the coming days and weeks.

He highlighted that the kidney transplant program at the Hamad Al-Essa Center set a record last year by performing 140 transplant cases, among which were new operations performed for the first time in the country.

The most prominent among them were transplant of pancreas after the transplant of a kidney, along with urinary tract restoration, the formation of a new bladder using the intestines and the transplant of the ureter into it, five cases of kidney removal following by placement of a new kidney, removal of a malignant tumor ramified from a previously transplanted kidney, and nine cases of kidney transplant in children who suffered from kidney failure, all of which were crowned with a success rate of more than 97 percent.

Dr. Al-Sanad stressed that last year also witnessed the launch of a comprehensive dental treatment service for children and adolescents under 15 years of age with special needs, as well as children who suffer from some other diseases and whose treatment requires specialized medical care at the Jaber Al-Ahmad Specialized Dental Center.

He indicated that this service is the result of the joint cooperation between the Jaber Al-Ahmad Specialized Dental Center and Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital's Dental Department, adding that this service is also available in the specialized dental centers of Adan, Amiri, Farwaniya and Jahra hospitals.



Dr. Al-Sanad

Other Voices

Studying drama in Victoria?

By Ahmad alsarraf

Former politician Abdullah Al-Nafisi tends to remain in the spotlight, or limelight, as he likes to pepper his interviews with English expressions, even if that tendency is at the expense of his "stature," and at the expense of logic and credibility. The last of these attempts was a tweet that aroused the amazement and pity of many, and it read: "The famous (...) Indian restaurant in Kuwait does not hesitate to spray deadly poison on the food served to anyone who criticizes the Indian Prime Minister (Modi) and his pro-Israel position in the Gaza war. Is that restaurant subject to or managed by external security directives?"



alsarraf

I responded to him with a tweet asking him to reveal the name of the restaurant, so that the lives of those who might happen to eat there could be saved, noting that the accusation affected all famous Indian restaurants, and I do not know how Al-Nafisi knew of the existence of such a restaurant? How many people "died" or were poisoned as a result of eating food there, and is it their only fault that they are hostile to Modi? Why did he limit himself to talking about the matter, and did not say that he had informed the security authorities of the name of the restaurant, to stop the killing spree?

How can any rational person believe in the existence of such a restaurant, and how do its "extremist" owners know which guest is hostile to their prime minister? Does the restaurant ask its customers to fill out a questionnaire, for example, that includes questions about their political orientations?

Who would believe that the workers of that unknown restaurant willingly participated in the "crime" of murder, by sprinkling poison on the food of the restaurant's guests, without fear of responsibility?

Mr. Al-Nafisi was not supposed to send such a tweet, which lacked credibility. What I know personally, for at least 75 years, is that the Indian community in Kuwait is the least involved in any violations, despite its number exceeding one million. It was not appropriate to spread such malicious rumors against Indians.

The sending of the tweet coincided with my receipt of part of the journalist Ammar Taqi's interview with Mr. Abdullah Al-Nafisi, in which the latter says that Israel had previously drawn up a "plan" to occupy the Gulf states, from Kuwait to Oman, and that he knew about the plan.

Al-Nafisi asked Taqi to visit Congress, and its library in particular, and go to the third floor, and ask to meet Monsieur George Attiya, because the Lebanese like to speak French, and ask him for a copy of the (Israeli) plan!!

Because I feel that it is impossible for such a plan to exist, and I do not deny Israel's ambitions, and I doubt that the story is inspired by the speaker's imagination, so how could Israel come up with such a dangerous plan, supposedly secret, and deposit it with Monsieur Attiya, in the Library of Congress!! This is not consistent with logic.

My doubt, as usual, about Al-Nafisi's claims prompted me to search, and it became clear to me that there was no Monsieur Attiya in the Library of Congress. There is no (Israeli) plan to occupy the Gulf oil states. Rather, I found only the text of a half-century-old "study", prepared by Congress, during the period in which the Gulf states cut off oil, and the study was preserved in the archives with other studies!

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

'Kuwait's Red Sea oil exports safe'

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Kuwait's oil exports through the Red Sea are safe, as the necessary precautions and measures have been taken to ensure the safety of Kuwaiti oil tankers, reports Al-Qabas daily quoting sources.

Sources confirmed that Kuwaiti oil tankers are sailing normally and are prepared for any emergency, pointing out that the attacks in the Red Sea are isolated cases.

Sources reiterated that a set of precautionary security measures have been taken to protect Kuwaiti oil tankers, explaining that protection and guarding systems

on all tankers have been strengthened, while the incentives and danger allowance for sailors have been increased.

Sources disclosed the cost of insurance for ships crossing the Red Sea has risen to record levels -- exceeding 1,000 percent; considering the intensifying security threats, continuing concerns about shipping disturbances in the Red Sea, and escalating tension in the Middle East.

Sources said the lion's share of Kuwaiti oil exports goes to Asia, so the movement of exports through the Arabian Gulf and the Arabian Sea is much greater than the exports that cross through the Red Sea.

Dental jobs, other services available

Abdali to get new health center

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: The Director of the Jahra Health District, Dr. Jamal Al-Duaij announced the opening of the new "Ali Muhammad Thunayan Al-Ghanim Center" in Abdali this month.

Al-Duaij said in a statement to Al-Jarida that the center includes a number of different departments and specializations, such as the dental department, minor accidents, medical observation, medical laboratories, pharmacy, and other medical departments.

He added that the coming period will witness an acceleration in the completion and provision of qualitative and distinguished services at the center, including the automated system.

Dr. Al-Duaij said he personally inspected the construction work at the new Center, and also inspected the ongoing work at the

current Abdali Health Center, inspected the pharmacy and nursing departments, spoke to the patients to find out their needs and suggestions, and supervised the treatment of some patients.

He stressed that all necessary medicines must be made available to meet the needs of patients and visitors to the center around the clock throughout the year, while at the same time praising the directives and efforts of the Minister of Health, Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadi, and the acting Undersecretary of the Ministry, Dr. Abdul Rahman Al-Mutairi in following up and facilitating the procedures for opening the new center.

The director of the Jahra Health District urged all workers at the center to carry out their duties to the fullest extent to meet the needs of patients and visitors.

Temp to hit 7 C in open areas

Chill to dig in as of next week

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: The upcoming weekend in Kuwait is anticipated to have stable weather conditions. According to Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi, the Director of the Department, the current weather on Thursday is expected to be moderate during the day. Winds are forecasted to be northwesterly and variable, ranging from light to moderate speeds of 12 to 35 kilometers per hour, reports Al-Qabas daily.

Maximum temperatures are projected to reach between 20 and 22 degrees Celsius, with the sea experiencing light to moderate waves measuring between 2 and 5 feet.

As the night approaches, Al-Qarawi suggests that the weather will turn cold, with northwesterly to variable winds at light to moderate speeds between 8 and 32 kilometers per hour. Some areas may experience fog formation, and the expected minimum temperature will range between 9 and 11 degrees Celsius.

The sea is anticipated to have light to moderate waves, ranging from 1 to 4 feet.

Looking ahead to tomorrow, the forecast indicates moderate weather with light to moderate northwesterly to variable winds at speeds of 10 to 32 kilometers per hour. Maximum temperatures are expected to range between 21 and 23 degrees Celsius, and the sea will exhibit light to moderate waves measuring between 1 and 4 feet.

The Kuwait Meteorological Department emphasizes that the weekend will witness stable and generally moderate weather during the day, transitioning to cold nights. Tomorrow night is expected to be cold with northwesterly to variable winds at light to moderate speeds between 6 and 30 kilometers per hour. Light fog may form in certain areas, and the

'Can't attack cops'

Family stays in jail

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: The judge has declined the defense plea to release the family from detention on any guarantee -- the family which has been put behind bars at the Central Prison for assaulting security personnel in the Jabriya area instead, the judge has opted to maintain their pretrial detention for an additional 10 days pending further investigation into the case, reports Al-Anba daily.

This decision follows the defense attorney's request for the release of his clients, asserting that there are no justifiable reasons for their continued imprisonment. The defense argued that the accused are law-abiding citizens with known residences, posing no flight risk.

minimum temperature is projected to be between 10 and 12 degrees Celsius.

Saturday night will bring cold temperatures with northwesterly to variable winds at light to moderate speeds between 12 and 35 kilometers per hour. Light fog may form in certain areas, and the expected minimum temperature is between 8 and 10 degrees Celsius. The sea will exhibit light to mild waves, ranging from 2 to 5 feet.

Meanwhile, according to Al-Rai daily, the upcoming week will bring a notable drop in temperatures, reaching as low as 7 degrees Celsius in the open areas, particularly the desert regions. Meteorologist Fahd Al-Otaibi anticipates extremely cold weather in the country, especially during the early hours of the morning, starting from the beginning of next week.

Officer gets '7 years' for beating, disabling expat

By Jaber Al-Hamoud/Munaif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: The Court of Appeals, presided over by Judge Nasr Salem Al-Heid, sentenced an officer in the Ministry of Interior to seven-year imprisonment for beating a Bangladeshi expatriate for not washing his car, which resulted in quadriplegia in the victim.

The Public Prosecution had charged the officer with hitting the victim so severely that it caused a permanent disability estimated at a minimum of 50 percent of the body's total capacity. However, the officer denied the allegations leveled against him.

The Criminal Court had earlier sentenced the defendant to ten-year imprisonment, but the defense team representing the officer appealed the ruling, urging the court to acquit his client due to the lack of seriousness of the investigations and the victim's laxity in reporting and that he had fallen on his own and the presence of an old injury that he had.

However, the Court of Appeal refused to acquit the defendant, and instead sentenced him to seven-year imprisonment with hard labor.

On the merits of its ruling, the court stated that the evidence against the defendant are correct, supportive, and sound, including the testimony of the witnesses, the victim, and the forensic medical report.

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'It's a pity you doing drugs': Judge Khalid Al Omaira issued a ruling to release a Kuwaiti woman in her 20s who was accused of drug abuse.

He told the woman, "It is sad to see such a young person getting involved in such activities". She had been arrested by securitymen for using psychotropic substances, but she had denied the allegations leveled against her.

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Shepherd kills himself: An Asian shepherd committed suicide in a livestock pen located in Artal desert.

According to security sources, when the Operations Room of the Ministry of Interior received a report that an Asian man ended his life by hanging in a livestock pen in Al-Artal desert, securitymen and paramedics rushed to the location of the report. Upon their arrival, it became clear to them that the Asian man had died by hanging using a rope that was tied to the top of the ceiling of his prefabricated room.

His body was taken down and referred to the Forensic Medicine Department. A case was registered.

diwaniya بعد الإفطار

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

New political era unfolds in the new year

"AS we usher in the New Year, the prevailing sentiments are tinged with a sense of change, particularly in light of the official mourning for the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah -- may God Almighty have mercy on him," columnist **Dr. Ghaadeer Muhammad Asiri** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.



Dr. Ghaadeer Asiri

"Simultaneously, the noteworthy event of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah -- may God protect him -- assuming the helm of government marks a significant political shift as the seventeenth Amir of the State of Kuwait.

"Amidst the backdrop of stability in the country and a series of rapid developments, the populace keenly observes the unfolding promises of reform and the anticipation of change articulated in various official addresses by His Highness the Amir -- may God protect and preserve him.

"International reports from the American Bloomberg Agency underscore Kuwait's developmental challenges, attributing them to factors such as the composition of the Kuwaiti parliament, prolonged political dysfunction, and instability.

"The parliament, characterized as an 'opposition majority,' is deemed a hindrance to genuine reform in the country's legislative landscape. His Highness, in a recent address, denounced the situation as 'programmed tampering' in certain matters, highlighting an ap-

parent attempt to legitimize corruption while sacrificing national interests and citizen welfare for the sake of political maneuvering.

"According to international reports, a key focus in the upcoming period will be the economic file, with legislation aimed at correcting the economic trajectory and formulating realistic plans aligned with the dynamics of the Gulf region and the evolving global landscape.

"Notably, Kuwait achieved its first surplus in oil revenues in March, ending a nine-year financial deficit. The Amir emphasized the need to reassess the nation's current reality, particularly in the realms of security, economy, and daily life.

"A Bloomberg report asserted that Kuwait, despite its wealth, has struggled with political instability, delaying crucial economic, investment, and tourism laws necessary for the country's progress.

"Security challenges loom large, with the geographical factor contributing to ongoing security threats. The parliament's understanding of fostering relationships with key economic and military players such as the United States, China, Russia, and Europe is crucial in avoiding potential tensions leading to regional conflicts.

"Maintaining the strength and stability of the Kuwaiti dinar on the global stage is identified as a pivotal political consideration, aligning with foreign policy positions to ensure economic stability and global confidence in the local currency.

"Looking ahead, the imperative lies in enacting legislative changes that restore the nation's economic and political standing, embracing bold mindsets and fostering a parliament aligned with Gulf and global development goals. The envisioned path involves diversifying income sources,

attracting foreign investments, and addressing economic concerns to position the State of Kuwait on a trajectory of renewed prosperity."

Also:

"His Highness the Amir, under divine protection, addressed critical issues in the country's political, executive, and parliamentary spheres. Specifically, he highlighted the concerns surrounding the national identity and the peril of manipulating citizenship," columnist **Hassan Al-Issa** wrote for **Al-Jarida** daily.

"His Highness expressed unease over the amnesty file, where controls were breached, and constitutional limits exceeded, leading to an unconstitutional overlap of actions by the two authorities; the parliamentary rush to enact legislation, such as the Rehabilitation Law, characterized by constitutional and legal deficiencies, prompted His Highness's rejection, adhering to the constitutional framework.

"In his momentous speech coinciding with assuming power and taking the constitutional oath, His Highness affirmed commitment to the 1962 Constitution, renewing a covenant with the people of Kuwait.

"Notably, His Highness emphasized on the national identity file, shedding light on the manipulation of Kuwaiti citizenship; initially, a symbol of loyalty and alliance, citizenship transformed into a tool for political and electoral gains and later, financial and self-interest gains, jeopardizing the nation's identity. This shift led to a substantial and illogical surge in the number of citizens, revealing vulnerabilities in the nationality file."

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes

No cold, no coal buyers

Sellers winding up businesses; 'Rates high'

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Charcoal is like many seasonal supplies, as the demand for charcoal increases in winter due to the large number of camps and low temperature -- when most people use charcoal for heating or to prepare some food, as the mainland gatherings are almost never devoid of charcoal and lighting a fire,

reports Al-Anba daily.

The situation this year is totally different from the previous year, as the weather is still moderate and the country has yet to experience extreme cold weather, which affected the charcoal market as many people began to use charcoal only out of necessity. Whoever used seven bags a week before uses only one bag now. The daily's staff visited the coal market recently to find out how the market has been affected by the weather conditions.

Umm Hassan Al-Ali disclosed that "for the first time in years, the winter season has passed and we reached the end of the year without the cold even for days. We buy charcoal so that we can feel the winter weather even if we do not feel the extreme cold. In the past, we used five to seven bags of charcoal weighing 10 kilograms during the week, but now we are satisfied with one bag and the second bag is for grilling."

She added: "The joy of winter comes with the cold weather. I am a fan of 'Kashtat Al-Barr' picnic every year, but this year we did not feel the cold and we are in the late days of Al-Murabbaniyah (December). Even the charcoal sellers do not see anyone buying the product. We hope that in the coming days, the weather will change and the cold will intensify. This allows us to feel the atmosphere of winter and the sweetness of the cold. The absence of cold has affected many economic areas and the movement of markets, such as winter clothes, blankets, charcoal, etc, all of which have decreased demand due to the absence of extreme cold."

Mohammad Al-Shaheen stated: "This year, it seems we forgot the cold and did not feel its atmosphere. We are in the last days of Al-Murabbaniyah. Every year at this time, we use all types of heating, including heaters, lighting fire and charcoal, and wearing various types of winter clothes, but this year, most of the aspects of the winter have disappeared due to the absence of cold weather. There are many means of heating in Kuwait, but I prefer charcoal and firewood. I buy large quantities of them every year, but this year I did not buy even 20 percent of my purchase rate each year. We are now in the main market for coal, which has been in existence for more than 60 years. Every year, you do not find parking space in front of the stores, but now the streets are empty and there is no demand for charcoal. Most of those who buy charcoal are either for grilling or for 'shisha' (hubbly bubbly).

Prices

Asked if prices increase each year, he said: "The prices of all supplies have increased, not just coal."

Adnan Al-Khatib stated: "I am a fan of weekly 'kashtas' (picnics). Every year in the past, I used to buy three types of charcoal and firewood for grilling, heating and shisha; but this year, I do not need charcoal much. In the past, the cold intensified at the beginning of December, when the temperature reached zero sometimes, but now we are in January and the temperature is still more than 20 degrees Celsius during the day and 15 degrees Celsius at night. Previously, I used to take four sacks of charcoal, but now I only take one sack and it is for grilling."

Al-Khatib talked about the best types of charcoal he has; explaining that African charcoal is the best, its price is reasonable, and the quality is high, although there are more than 15 types of charcoal, but he prefers this charcoal.

Rajab Abdul Qader, a seller in a charcoal store, told the daily: After 33 years in Kuwait and working in this store, I will leave Kuwait because of the 60-year old law.

Regarding the season this year, Rajab explained "the season has ended and we have not benefited from it at all. There is a decrease in sales each year by more than 60 percent, as we used to sell wholesale and retail, and the three months that we work during the winter spare us the rest of the days of the year, but now, as you can see, the market is empty and there are only some customers who used to take five bags of charcoal, now they take one for barbecuing, while the rest take a special type of charcoal for shisha.

About the prices, Rajab said the prices are similar to that of last year, and the goods are piled up in stores due to the lack of demand. "My final word is that coal is for seasonal use all over the world, and the colder the cold, the greater the demand for it."

Shaaban Mohammad, a seller in the charcoal market, asserted: Thank Allah for everything and the compensation is from Him. For years, I have been working in this field and everyone says that 'the colder the cold, the greater the demand for charcoal'. This saying is 100 percent true, and we saw it this year after an absence of cold and the moderate weather, so the demand for coal decreased significantly.

Throughout the year, we sell charcoal to restaurants and cafés. In winter when camping is allowed in Kuwait, we are hopeful and the demand for charcoal increases and our sales rise to more than 70 percent. We have regular customers who come continuously during the camping season, but this year, we did not see them due to the mild weather and the absence of extreme cold."



Bags of charcoal stashed up in a shop await customers.

Kuwaiti girl dies in accident

Liquor, drugs with 10 bootleggers

By Mansour Al-Sultan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: The Fahaheel police station personnel conducted a raid on a clandestine local liquor production facility situated in the Fahaheel area.

The operation resulted in the arrest of three expatriates who were found in possession of locally brewed alcohol, barrels filled with brew and equipment used for producing alcohol.

The place was raided based on confidential information received by the security forces of the Fahaheel Police Station, indicating the presence of a residence operating as a local liquor factory. After thorough surveillance and confirmation of the provided intelligence, a legal permit was obtained, and the house was raided.

Meanwhile, personnel from the General Department of Criminal Investigation, represented by the Department for the Protection of Public Morals, have arrested 7 people for manufacturing alcohol, possessing narcotic substances for the purpose of trafficking, and possessing weapons without a license, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The arrests came as part of the department's continued monitoring and follow-up of all negative phenomena that violate public morals in the various governorates of the country.

The General Department of Security Relations and Media at the Ministry of Interior said in a statement 4 barrels of raw material

and 14 large bottles containing intoxicants, 10 bags containing narcotic substances and 2 air guns stored in the Al-Wafra agricultural area.

Kuwaiti girl dies in mishap: A seven-year-old Kuwaiti girl died on the spot and 6 members of her family were injured in a four-wheeler accident on the Sabhan road opposite the Ministry of Interior camp, reports Al-Anba daily.

The traffic police have opened an investigation to determine the circumstances of the accident after registering a case at the area police station.

The accident was dealt with by personnel from Directorate-General of Fire Department (DGFD). The corpse of the little girl has been referred to Forensic medicine.

Threat to kill brother: The Surra Police Station has ordered the arrest of an unidentified young man for threatening to kill his brother, reports Al-Anba daily.

A security source said the Operations Department of the Ministry of Interior after receiving the report sent a police patrol to look into the matter but the suspect refused to talk to the police from inside the locked room following which the brother filed a complaint with the police station and orders were given by the police station investigator to arrest the man.

It is not known why the suspect threatened to kill his brother.



Bootleggers in police custody.

Major events in Kuwait during 2023

Defense and internal security

Jan 1: Kuwait's Ministry of Interior announced that 1.2 million Captagon pills, 250 kgs of hashish and 104 kgs of shabu were seized.

Jan 11: Interior Ministry detained a person running a local alcohol factory in Al-Wafra area.

Jan 16: Ministry of Interior seized an alcohol factory.

Jan 19: First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah approved the highest number of promotions in the history of the ministry, including 3,193 officers.

Jan 24: First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah ordered appending some 759 interior ministry retirees and those with prior military service to re-admittance course.

Jan 30: The National Guard conducted Asad Al-Jazeerah V drills in Sheikh Salem Al-Ali camp.

Feb 1: Kuwaiti Interior Ministry conducted the largest-ever seizure of illegally-obtained Lyrica (pregabalin) pills, some 15 million, and half a ton of the drug in raw powder form.

Feb 4: British forces arrived to Kuwait to take part in Desert Warrior VII drills alongside Kuwaiti forces from the 5th to the 23rd of this month.

Feb 5: "Taawun I drills" kickstarted under sponsorship and attendance of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and attendance of Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud.

Feb 14: The Interior Ministry launched a project linking traffic fines in the State of Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.

Feb 23: A joint drill between Kuwait's forces, "American Spartans" and the "British Dragons" squads concluded.

Feb 24: Ministry of Interior announced sabotaging a large smuggling operation consisting of about a quarter ton of hashish and other narcotics by five suspects.

Feb 25: Kuwait Air Force jets and Saudi "suqoor team" present an air show on occasion of the country's national holidays.

Feb 26: The Ministry of Interior partially closed the Arabian Gulf Road for the fireworks show on occasion of the national holidays.

March 5: Activities of the 36th Gulf traffic week commenced and set to last until the 9th.

March 5: Kuwaiti general staff leadership begins a second coordination meeting with the participation of the Gulf Cooperation Council and its general secretariat.

March 8: Fire broke out and was contained at a powerhouse in Salmiya.

March 11: First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Acting Defense Minister oversaw the seizure and capture of 120 kgs of Hashish, 36,000 Captagon pills and more narcotics, all in the possession of six siblings who manufacture and distribute the substances.

March 16: Kuwait's Naval Force concluded "Danah 23" drills.

March 17: Interior Ministry arrests a runaway suspected of smuggling 18 kgs of hashish into the country.

April 14: The Interior Ministry launched a wide-scale campaign to search for a missing citizen, Mubarak Al-Rashidi, in Kabd Area.

May 13: First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Acting Defense Minister supervised seizure of over 152 kilograms of drugs.

May 21: The Ministry of Interior seized around 120 kgs of hashish and opium smuggled through sea.

May 29: The Interior Ministry found body of Mubarak Al-Rashidi in Salmi Area.

May 27: The Interior Ministry arrested 10 people charged with bribing voters to vote for certain candidates in Kuwait's parliamentary elections.

June 1: Three Asian nationals died in a fire in a house in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh.

June 3: The Interior Ministry arrested two persons who worked for three parliamentary candidates accused of buying votes.

June 9: The Interior Ministry announced arrest of seven persons who possessed some five kgs of illegal pills.

June 11: Kuwaiti and Pakistani armed forces signed a cooperation agreement.

June 13: Kuwait and Qatar launched an electronic system that allows collection of traffic fines.

June 13: Ministry of Defense said it agreed with Turkiye to purchase drones with a value of USD 367 million.

July 6: Fire erupted in Amghara contained by four firefighting force teams.

July 6: Interior Ministry announced that expatriates who break traffic laws will not be allowed to travel if they do not pay fines

for the traffic department.

July 7: Interior Ministry detained 33 people who had been fabricating official documents and submitting them to concerned bodies in the country.

July 9: A firefighting station in Saad Al-Abdullah area had been inaugurated.

July 13: Kuwaiti officers Khaled Al-Najjar and Tareq Al-Saddani were honored by Colombia's Ministry of Interior in the capital, Bogota.

July 15: The special military squad, "Maghawir 25 force," headed to Jordan to participate in joint drills.

July 17: Interior Ministry apprehended 22 persons for various offenses including possession of narcotics and varying sums of money.

August 7: Defense Ministry inked a deal with KISR on innovations and facilitating work procedures.

Aug 11: The anti-drug division sabotaged a smuggling attempt of captagon pills into the country.

Aug 15: Interior Ministry nabbed 21 persons in possession of narcotics, alcohol, bullets and sums of money.

Aug 16: Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior detained two women who attempted to smuggle three packages carrying 15 kgs of marijuana.

Aug 18: Fifteen people with narcotics, alcohol, fire arms, sums of money and forged money had been nabbed by the Interior Ministry.

Aug 19: Seven people have been implicated in two separate cables theft cases.

Aug 22: A smuggling attempt of two kgs of heroin had been sabotaged by the anti-drugs division.

Aug 23: A fire erupted in a cement factory with no human losses.

Aug 27: The Ministry of Interior launched an app for police officers to issue traffic fines.

Aug 29: Interior Ministry in cooperation with Foreign Ministry launched a service for emergency travel permit on Sahel smart phone application.

Aug 31: The Ministry of Interior announced new service for nationals wishing to renew passports and with a travel ticket in less than 24 hours.

Sept 2: Eight people who tried to smuggle 140 kgs of marijuana and 50,000 captagon pills were detained by the interior ministry.

Sept 6: A funeral with military ceremonies had been held for the martyr Hamdan Al-Mutairi after his body had been returned to the country.

Sept 10: An attempt at smuggling narcotics had been foiled by the interior ministry.

Sept 13: Interior Ministry announced seizing largest alcoholic beverages factory in the country run by six people.

Sept 15: sixteen people indicted with 13 cases were detained by the interior ministry.

Sept 17: The interior ministry obtained 300 motor cycles to improve traffic services.

Sept 21: Ministry of Interior seized 21 people on accounts of drug possession.

Oct 15: The coast guard executed maneuvers in four sites.

Oct 20: Interior Ministry detained 24 people for narcotics possession, alcoholic beverages, unlicensed weapons and sums of money.

Oct 25: Kuwait Air Force received the fifth batch of Eurofighter typhoon jets.

Nov 1: Kuwait Army along with the elite squad, the "Maghawir 25," carry out a drill in the desert.

Nov 18: Around 800 kgs of cannabis have been seized by Interior Ministry personnel.

Nov 20: Interior Ministry thwarted a smuggling attempt of 500 kgs of cannabis.

Nov 24: Troops of the special force, "Maghawir 25," left for Pakistan to take part in drills.

Nov 25: An Emirati frigate arrived in the country as part of expertise exchange program.

Dec 4: Interior Ministry detained individuals implicated in burning vehicle of Justice Sultan Bureish with large amounts of drugs, fire arms and monetary sums in their possession.

Dec 6: Coast guard seized eight people trying to smuggle in around 100 kgs of meth of an estimated market value of KD two million (approx. USD 6.5 million).



Sheikh Talal



Prince Faisal

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Greetings

Congratulations continue to pour in on HH Amir assuming top office

'Discussions on with Kuwait to bring in Indonesian healthcare specialists'

No plans to send domestic workers: Maryana

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Indonesian Ambassador to Kuwait Lena Maryana confirmed that co-operation in the field of labor and employment between Indonesia and Kuwait is progressing positively, indicating the discussions and technical arrangements are currently underway with the Kuwaiti government in employing healthcare specialists from the Indonesian nursing professionals to work in government hospitals, reports Al-Qabas daily.



Maryana

problems in Kuwait has witnessed a significant decrease over the past few years."

Cooperation

She noted that the Indonesian government expresses its appreciation for the cooperation between the two sides and the tremendous efforts made by both countries in protecting and ensuring the well-being of Indonesian migrant workers.

She also revealed that the embassy issued 299 tourist visas to the residents in Kuwait in 2023, adding that Kuwaitis and the citizens of other Gulf countries can obtain visa upon arrival in Jakarta.

She praised Kuwait's role, democracy and foreign policy;

tion and automobiles. She said this policy also aims to meet the growing demand for Indonesian workers and professionals in Kuwait.

She added: "The Indonesian government also gives priority to the protection of Indonesian workers abroad, including Kuwait. As a result, the number of Indonesian migrant workers facing

affirming that it plays an important role in the region, and is also one of the leading countries in the field of humanitarian and relief work, confirming the depth of diplomatic relations between her country and Kuwait.

Relations

She added: "Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Kuwait on Feb 28, 1968, and the opening of the Indonesian Embassy in Kuwait in April 1976, relations and cooperation between the two countries have been constantly strengthening and showing improvement in any field, whether at the bilateral, regional or international level."

She referred to the mutual visits between leaders and high-level officials of the two countries, stating that the two countries have signed many cooperation agreements.

She revealed the second meeting of the joint committee between the two countries will be held in Jakarta next year, indicating the first meeting was held in Kuwait in 2019 under the chairmanship of Indonesian Foreign Minister Dr Retno LP Marsudi and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

She added: "Indonesia and Kuwait share many common positions on a variety of regional and international issues. Kuwait

signed the instrument of accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) on Sept 4, 2023. The signing was supervised by Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah in Jakarta on the sidelines of the 43rd ASEAN Summit and related summits, making Kuwait the 54th country to join this treaty."

The Indonesian ambassador indicated that at the end of November 2023, a delegation headed by President of the Indonesian Supreme Court Professor Dr Muhammad Sharifuddin visited Kuwait. During this visit, the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Supreme Court of the Republic of Indonesia and the Supreme Judicial Council of the State of Kuwait regarding judicial cooperation.

Maryana also spoke about her country's support for the Palestinian cause, disclosing that during the 147th General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Luanda, Angola in October 2023, a delegation from the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia participated, along with delegations from Kuwait, Algeria, Iran and South Africa, in proposing an emergency clause on stopping the war and human rights violations against Gaza.

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad received, Wednesday, a cable from Armenia President Vahagn Khachatryan, congratulating His Highness the Amir on assuming post.

In the cable, the president wished His Highness the Amir good health and well-being as well as further success in leading Kuwait.

His Highness the Amir sent a reply cable to the president, expressing utmost appreciation for the heartfelt sentiments.

Also, His Highness the Amir received a cable from the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan, congratulating him on assuming the top office.

Laos

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad received a cable from Lao People's Democratic Republic President Thongloun Sisolouth, congratulating His Highness the Amir on assuming post.

In the cable, the president wished His Highness the Amir good health and further success in leading Kuwait.

His Highness the Amir sent a reply cable to the president, expressing utmost appreciation for the heartfelt sentiments.

Comoros

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal received a congratulatory cable from President of Comoros Azali Assoumani on assuming the top office.

His Highness the Amir sent a reply cable expressing utmost appreciation for the heartfelt sentiments.

Poland

His Highness the Amir received a cable from the President of Poland Andrzej Duda, congratulating him on assuming the top office.

In the cable, he wished him good health and further success in leading Kuwait into a much prosperous and promising future. In return, His Highness the Amir sent a cable to the president expressing his utmost appreciation for the kind words and heartfelt sentiments.

Chad

His Highness the Amir received a cable from President General Mahamat Deby, the President of the Republic of Chad, congratulating His Highness the Amir on assuming the office.

President Deby expressed his congratulations and wishing His Highness the Amir success and good health, prosperity and progress for Kuwait. His Highness the Amir sent a reply cable to the president expressing his appreciation for the heartfelt sentiments and wishing him good health.

Greece

His Highness the Amir received a cable from Greece's President Katrina Sakellariopoulou, congratulating His Highness the Amir on assuming the office.

President Sakellariopoulou expressed her sincere congratulations and wishing His Highness the Amir success and good health, prosperity and progress for Kuwait.

His Highness the Amir sent a reply cable to the president expressing his appreciation for the heartfelt sentiments and wishing her good health.

Japan

His Highness the Amir received a cable from Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, which congratulated His Highness the Amir on assuming post.

In the cable, Prime Minister Kishida wished His Highness the Amir and the Kuwaiti people ever more progress and development.

His Highness the Amir sent a reply cable thanking the Japanese official on his sincere sentiments, wishing him good health and Japan further progress.

Tanzania

The Embassy of the United Republic of Tanzania to the State of Kuwait wishes to extend its warmest congratulations and best wishes to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad as the seventeenth Amir of Kuwait, and wishing him all success in supporting the State of Kuwait's march towards progress and prosperity.

We look forward to strengthening our bilateral relations and achieving new horizon in the future in a way that serves the interests of our two friendly countries. We also wish His Highness the friendly Kuwaiti people on the occasion of coming of the New Year 2024 peace, security and prosperity.



Khachatryan



Sisolouth



Sakellariopoulou



Deputy FM Sheikh Jarrah Jaber receiving Ambassador Dr Balanutsa. KUNA photo

Deputy FM receives Ukrainian envoy

Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received on Wednesday, Ambassador of Ukraine to Kuwait Dr. Oleksandr Balanutsa. The two sides discussed bilateral relations and ways to bolster them. (KUNA)

Committee achieves 146 activities

Kuwait Society for Human Rights' panel issues report for year 2023

By Inass Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: The Permanent Committee for Complaints and Grievances at the Kuwait Society for Human Rights issued its statistical report for the year 2023, which included its activities and work in its various competencies stipulated in the Law No. 67/2015 on the establishment of the society.

According to the Chairman of the committee and a member of the society's Board of Directors Dr. Abdul Redha Asiri, the committee achieved 146 activities in 2023, received 39 complaints and grievances from various parties, and carried out two studies on human rights issues.

The committee held two seminars and conducted 19 field visits to various institutions such as prisons and other correctional institutions, detention centers, and social welfare centers. It also visited 12 police stations, issued 13 reports on its work, achieved cooperation with three civil society organizations, and participated in six media events and meetings, nine overseas meetings and conferences, and 26 local

meetings. The committee, through its various activities, was able to activate many practical programs for prisoners, with the cooperation of a number of civil society organizations and charity societies, led by the Human Construction Society for Social Development, and carried out public education activities in the fields of human rights through cooperation with the Center for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies at Kuwait University.

Dr. Asiri stressed that a number of complaints received by the committee were dealt with positively, indicating that the committee has many educational and dialogue programs, which will be announced at the right time, directed to the residents of social welfare homes such as juveniles, orphans, and the elderly, in addition to law enforcement officials.

He affirmed the keenness of the society to interact with regional and international organizations by participating in various official and training meetings in order to gain experience and learn about new policies and programs in the humanitarian field in general.

Biometric gates for Kuwaitis traveling to UK

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Kuwaitis and the citizens of 12 other countries outside the European Union, who are traveling to the United Kingdom, will be able to bypass passport checks within this year by using the biometric gates (biometric technology), reports Al-Seyassah daily quoting the London Times.

British Director General of Border Force at the Home Office Phil Douglas has been quoted as saying that the facial biometrics system will reduce friction compared to the

previously used facial recognition system. He affirmed that the new system is linked to the new British travel visa program -- Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA). He added British airports will replace 270 gates that include passport check offices within the next two years.

The British Embassy in Kuwait will start granting ETA in February, in addition to linking it to the immigration system to prevent unqualified travelers from boarding the plane.



January

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Licenses for tourist guide and consulting under review: MoCI

'DGCA keeping watch on brokers, flight and hotel reservations'

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: The recent actions taken by the Directorate-General Administration of Civil Aviation have sparked inquiries about their nature and whether they involve existing violations, reports Al-Anba daily.

These measures, implemented in the past days, encourage individuals engaged in tourism and travel activities under the administration's control to review and obtain approvals in accordance with prevailing laws and regulations.

The daily investigated the situa-

tion and found that the focus of this call is specifically on license holders providing tourism consultations and guidance (known as trip account holders). This pertains solely to offering advice without engaging in reservation procedures for airline tickets or hotels.

The DGCA oversees these activities to safeguard the interests of travelers and approved tourism and travel offices, preventing dealings with unlicensed entities amid a rise in fraudulent activities. Some license holders, initially falling un-

der specialized activities, have now come under civil aviation regulatory authority due to the nature of the services they currently provide.

Sources within the DGCA have confirmed that the activities of these license holders, including "brokers," are continually monitored for compliance with best practices, ensuring customer protection.

The Federation of Tourism and Travel Offices corroborates that these measures were not initiated due to complaints from them, but rather as proactive steps taken by

the administration to uphold market integrity.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry says licenses for tourist guide and consulting are under review in collaboration with the DGCA and according to an informed DGCA source those offering tourism guidance and consulting services, without engaging in ticket or hotel reservations, are being monitored for any practices inconsistent with the law.

The administration takes preventive measures against those violating

the law, including direct referrals to prosecution. Some were already referred before the holiday season.

Abdul Rahman Al-Kharafi, a member of the Board of Directors of the Kuwaiti Federation of Tourism and Travel Offices, commended the DGCA efforts in controlling practices within the Kuwaiti tourism and travel market.

He emphasized that these measures do not affect tourism and travel companies, as the work of license holders providing guidance aligns with the daily routines of these offices.

Furthermore, an official source from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry confirmed the suspension of licenses for organizing tourist trips and external tourist guidance based on a decision issued by the DGCA.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry is currently examining the legal aspects of the situation to reach a resolution with the General Administration of Civil Aviation. Notably, this activity falls under Ministerial Resolution No. 86 of 2023, amending Resolution No. 82 of 2023.

Amir appoints

Continued from Page 1

new premier since he resigned from the government headed by HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad and he now returns to power through the big door. He said the trust of the political leadership and satisfaction of the people entail that Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem must exert tremendous efforts; starting with the formation of the new government with the capability to address the citizens' demands, face current challenges and adhere to the legislative agenda which was approved by 48 MPs.

MP Abdulkareem Al-Kandari implored Allah Almighty to bless Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem with honest and competent advisors who can help him serve in the interest of the nation and its people.

MP Dawoud Maarefi also prayed that Allah Almighty will support Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem and grant him the strength to shoulder the responsibility.

MP Majed Al-Mutairi stressed the need for a comprehensive renaissance and convergence of views of the government and National Assembly in order to ratify laws in favor of the citizens.

MP Marzouq Al-Amera is hoping for the continuous cooperation between the executive and legislative authorities in order to accomplish the legislative agenda and protect the interests of citizens.

MP Marzouq Al-Ghanim praised the capabilities of the new premier whom he described as hardworking based on what he observed when they worked together during the latter's tenure as Foreign Affairs Minister while he chaired the Foreign Affairs Committee in the 13th parliamentary round. He urged HH the PM Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem to adhere to the directives included in the speech that HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah delivered on Dec 30, 2023 to correct the mistakes of the former government and to dismiss whoever is proven to have contributed to corruption, which damaged the nation's interests.

MP Badr Nashmi Al-Anzi asked Allah Almighty to help Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem and provide him with the best advisors in order to fulfill the citizens' demands.

MP Osama Al-Shaheen affirmed the people are very optimistic and they are looking forward to an era of reforms and progress based on cooperation.

MP Muhammad Al-Regaib prayed that Allah Almighty will help Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem in leading the government towards justice, development and cooperation with the Assembly in the interest of citizens.

MP Adel Al-Damkhi also expressed gratitude to HH the former Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and his government for cooperating with the Assembly.

MP Hamad Al-Medlej implored Allah Almighty to support the new premier in shouldering such a huge responsibility. He disclosed that he will support whoever is committed to the Constitution, focuses on the citizens' demands and cooperates with the Assembly.

MP Saud Al-Asfour urged the newly appointed prime minister to choose the members of his government based on professional criteria, not favoritism. He also thanked HH the former Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for cooperating with the Assembly, especially since this led to the ratification of important bills.

MP Osama Al-Zaid praised Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem, stressing the latter protected his reputation when he resigned in protest against corruption. He said the people of Kuwait loved the father of Sheikh Mohammad Al-Salem -- HH the late Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah, affirming this love will be passed on to the son.

Assembly to

Continued from Page 1

grant zero interest loans to retirees, increase the cost of living allowance, transform Kuwait Airways Corporation into a shareholding national company, and exempt the heirs of those who obtained loans from Kuwait Credit Bank from paying the remaining installments in case of the death of the borrowers;

- Reports of the Interior and Defense Affairs Committee on the proposal to amend the Traffic and Police laws;

- Report of the Illegal Residents Affairs Committee about the bills on granting social, civil and career rights to Bedouins;

- Report of the Human Resources Development Committee on the proposed amendment of Civil Service Commission Law number 15/1979;

- Report of the Public Funds Protection Committee on the proposed amendment of the Public Funds Protection Law;

- Report of the Health, Social and Labor Affairs Committee on the proposed amendment of the Cooperative Societies Law;

- Report of the Family, Women and Children Affairs Committee on the proposal to grant rights to the children of Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaitis;

- Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee on the military cooperation treaty between Kuwait and Turkey;

- Request of several MPs to discuss the strategic alternative to the salary scale with the government;

- Request to discuss the factors leading to price hikes;

- Request to discuss the procedures and criteria adopted to fill up vacant supervisory posts;

- Request to form a fact-finding committee to investigate the Dhaman Hospital issue and violations recorded by the State Audit Bureau.

On the other hand, Chairman of the Education, Culture and Guidance Affairs Committee MP Hamad Al-Elyan has disclosed the that the committee, along with members of the Technical Office, will travel to Qatar on Friday to personally look into the educational sector there.

He said the official trip, which will last for four days, will include meetings with senior officials at the Qatari Ministry of Education to discuss the strategy that put education in Qatar in first place among Arab countries and fourth in the world as per the internationally accredited indexes. He confirmed that the visit is aimed at transferring the Qatari education experience to Kuwait, while the committee will use such experience as reference for the completion of its reports on the relevant bills. He added the committee will discuss these reports with the senior officials at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in preparation for the session scheduled for April 30, 2024 to vote on the bills about the development of the local educational sector and its outputs.

Meanwhile, MP Saud Al-Asfour forwarded queries to Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and acting Minister of Public Works Jassem Al-Ostad about the statement of former Secretary General of the Sustainable Peaceful Nuclear Energy Committee Ahmed Beshara in 2010 that "by 2022, Kuwait would have established four nuclear reactors for peaceful purposes with a capacity of 1,000 megawatts per hour. The necessary steps are being taken to float the tenders and allocate the sites for the project."

Al-Asfour revealed that in 2010, Kuwait and Japan signed an agreement to cooperate in the development of nuclear energy and to push for the export of nuclear energy as part of the State's strategy to boost the economy. He added Kuwait signed a treaty on nuclear cooperation with France in April 2010 to allow ARIVA Company to export nuclear energy to Kuwait.

Based on the above, the lawmaker wants to know the achievements of the committee since its establishment till date, if Kuwait has benefited from the agreements it signed with Japan and France in 2010, and if the ministry has a strategy to establish nuclear energy reactors. If yes, he requested for details, including the terms and schedule of establishment.

MP Majed Al-Mutairi asked Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Oil, Economic and Investment Affairs Saad Al-Barrak to provide him with information about the fire incident at the gathering center of Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) on Dec 3, 2023. He inquired if the incident resulted in death or injuries, period and cost needed to repair the damages and put the center back to full operation, if a fact-finding committee was formed to investigate the incident, copy of the committee's report if the answer is "yes", if the incident occurred in an area that belongs to a contracting company, copy of the contract if the answer is "yes", measures taken to prevent the recurrence of such incidents, and the department at the Ministry of Oil tasked to ensure strict compliance with the safety and security regulations.

MP Hamad Al-Elyan asked Minister of Finance Fahd Al-Jarallah to provide him with copies of all decisions issued by Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) regarding the Abdally Economic Project. He said KDIPA has taken the necessary step to float the tender for the project as per circular number 1/2023 regarding public tenders issued by the Ministry of Finance, specifically the stipulation on obligating the foreign investor to establish and manage infrastructure and enterprises in the project site for a term of 50 years. He affirmed that the project is covered by Partnership Projects Law number 116/2014.

Kuwait tightens

Continued from Page 1

In case of violations, the Central Bank does not hesitate to impose rigorous financial penalties, with a maximum limit of 500,000 dinars, and administrative penalties as stipulated in the law. The applied penalties are presented at the general assembly meeting of the offending bank.

The Central Bank is committed to its role in combating money laundering and terrorist financing operations, closely monitoring entities under its supervision to ensure compliance with all legal requirements and instructions. The Central Bank collaborates with relevant parties, including the Investigation Unit and judicial authorities, taking measures to strengthen the integrity of the banking and financial sector.

Regarding reporting suspicious operations, the sources clarify that Article 12 of the law mandates financial institutions, including banks, to notify the FIU, not the Central Bank, without delay, if there is sufficient evidence to suspect that funds involved in a transaction are derived from a crime or are linked to money laundering or terrorist financing.

Entities supervised by the Central Bank adhere to their duties in accordance with the law and decisions issued by the Security Council Resolutions Implementation Committee. Banks abstain from dealing with individuals listed by the Office of Foreign Assets Control at the US Treasury Department (OFAC) and comply with instructions regarding anti-money laundering and terrorist financing requirements.

The Investigation Unit, having independent legal personality, is not affiliated with the Central Bank. Its responsibilities include receiving reports, requesting information related to suspected proceeds from a crime or funds linked to money laundering or terrorist financing, and subsequently analyzing and forwarding relevant information to the Public Prosecution and competent authorities for necessary actions.

Kuwait tops

Continued from Page 1

spending amid increased oil prices. Despite this, certain Gulf countries experienced lower increases in specific sectors due to government support.

The research assessed the impact of inflation on three sectors -- food, housing services, and fuel -- in Gulf countries. The report highlighted that the Gulf's elevated inflation rates stem from a significant dependence on imports, double that of advanced economies, exacerbated by global market challenges like geopolitical tensions and the conflict in Ukraine disrupting supply chains.

Kuwait emerged as the Gulf country with the lowest fuel prices and the second-lowest in the Arab world. It experienced a marginal 1% decrease from global price averages between 2019 and 2022, ranking just behind Algeria. Notably, all Arab countries surveyed demonstrated lower changes in fuel prices compared to the global average, except for the UAE.

Kuwait's annual imports accounted for 43% of its gross domestic product, positioning it third among Gulf nations. The UAE topped the list with an 80% import-to-GDP ratio, followed by Bahrain at 68%. Oman ranked fourth at 42%, while Qatar and Saudi Arabia had the lowest ratios at 38% and 29%, respectively.

In terms of the import-to-trade-exchange ratio index (value of imports + value of exports), Kuwait led with a percentage ranging between 41% and 46%, surpassing other Gulf nations. Qatar recorded the lowest rate in this category.

The contribution of housing and food services to the rise in inflation rates varied across Gulf countries. Kuwait led in the contribution of food price increases, while Qatar took the lead in housing services. Kuwait also ranked second in the overall contribution of housing services to inflation rates, after Qatar.

The report highlighted the decline in the contribution of food price increases in other Gulf countries, with Saudi Arabia experiencing a gradual decrease from 2020 to the previous year. The UAE saw a neutral impact in 2021.

Technical workers

Continued from Page 1

that will be determined by the memorandum between the two parties, especially since these tests will work to raise the level of the technical proficiency of those working in Kuwait to help develop the labor market.

The statement indicated that the first professions that will be subject to tests and obtain work permits will be in the contracting sector, in order to raise the efficiency of this sector and protect the Kuwaiti family from fraud and poor implementation.

PAM added that there are upcoming steps to develop a mechanism for issuing a skill classification so that there are levels of employment according to skill and experience that will be decided in the future.

Al-Shoula issues decision on 'administrative grievances'

'Enhancing accountability'

By Mohammed Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: The Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and the Minister of State for Communication Affairs Fahad Al-Shoula issued a decision recently, regarding grievances against administrative decisions.

The decision, in its First Article, stressed that the provisions of the decision must be adhered to regarding the procedures for submitting grievances against administrative decisions, as well as the procedures for deciding on the grievances against administrative decisions regarding appointments to public positions, promotions, or terminations of service, or imposition of disciplinary sanctions submitted by ministry employees to the minister or the undersecretary, with the exception of the decisions to terminate service based on a decision by the Council of Ministers.

Grievance

In its Second Article, the decision stated that the grievance must include the following data - the name of the grievant, his position and address, the date of issuance of the relevant decision against which the grievance has been submitted, the date of its publication in the official gazette or in the bulletins issued by the ministry, the date of the grievant's announcement, the subject of the decision being appealed against, and the reasons on which the grievance is based. It must also include the documents that the complainant sees fit to be attached to the grievance.

In its Third Article, the decision explained that the grievances against the administrative decisions referred to in the first article of the decision must be submitted to the department of the office of the minister or the undersecretary. The department, upon receiving the grievance, must record it in a special register with a serial number indicating the date. Upon submission, the complainant must be given a receipt showing the grievance number, date of receipt, and the recipient's name and signature. The grievance should then be referred to the ministry's Legal Department in accordance with the procedures established in this regard.

In its Fourth Article, the decision clarified that all ministry employees must submit their grievances within the legally prescribed deadlines using the grievance form attached to the decision and published on the ministry's website. They must fill out all the data necessary to examine the grievance, and attach all documents indicating the subject, after which it should be submitted to the concerned department to study the grievance and take the necessary measures to decide on it in accordance with the provisions of this decision.



Fahad Al-Shoula



Photo by Mohammad Morsi

People at the PACI headquarters to collect their civil IDs after the end of New Year holidays.

Major events in Kuwait during 2023

March 2: Representative of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah headed the state's delegation to the non-aligned movement summit taking place in Baku, capital of Azerbaijan.

March 5: Qatari Amir received Representative of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah who headed the state's delegation to the United Nations' fifth conference for least developed countries in capital, Doha.

March 7: State minister of social affairs and societal development and state minister for women and childhood affairs, Mai Al-Baghlhi, gave a speech to the UN Security Council.

March 7: Deputy Foreign Minister ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi delivered Kuwait's speech foreign terrorist fighters work group meeting, hosted by Kuwait.

March 8: Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah headed Kuwait's delegation to 159th Arab foreign ministers consultative meeting held at the Arab bloc's headquarters in Cairo.

March 12: Kuwaiti delegation, headed by Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah, took part in ninth session of Kuwaiti-Omani joint committee.

March 17: Top diplomat Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah headed Kuwaiti delegation to Organization of Islamic Development foreign ministers' council meeting in its 49th session and taking place in capital of Mauritania, Nouakchott.

March 21: First round of strategic dialogue meetings between Kuwait and the United Kingdom kick started in the capital, London.

March 21: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah held talks with British Minister of State for Investment in the Department for International Trade, Lord Dominic Johnson, and a number of high officials, as part of the minister's official visit to Britain.

March 22: Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah headed the Kuwaiti delegation to Gulf Cooperation Council ministerial meeting, in its 155th session held at the bloc's headquarters in Riyadh.

March 23: Kuwait's ambassador to Indian Jassem Al-Najem gave a speech at the Shanghai organization international conference.

March 25: Permanent Envoy to the UN ambassador Tareq al-Bannai gave the country's statement to the UN's water conference.

March 26: The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs announced Kuwaiti' pledge to donate around USD 90 million to aid survivors of the Syria, Turkiye earthquake.

March 29: Kuwait's permanent envoy to UNESCO Adam Al-Mulla participated in a symposium on open science in Paris.

March 29: Kuwait participated in ninth round of Berlin Energy Transition Dialogue Conference.

March 30: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah received invitation from Emirati counterpart Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahayan to attend 14th edition of Sir Baniyas forum,

slated to take place from December 8 to December 10 of 2023.

April 6: UN refugees agency signed an MoU with the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development to support refugees and displaced persons in the Middle East and North Africa.

April 22: Ministry of Foreign Affairs began evacuating Kuwaiti citizens from Sudan following armed conflicts.

April 30: Sheikha Al-Zain Al-Sabah submitted her credentials to US President Joe Biden as Kuwait Ambassador in Washington.

May 3: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah met President of the UN General Assembly at the Foreign Ministry.

May 6: Kuwait signed an MoU to join the Shanghai cooperation organization as an observer.

May 15: Foreign Ministry announced sabotage of the residence of the military attaché in Khartoum, Sudan.

June 3: Kuwait donated USD two million to the UN Palestinian refugees' agency (UNRWA) for 2023.

June 3: His Highness the Amir's representative, Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem arrived in Ankara to attend inauguration of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan following his re-election.

June 3: Kuwait's ambassador to Canada Reen Al-Khaled won the 2023 Best Middle East ambassador to Canada award in recognition of her contributions since assuming her post in 2019.

June 19: Kuwait and Japan waived diplomatic and private passport holder from entry visa.

June 20: Kuwait Embassy in Islamabad announced a donation of USD 970,000 to support victims of floods in Pakistan.

June 23: Foreign Ministry and UN anti-terrorism office signed MoU to boost cooperation and exchange information against terrorism.

July 3: The Foreign Ministry asserted that the natural resources of the Durra field are fully owned by Kuwait and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in response to Iranian claims.

July 4: The Foreign Ministry handed Egyptian ambassador to the country a memorandum requesting legal action to be taken against person who posted video burning national flag.

July 5: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah headed Kuwaiti delegation to non-aligned movement ministerial meeting in capital of Azerbaijan, Baku.

July 10: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah headed Kuwaiti delegation participating in sixth ministerial meeting for strategic dialogue between GCC and Russia held in capital Moscow.

July 10: Kuwait joined with a group of Muslim countries to prepare draft law to ban desecration of holy sanctities.

July 27: The state of Kuwait submitted written memo requesting that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) adopts an opinion on the consequences of continued Israeli occupation violations against the Palestinian people.

July 13: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah headed to Iraqi capital of Baghdad on an officials visit to hold a number of meetings and engage in political negotiations.

To be continued

World News Roundup

Europe

'Uncertain effectiveness'

'UK isn't cooperating to curb migrant crossings'

PARIS, Jan 4, (AP): The United Kingdom is not sufficiently coordinating with France in efforts to reduce the number of migrants crossing the English Channel in small boats, according to a French report that points to the "uncertain effectiveness" of illegal migration policies.

France is "struggling to develop operational cooperation arrangements" with the U.K., according to the report published Thursday by France's Court of Accounts, a body in charge of auditing the use of public funds, independent from the government and parliament.

The report refers in particular to a joint intelligence unit created in 2020 to fight human smuggling and reduce the number of people risking their lives to cross the Channel illegally. In 2022, it helped dismantle seven illegal migration networks.

The Court "found that the British don't provide usable information on the departures of small boats, and give very general, first-level information that has not been counter-checked."

Information on the circumstances in which migrants arrive and their nationalities and on boats "appears to be very patchy," the report said. "The relationship between France and the UK is therefore unbalanced in terms of information and intelligence exchange."

The U.K. Defense Ministry estimated that crossings of the English Channel by boat increased by at least 58% between 2021 and 2022, a year that saw over 45,000 migrants arrested on British shores.

The report said 56% of crossing attempts were prevented that same year - unchanged from the year before.

The British government announced this week that the number of migrants crossing fell by more than a third in 2023, to just under 26,000. The U.K. Home Office said Wednesday that another 26,000 "of these dangerous, illegal and unnecessary crossing attempts were prevented in 2023 thanks to our partnership with France."

France in recent years has stepped up efforts to prevent migrants from crossing the Channel, including through more police, equipment and facilities. The country received 222 million euros (\$243 million) from the U.K. from 2018 to 2022 as part of a bilateral agreement and British Prime Minister **Rishi Sunak** last March promised 541 million euros for the 2023-2026 period.

Migrants

The number of people living illegally in France is unknown, but researchers from the Pew Research Center estimated their numbers in 2017 to be between 300,000 and 400,000, in a country of 67 million inhabitants. This is about three times fewer migrants with no legal status than in the U.K. and Germany.

The Court of Account's report assessed a series of other issues related to illegal immigration policies, which were subject to 133 changes in law in the past decade.

It pointed to the difficulty of implementing orders to leave the national territory, despite France carrying out the most deportations in the European Union. Over 150,000 such decisions were made in 2022 and only 10% of the concerned people actually left, it said.

Amid recent debate over an immigration bill that focused largely on how to speed up the deportation process, the report said that "international comparisons suggest that a change of scale is not realistic" regarding such policies.

U.K. authorities sent back about 3,500 people to their home country and Germany sent back about 13,000 people in 2022, according to statistics gathered by the French Interior Ministry.

Reasons listed in the report include French authorities' difficulty to prove the identity of the concerned migrants, reluctance from home countries to issue authorization to let them in and refusal by commercial airlines and plane pilots to take them onboard.

The Court of Account instead suggested enacting policies that would encourage migrants to voluntarily move back to their home countries by offering them money. Such policies have been proven to have "significant efficiency," the Court said, noting that France is lagging behind the UK and Germany in that respect.

Pierre Moscovici, head of the Court of Account, said Thursday the body also recommends a better organization of border guards and police to make them more efficient, noting that more people are illegally crossing the border, mostly from Italy and Spain, in recent years.

Irregular immigration costs France about 1.8 billion euros each year and involves 16,000 state employees, police and military, the Court said.

Also:

MOSCOW: Russia and Ukraine on Wednesday exchanged hundreds of prisoners of war in the biggest single release of captives since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022.

Ukrainian authorities said that 230 Ukrainian prisoners of war returned home in the first exchange in almost five months. Russia's Defense Ministry said that 248 Russian servicemen have been freed under the deal sponsored by the **United Arab Emirates**.

The UAE's Foreign Ministry attributed the successful swap to the "strong friendly relations between the UAE and both the Russian Federation and the Republic of Ukraine, which were supported by sustained calls at the highest levels."

The UAE has maintained close economic ties with Moscow despite Western sanctions and pressure on Russia after it launched its invasion in 2022.

Ukraine's human rights ombudsman, **Dmytro Lubinets**, said it was the 49th prisoner exchange during the war. Some of the Ukrainians had been held since 2022. Among them were some of those who fought in milestone battles for Ukraine's **Snake Island** and the Ukrainian city of **Mariupol**.

Russian officials offered no other details of the exchange.

Also Wednesday, Russia said it shot down 12 missiles fired at one of its southern regions bordering Ukraine, as **Kyiv's** forces seek to embarrass the Kremlin and puncture President **Vladimir Putin's** argument that life is going on as normal despite the fighting.

The situation in the border city of **Belgorod**, which came under two rounds of shelling on Wednesday morning, "remains tense," said regional Gov. **Vyacheslav Gladkov**, writing on Telegram.

"Air defense systems worked," he said, promising more details about possible damage after inspecting the area later in the day, part of a New Year's holiday week in Russia.



Sunak



From left, Queen Margrethe, Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Mary receive the diplomatic corps on occasion of the New Year at Christiansborg Palace, Copenhagen, Denmark, Wednesday, Jan. 3, 2024. (AP)

Denmark's queen makes one last public appearance

Europe's longest reigning monarch Queen Margrethe rode through Denmark's capital Thursday in a gilded, horse-drawn coach as she concluded her last New Year celebrations before her abdication later this month.

Thousands braved the freezing temperatures, strong winds, snow and sleet to cheer the popular queen

along the route in what is to be her last public appearance as monarch. She will step down on Jan. 14 after 52 years on the throne.

The 83-year-old monarch will hand the throne to her oldest son, Crown Prince Frederik in the first such resignation in Europe's oldest ruling monarchy in nearly 900 years.

Margrethe rode in the so-called

Gold Coach - pulled by six white horses - that is used when the monarch rides from the royal residence at the Amalienborg Palace to the Christiansborg Palace during the traditional New Year's fete with officers from the Armed Forces, among others.

The monarch wore a fur coat and white gloves in the closed 19th-century

coach covered in 24-karat gold leaf and topped with four gilded crowns on the roof. It was escorted by members of the Hussar Regiment in blue uniforms with red jackets.

Earlier this week, Queen Margrethe held a series of events to greet the Danish government, parliament, top civilian and military officials and foreign diplomats. (AP)

America

One attack, two interpretations

Biden, Trump politicize Jan 6 riot

WASHINGTON, Jan 4, (AP): Former President Donald Trump will spend Saturday's third anniversary of the Jan. 6 insurrection on the campaign trail in Iowa, holding two rallies in his bid to win back the White House.

That is set to come a day after President Joe Biden visits a site near Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, where George Washington and the struggling Continental Army endured a tough winter during the American Revolution. His advisers say the stop in a critical swing state will highlight Trump's role in the Capitol riot and be a chance for him to lay out the stakes of this year's election.

With Biden and Trump now headed toward a potential 2020 rematch, both are talking about the same event in very different ways and offering framing they believe gives them an advantage. The dueling narratives reflect how an attack that disrupted the certification of the election is increasingly viewed differently along partisan lines - and how Trump has bet that the riot won't hurt his candidacy.

Rioters loyal to Trump stormed the Capitol building in an attempt to stop Congress from certifying Biden's victory, forcing lawmakers and then-Vice President Mike Pence to flee for their lives. Many walked to the Capitol after a rally outside the White House in which Trump exhorted the crowd to "fight like hell" or "you're not going to have a country anymore."

Nine deaths were linked to the attack and 700-plus people have gone

to court for their roles in it, with more than 450 sentenced to prison.

Federal prosecutors in Washington have charged Trump in connection with the riot, citing his promotion of false and debunked theories of election fraud and efforts to overturn the results. Trump has pleaded not guilty and continued to lie about the 2020 election.

The former president has still built a commanding lead in the Republican primary, and his rivals largely refrain from criticizing him about Jan 6. He has called it a beautiful day and described those imprisoned for the insurrection as "great, great patriots" and "hostages." He has played at some of his rallies a recording of "The Star-Spangled Banner" sung by jailed rioters interspersed with him reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Economic policies

Republican strategist Alice Stewart said that "a lot of Republican voters don't love Jan. 6, but they're not obsessed about it either" and may support Trump because they oppose Biden's economic policies.

"Republican voters can hold two consecutive thoughts and say, 'Jan. 6, that wasn't great, but that doesn't affect my bottom line,'" she said.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis called Jan. 6 a "protest" that "ended up devolving," and has more recently said Trump "should have come out more forcefully" against the rioters. Former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley frequently tells crowds that Jan. 6 "was not a beautiful day, it was a ter-

rible day."

But views overall of the attack have hardened along partisan lines.

In the days after the attack, 52% of U.S. adults said Trump bore a lot of responsibility for Jan. 6, according to the Pew Research Center. By early 2022, that had declined to 43%. The number of Americans who said Trump bore no responsibility also increased to 32% in 2022 compared to 24% in 2021.

A Washington Post-University of Maryland poll released this week found that about 7 in 10 Republicans say too much is being made of the attack. Just 18% of GOP supporters say that protesters who entered the Capitol were "mostly violent," down from 26% in 2021, while 77% of Democrats and 54% of independents say the protesters were mostly violent - essentially unchanged from 2021.

A December poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, meanwhile, found that 87% of Democrats and 54% of independents believe a second Trump term would negatively affect U.S. democracy. Some 82% of Republicans believe democracy would be weakened by another Biden win, with 56% of independents agreeing.

Biden marked the first anniversary of the riot in 2022 by standing inside the Capitol's National Statuary Hall - which was flooded by pro-Trump rioters during the attack - to suggest that his predecessor and his supporters had had "a dagger at the throat of America."

not disclose the identity of the men - who were detained over the weekend - but released images of the suspects with their faces blurred.

In a statement issued hours before, the ministry said that one of those arrested was a Syrian national who carried passports from Venezuela and Colombia bearing his name. The nationalities of the other two

men were not disclosed, but Bullrich said the men previously had used documents of various nationalities.

"We do not know if their names are the real ones," Bullrich told reporters.

The Colombian government said in a statement later Wednesday that it had been notified about the arrest of Chassan Naem Chatay, who since May 2022 has been Colombian by adop-

tion, one of the ways to obtain nationality. The government said it will provide him with consular assistance, but did not say if the man is of Syrian origin. (AP)

□ □ □

Mexico rescues 31 migrants: Mexican authorities on Wednesday rescued 31 migrants who had been abducted over the weekend by armed men near the border with Texas, officials said.

Presidential spokesman Jesús Ramírez said via X that the migrants were now under government protection. The operation was carried out by the Tamaulipas state prosecutor's office, the army and the national guard, he said. The rescue was confirmed by Interior Secretary Luisa Alcalde.

Armed and masked men on Saturday stopped the bus on the highway that connects the border cities of Reynosa and Matamoros, Federal Security Secretary Rosa Icela Rodríguez said. They made all 36 people aboard get off and then took 31 of them away in five vehicles.

The abducted migrants were from Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Honduras and Mexico, she said. Colombian President Gustavo Petro said Tuesday that four Colombians were among the abducted.

Rodríguez said Wednesday that the search for the abductees included tracking their cell phones, reviewing surveillance video from the bus and scanning the area by helicopter for signs of the missing.

The bus had left the northern city of Monterrey and had a final destination of Matamoros. It was intercepted near Rio Bravo. (AP)



Puerto Rico Gov. Pedro Pierluisi gives a press conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Aug. 6, 2019. The governor's office must stop using the slogan 'Making things happen' to promote the administration's work because it looks like election campaigning, election officials said Jan. 3, 2024. Pierluisi is seeking a second term in a 2024 election. (AP)



Bukele



Bullrich

Latin America

El Salvador Prez expands campaign: El Salvador's Nayib Bukele took his presidential reelection campaign beyond the tiny Central American country's borders Wednesday night to capitalize on his rising profile across Latin America.

During a two-hour forum on the platform X, Bukele accused critics of his controversial policies - including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and international institutions like it - of trying to keep El Salvador and other developing nations down.

Bukele was granted a six-month leave from the presidency starting in December to run for reelection - despite a constitutional ban on reelection. Congress approved the president's selection of his private secretary to be the country's interim leader.

The Supreme Court, stacked with justices selected by Bukele's allies in Congress, ruled in 2021 that Bukele could seek a second five-year term in the Feb. 4 election.

Asked Wednesday if he would seek to change the constitution to allow his indefinite reelection, Bukele said he would not.

In April 2023, the commission called on El Salvador to lift the state of emergency instituted in March 2022 that allowed Bukele's administration to step up its fight against the country's powerful gangs. The state of emergency suspends some fundamental rights like police having to inform people of the reason for their arrest or give them access to an attorney. (AP)

□ □ □

Argentina nabs 3 terror suspects: Authorities in Argentina are investigating three men, including a Syrian national, who were detained in Buenos Aires and surrounding areas on suspicion of being part of a terror cell, the government announced Wednesday.

Security Minister **Patricia Bullrich** did



Puerto Rico Gov. Pedro Pierluisi gives a press conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Aug. 6, 2019. The governor's office must stop using the slogan 'Making things happen' to promote the administration's work because it looks like election campaigning, election officials said Jan. 3, 2024. Pierluisi is seeking a second term in a 2024 election. (AP)

North Korea

'Most beloved'

Jong Un daughter seen as likely 'heir apparent'

SEOUL, Jan 4, (AP) — The young daughter of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is seen as her father's likely heir apparent, South Korea's spy agency said Thursday, its first such assessment on the girl who was unveiled to the outside world a little more than a year ago.

There has been intense outside debate and speculation about the girl, reportedly about 10 years old and named Ju Ae, since she made her first public appearance in November 2022, when she watched a long-range missile test-launch with her father.

The girl has since accompanied her father at a number of major public events, with state media calling her father's "most beloved" or "respected" child and churning out footage and photos proving her rising political standing and closeness with her father.



Jong Un

A senior general knelt and whispered to her when she clapped while watching a military parade at a VIP observation stand in September. She was photographed standing in front of her father at one point during a visit to the air force headquarters in November, with both Kims wearing sunglasses and long leather jackets. In a New Year's Eve celebration at a packed Pyongyang stadium Sunday, Kim Jong Un

kissed her on the cheek and she did the same to her father.

Most of these scenes are something that had been unimaginable in North Korea, where Kim is the subject of a strong and loyal following that treats him like god.

South Korea's main spy agency, the National Intelligence Service, said Thursday that it sees Kim Ju Ae as her father's highly likely successor, citing a comprehensive analysis of her public activities and the state protocols provided to her.

The NIS public affairs office told The Associated Press that it still considers all possibilities regarding the North's power succession process because Kim is still young, has no major health issues, and has at least one other child. Kim turns 40 on Monday.

The NIS statement confirmed the comments by lawmaker Youn Kun-Young, who cited the nominee for the NIS chief, Cho Tae-yong. Youn said Cho made the same assessment in written responses to his questions ahead of his parliamentary hearing.

In phone conversations with the AP, Youn, a member of parliament's intelligence committee, reconfirmed Cho's assessment, which matched what the NIS told the AP. He said Cho's written responses to his questions contained no other details about Kim Ju Ae.

The NIS has a spotty record in confirming developments in North Korea, one of the world's most secretive nations. North Korea's state media have yet to make any direct comments on the succession plan.

Du Hyeogn Cha, an analyst at Seoul's Asan Institute for Policy Studies, said while the NIS currently sees a high possibility for Kim Ju Ae to be primed as her father's successor, few can predict whether she would eventually become the North's next leader. Cha added that Kim Ju Ae lacks political achievements that he said are essential to be formally anointed as the country's future leader.

NIS and other South Korean officials earlier said it was premature to view Kim Ju Ae as her father's heir, given Kim Jong Un's relatively young age and North Korea's Confucianism-influenced, male-nominated power ranking. They had said the girl's repeated appearances were more likely meant to shore up public support of Kim's ruling family and his plan to hand over his power to one of his children.

Since its foundation in 1948, North Korea has been successively ruled by male members of the Kim family. Kim Jong Un inherited power upon his father Kim Jong Il's death in late 2011. Kim Jong Il took over power after his father and state founder Kim Il Sung when he died in 1994.

The name of Ju Ae matched what retired NBA star Dennis Rodman called Kim's baby daughter, whom he said he saw and held during a trip to Pyongyang in 2013. In 2023, the NIS told lawmakers Kim Ju Ae has an older brother and a younger sibling whose gender has not been made public.

Also:

SEOUL: The powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has derided South Korea's conservative president for being "foolishly brave" but called his liberal predecessor "smart" - rhetoric likely meant to help stoke domestic divisions in South Korea.

Her statement Tuesday came as a response to South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's New Year's Day address, in which he said he would bolster South Korea's military capability and enhance its alliance with the U.S. to cope with North Korea's evolving nuclear threats.

Since taking office in 2022, Yoon has made such comments numerous times. Kim's sister, Kim Yo Jong, used Yoon's latest remarks as an opportunity to fire off derisive rhetoric against him.

"Since his inauguration he's been clamoring for the strengthening of the South Korea-U.S. extended deterrence and focusing on their joint military drills, bringing the fate of South Korea to the brink," Kim Yo Jong said in a statement carried by state media. She said that Yoon's "ability to think and reason are questionable."

Kim Yo Jong said that Yoon's "foolishly brave" stance and "fanatical military confrontation posture" have given North Korea a golden opportunity to beef up its military programs. She said Yoon's New Year's Day speech once again provided North Korea with a reason and a justification to obtain "more overwhelming nuclear capability."

Later she compared Yoon with his liberal predecessor Moon Jae-in, calling the former South Korean president "smart" and "cunning."

She said that Moon's appeasement policy left North Korea wasting time and failing to press forward with its arms build-up programs. She said Moon solicited North Korea to halt missile and nuclear tests while beeping up South Korea's own national security by procuring advanced U.S. fighter jets and winning U.S. consent in acquiring more powerful missiles.

Her praise of Moon lacks sincerity, because she and her government have previously berated him severely. Some observers say Kim Yo Jong may be seeking to boost anti-Yoon sentiments in South Korea among those opposing his North Korea policy ahead of April's parliamentary elections.



Burnt Japan Airlines plane is seen at Haneda Airport on Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024, in Tokyo, Japan. (AP)

At least 163 flights canceled due to Tokyo airport collision

At least 163 domestic flights to and from Tokyo's Haneda Airport were canceled Thursday, affecting some 34,000 passengers following an aircraft collision on Tuesday evening, according to the airlines.

Japan Airlines Co. announced the cancellation of 68 Haneda-involved domestic flights, while All Nippon Air-

ways Co. grounded 95 domestic flights, urging passengers to stay updated with the latest flight information.

On Tuesday, Japan Airlines Airbus A350 landing at Haneda Airport collided with a Japan Coast Guard plane on the runway, causing both aircraft to burst into flames. All 379 JAL passengers and crew

escaped via evacuation slides, but five of the six people aboard the Coast Guard plane were killed.

The Coast Guard aircraft was on its way to provide emergency goods for disaster-hit areas on the Noto Peninsula, which was hit by the magnitude 7.6 earthquakes on New Year's Day. (KUNA)



Kaung Sett Lin (center), photojournalist, is welcomed by family members and colleagues after he was released from Insein Prison in Yangon, Myanmar, Jan. 4, 2024. Myanmar's military government on Thursday pardoned nearly 10,000 prisoners to mark the 76th anniversary of gaining independence from Britain, but it wasn't immediately clear if any of those released included the thousands of political detainees jailed for opposing army rule. (AP)



Khan



Sharif

Subcontinent

Ex-Pakistan PM Khan indicted: A Pakistani court on Wednesday indicted imprisoned former Prime Minister Imran Khan in a contempt case for allegedly insulting election officials, his defense lawyer said.

The indictment is another blow for Khan, who is serving time on a corruption conviction and has multiple other legal cases hanging over him.

It also comes days after election officials rejected Khan's nomination papers, blocking his attempt to contest parliamentary polls on Feb. 8.

Khan is accused of calling the head of the Election Commission, Sikandar Sultan Rajaa, and other officials "personal servants" of former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Sharif replaced Khan in April 2022 after he was ousted from power in a no-confidence vote in Parliament by his political opponents. Since then, government agencies have pursued him in the courts.

The 71-year-old former cricketer is the country's most popular opposition figure. Khan's lawyer, Naeem Haider Panjutha, said Khan was indicted at Adiala Prison in Rawalpindi.

He said during the court hearing, Khan pleaded not guilty when the charges were read to him. One of Khan's former deputies, Fawad Chaudhry, was also indicted on the same charges.

Election officials say they rejected Khan's candidacy because of his corruption conviction. (AP)

Indian Navy stays on mission: Indian authorities said on Wednesday that its Navy is continuously monitoring maritime security situation in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

A statement from the Indian Ministry of Defense said Indian Naval ships and aircraft remain mission deployed for maintaining strong surveillance and undertaking maritime security operations in the North and Central Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

The ministry added that several agencies of maritime security have been closely monitoring ships, especially the Indian flagged merchant vessels, navigating in

Japan

Essential supplies running short

Scenes of grief as quake toll hits 81

SUZU, Japan, Jan 4, (AP) — His face hidden under a humble straw hat, the man stood silent, watching several helmeted rescue workers carefully lift his wife's body from the rubble, wrapped in blue plastic on a stretcher.

He wiped his weary face with a rag. His eyes were red.

This scene in the city of Suzu was tragically repeated across Ishikawa Prefecture and nearby regions on the western coastline of Japan after Monday's 7.6 magnitude temblor that decimated houses, twisted and scarred roads and scattered boats like toys in the waters, and prompted tsunami warnings.

The death toll stood at 81 people as of Thursday.

Ishikawa officials said 47 of those who died were in the city of Wajima and 23 were in Suzu. The 11 others were reported in five neighboring towns. More than 330 people have been injured, at least 25 seriously.

Those reported missing ballooned from 15 to 79 overnight, including a 13-year-old boy. Officials initially said 80 were missing but corrected the number later.

What exacerbated matters was people visiting to ring in the new year with their loved ones when the quake hit.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida reinforced rescue operations with about 3,600 soldiers in addition to the initial 1,000. Their mission is to provide those affected with fresh water and hot meals, as well as set up bathing facilities for the 34,000 who lost their homes and are now staying at evacuation facilities.

Although Japan is reputed for relatively reliable disaster relief, essential supplies such as water, food and blankets have been running short.

"All we got was a couple of rice

balls," said elderly Yasuo Kobatake cupping his hand in a tiny ball to show how small the meal was. He has been staying with his wife at an elementary school, an impromptu evacuation center. He was only given a tiny paper cup, half-filled with water that "vanished in a sip."

When the earth trembled, Kobatake was about to wear his shoes to head out. He ran out of the house barefoot with just one sock on. That first tremor was followed by the main more destructive quake which flung him to the ground. A concrete wall came crashing down, barely missing him.

Kobatake can no longer access his destroyed house.

Encourage

"So here I am with my wife sleeping beside all the others (taking shelter at the school). We talk to each other and we try to encourage each other," he said.

Kobatake hoped help was on the way.

However, many roads have been blocked by landslides or suffered cracks because of the strong quake, making it difficult for trucks delivering water and food supplies to reach those in need. The hardest hit spots were on the Noto Peninsula, the center of the quake, connected by a narrow land strip to the rest of the main island of Honshu, making alternative routes scarce.

Snow is expected over the weekend, so finding those trapped under the rubble has become even more critical.

Three days after Monday's quake, rescuers are still pulling out people alive from under debris. But time is running out. Experts categorize the first 72 hours as crucial to finding survivors.

Authorities warned more quakes and tsunamis could follow, stressing extra caution over the coming few days. Plans are also underway to fly some evacuated people out to safer areas.

Aftershocks continued to rock the coastal areas, near the epicenter in Noto, about 300 kilometers (185 miles) from Tokyo on the opposite coast, hit Monday.

The quake set off tsunami warnings, followed by waves measuring more than 1 meter (3 feet) in some places. The warnings have since been lifted.

The usual pastoral landscape of Ishikawa was replaced by gray stretches of ash and charred walls, where a fire broke out in Wajima city.

Cars were perched crooked on roads scarred with deep giant cracks. Lopsided houses missing rooftop tiles sat sadly beside a home the quake flattened to the ground, reducing it to a pile of wood. Boats floated belly-up in the bay.

The first day of trading on the Tokyo Stock Exchange, usually a celebratory affair with the ringing of a big bell and throngs of kimono-clad women, was marked with a moment of silence, as people bowed their heads, to mourn the dead.

"I would like to express my heartfelt prayers for the souls of those who lost their lives, and my deepest sympathies to all those suffering from the disaster," said Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki.

Japan is prone to earthquakes, with many fault lines and volcanoes. A massive quake, tsunami and nuclear disaster in 2011 caused widespread damage in northeastern Japan.

So far, no major problems have been reported at nuclear plants following this week's earthquake and aftershocks.

the area.

"Indian Navy is closely monitoring overall situation in coordination with national maritime agencies and remains committed towards ensuring safety of merchant shipping and seafarers in the

region," it added. (KUNA)

Women arrested for bad hijab: The Taliban have arrested women in the Afghan capital for wearing "bad hijab," a



A painting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina along with the Bangabandhu Satellite is seen on a metro railway pillar in Dhaka University area, Bangladesh, Dec. 21, 2023. For decades, political battles in Bangladesh have been fought on the streets, often with violence, by parties led by two powerful women. But there are signs of a generational change as the country of 169 million heads into another general election Sunday. (AP)

spokesman at the country's Vice and Virtue Ministry said Thursday.

It's the first official confirmation of a crackdown on women who don't follow the dress code imposed by the Taliban since they returned to power in 2021 and has echoes with neighboring Iran, which has enforced mandatory hijab for decades.

The development is the latest blow to Afghan women and girls, who are already reeling from bans on education, employment and access to public spaces.

The spokesman from the Vice and Virtue Ministry, Abdul Ghafar Farooq, didn't say how many women have been arrested or what constitutes bad hijab.

In May 2022, the Taliban issued a decree calling for women to only show their eyes and recommending they wear the head-to-toe burqa, similar to restrictions during the Taliban's previous rule between 1996 and 2001.

Farooq said the women were arrested three days ago.

In voice notes to The Associated Press, he said the ministry has heard complaints about women's lack of correct hijab in the capital and provinces for almost two-and-a-half years.

Ministry officials made recommendations to women and advised them to follow the dress code. Female police officers were sent to arrest the women after they failed to follow the advice, he added. (AP)

USD stable

The US dollar exchange rate against the Kuwaiti dinar was stable at KD 0.307 on Thursday, while the Euro went down 0.30 percent to KD 0.335 in comparison to the day before.

The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) said in its online daily bulletin that the exchange rate of the Sterling Pound went up 0.29 percent to reach KD 0.389, and the Swiss Franc by 0.13 percent to reach KD 0.362, while the Japanese Yen was stood at KD 0.002.

The exchange rates announced by the Central Bank of Kuwait are for the average currency rates for the day and do not reflect the actual buying and selling rates. (KUNA)

Kuwait oil down

The price of Kuwaiti crude oil went down by USD 2.77 to USD 77.35 per barrel on Wednesday, compared with USD 80.12 per barrel last Tuesday, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Thursday.

In international markets, the Brent crude went up by USD 2.36 to USD 78.25 per barrel, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which also rose by USD 2.32 to USD 72.70 per barrel. (KUNA)

US job openings fell slightly in November

America's employers posted 8.8 million job openings in November, down slightly from October and the fewest since March 2021. But demand for workers remains strong by historical standards despite higher interest rates.

Wednesday's report from the Labor Department showed that the number of job vacancies dipped from 8.9 million in October. It also showed that the number of people quitting their jobs - a sign of confidence in the labor market - fell to its lowest level since February 2021. The number of quits is now roughly where it stood before the pandemic erupted nearly four years ago.

In November, job openings dropped by 128,000 in transportation, warehousing and utilities and by 78,000 at hotels and restaurants. The federal government reduced job openings by 58,000. By contrast, openings in construction rose by 43,000 and in retail by 42,000.

Wednesday's report, called the Jobs Openings and Labor Turnover Summary, reinforced other recent evidence that while the job market is slowing from its robust heights, it remains solid. Layoffs, for example, are still at unusually low levels. In the face of rising interest rates, job openings have gradually but steadily declined since peaking at a record 12 million in March 2022. (AP)

Market Movements

04-01-2024

	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts
UAE - DFM	+0.24	4,087.35	JAPAN - Nikkei	-0.53	33,288.29
PHILIPPINES - PSEI	+1.59	6,602.52	PAKISTAN - KSE 100	-0.05	64,655.19
SAUDI - Tadawul	+1.82	12,145.45	EGYPT - EGX 30	-0.23	25,350.28

Business

Divergent demand growth forecasts raise uncertainty around outlook for 2024

Oil prices fall on demand concerns, despite vessel attacks

By National Bank of Kuwait

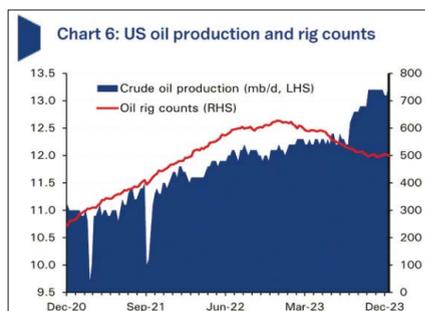
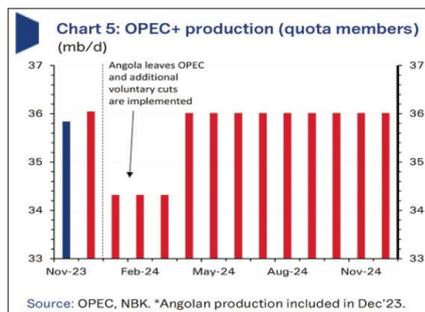
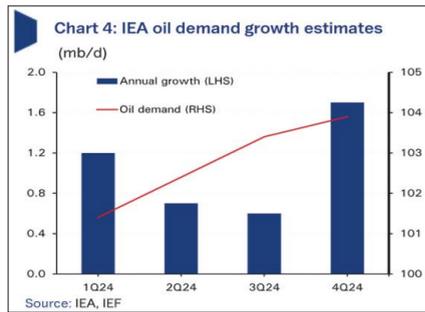
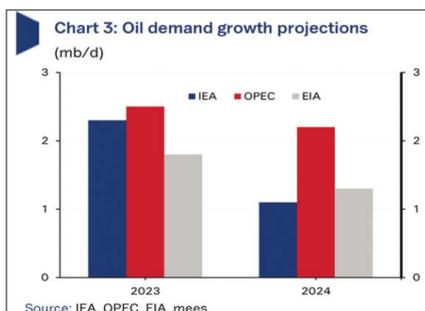
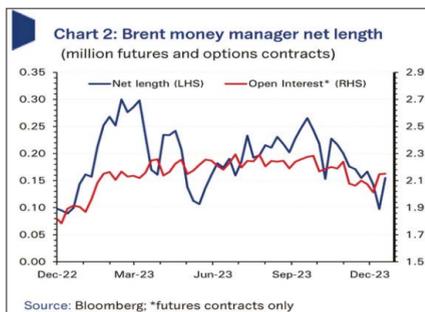
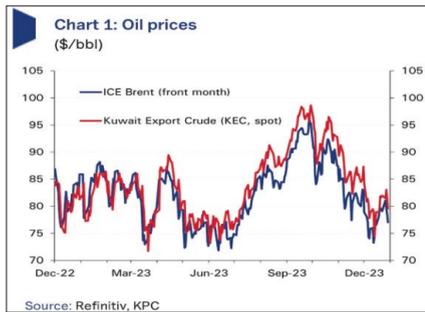
Oil prices fell into the year-end, continuing a trend of weakening momentum as demand concerns outweighed the impact of renewed geopolitical risks and faster interest rate cuts next year. Brent futures ended December at \$77/bbl (-7% m/m), closing lower for the third consecutive month and ending the year down 10.3%, in sharp contrast to 2022's gain of 10.4%. (Chart 1.) Kuwait Export Crude (KEC), meanwhile, ended the month at \$79.6/bbl (-8.9% m/m; -3% ytd). Prices during the month were initially boosted by Houthi rebel attacks on merchant shipping in the Red Sea, causing many cargoes to be diverted to lengthier and costlier routes around Africa, and by hopes that 2024 would see central banks cut interest rates sooner and by more than previously anticipated. The latter followed the release of inflation prints in the US and Europe, which surprised on the downside. Ultimately, however, bearish impulses from easing geopolitical concerns prevailed as shipping resumed through the Red Sea.

Brent futures and options data showed a marked shift in participant positioning, with speculative net length (the difference between the number of bullish "long" and bearish "short" contracts) abruptly reversing course with a sharp, 59% w/w increase to 155k contracts (week-ending 19th December). (Chart 2.) The turnaround was on the back of a drastic pullback in the number of short contracts, which had been the dominant story since mid-October.

The marked deceleration in inflation rates (down to +2% y/y in the US and the eurozone), coupled with fairly resilient US economic data—Q3 GDP expanded by an annualized 4.9%—has raised not only hopes of a so-called soft landing but that monetary policy could shift to a more accommodative and thus economically supportive stance in 2024 following nearly two years of rising interest rates.

The International Energy Agency (IEA), citing resilient US economic activity and lower oil prices, revised up its forecast for oil demand next year, pegging growth at 1.1 mb/d (+130 kb/d). (Charts 3 & 4.) This is still less than half of the IEA's expected growth rate for 2023 of 2.3 mb/d, however, a reflection of macro headwinds including normalization of Chinese oil consumption after a robust rebound in 2023. Nevertheless, consensus on the potential rate of oil demand growth in 2024 has been difficult to establish, with the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) projecting 1.3 mb/d but from a lower forecast baseline and OPEC expecting growth to clock in at a robust 2.2 mb/d, which appears counter-intuitive given the group's decision in late November to reduce supplies ostensibly to balance weaker demand.

On the supply side, combined data from OPEC secondary sources and S&P Global show aggregate OPEC+ production (quota-bound members) falling to 35.8 mb/d (-153 kb/d) in November. (Chart 5.) The declines were led by Iraq (-77 kb/d)



and Angola (-38 kb/d). Non-quota bound members Iran, Libya and Venezuela, meanwhile, boosted output by a combined 51 kb/d in November and by 0.7 mb/d in aggregate in the year to November, a not inconsiderable volume that has had the effect of diluting OPEC+'s supply tightening efforts.

Within OPEC, Angola's decision to exit the group after 16 years has exposed underlying tensions and laid bare the challenges facing Saudi Arabia as it attempts to rein in global supplies while attempting to maintain cohesion among a bloc of oil producers with widely differing production capacities and capabilities. Angola's decision to leave OPEC was sparked by disagreement over its potential production capacity, which was assessed by independent energy houses to be far lower than it believed and closer to the level the country was producing at now. Angola was thus unwilling to accept a sharply reduced production quota for 2024, especially one it believed was forced on it in order to make room for a higher UAE quota.

While Angola's decision to leave the coalition may not have an outsized impact on oil prices given the country's limited capacity, OPEC's inability to garner a group-wide consensus to reduce production highlights members' unwillingness to stomach further output cuts. This could certainly be needed if oil demand growth proves far less robust than envisaged by the group.

Meanwhile in the US, crude oil production rose to a record 13.3 mb/d in December, EIA weekly data showed. US output growth in 2023 topped 1.1 mb/d (+9%), a remarkable turnaround from the pandemic and the US oil sector's best performing year since 2019. It may not be repeated next year, though, if the EIA's forecasts of a significant slowdown in output growth to just 0.2 mb/d—due to expected declines in the number of active oil rigs and relatively higher cost of credit—bears out.

The outlook for oil prices in 2024 is far from clear. The widely divergent forecasts for oil demand next year underline the uncertainty surrounding oil market fundamentals going into 2024. Easing inflation in the US and EU could allow for a soft landing in the former and perhaps a more aggressive monetary policy loosening in the latter, all potentially boding well for oil demand prospects. Oil supply will remain largely dependent on OPEC policy choices after the first quarter voluntary cuts are set to expire and as non-OPEC supply growth decelerates. Risks to the demand outlook include a stronger-than-expected consumption growth in India and the Middle East, offset slightly by slower economic activity in OECD economies. On the supply side, OPEC cuts are the main factor for higher prices supported by potentially a stricter US enforcement of sanctions on Iranian crude given recent geopolitical developments, both outweighing the impact of (slowing) US crude production growth. We therefore forecast Brent at \$85/bbl in 2024, slightly above \$82.6/bbl third party consensus forecasts and up from current prices.

Local banks financing of industrial sector declined in 1st 10 mth of '23

Decline translates to 32.4% decrease, compared to same period in 22

By Ahmad Fathi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: In the first ten months of 2023, local banks have experienced a notable decline in the monthly financing they extend to the industrial sector, marking a significant 32.4 percent decrease from the corresponding period in 2022. The total monthly financing dropped from 1.359 billion dinars in 2022 to 918.7 million dinars in 2023. Insights from the Central Bank of Kuwait's October statistics reveal a monthly upswing of 32.6 percent, with financing reaching 18.5 million dinars. However, this figure depicts a substantial 52.3 percent year-on-year reduction from 157.9 million dinars in October 2022.

Examining the trajectory of financing within the industrial sector, February 2022 saw the pinnacle with financing exceeding 414 million dinars. In contrast, the sector witnessed its lowest point in September 2023, with financing reaching approximately 56.8 million dinars. This decline in financing to the industrial sector coincides with a reduction in new monthly credit facilities, aggregated over ten months, by 1.8 percent. The total credit facilities dwindled from 19.28 billion dinars in 2022 to 18.921 billion in 2023. However, on a monthly basis, credit facilities surged by 36.2 percent, totaling 1.875 billion dinars in October, up from 1.376 billion dinars in September.

The accumulated balance of in-

Stock market indices continue to rise

13 cos face challenge of closing their losses by 2024

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: Small shareholders are eagerly anticipating the plans that will rejuvenate their investments in a list of 15 companies listed on the Boursa Kuwait, set to unveil their 2023 results, reports Al-Rai daily.

Among them, 13 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have reported losses ranging from 50 to 75 percent, while two companies incurred losses exceeding 75 percent of their capital.

Small shareholders are eagerly awaiting transparent disclosures about the conditions and strategic plans of these companies during the last three months of the previous year. All 15 companies are listed on the main market.

These companies have the right to implement capitalization plans, which may involve capital reduction or increase and steps leading to the entry of new shareholders with shares in exchange for cash or debts. This process aims to move the companies to a more stable stage.

Industrial financing provided by local banks witnessed a 5.7 percent annual dip, totaling 167.6 million dinars. This decline is evident when comparing October 2022's figure of 2.922 billion dinars to October 2023's reduced balance of 2.754 billion dinars.

While this balance decreased by 2.2 percent and approximately 61.9 million dinars compared to December 2022, it increased on a monthly basis by 0.4 percent, amounting to 11.6 million dinars. This positive shift came after registering 2.743 billion dinars in September.

In contrast, the total cash credit

Once the 2023 financial statements are approved by auditors and regulatory authorities in the coming weeks, preparations for the annual general assemblies will commence. It is expected that the companies will present plans to address their losses, subject to approval by the board of directors and general assembly.

The list of companies grappling with losses includes three in the financial services sector, five in real estate, three in industry, and one each in the consumer goods, insurance, and healthcare sectors. Some of these companies possess financial capabilities sufficient to overcome their losses.

Small shareholders are hoping for positive developments that could enable their companies to overcome crises, leading to cash distribution and free grants, similar to other successful companies. Companies are focusing on maximizing shareholder rights and compensating for missed opportunities due to ownership en-

facilities provided by banks across all sectors showcased a growth of 1.3 percent during the initial ten months of 2023, amounting to 677.9 million dinars.

On a monthly basis, this figure increased by 0.5 percent, reaching approximately 296.2 million dinars in October, up from 52.828 billion dinars at the end of September. On an annual basis, the total cash credit facilities increased by about 998.6 million dinars, surpassing 52.126 billion dinars in October 2022.

The industrial sector has faced a multitude of challenges over the last three years, emerging as one of the main sectors adversely affected

tanglements in listed stocks. The daily trading scene on the stock exchange is expected to be optimally exploited to overcome any decline in asset value.

In terms of trading activity, the stock exchange closed the second session of the new year with a collective rise in indicators for the second consecutive day. This positive trend is supported by purchases of selected stocks in the primary and main markets.

The financial community is optimistic about the current pace and the future of daily transactions, especially following a series of losses incurred by portfolios, funds, and individuals.

The market witnessed active trading, with the general index closing higher, trading volume reaching 209,308 million shares, and a total value of 50.8 million dinars, executed through 12,035 cash transactions. The primary and main markets achieved gains, reflecting a positive sentiment among investors.

by the COVID-19 pandemic. The imposition of bans and the suspension of corporate activities, coupled with disruptions in the supply and production chain, has led to significant setbacks for the industrial sector.

Additionally, the sector has suffered from reduced demand and limited new projects within the country.

These multifaceted challenges have had a substantial impact on local industrial projects, clearly reflected in the decline in funding received by the sector during the initial ten months of 2023 compared to the same period last year.

Year-ender

The second part was published in yesterday's issue of the paper.

□ □ □

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4, (KUNA): India and Nepal sign in New Delhi seven agreements to enhance cooperation between them in a number of fields, including economy, energy, infrastructure, education, and communications.

June 1: The US House of Representatives approved by a large majority a bill on public debt ceiling until 2025.

June 2: The US Congress approved a bill to raise the debt ceiling, dispelling fears about the United States defaulting on its debts for the first time.

June 8: Britain imposes additional economic sanctions on Belarus because of its support for the Russian war in Ukraine.

June 8: The United States and Britain launch a massive partnership to deepen the alliance and economic security between the United States and Britain during the 21st century.

June 14: Britain announces an investment of 54 million pounds (USD 68.8 million) in supporting projects and research to develop artificial intelligence.

June 16: The United States announce aid to Ukraine of USD 205 million, including funding for shelter, food, drinking water, and basic services through international and non-governmental organizations.

June 19: The United Kingdom launches a new trade program to reduce customs tariffs on goods coming from 65 developing countries, saving British companies and British consumers more than 770 million pounds (USD 984.12 million) annually.

June 20: Austria leads European countries in terms of inflation rates, reaching 9 percent in May, while the rate in Germany was 6.1 percent and in Switzerland only 2.2 percent.

June 22: Director of the United States Agency for International Development, Samantha Power, announced additional funding of USD 260 million to increase support of United States' response to the global food crisis that has worsened following Russia-Ukraine crisis.

June 22: The International Monetary Fund allocates USD 100 billion for development and climate change for poor countries, which was set at the Copenhagen Summit in 2009.

June 22: The European Commission allocates of 1.5 billion euros (USD 1.6 billion) as part of the financial aid program for Ukraine with a total value of 18 billion euro (USD 19 billion).

June 29: The International Monetary Fund agrees to grant Ukraine USD 890 million US dollars.

July 1: Spain allocated EUR 55 million (USD 60 million) in new additional support to Ukrainian small and

medium sized enterprises.

July 7: Russian Federation reduced its oil exports by half a million barrels per day, similar to other countries, with the aim of ensuring stability in global energy markets.

July 9: EU signed a free trade agreement with New Zealand to expand bilateral trade cooperation.

July 10: China and the US have agreed to maintain high-level exchanges and communications on all levels in the economic field.

July 12: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) Executive Board approved a nine-month Stand-By Arrangement for Pakistan worth about USD 3 billion directed at Pakistan's economic reform program.

July 13: US provided an initial USD 100 million in response to the global food crisis.

July 13: US announced USD 74 million in additional humanitarian aid for Myanmar, Bangladesh, and the region.

July 16: Britain officially signed its Accession Protocol to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

July 17: Russia refused to extend the grain agreement, withdraw safety guarantees for shipping and close the maritime corridor.

July 18: US provided an additional USD 250 million to support Ukraine's agriculture sector, after Russia's decision to suspend participation in the Black Sea Grain Initiative that is hugely important in moving Ukrainian food to the global market.

July 20: EU extended sanctions that targets specific sectors of the economy of the Russian Federation.

July 21: India and Sri Lanka have endorsed a vision document for economic partnership, and decided to conduct a feasibility study for an oil pipeline and establish a bridge between their countries.

July 25: The European Commission announced paying the sixth tranche of EUR 1.5 billion (USD 1.6 billion) under the Macro-financial Assistance package for Ukraine; worth up to EUR 18 billion (USD 19.5 billion).

July 26: The European Commission approved EUR 5 billion Czech scheme to support large energy producers in the context of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine.

July 27: China has rolled over a USD 2.4 billion loan to Islamabad for a period of two years.

July 28: The European Commission approved a 246 million euro (USD 271 million) Dutch scheme to support the production of renewable hydrogen.

July 28: The Austrian gas conglomerate OMV announced discovering the largest gas field in the country for 40 years ago.

To be continued

Microsoft adds AI button to keyboards to summon chatbots

Pressing a button will be one way to summon an artificial intelligence agent as Microsoft yields its computer industry influence to reshape the next generation of keyboards. Starting this month, some new personal computers that run Microsoft's Windows operating system will have a special "Copilot key" that launches the software giant's AI chatbot. Getting third-party computer manufacturers to add an AI button to laptops is the latest move by Microsoft to capitalize on its close partnership with ChatGPT-maker

OpenAI and make itself a gateway for applications of generative AI technology. Although most people now connect to the internet - and AI applications - by phone rather than computer, it's a symbolic kick-off to what's expected to be an intensively competitive year as tech companies race to outdo each other in AI applications even as they haven't yet resolved all the ethical and legal ramifications. The New York Times last month sued both OpenAI and Microsoft alleging that tools like ChatGPT and Copilot - formerly known as Bing Chat - were built

by infringing on copyrighted news articles. The keyboard redesign will be Microsoft's biggest change to PC keyboards since it introduced a special Windows key in the 1990s. Microsoft's four-squared logo design has evolved, but the key has been a fixture on Windows-oriented keyboards for nearly three decades. The newest AI button will be marked by the ribbon-like Copilot logo and be located near the space bar. On some computers it will replace the right "CTRL" key, while on others it will replace a menu key. (AP)



The Microsoft logo is shown at the Mobile World Congress 2023 in Barcelona, Spain, on March 2, 2023. Starting in February, some new personal computers that run Microsoft's Windows operating system will have a special 'Copilot key' that launches the software giant's AI chatbot. (AP)

Bahrain Bourse achieves 3rd consecutive annual growth, closing with a 4.0% increase

Qatar Stock Exchange wraps up 2023 with marginal gain

This is the last part of GCC Equity Markets report by Kamco Invest. — Editor

Moreover, the number of real estate transactions in Dubai for the first nine months of the year rose by 36% exceeding 116 thousand transactions during the period. Dubai's residential properties continued to remain one of the highest performing sectors in the Emirates property market due to the strong brands of the developers, flexible payment plans and the diversified menu of available properties. Moreover, driven by the influx of multinational companies into Dubai, office space is another important performing sector in Dubai's property market.

On the economic side, the number of companies in the Dubai Chamber of Commerce jumped nearly 50% for the first nine months of the year supported by the growth of the number of new companies registered during 9M-2023 which reached 48,616 companies recording 42.9% growth y-o-y. According to the Dubai Chamber of Companies, the value of value of exports and re-exports of the chamber's member companies increased to reach USD 57.2 Bn during the first nine months of the year. The robust growth in the newly registered companies and the increase in value of goods exported and re-exported underlines Dubai's continued attractiveness to investors and companies and its rising status as a global hub for business and investment. Dubai's GDP expanded 3.2% for 1H-2023, mainly driven by strong growth in key sectors such as transportation.

Qatar Exchange

After closing 2022 with the biggest decline in the GCC, the Qatar Stock Exchange wrapped up 2023 at 10,830.6 points with a minimal gain of 1.4%. Comparatively, the broad-based Qatar All Share Index reported a yearly gain of 5.2% to close at 3,629.57 points. The primary market in Qatar remained fairly active during the year. The exchange saw three new listings during the year namely, Dukhan Bank in the Banking sector, Damaan Islamic Insurance Co in the Insurance sector and MEEZA in the Consumer Goods & Services sector.

Sectoral performance was mixed during the year between gainers and decliners. The Telecom index was the best performing index in 2023 with a gain of 29.4% led by the shares of Ooredoo and Vodafone Qatar which were up by 23.9% and 20.3%, respectively. The Insurance index followed with a gain of 20.4% led by the positive performance of most of the constituent stocks. Qatar Insurance Co SAQ (+34.7) and Al Khaleej Takaful QSC (+29.1) witnessed strong gains during the year. The Industries sector was the third-best performing sector during the year with a gain of 8.9%. On the other hand, the Consumer Goods & Services index was the worst performing index during the year, declining by 4.3% y-o-y, followed by

Real Estate and Transportation indices that receded by 3.8% and 1.2%, respectively. The decline in the Consumer Goods & Services index came after eight out of twelve constituents of the index reported declines during the year. Baladna, Al Meera Consumer Goods Co and Medicare Group declined by -20.1%, -12.6% and -11.6% respectively. The large-cap Banking index was up 3.4% during the year. In the banking sector, shares of 4 out of 9 banks showed declines.

Gulf International Services topped the gainers chart for the year with a gain of 89.1% followed by Qatar Oman Investment Co QSC and Qatar Insurance Co SAQ with gains of 72.9% and 34.7%, respectively. In terms of laggards, QLM Life & Medical Insurance Co. saw its stock price decline by over 47.9% for the year and was the worst performer followed by Mannai Corp QSC and Mekdam Holding Group, as they saw their stock prices recede by over 44.6% and 32.2%, respectively. QNB was once again the most heavily traded stock in 2023 with yearly value traded at QAR 15.4 Bn accounting for 12.3% of the total value traded during the year followed by Masraf Al Rayan and Industries Qatar at QAR 11.0 Bn and QAR 10.6 Bn, respectively. In terms of yearly volume, QAMCO topped with 4.3 Bn shares followed by Masraf Al Rayan and Mazaya Real Estate Development at 4.3 Bn and 3.6 Bn shares, respectively.

On the economic front, Qatar approved the state general budget for 2024 with an oil price assumption of USD 60 per barrel as compared to USD 65 per barrel as the basis for the 2023 budget. The 2024 budget forecasts revenues to decrease by 11.4% to QAR 202 Bn (USD 55.5 Bn), while expenses are expected to rise by 1% to reach QAR 200.9 Bn (USD 55.2 Bn). Oil and Gas revenues are projected to decline by 14.5% to QAR 159 Bn (USD 43.7 Bn) compared to QAR 186 Bn (USD 51.1 Bn) in 2023, whereas non-oil revenue is estimated to increase by 2.4% in 2024 to reach QAR 43 Bn (USD 11.8 Bn). According to the Finance Ministry, Qatar posted a budget surplus of QAR 12 Bn (USD 3.3 Bn) for the Q3-2023, and was directed to repay government debts and strengthen public reserves.

Bahrain Bourse

The Bahrain Bourse All Share Index witnessed its third consecutive yearly growth registering a 4.0% rise in 2023 that came after a robust growth of 5.5% in 2022. Bahrain was the third-best performing market in the GCC during 2023. The index wrapped the year at 1,971.49 points. During the year, the benchmark reached its highest point towards the end of July-2023 at 1,992.41 points. However, the index declined for the next three months only to show partial recovery during November-2023 and December-2023.

Sectoral performance was mixed between gainers and decliners but skewed to the gainers. Five out of the seven indices of the Bourse registered gains during the year as compared to two decliners. The Consumer Discretionary Sector recorded

the largest yearly growth in the Bourse with a gain of 5.1% followed by the Materials Sector, which has only one constituent company (Aluminum Bahrain), which registered 5.0% yearly increase to close the year at 5,260.3 points. ALBA's share price jump underlined the company's robust financial performance during the year.

Nass Corp led Bahrain Bourse's yearly gainers table recording 164.1% gain in share price during 2023. Al Salam Bank Bahrain and Arab Insurance Group followed as the second and third biggest gainers registering 110.0% and 81.8% share price gains, respectively. On the decliners side, Bahrain Commercial Facilities topped the yearly table registering 49.8% y-o-y fall in share price followed by Inovest and Bahrain Car Park Company which witnessed 49.3% and 28.6% decline in their share prices, respectively.

Trading activity in the Bahrain Bourse increased sharply during 2023. Total value traded during the year rose by 24.1% to BHD 210.7 Mn up from BHD 169.8 Mn during 2022. Similarly, total yearly volume traded in the bourse also declined 45.4% to 210.7 Mn shares during 2022 up from 169.8 Mn in 2022. Aluminum Bahrain topped the yearly value traded chart with BHD 72.8 Mn worth of shares changing hands during the year followed by Al Salam Bank Bahrain and GFH Financial Group which at BHD 45.7 Mn BHD 44.1 Mn shares traded, respectively. In terms of volume traded during the year, Al Salam Bank Bahrain led the way witnessing 290.8 Mn of its shares changing hands during year. GFH Financial Group and Aluminum Bahrain followed witnessing 170.4 Mn and 65.8 Mn of their respective shares being traded during 2023.

On the economic front, the Bahrain's real GDP witnessed 2.45% growth at constant prices in the and 1.09% uptick at current prices during third quarter of 2023. According to the Bahrain Information and eGovernment Authority, the Kingdom's GDP at constant prices reached BHD 3,387.8 Mn as compared to BHD 3, 306.7 Mn in Q3-2022. Bahrain's economic growth during the period was mainly driven by the non-oil sector which expanded 4.5% at constant prices and 4.8% at current prices. In terms of sectors of the economy and their overall contributions to the real GDP; the Financial Corporations sector was one of the largest non-oil sectors that contributed to the growth of the real GDP during the Q3-2023 adding 18.1% followed by Manufacturing Industry Sector which added 13.9% to the real GDP.

Muscat Securities Market

Oman was the worst performing market in the GCC during 2023 as compared to its 2022 performance when it was the second -best performing market in the region. The MSX 30 Index declined by 7.1% during 2023 and closed the year at 4,514.1 points as compared to a growth of 17.6% during 2022. The Index witnessed volatile performance during the last quarter with gains only during Q1-2023 followed by three

consecutive quarters of declines. The last quarter of the year saw the steepest decline of 3.5% as compared to marginal index changes during the rest of the quarters.

Sectoral performance was skewed to the negative for 2023 all the three sectors witnessed declines during the year. The Industrial Sector was the worst performing index on the MSX recording a decline of 14.8% to close at 5,475.23 points, as a significant number of the sector's constituents posted yearly decline in share prices. The Financial index followed with a decline of 6.5%, closing the year at 8,275.4 points. The Services index recorded the smallest yearly decline at 3.2% to close the year at 1,773.9 points.

Oman Chromite topped the gainers table for 2023 with 118.1% followed by Al Madina Investment Holding and Al Batinah Development which witnessed 100% share price growth each during the year. On the decliners side, Dhofar Poultry led the way after its share prices fell 88.9% during the year, followed by Majan Glass and Barka Water and Power which lost 85.8% and 81.6% of their share price values respectively during 2023.

Trading activity on the exchange increased during the year as compared to 2022 mainly supported by the listing of OQ Gas Networks which raised USD 749 Mn in its IPO. Total value traded rose by 14.0% to reach OMR 1.0 Bn as compared to OMR 882.7 Mn in 2022. Comparatively, total yearly volume traded also grew during 2023 registering a 3.5% uptick to reach 4.4 Bn shares as compared to 4.2 Bn shares during 2022. Bank Muscat topped the yearly value traded chart for the fourth consecutive year with OMR 357.6 Mn worth of shares changing hands during the year as compared to OMR 196 Mn value of shares traded in 2022. Oman Telecom and OQ Gas Networks followed as the second and third recording value traded at OMR 111.8 Mn and OMR 97.4 Mn, respectively. Bank Muscat lead the way in terms of volume traded during the year with 1.4 Bn shares traded during the year against 736.1 Mn shares in 2022 followed by OQ Gas Networks and Sohar International Bank with 639.5 Mn and 293.9 Mn in trades shares for each of these stocks, respectively.

On the economic side, Oman's overall GDP at constant prices witnessed a 2% growth during the third quarter of the year to reach OMR 20.6 Bn driven mainly by the Sultanate's non-oil sector which represents nearly 70% of country's GDP. Oman's GDP growth was accompanied by a decrease in public spending and a reduction of the Sultanate's public debt. according to Oman's Ministry of the Economy, public spending in the Sultanate fell 15% for first ten months of the year to reach OMR 9 Bn as a result of continued implementation of financial control measures allowing Oman to achieve a budget surplus of OMR 830 Mn during the period between January and October this year. Similarly, Oman's public debt declined from OMR 17.6 Bn in December-2022 to OMR 16.3 Bn in October-2023 reflecting the fruition of Oman's debt and financial reforms.

Threat to global automakers

China's BYD surpasses Tesla as top electric car seller in Q4 '23

BEIJING, Jan 4, (AP): A less flashy Chinese electric vehicle maker is fast closing the gap with Tesla, the long-time, market-leading pioneer.

BYD Co., based in the southern China tech hub of Shenzhen, dethroned Texas-based Tesla Inc. as the top seller of electric cars in the last three months of 2023, according to sales figures released by the companies this week.

"This was an expected milestone event, given China's share of the global EV market and BYD's position in the domestic market," said Jing Yang, the director of China corporate research at Fitch Ratings.

Tesla retained the crown for all of 2023, but BYD's sales have skyrocketed on the back of a government-driven EV boom in China. The rise of BYD and other Chinese electric vehicle makers is a challenge not only for Tesla but also the world's major automakers as Chinese competitors push into Europe, Southeast Asia and other overseas markets with a relatively affordable option for drivers who want to go green.

Aggressive price cutting helped Tesla beat analysts' estimates for sales in the October to December quarter, but BYD did even better. The Chinese automaker sold 526,409 electric cars in the three-month period, topping Tesla's 484,507 units.

Its results were boosted by a surge in sales of small, low-cost EVs such as its Seagull and Dolphin models, said Cui Dongshu, secretary-general of the China Passenger Car Association. Whether that growth in small vehicles can be sustained remains to be seen, he said.

For the entire year, BYD's EV sales rose 73% in 2023 to nearly 1.6 million vehicles, the company said in a filing Monday with the Hong Kong Stock Exchange. The total still fell short of



A model stands next to a car from BYD during the Shanghai auto show in Shanghai, on April 18, 2023. (AP)

Spain records lowest unemployment rate

MADRID, Jan 4, (KUNA): Ministry of Labour and Social Economy in Spain stated Wednesday the number of unemployed individuals dropped to 2.7 million in 2023, the lowest since 2007.

Despite the global economic slowdown and conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza Strip, 53,9740 individuals were hired in 2023 most of whom were women, which increased the total of employment to 20.8 millions, said the Ministry in a statement in its website.

Spain's job market saw success in 2021 after Covid-19 pandemic when 777,000 individuals got jobs and it increased by 471,360 in 2022, noted the statement.

Yolanda Diaz, Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Labour and Social Economy, said that the statistics showed that labor policies were "heading in the right direction," stressing on continuing this path since a lot of families have individuals who are jobless.

Tesla, which announced the next day that its annual sales were up 38% to 1.8 million cars.

Unlike Tesla, BYD also makes hybrid vehicles. Including its 1.4 million hybrids, BYD far outpaced its American competitor in 2023 with sales of 3 million passenger cars.

China's subsidies for EVs were phased out at the start of this year, but a fierce price war among makers including BYD and Tesla has kept sales buoyant. China is a major market and production base for Tesla, which exports cars to Europe from China.

DETROIT, Jan 4, (AP): Undeterred by high prices, rising interest rates, auto-worker strikes and a computer-chip shortage that slowed assembly lines, American consumers still bought 15.6 million new vehicles last year, 12% more than in 2022, the biggest increase in more than a decade.

Yet sales still haven't returned to the 17 million rate in the years before the pandemic, and there are signs of a cooling market as buyers aren't as willing to pay astronomical prices that dealers and manufacturers were charging just months ago.

"You see the consumer making a concerted effort to ensure that they're getting the best price possible," said Jonathan Chariff, CEO of South Automotive Group, a 10-dealership group in the Miami area. "They basically feel that this is the right time to buy from a perspective of being able to get the discounts."

Production

Average auto sales prices peaked in December of 2022 just over \$47,300, with vehicles in short supply because of the global chip shortage that limited production. Some dealers were able to charge over the sticker price to buyers who needed a new ride or had the money to get one.

But the chip shortage gradually eased last year to the point where it's nearly over, and assembly lines are running at near normal speeds. General Motors, Ford and Stellantis endured six-week strikes by the United Auto Workers that ended last fall. As a result, vehicle supplies on dealer lots are strong and growing, and prices are starting to fall as automakers and dealers dangle discounts.

Data from J.D. Power show that average prices in mid-December were down 2.7% from the peak, to around \$46,000. But they're still nowhere near pre-pandemic prices due to a 26% run-up from 2020 to 2022 as cash-rich buyers drove up prices mainly by buying loaded-out trucks and SUVs. That was about 10 percentage points higher than the inflation rate for the same period.

Still, Jonathan Smoke, chief economist for Cox Automotive, said he expects the gap between the sticker price and the transaction price that consumers pay to widen this year. "We do think that the tables start to turn in 2024," he said. "Discounting will be the key difference in why transaction prices are declining."

Discounts, on average, more than

Buyers shake off high prices, interest rates and auto strikes



Unsold 2023 Charger sedans and Challenger hardtops sit at a Dodge dealership on June 18, 2023, in Littleton, Colo. (AP)

Germany relies on over 50% renewable electricity

BERLIN, Jan 4, (KUNA): Renewable energy accounted for over 50 percent of Germany's electricity supply last year, according to a report issued by the German Energy Agency (DENA) Wednesday.

According to DENA's report, Germany sourced 56 percent of its electricity from renewable energies like water and wind. Furthermore, the electricity generated from renewable sources surged by 56 percent in 2023,

compared to 47 percent in 2022.

As per the report, hydroelectric power stations contributed 16 percent to the overall electricity generation, while wind farms produced 18 percent.

Germany, boasting the largest economy and population in the EU, has an energy strategy focused on progressively reducing reliance on fossil fuels and achieving climate neutrality.

Alrosa's assets to be frozen

EU targets world's biggest diamond miner as part of sanctions on Russia

BRUSSELS, Jan 4, (AP): The European Union imposed sanctions on the world's biggest diamond mining company and its chief executive officer on Wednesday as part of what it called its "unwavering commitment" to Ukraine in the war against Russia.

The move targeted Alrosa, which accounts for about 90% of Russia's diamond production, and CEO Pavel Marinychev. The EU headquarters said the company "constitutes an important part of an economic sector that is providing substantial revenue" to Moscow.

It means Alrosa's assets in Europe will be frozen and EU citizens and

companies will be barred from making funds available to the company. Marinychev, who was appointed CEO last May for three years, also faces a travel ban in Europe.

The EU had already banned the import, purchase or transfer of Russian non-industrial natural and synthetic diamonds and diamond jewelry from Jan. 1. The measure applies to diamonds originating in Russia, exported from Russia, transiting through Russia and Russian diamonds processed elsewhere.

"The European Council confirmed the EU's unwavering commitment to continue to support Ukraine and its people for as long as it takes," it said.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Business Plus



Research reveals unique occupational safety hazards

Younger employees prone to workplace injuries



A worker handles labels at an Amazon same-day delivery shipping center in Woodland Park, N.J., on Dec 18, 2023. On Wednesday, the Labor Department reported on job openings and labor turnover for November. (AP)

By Diane Rohlman
University of Iowa

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

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Young people are inclined to seek approval and respect, which influences their decision-making.

Think about your first job. Maybe it was delivering pizza, bagging groceries, busing tables or doing landscaping work. Did you get enough training to avoid potential injuries? Chances are, you didn't - and your boss or supervisor just told you to get to work.

Employing young people helps them in many ways. They can learn a trade, develop job skills, become more responsible and earn money. But there's danger, too: Americans between 15 and 24 years old are up to 2.3 times more likely to get injured on the job than workers who are 25 and over.

In 2021, 398 workers under 25 died after getting injured on the job.

In my research about the unique occupational safety hazards young workers face, I've identified three common causes of this susceptibility to injury: their lack of experience, developing bodies and brains, and reluctance to speak up.

The 19 million young people employed today make up approximately 13% of the U.S. workforce.

Work is more dangerous for young people because they've simply had less time to become aware of many common workplace hazards than their older co-workers.

And yet this problem isn't typically addressed during onboarding: Even those who have been trained to do a specific job may not be taught ways to avoid common injuries. These include tendonitis from scooping ice cream for hours on end, burns from operating a deep fryer, lacerations from sharp objects, and slips, trips and falls.

It's also important to remember that bodies and brains continue to develop well into adulthood - up to

age 25. This can make some tasks riskier before that point for the 55% of individuals between the ages of 16 and 24 who work.

For example, workers in their teens and early 20s may be smaller and weaker than older workers. Furthermore, some safety equipment, such as gloves and masks, may not properly fit.

In addition to physical changes that occur during adolescence, the brain is also developing and restructuring into early adulthood. The frontal cortex, which is used for decision-making and helps you to think before you act, continues to develop into adulthood and can lead to risky behaviors.

Young people are inclined to seek approval and respect, which influences their decision-making.

They also engage in risky behaviors both on and off the job that may affect their performance at work.

Finally, many young workers are reluctant to speak up if they have concerns, or to ask questions if they don't know what to do, because they

don't want to lose respect from their boss or supervisor. To avoid appearing unqualified, they may not want to admit that they need help.

Despite these inherent risks, Arkansas, Iowa and other states have recently weakened labor laws, loosening restrictions about the kinds of work teens can do and increasing the number of hours they can work.

This is happening at a time when the number of child labor violations are rising and more children are dying or getting injured, especially when they do tasks that violate federal labor laws.

Duvan Tomas Perez, for example, died on the job while cleaning machinery in the Mar-Jac Poultry plant in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, in August 2023. Perez was 16. So was Michael Schuls, who died in June 2023 while attempting to unjam a wood-stacking machine at Florence Hardwoods, a Wisconsin lumber company. Will Hampton, another 16-year-old, also died that month in Lee's Summit,

Missouri, while working at a landfill. Teachers at a Nebraska middle school figured out that students who had trouble staying awake at school were working night shifts at a slaughterhouse, doing dangerous cleaning work that caused chemical burns.

Enacted in 1938, the Fair Labor Standards Act established federal standards to ensure workplace safety for workers under 18 and bars employers from interfering with their educational opportunities. This law sets 14 as a minimum age for formal employment, restricts when and how many hours children may work, and outlines the type of work children may safely perform.

Some of the new state labor laws allow children to work in more dangerous jobs and limit their employers' liability for injury, illness or even death on the job.

When state labor laws are less restrictive than the federal law, however, the federal standards apply.

The federal government is also ramping up enforcement efforts. The Labor Department found 4,474 children employed in violation of federal child labor laws between Oct. 1, 2022, and July 20, 2023. Employers, including McDonald's and Sonic fast-food franchisees, owed more than \$6.6 million in penalties as a result.

In addition to following the law, I believe that employers and supervisors need to address the unique risks to young workers by taking these necessary steps:

- Provide training on how to do tasks safely and supervise young workers until key tasks have been mastered. Training should not only occur right before a new employee gets ready for their first shift, but whenever new tasks are assigned, when there is a new hazard in the workplace, and after an injury or near miss occurs in the workplace.

- Model safe behaviors. Remember that young workers often learn by watching their bosses and co-workers, whose actions can reinforce safety expectations and build a culture of safety.

- Take into account a worker's abilities when assigning tasks, and check in on them regularly, especially when switching tasks. Ask open-ended questions, such as, "What are the steps you are going to take when you do this task?" as opposed to questions that can be answered with a yes or no, like, "Do you know how to do this task?" Be sure to let workers know how to report concerns and who they can talk to if they have questions about workplace procedures and policies.

These strategies are easy to implement and cost little to follow.

And they surely make it safer for workers in their teens and early 20s to gain the valuable work experience they want and need, while helping their employers to maintain safe, productive workplaces that nurture the workers our economy will increasingly depend upon in the years ahead. (AP)

Travel lodging industry seeing 'bleisure' trend's impact

Remote employees redefine business travel norms

By Sam Kemmis
NerdWallet

Remote and hybrid work has affected many industries, from commercial real estate to downtown restaurants. And it has impacted how many workers, unfettered by office attendance requirements, plan their travels.

Some call it "bleisure travel," "laptop lugging," "workations" or simply "blended travel." The gist is the same: Remote and hybrid employees extend work trips to include leisure activities or work during their leisure trips.

Whatever it's called, it could upend the traditional divide between leisure and business travel.

The travel lodging industry is already seeing the trend's impact. Because bleisure travelers' needs differ from those of traditional vacationers or work trippers, existing lodging options - particularly hotels - can fall short. This has created an opportunity and appears to be fueling a boom among short-term vacation rentals such as

Airbnb.

Quarterly demand growth for short-term rentals has outpaced that for hotels since the first quarter of 2022, when travel began to fully rebound from the pandemic, according to a 2023 report from AirDNA and STR/CoStar, hospitality industry analytic services. This shift reflects changing traveler preferences and the ability of short-term rental hosts to react swiftly to these changes.

"We saw more and more people looking to convert their homes to short-term rentals," says Jamie Lane, chief economist at AirDNA. "So supply could be added in an instant. It takes 10 minutes to create a listing, while building a hotel can take years."

Indeed, the year-over-year growth in supply of short-term rentals has exceeded 15% in every quarter from the first quarter of 2022 through the second quarter of 2023, compared with below 5% growth for hotels, according to the report.

More short-term rentals are available and more travelers are choos-

ing them. How does "bleisure" travel factor in?

A new kind of travel - and traveler

Vacations used to be something that employees squeezed between long periods of work. That's no longer the paradigm for many office workers with more flexible schedules.

Far from being a pandemic-only trend, the popularity of bleisure travel is increasing. For instance, more than a third of workers plan to do some work on holiday season trips this year (up from 26% during the 2022 holiday season), according to a fall 2023 survey by consulting firm Deloitte.

Importantly, remote employees who planned to work during their holiday trips expected to extend their trips by nine days due to increased schedule flexibility. That is, bleisure travelers are taking much longer trips than they would have if they had to rush back to the office.

This has profound implications for the lodging industry.

"Half of nights booked are now over a week," Lane says, referring to short-term rental booking data. "And when people are looking to stay longer, there's a higher propensity for them to book a short-term rental."

Many short-term rentals offer discounts for extended stays, which is attractive for bleisure travelers. And they provide home-like conditions that make them more comfortable for longer stays.

"They want those amenities - a kitchen, workspace, etc.," explains Lane.

We can always (not) go downtown

Combining work and play has shifted what amenities travelers seek, and where they're traveling. While business travel and business hotels are traditionally centered in dense urban cores, bleisure travelers appear to be looking elsewhere.

"The vast majority of hotel supply is in large cities and along the interstate," says Lane. "The vast majority of short-term rental supply is in the mountains and beaches."

Indeed, small city and rural destinations saw the largest supply uptick in the first part of 2023, followed by suburban areas, according to the AirDNA and STR/CoStar report.

This has led to another change in lodging preferences.

"We're not seeing a recovery on shared rooms or studios, they're still below 2019 demand," says Lane. "We're seeing all that demand growth in larger homes."

Travelers combining work and play are looking for larger accommodations out of major cities that they can rent for longer. All of these changes favor short-term rentals over traditional hotels.

According to Lane, these dynamics are unlikely to shift in the near future as economic headwinds stunt new hotel development, leaving room for the number of homeowners who list their properties on Airbnb to meet demand and fill the supply gaps.

The bleisure travel trend, and its industry-shaking implications, could just be getting started. (AP)

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We saw more and more people looking to convert their homes to short-term rentals

editor's choice



13-year-old becomes first to beat the 'unbeatable' Tetris

SAN FRANCISCO, Jan 4, (AP): The falling-block video game Tetris has met its match in 13-year-old Willis Gibson, who has become the first player to officially "beat" the original Nintendo version of the game - by breaking it.

Technically, Willis - aka "blue scuti" in the gaming world - made it to what gamers call a "kill screen," a point where the Tetris code glitches, crashing the game. That might not sound like much of a victory to anyone thinking that only high scores count, but it's a highly coveted achievement in the world of video games, where records involve pushing hardware and software to their limits. And beyond.

It's also a very big deal for players of Tetris, which many had long considered unbeatable. That's partly because the game doesn't have a scripted ending; those four-block shapes just keep falling no matter how good you get at stacking them into disappearing rows. Top players continued to find ways to extend their winning streaks by staying in the game to reach higher and higher levels, but in the end, the game beat them all.

Until, that is, Willis managed on Dec. 21 to trigger a kill screen on Level 157, which the gaming world takes as a victory over the game - something along the lines of pushing the software past its own limits.

The makers of Tetris agree. "Congratulations to 'blue scuti' for achieving this extraordinary accomplishment, a feat that defies all preconceived limits of this legendary game," Tetris CEO Maya Rogers said in a statement. Rogers noted that Tetris will celebrate its 40th anniversary this year and called Willis' victory a "monumental achievement."

It's been a very long road. Early on, "the Tetris scene people didn't even know how to get to these higher levels," said David Macdonald,

a gaming YouTuber who has chronicled the gaming industry for years. "They were just stuck in the 20s and 30s because they just didn't know techniques to get any further." Level 29 posed an especially tough roadblock because the blocks began falling more quickly than the in-game controller could respond.

Eventually players found ways to make progress, as Macdonald chronicled in his detailed video on Willis' victory. In 2011, one got to Level 30 using a technique called "hypertapping," in which a player could rhythmically vibrate their fingers to move the game controller faster than the game's built-in speed. That technique took players to level 35 by 2018, after which they hit a wall.

Technique

The next big thing came in 2020 when a gamer combined a multi-finger technique originally used on arcade video games with a finger positioned on the bottom of the controller to push it against another finger on the top. Called "rolling," this much speedier approach helped one player reach Level 95 in 2022.

Then other obstacles arose. Because the original Tetris developers had never counted on players pushing the game's limits so aggressively, bizarre quirks began to crop up at higher levels. One particularly difficult issue arose with the game's color palette, which traditionally cycled through 10 easily distinguished patterns. Starting at level 138, though, random color combinations began to appear - some of which made it much harder to distinguish the blocks from the game's black background.

Two particularly devilish patterns - one a dim combination of dark blues and greens later dubbed "Dusk," the other composed of black,

gray and white blocks called "Charcoal" - proved taxing for players. When combined with the strain of increasingly longer games, which could run 40 minutes or more, progress slowed again. It took a Tetris-playing AI program dubbed StackRabbit to break that logjam by helping map out just where players might happen across a glitch resulting in a kill screen, and finally beat the game.

StackRabbit, which managed to make it all the way to Level 237 before crashing the game, ran on a modified version of Tetris, so its achievements aren't strictly comparable to those of human players. And its findings weren't immediately applicable to the human-played game, either. But its runs clearly demonstrated that game-ending glitches could be triggered by very specific events, such as which block pieces were in play or how many lines a player cleared at once.

That let human players take over the task of mapping all possible scenarios that could cause such crashes in the original game. These typically resulted when the game's decade-old code lost its place and began reading its next instructions from the wrong location, generally resulting in garbage input. A massive effort spurred by StackRabbit's experience eventually led to the compilation of a large spreadsheet that detailed which game levels and which specific conditions were most likely to lead to a crash.

That's what compelled Willis to make his run for the record. Yet even he appeared shocked when he crashed the game at Level 157. In his livestream video, he appears to hyperventilate before barely gasping "Oh my God" several times, clutching his temples and worrying that he might be passing out. After cupping his hands over his mouth in an apparent attempt to regulate his breathing, he finally exclaims, "I can't feel my fingers."

Gaming

Variety



This image provided by Sony Pictures Classics shows Anthony Hopkins as Sigmund Freud in a scene from 'Freud's Last Session.' (AP)

Film

Mickey Mouse to star in horror movies

Hopkins shines in 'Freud's Last Session'

By Jake Coyle

"Freud's Last Session," starring Anthony Hopkins as Sigmund Freud, adds to a string of sterling late-chapter performances by the 86-year-old actor. He was the soul of "Armageddon Time," the reason to see "The Father" and the papal foil to Jonathan Pryce's Pope Francis in "The Two Popes." With the exception of James Gray's more cinematically composed "Armageddon Time," the movies have offered simple, stately showcases for Hopkins, a lion in winter.

"Freud's Last Session," which expands in theaters this weekend, also comes from the stage and, like "The Two Popes," centers on the tete-a-tete of intellectual opposites. Mark St. Germain's 2009 two-character play brought together Freud and C.S. Lewis (played by Matthew Goode in the film) for a speculative meeting between the two in 1939 London.

An aged Freud, suffering from oral cancer, prepares to receive the Oxford academic at his London home while war with Germany is growing inevitable. The factual jumping off point is that Freud, three weeks before his death, is recorded as meeting with an unnamed Oxford don. As Freud's daughter Anna (Liv Lisa Fries) prepares to leave in the morning, he mentions Lewis' impending arrival. "The Christian apologist?" she responds. "Yah," he chuckles.

Their conversation, which makes up the bulk of the film, imagines a spiritual debate between the father of psychoanalysis, a proud atheist and man of science, and the theological Lewis, a believer who in the years after "Freud's Last Session" takes place would pen his Christian apologetic novel "The Screwtape Letters" and, later, the fantasy parables of "The Chronicles of Narnia."

If their adverse positions didn't make for enough drama, air raid sirens are sounding (Hitler has just taken Poland) and Freud's health is bad enough that he, in between dripping morphine into his whiskey, several times eyes a suicide pill during the day. Death and history buffer their talk of God, fear and pain.

But the elements never quite cohere in "Freud's Last Session." The rhythm of conversation feels choppy and lacks the probing give and take that can electrify

a two-hander. Freud - or it Hopkins? - so dominates their talk. Goode, with less to chew on, remains more observational and removed for his Lewis to ever fully engage Freud.

Director Matthew Brown, who shares screenwriting credit with St. Germain, has artificially "opened up" the play to include flashbacks and side plots, most notably that of Anna, whose extreme devotion to her father factors into Freud's discussions of sexuality. Yet Anna's story, including a relationship with a woman, Dorothy Tiffany Burlingham (Jodi Balfour), not acknowledged by her father, is too complex to graft into the theological debate. It feels like a movie in its own right. That "Freud's Last Session" is overly murky in shadows also contributes to the movie's lack of clarity.

But Freud and Lewis' dialogue sometimes finds compelling points of commonality. Fantasy figures prominently into both minds - Freud in his analysis of dreams and Lewis in the dreamworlds he'll create. And both come to their beliefs in part from childhood experiences that color their lives. "I have only two words to offer humanity: Grow up," says Freud.

And Hopkins remains riveting. Some three decades after memorably playing Lewis, himself, in 1993's "Shadowlands," he now plays across from the novelist, adding to the poignance of the movie.

But I suspect my memory will bleed some of these late films of Hopkins' together. In each, he grapples with a life of accomplishment just as he does present pains and joys. He might be plucking an azalea in "Freud's Last Session," or watching a grandson fly a model rocket in "Armageddon Time." But each performance crackles with wit, wisdom and playfulness in the face of the inevitable. They add up to a wistful cycle of films of big questions and small moments.

"Freud's Last Session," a Sony Pictures Classics release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for thematic material, some bloody/violent images, sexual material and smoking. Running time: 108 minutes. Two stars out of four.

Also:

LOS ANGELES: The earliest iteration of Mickey Mouse

is on a rampage, barely two days in the public domain.

Slashed free of Disney's copyright as of Monday, the iconic character from "Steamboat Willie" is already the focus of two horror films. On Monday, just hours after the 1928 short entered the public domain, a trailer for "Mickey's Mouse Trap" dropped on YouTube. Another yet-to-be-titled film was announced Tuesday.

"Steamboat Willie" featured early versions of both Mickey and Minnie Mouse. Directed by Walt Disney and Ub Iwerks, it was the third cartoon featuring the duo they made but the first to be released. In it, a more menacing Mickey, bearing more resemblance to rat than mouse, captains a boat and makes musical instruments out of other animals.

It's perhaps fitting, then, that the first projects announced are seemingly low-budget and campy slasher movies - and not unprecedented. Winnie the Pooh - sans red shirt - entered the public domain in 2022; scarcely a year later, he was notching up a heavy body count in the microbudget "Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey."

In the trailer for "Mickey's Mouse Trap," directed by Jamie Bailey, what appears to be a human in a comically small Mickey mask terrorizes a group of young people at an arcade.

"A place for fun. A place for friends. A place for hunting," text flashed during the trailer reads. "The mouse is out."

"We just wanted to have fun with it all. I mean it's Steamboat Willie's Mickey Mouse murdering people," director Jamie Bailey said in a statement cited by trade publications. "It's ridiculous. We ran with it and had fun doing it and I think it shows."

No release date has been set.

The second movie is from director Steven LaMorte, who previously directed a horror parody of "The Grinch," which is not in the public domain (the movie is thus called "The Mean One").

"A late-night boat ride turns into a desperate fight for survival in New York City when a mischievous mouse becomes a monstrous reality," is the logline for the untitled film, per a post on LaMorte's Instagram. (AP)

MAYVILLE, N.Y.: The New Jersey man charged with stabbing "The Satanic Verses" author Salman Rushdie is allowed to seek material related to Rushdie's upcoming memoir about the attack before standing trial, a judge ruled Wednesday.

Jury selection in Hadi Matar's attempted murder and assault trial was originally scheduled to start Jan. 8.

Instead, the trial is on hold, since Matar's lawyer argued Tuesday that the defendant is entitled by law to see the manuscript, due out in April 2024, and related material before standing trial. Written or recorded statements about the attack made by any witness are considered potential evidence, attorneys said.

"It will not change the ultimate outcome," Chautauque County District Attorney Jason Schmidt said of the postponement. A new date has not yet been set.

Matar, 26, who lived in Fairview, New Jersey, has been held without bail since prosecutors said he stabbed Rushdie more than a dozen times after rushing the stage at the Chautauque Institution where the author was about to speak in August 2022.

Rushdie, 75, was blinded in his right eye and his left hand was damaged in the attack. The author announced in Oct. 2023 that he had written about the attack in a forthcoming memoir: "Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder."

With trial preparations under way at the time, the prosecutor said he requested a copy of the manuscript as part of the legal discovery process. The request, he said, was declined by Rushdie's representatives, who cited intellectual property rights.

Defense attorney Nathaniel Barone is expected to subpoena the material.

Rushdie's literary agent did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment. Penguin Random House, the book's publisher, also didn't immediately respond to request for comment.

The prosecution on Tuesday downplayed the book's significance to the trial, noting the attack was witnessed - and in some cases recorded - by a large, live audience. (AP)

ARLINGTON, Mass.: Rayner Pike, a retired reporter for The As-

sociated Press who contributed his encyclopedic knowledge of news and crafty writing skills to some of New York City's biggest stories for over four decades, has died. He was 90.

Surrounded by family at the end, his Dec. 26 death at home in Arlington, Massachusetts, set off a wave of tributes from former co-workers.



Rushdie



Matar

For a 1986 story challenging city-provided crowd estimates, he paced out a parade route on foot - "literally shoe-leather journalism," New York City bureau colleague Kiley Armstrong recalled.

The memorable lead that followed: "Only a grinch cavils when, in a burst of hometown boosterism, the mayor of New

York says with a straight face that 3.5 million people turned out for the Yankees' ticker-tape parade."

Pike worked at the AP for 44 years, from 1954 to 1998, mostly in New York City - yet he was famously reluctant to take a byline, colleagues said. He also taught journalism at Rutgers University for years.

"He was smart and wry," former colleague Beth Harpaz said. "He seemed crusty on the outside but was really quite sweet, a super-fast and trustworthy writer who just had the whole 20th century history of New York City in his head (or so it seemed - we didn't have Google in those days - we just asked Ray)." (AP)

Features

ARABIC TIMES

FRIDAY-SATURDAY, JANUARY 5-6, 2024

People & Places

Year-ender

Year in review

Influential people who died in 2023

Chris Ford, 74. A member of the Boston Celtics 1981 championship team, a longtime NBA coach and the player credited with scoring the league's first 3-point basket. Jan. 17.

David Crosby, 81. The brash rock musician who evolved from a baby-faced harmony singer with the Byrds to a mustachioed hippie superstar and troubadour in Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. Jan. 18.

Cindy Williams, 75. She was among the most recognizable stars in America in the 1970s and 1980s for her role as Shirley on the beloved sitcom "Laverne & Shirley." Jan. 25.

Billy Packer, 82. An Emmy award-winning college basketball broadcaster who covered 34 Final Fours for NBC and CBS. Jan. 26.

Sylvia Syms, 89. She starred in classic British films including "Ice Cold in Alex" and "Victim." Jan. 27.

Barrett Strong, 81. One of Motown's founding artists and most gifted songwriters who sang lead on the company's breakthrough single "Money (That's What I Want)" and collaborated with Norman Whitfield on such classics as "I Heard It Through the Grapevine," "War" and "Papa Was a Rollin' Stone." Jan. 28.

Tom Verlaine, 73. The guitarist and co-founder of the seminal proto-punk band Television who influenced many bands while playing at ultra-cool downtown New York music venue CBGB alongside the Ramones, Patti Smith and Talking Heads. Jan. 28.

Bobby Hull, 84. A Hall of Fame forward who helped the Chicago Blackhawks win the 1961 Stanley Cup Final. Jan. 30.



Williams

February

Paco Rabanne, 88. The Spanish-born designer known for perfumes sold worldwide but who made his name with metallic space-age fashions that put a bold, new edge on catwalks. Feb. 3.

Harry Whittington, 95. The man who former Vice President Dick Cheney accidentally shot while they were hunting quail on a Texas ranch more than 17 years ago. Feb. 4.

Hsing Yun, 95. A Buddhist abbot who established a thriving religious community in southern Taiwan and built universities overseas. Feb. 5.

Pervez Musharraf, 79. The general who seized power in a bloodless coup and later led a reluctant Pakistan into aiding the US war in Afghanistan against the Taliban. Feb. 5.

Burt Bacharach, 94. The singularly gifted and popular composer who delighted millions with the quirky arrangements and unforgettable melodies of "Walk on By," "Do You Know the Way to San Jose" and dozens of other hits. Feb. 8.

Carlos Saura, 91. Spain's celebrated filmmaker who earned three Academy Award nominations for Best Foreign Language Film during his seven-decade career. Feb. 10.

Hugh Hudson, 86. A British filmmaker who debuted as a feature director with the Oscar-winning Olympics drama "Chariots of Fire" and made other well-regarded movies including "My Life So Far" and the Oscar-nominated "Greystroke." Feb. 10.

Hans Modrow, 95. He served as East Germany's last communist leader during a turbulent tenure that ended in the country's first and only free election. Feb. 11.

David Jude Jolicoeur, 54. Widely known as Tru-goy the Dove, he was one of the founding members of the Long Island hip hop trio De La Soul. Feb. 12.

Huey "Piano" Smith, 89. A beloved New Orleans session musician who backed Little Richard, Lloyd Price and other early rock stars, and with his own group made the party favorites "Don't You Just Know It" and "Rockin' Pneumonia and Boogie Woogie Flu." Feb. 13.

Leiji Matsumoto, 85. The anime creator known for "Space Battleship Yamato" and other classics using a fantastical style and antiwar themes. Feb. 13.

Raquel Welch, 82. Her emergence from the sea in a skimpy, furry bikini in the film "One Million Years B.C." propelled her to international sex symbol status in the 1960s and '70s. Feb. 15.

Tim McCarver, 81. The All-Star catcher and Hall of Fame broadcaster who during 60 years in baseball won two World Series titles with the St. Louis Cardinals and had a long run as one of the country's most recognized, incisive and talkative television commentators. Feb. 16.

Stella Stevens, 84. A prominent leading lady in 1960s and 70s comedies perhaps best known for playing the object of Jerry Lewis's affection in "The Nutty Professor." Feb. 17.

Richard Belzer, 78. The longtime stand-up comedian who became one of TV's most indelible detectives as John Munch in "Homicide: Life on the Street" and "Law & Order: SVU." Feb. 19.

Ahmed Qureia, 85. A former Palestinian prime minister and one of the architects of interim peace deals with Israel. Feb. 22.

James Abourezk, 92. A South Dakota Democrat who grew up on the Rosebud Indian Reservation, became the first Arab American US senator and was known for his quick wit as he advocated for populist causes. Feb. 24.

Betty Boothroyd, 93. The first female speaker of Britain's House of Commons. Feb. 26.

Ricou Browning, 93. A skilled swimmer best known for his underwater role as the Gill Man in the quintessential 3D black-and-white 1950s monster movie "Creature from the Black Lagoon." Feb. 27.

Gérard Latortue, 88. A former interim prime minister of Haiti who helped rebuild and unite the country after a violent coup in the mid-2000s. Feb. 27.

March

Just Fontaine, 89. The French soccer great who scored a record 13 goals at the 1958 World Cup. March 1.

Barbara Everitt Bryant, 96. The first woman to run the US Census Bureau and its leader during the contentious debate over how to compensate for undercounts of minority groups in the 1990 census. March 2.

Tom Sizemore, 61. The "Saving Private Ryan" actor whose bright 1990s star burned out under the weight of his own domestic violence and drug convictions. March 3.

Kenzaburo Oe, 88. The Nobel literature laureate whose darkly poetic novels were built from his childhood memories during Japan's postwar occupation and from being the parent of a disabled son. March 3. (AP)

To be continued



This image released by Universal Pictures shows Cillian Murphy in a scene from 'Oppenheimer.' (AP)

Awards

A starry night with Yeoh, Ferrell, Bassett, and more

A-list presenters unveiled for Globes

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif., Jan. 4. (AP) Michelle Yeoh, Will Ferrell, Angela Bassett and Amanda Seyfried will be among the presenters at Sunday's Golden Globe Awards.

The show announced its first batch of presenters Wednesday. Others taking the stage will be Julia Garner, George Lopez and Justin Hartley.

Yeoh is returning to the Globes a year after she won best actress in a drama film for "Everything Everywhere All at Once," delivering a poignant acceptance speech.

Wednesday's announcement is the latest indicator that stars are likely to return to the show as it continues to attempt a return to form after several scandal-tarnished years. The show is known for its boozey celebration of film and television and as an early stop for awards season contenders. Scandals have led to a membership revamp and a new broadcaster for the Jan. 7 show, but a key question remains: Will viewers tune in?

Here's more to know about the 81st Golden Globe Awards.

Viewers in the United States can catch the ceremony, broadcast live from the Beverly Hilton Hotel, beginning at 8 p.m. Eastern. It will air beginning at 5 p.m. on the West Coast.

The three-hour show will have a strong lead-in since CBS is airing an NFL game directly before the Globes.

CBS says the show will air on its app and stream on Paramount+, but there's an important caveat. Only Paramount+ subscribers with the Showtime add-on will be able to watch the show live. Otherwise, it'll be available on the streaming platform on Monday.

The 81st Golden Globe Awards will be the first major broadcast of awards season, with a new home on CBS. And while audiences it might look similar on the surface, it's been a tumultuous few years behind the scenes following a bombshell report in the Los Angeles Times. The 2021 report found that there were no Black members in the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, which voted on the awards.

Stars and studios boycotted the Globes and NBC refused to air it in 2022 as a result. After the group added journalists of color to its ranks and instituted other reforms to address ethi-

cal concerns, the show came back in January 2023 in a one-year probationary agreement with NBC. The network did not opt to renew.

In June, billionaire Todd Boehly was granted approval to dissolve the HFPA and reinvent the Golden Globes as a for-profit organization. Its assets were acquired by Boehly's Eldridge Industries, along with Dick Clark Productions, a group that is owned by Penske Media whose assets also include Variety, Deadline, The Hollywood Reporter, Rolling Stone and Billboard.

The show has also added a new award for stand-up comedy, with Chris Rock, Amy Schumer and former Globes host Ricky Gervais among the nominees.

Comedian Jo Koy, who has headlined several Netflix specials and starred in last year's comedy film "Easter Sunday," will host the Globes.

Ceremony

Organizers cited his "infectious energy and relatable humor" in announcing Koy would headline the event.

Hosting the Globes typically requires serving a mix of biting humor to the audience of film and television stars and keeping the ceremony from getting too sloppy.

Previous hosts include Ricky Gervais, whose jokes were particularly caustic, the duo of Tina Fey and Amy Poehler and last year's emcee, Jerrod Carmichael.

The Globes, and New Year's Eve celebrations, are keeping "60 Minutes" from airing for two weeks.

CBS aired "New Year's Eve Live: Nashville's Big Bash" on Sunday. CBS says "60 Minutes" will resume on Jan. 14.

"Barbie" is the top nominee this year, followed closely by "Oppenheimer."

The films reflect one unique aspect of the Globes - they split the top film winners into two categories. With Greta Gerwig's "Barbie" and Christopher Nolan's "Oppenheimer" leading the way, it gives the show a chance to capitalize on the Barbenheimer craze that boosted theaters in 2023.

Films nominated for best motion picture drama include "Oppenheimer," Martin Scorsese's "Killers of

the Flower Moon," Bradley Cooper's "Maestro," Celine Song's "Past Lives," Justine Triet's "Anatomy of a Fall" and Jonathan Glazer's "The Zone of Interest."

In the best motion picture musical or comedy category, "Barbie" was joined by Ben Affleck's "Air," Cord Jefferson's "American Fiction," Alexander Payne's "The Holdovers," Todd Haynes' "May December" and Yorgos Lanthimos' "Poor Things."

"Succession" was the top-nominated television program, with nine nods including for series stars Brian Cox, Jeremy Strong, Sarah Snook and Kieran Culkin, followed by Hulu's "The Bear." The Golden Globe Awards had long been one of the highest-profile awards season broadcasts, second only to the Oscars.

The show was touted as an A-list party whose hosts often took a more irreverent tone than their Academy counterparts. It also only honored the flashiest filmmaking categories - picture, director, actors among them - meaning no long speeches from visual effects supervisors or directors of little-known shorts.

But the voting body was a small group of around 87 members who wielded incredible influence in the industry and often accepted lavish gifts and travel from studios and awards publicists eager to court favor and win votes.

Some years, the HFPA were pilloried for nominating poorly reviewed films with big-name talent in hopes of getting them to the show - the most infamous being "The Tourist," with Angelina Jolie and Johnny Depp. In the past decade, they've more often overlapped with the Oscars. The show also recognizes television.

Before the expose and public relations crisis though, no one in the industry took much umbrage with who was voting on the awards. The show had become an important part of the Hollywood awards ecosystem, a platform for Oscar hopefuls and was, until recently, a reliable ratings draw. As of 2019, the broadcast was still pulling in nearly 19 million viewers. In 2023, NBC's Tuesday night broadcast got its smallest audience ever for a traditional broadcast, with 6.3 million viewers.



Best film honoree for "Killers of the Flower Moon" Martin Scorsese attends the New York Film Critics Circle Awards at Tao Downtown on Wednesday, Jan. 3, in New York. (AP)



Dudamel



Williams

Variety

NEW YORK: Former New York Yankees center fielder **Bernie Williams** will make his New York Philharmonic debut on April 24 when future music director **Gustavo Dudamel** leads the orchestra's spring gala at Lincoln Center's David Geffen Hall.

Common, a rapper whose actual name is **Lonnie Rashid Lynn**, will also make his philharmonic debut in a program with soprano **Hera Hyesang Park**, the orchestra said Wednesday. The philharmonic will perform alongside high school musicians chosen in auditions.

Williams, 55, was a five-time All-Star while playing for the Yankees from 1991 to 2006 and won the 1998 American League batting title. He released a pair of guitar recordings, in 2003 and 2009.

Dudamel, 42, has been music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic since 2009, a tenure that will end after 17 seasons when he starts in New York for the 2026-27 season. He will have a rehearsal with the students on April 22 and will lead the youth orchestra in a concert on April 26 at Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts. There also will be a rehearsal on the morning of April 24 open to music teachers, families of the youth orchestra and the orchestra's community partners.

The program is still being planned. (AP)

SYDNEY: With fangs that could pierce a human fingernail, the largest male specimen of the world's most poisonous arachnid has found a new home at the Australian Reptile Park where it will help save lives after a member of the public discovered it by chance.

The deadly Sydney funnel-web spider dubbed "Hercules" was found on the Central Coast, about 50 miles north of Sydney, and was initially given to a local hospital, the Australian Reptile Park said in a statement Thursday.

Spider experts from the nearby park retrieved it and soon realized it was the largest male specimen ever received from the public in Australia.

The spider measured 7.9 centimeters (3.1 inches) from foot to foot, surpassing the park's previous record-holder from 2018, the male funnel-web named "Colossus".

Sydney funnel-web spiders usually range in length from one to five centimeters, with females being generally larger than their male counterparts but not as deadly. They are predominantly found in forested areas and suburban gardens from Sydney, Australia's most populous city, to the coastal city of Newcastle in the north and the Blue Mountains to the west.

"Hercules" will contribute to the reptile park's antivenom program. Safely captured spiders handed in by the public undergo "milking" to extract venom, essential for

producing life-saving antivenom.

"We're used to having pretty big funnel-web spiders donated to the park, however receiving a male funnel-web this big is like



Kerry Condon, (from left), Amelie Hoferle, Bryce McGuire, Gavin Warren and Wyatt Russell attend the premiere of "Night Swim" on Wednesday, Jan. 3, in Los Angeles. (AP)

hitting the jackpot," said **Emma Teni**, a spider keeper at Australian Reptile Park. "Whilst female funnel-web spiders are venomous, males have proven to be more lethal. (AP)

LONDON: A sign directed the animals to line up to be counted and several of the 74 Humboldt penguins did just that, waiting patiently Wednesday to be tallied in the London Zoo's annual census.

Not all the animals were as obedient. Crispin, an endangered Sumatran tiger cub, treated a chalk board like cat nip, gnawing on it playfully in its powerful jaws while being counted with three others.

Over two days, about 14,000 animals will be accounted for - everything from alpacas to zebras - as a requirement of the zoo's license. Information from the count will be shared with zoos around the world to help manage breeding programs of endangered species.

The count will note some of the new additions to its menagerie in the past year: a little two-toed sloth and 17 chicks hatched in its birdhouse that included six Socorro doves, which are extinct in the wild.

"The keepers have got lots of tricks up their sleeve to be able to count these animals," zoological operations manager **Dan Simmonds** said. (AP)

The Conversation

1 in 10 people experience a seizure during their lifetime

Silent, subtle and unseen ... seizures are hard to diagnose

By Jacob Pellinen

University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus

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

The dramatic and incapacitating nature of seizures is reflected in the word itself, which derives from the Greek "to take hold" - like an invisible force suddenly grasping someone and controlling their body. This sense of an unknown force has driven many superstitions and misrepresentations of seizures throughout history.

Over the past century, the public's understanding of seizures has been gleaned mostly from depictions in movies and television, which are often as disturbing as they are inaccurate. While these dramatic representations intensify visual storytelling, they frequently perpetuate stigma and understate the complexity of seizures.

The truth is, seizures are far more varied than what you see in popular culture. Instead, they are often subtle, silent and unseen.

As a neurologist who focuses on the comprehensive care of people who experience seizures, I subspecialize in the treatment of those with epilepsy. That includes identifying and improving gaps in epilepsy care. Research shows there are many.

A seizure is caused by sudden uncontrolled electrical activity from a group of neurons. This hyperactivity overwhelms the brain's normal tendency to suppress such abnormal activity on both a cellular and network level.

Not all seizures are indicative of epilepsy. An otherwise normal brain may experience seizures during alcohol withdrawal. Seizure-like events may also occur with an acute decrease in blood flow, which can cause fainting.

Seizures associated with epilepsy, on the other hand, are unprovoked and often very difficult to predict. A broad spectrum of underlying abnormalities can all lead to the development of epileptic seizures, including brain tumors, infections, strokes, traumatic brain injury, autoimmune conditions, developmental abnormalities and genetic predispositions.

Epilepsy

Approximately 1 in 10 people will experience a seizure during their lifetime. But only those with a risk of recurrent unprovoked seizures are considered to have epilepsy, which represents about 1 in 26 people.

Because of the wide variety of symptoms, substantial delays to diagnosis and treatment can happen. When unrecognized and untreated, seizures worsen over time and lead to decreased quality of life, cognitive impairments, injuries, including motor vehicle accidents, and sometimes death.

The irony is, much of the suffering is unnecessary. Most people with epilepsy can be seizure-free through the use of an inexpensive medication.

Regardless of the cause, focal seizures are the most common type found in adults. This seizure type arises from hyperactivation of a confined brain region. For instance, a seizure arising from the left motor cortex of the brain may result in shaking of the right arm. A seizure arising from the visual cortex may cause a person to see flashes of light or other strange visual phenomena.

The most common brain region for focal seizures to arise is one of the temporal lobes, of which there are two - one on either side of the brain. These lobes serve many functions and are involved in vocal, auditory and visual processing, as well as emotions and memory. This is why seizures arising from these areas can lead to a variety of unusual symptoms.

Frequently, focal temporal lobe seizures are relatively subtle, particularly to witnesses. Sometimes they are comprised of purely unusual internal sensations such as sudden intense fear, a sudden sense of déjà vu or possibly a strong odor. Until a seizure spreads to involve more areas of the brain, it may not cause loss of consciousness or convulsions.

Because untreated seizures become more frequent and severe over time, it is not uncommon for epilepsy to begin with these relatively subtle focal seizures, then worsen as the seizures begin to involve more brain tissue, and eventually progress to convulsions.

A patient of mine described having strange symptoms for over a decade - symptoms he had not discussed before with me or anyone else. He described recurrent, sudden-onset euphoric sensations, which progressed to an inability to speak for one to two minutes. A bystander would think he was just starting into space. Over the years, these sensations increased in frequency. They eventually became more severe and led to loss of consciousness.

Medication

After the patient began an anti-seizure medication regimen, the sensations went away, and he reported improvements in both memory and cognition. Fortunately, he did not experience physical injury, or worse, before his evaluation. But many people are not so lucky.

Recent studies have confirmed that delays in diagnosis are common among people who have epilepsy. Undoubtedly, this is because the early subtle and unusual symptoms are not well recognized by patients, families or medical professionals.

The Human Epilepsy Project is a large, multinational prospective study that followed nearly 500 people with newly treated focal epilepsy for five years. I was among the researchers who analyzed the study's data, and we found a striking diagnostic delay among many participants. Many of them experienced seizures for several months or even several years before diagnosis.

From those first seizures to the diagnosis, half the participants experienced injuries; 5% had car accidents attributable to seizures. Extrapolating this data to the general population suggests that every year in the US, over 1,800 motor vehicle accidents are due to undiagnosed subtle focal seizures. With a timely diagnosis, these accidents are potentially preventable.

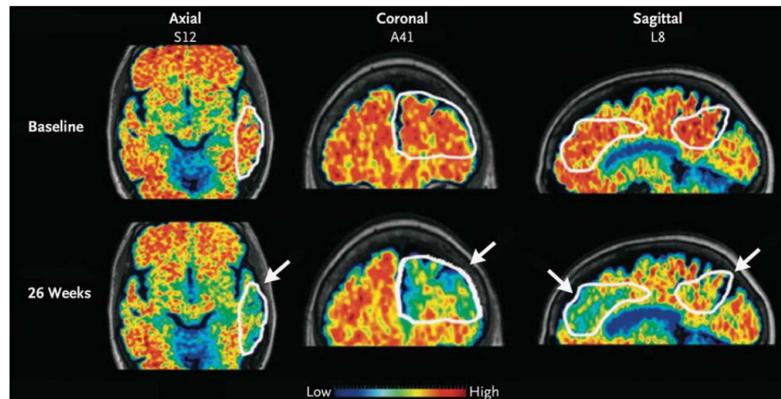
However, even those evaluated for seizures don't always receive the correct diagnosis or treatment. Nearly two-thirds of those participating in the Human Epilepsy Project sought an initial seizure evaluation in an emergency department. About 90% were there only after their first convulsive seizure - that is, after the seizure spread and now involved the full brain.

But leading up to that first convulsive seizure, nearly half of participants had been experiencing nonmotor focal seizures, which went largely unrecognized. For that reason, many people who could have been diagnosed with epilepsy and started on treatment were not.

As it stands now, about 200,000 US adults seek evaluation at a hospital's emergency department for a first lifetime seizure every year. Often, they are diagnosed with epilepsy at that time or shortly thereafter. Poor recognition of subtle seizures bears significant consequences for individuals, communities and the health care system. Improving our understanding of the diverse ways seizures arise and affect lives will help us close the gap and lessen the consequences. (AP)

Focused ultrasound unlocks new potential

Alzheimer's drugs might get into the brain faster with new ultrasound tool



These PET scan images provided by the New England Journal of Medicine in January 2024 show a reduction in amyloid-beta levels in an Alzheimer's patient after focused ultrasound treatment to open the blood-brain barrier after 26 weeks. Red is associated with higher levels of amyloid-beta levels. (AP)

WASHINGTON, Jan 4, (AP) - Scientists have found a way to help Alzheimer's drugs seep inside the brain faster - by temporarily breaching its protective shield.

The novel experiment was a first attempt in just three patients. But in spots in the brain where the new technology took aim, it enhanced removal of Alzheimer's trademark brain-clogging plaque, researchers reported Wednesday.

"Our goal is to give patients a head start," by boosting some new Alzheimer's treatments that take a long time to work, said Dr. Ali Rezaei of West Virginia University's Rockefeller Neuroscience Institute, who led the study.

At issue is what's called the blood-brain barrier, a protective lining in blood vessels that prevents germs and other damaging substances from leaching into brain from the bloodstream. But it also can block drugs for Alzheimer's, tumors and other neurologic diseases, requiring higher doses for longer periods for enough to reach their target inside the brain.

Now scientists are using a technology called focused ultrasound to jiggle temporary openings in that shield. They inject microscopic bubbles into the bloodstream. Next, they beam sound waves through a helmetlike device to a precise brain area. The pulses of energy vibrate the microbubbles, which loosen gaps in the barrier enough for medications to slip in.

Prior small studies have found the technology can safely poke tiny holes that seal up in 48 hours. Now Rezaei's team has gone a step further - administering an Alzheimer's drug at the same time.

Plaques

Some new Alzheimer's drugs, on the market or in the pipeline, promise to modestly slow worsening of the mind-robbing disease. They're designed to clear away a sticky protein called beta-amyloid that builds up in certain brain regions. But they require IV infusions every few weeks for at least 18 months.

"Why not try to clear the plaques within a few months?" Rezaei said, his rationale for the proof-of-concept study.

His team gave three patients with mild Alzheimer's monthly doses of one such drug, Aduhelm, for six months. Right after each IV, researchers aimed the focused ultrasound on a specific amyloid-clogged part of each patient's brain, opening the blood-brain barrier so more of that day's dose might enter that spot.

PET scans show patients' amyloid levels before and after the six months of medication. There was about 32% greater plaque reduction in spots where the blood-brain barrier was breached compared to the same region on the brain's opposite side, researchers reported in the New England Journal of Medicine.

This pilot study is elegant but too tiny to draw any conclusions, cautioned Dr. Eliezer Masliah of the National Institute on Aging.

Still, "it's very exciting, compelling data," added Masliah, who wasn't involved with the research. "It opens the door for more extensive, larger studies definitely."

Rezaei is about to begin another small test of a similar but better proven drug named Leqembi. Eventually large studies would be needed to tell if combining focused ultrasound with Alzheimer's drugs makes a real difference for patients.

Masliah said it's also important to closely check whether speedier plaque reduction might increase the risk of a rare but worrisome side effect of these new drugs - bleeding and swelling in the brain.

Alzheimer's isn't the only target. Other researchers are testing if breaching the blood-brain barrier could allow more chemotherapy to reach brain tumors, and ways to target other diseases.

Less deadly winter predicted

More hospitals requiring masks as flu and COVID-19 cases surge

NEW YORK, Jan 4, (AP) - More US hospitals are requiring masks and limiting visitors as health officials face an expected but still nasty post-holiday spike in flu, COVID-19 and other illnesses.

While many experts say this season likely won't prove to be as deadly as some other recent winters, it still could mean hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations and many thousands of deaths across the country.

New York City last week instituted a mask mandate for the city's 11 public hospitals. Similar measures were ordered last week at some hospitals in Los Angeles and Massachusetts. Some hospitals reinstated masking rules for employees months ago, in anticipation of a seasonal rush of sick people.

Infections

Flu and COVID-19 infections have been increasing for weeks, with high levels of flu-like illness reported in 31 states just before Christmas. Updated national numbers are to be released Friday, but health officials predict infections will grow in many states well into January.

"What we're seeing right now, in the first week of January, is really an acceleration - of flu cases, in particular," said Dr. Mandy Cohen, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

There is some good news. Flu and COVID-19 cases may peak by the end of the month and then drop, Cohen said. Though the flu has been skyrocketing, this year's cases are being caused by a strain that usually doesn't cause as many deaths and hospitalizations as some other versions. What's more, signs suggest current flu vaccines are well-matched to the strain.

"I don't think it's going to be overwhelming," said Dr. William Schaffner, Vanderbilt University infectious diseases expert. He deemed the current season "moderately severe."

The CDC is pointing the public to an agency website where people can look up their county, which can help them make decisions about whether to wear masks or take other precautions. Cohen urged people to get vaccinated and to seek treatment for flu and COVID-19.

Vaccinations are down this year, officials say.

About 44% of U.S. adults had gotten flu shots by Dec. 23, according to the most recently available CDC vaccination survey data. Only about 19% of U.S. adults were reported to have received an updated COVID-19 shot as of early December.

COVID-19 cases are causing more severe disease than the flu but have been rising less dramatically. Health officials are keeping an eye on JN.1, a new version of the ever-evolving coronavirus. The omicron variant was first detected in the U.S. in September and just before Christmas accounted for an estimated 44% of COVID-19 cases.

The JN.1 variant may spread easier or be better at evading our immune systems, but there is no evidence that it causes more severe disease than other recent variants, health officials say. Current evidence indicates vaccines and antiviral medications work against it.

The CDC also has reported disappointing vaccination rates against another seasonal bug, respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV. That is a common cause of mild cold-like symptoms, but it can be dangerous for infants and older people. RSV cases rose in the fall but appear to have plateaued and are even going down in some places, according to the latest data.

Respiratory

At Hillsdale Hospital in southern Michigan, a 65% increase in respiratory illness activity in late December triggered a limitation to visitors in the birthing center. Only a spouse, a support person and grandparents can visit. They all must wear a mask and not show symptoms of sickness.

The restriction is common for the hospital around this time of year, said Dr. Nichole Ellis, a pediatrician who is the hospital's medical chief of staff. But it's more difficult this season, she added.

"In the past, we would have one ... disease that we were tracking or monitoring at one time," Ellis said. "But now, babies and children will have multiple diseases at the same time. It's not that they just have RSV ... but they're getting RSV and COVID at the same time, or influenza and RSV at the same time because all of the diseases are prevalent in our community."

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Gauff through to the quarters at Auckland Tennis Classic

France beat Norway to make United Cup semis

Rain, poor light curtail 2nd day of 3rd Australia-Pakistan Test

Warner out for 34

SYDNEY, Jan 4, (AP): Australia opener David Warner was dismissed for 34 in his farewell cricket test against Pakistan at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Thursday before rain and poor light ruined most of the rest of the second day.

Playing in his 112th and last test, Warner was caught at first slip by Babar Azam off Agha Salman's bowling before lunch.

Play was interrupted in the middle session with Australia at 116-2 in reply to Pakistan's 313. The lights were on at the SCG and the conditions were gloomy, but the decision to take players from the field for bad light was met with boos from the crowd and criticism from former players.

Players stayed off for a further 40 minutes while 25,000 fans remained in attendance, before rain began to fall and the day was officially washed out.

Marnus Labuschagne will resume on 23 on Friday morning with Steve Smith on 6.

"It is so frustrating," Australia's ex-coach and test opener Justin Langer said on Channel 7 television. "I have walked in all the shoes as a player and batsman. You want to be off and want perfect conditions, and then as coach you want what's best for your team."

"But when you look at the big picture, it is crazy these guys aren't playing test cricket here. You have a big crowd here, they have come here for David Warner's last game."

Warner will still likely have a chance to bat in the fourth innings



Australia's Marnus Labuschagne ducks under a high delivery from Pakistan on the second day of their cricket Test match in Sydney, Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024. (AP)

of the match. He had threatened to go on with a big score on his home ground after surviving a chance earlier when dropped at slip by Saim Ayub on 20.

Resuming on six following a nervous one-over stay late on Day 1, Warner produced one of the shots of the morning when he square-drove Hasan Ali for four. He steered another ball from Hasan between slips and gully to the boundary, while an edge off Aamir Jamal also went for four.

But on 34, Warner's time at the crease came to an end. Facing a ball from Salman that gripped and bounced, Warner was squared up on

the crease and outside-edged the ball to Babar at first slip.

Warner walked from the field and quickly glanced back to view a replay on the stadium screen as he received a standing ovation from the

CRICKET

crowd.

On Wednesday after Pakistan won the toss and elected to bat, Australia captain Pat Cummins took 5-61 for his third consecutive five-wicket haul. Pakistan's top order was again exposed before a lower-order rally

helped the tourists to its 300-plus total.

Pakistan was in danger of being dismissed cheaply at 96-5 but an enterprising counterattack led by wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan with a brisk 88, followed by a half-century from Agha Salman and a maiden test half-century by Aamer Jamal helped Pakistan recover to a respectable total.

With Australia assured of winning the series after wins in Perth and Adelaide, the lead-up to the match was almost exclusively about Warner's last test. Flanked by his three daughters, he led the home team out on to the SCG before the match.

SYDNEY, Jan 4, (AP): France defeated Norway in the deciding mixed doubles and set up a United Cup semifinal against Poland on Thursday.

Caroline Garcia and Edouard Roger-Vasselin of France beat Ulrikke Eikeri and Casper Ruud 7-5, 6-4 in a tie that stretched nearly 6 1/2 hours.

Ruud forced the quarterfinal to a decider by downing Adrian Mannarino 6-1, 6-4 after Garcia put France up 1-0 by edging Malene Helgo 6-2, 6-7 (6), 7-6 (5).

Garcia, ranked 20th and the 2022 WTA Finals champion, was made to work for more than 2 1/2 hours against 544th-ranked Helgo.

"It was a crazy match, a crazy performance from Helgo," Garcia said. "I didn't know her very well and she just played a crazy match, was hitting the ball so well."

Ruud outclassed Mannarino in the men's singles.

"I don't think I faced a break point," Ruud said. "So that's great for my standards of serving ... and putting Norway back on the board."

Who meets Australia in the other semifinal on Saturday will be decided between Greece and Germany on Friday. The final on Sunday is also at Ken Rosewall Arena in Sydney.

Top-ranked Iga Swiatek beat No. 14 Zheng Qinwen 6-2, 6-3 to give Poland a winning 2-0 lead after Hubert Hurkacz's 6-3, 6-4 victory over Zhang Zhizhen.

Polish pair Katarzyna Piter and Jan Zieliński sealed the sweep with a 6-3, 5-7, 10-7 win over You Xiaodi and Sun Fajing in the mixed doubles.

The Poland team will travel across Australia for Saturday's semifinals in Sydney, where they will play either France or Norway.

Earlier in Sydney, Caroline Garcia and Adrian Mannarino led France past Italy.

Mannarino overcame Lorenzo Sonego in straight sets before Garcia beat Jasmine Paolini 6-4, 5-7, 6-4 to give France a 2-0 lead and confirm top spot in Group D.

French pair Elixane Lechemia and Edouard Roger-Vasselin completed the sweep with a straight-sets win in the mixed doubles.

No. 6 Stefanos Tsitsipas returned after missing Greece's opener against Chile to defeat Canada's Steven Diez 6-2, 6-3 and give his team the lead.

Maria Sakkari sealed Greece's spot in the quarterfinals when she saved four set points in the first set and then came back from 3-1 down in the second to beat Leylah Fernandez 7-6 (2), 6-3. Tsitsipas and Despina Papamichail also beat Stacey Fung and Felix Auger-Aliassime 7-5, 6-4 in the mixed doubles.

In Brisbane, Australia, Rafael Nadal's comeback from a year-long injury layoff reached the Brisbane International quarterfinals after dominating Jason Kubler 6-1, 6-2 on Thursday.

The 22-time major winner is playing on a wild card after his ranking slipped into the 600s as he recovered from hip surgery, and he's desperate for match time ahead of the Australian Open this month.

Nadal's first competitive match since January last year was a win on Tuesday against 2020 U.S. Open champion and former No. 3-ranked Dominic Thiem.

He was more convincing against Kubler, a hometown favorite who is ranked 63rd after a career interrupted by multiple operations on his knees.

Nadal had 20 winners, including some ripping forehands, and eight unforced errors. He hit volleys and half-volleys and overhands. He scrambled to chase drop shots and covered the baseline without any visible signs of the injury.

The 37-year-old Spaniard lost only one point in his first three service games - a double-fault on the second point of the match. But he was also able to dig himself out of a hole by winning five straight points when he faced triple breakpoint while serving for the first set.

The only blip for Nadal was a warning for a time violation for taking too long in a locker-room break between sets. He shrugged it off, saying it was so humid he needed to change his clothing. He promised he'd work on getting faster this year.

He'll play another Australian, Jordan Thompson, in the quarterfinals on Friday. Thompson got a walkover when fourth-seeded Ugo Humbert withdrew from their second-round match because of illness.

Victoria Azarenka is in familiar territory after reaching the quarterfinals in Brisbane, where she won her first WTA title in 2009 when the tournament was staged for the first time.

Azarenka beat Clara Burel of France 7-5, 6-2 to reach the quarterfinals for the fifth time in six trips to the key Australian Open tune-up event.

The two-time Australian Open champion - in 2012 and 2013 - will next face third-seeded Jelena Ostapenko, the 2017 French Open champion



Norway's Ulrikke Eikeri and Casper Ruud in action against France's Caroline Garcia and Edouard Roger-Vasselin during their United Cup doubles quarterfinal tennis match in Sydney, Australia, Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024. (AP)

who beat big-serving three-time Brisbane International winner Karolina Pliskova 6-2, 4-6, 6-3.

Pliskova went into the match on a 10-match winning streak in Brisbane and was coming off a second-round win over another former No. 1, Naomi Osaka. But Pliskova was often on the back foot with Ostapenko hitting 50 winners.

Azarenka opened Day 5 on Pat Rafter Arena and quickly took a 4-1 lead before withstanding a comeback from the No. 56-ranked Burel. She took an early break in the second set and finished off in 92 minutes.

No. 2-seeded Elena Rybakina, the 2022 Wimbledon champion, also stepped up her game in a 6-1, 6-0 win over No. 13 Elise Mertens.

Top-seeded Aryna Sabalenka, the Australian Open champion, was playing a night match against Zhu Lin.

TENNIS

On the men's side, 2017 champion Grigor Dimitrov beat Daniel Altmaier 6-1, 6-2 with 20 winners and just five unforced errors. Dimitrov will

In Auckland, New Zealand, U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff overcame hard-hitting Czech teenager Barbara Fruhvirtova 6-3, 6-0 on Thursday to extend her winning start to the year and the defense of her title at the Auckland Tennis Classic.

The 16-year-old Fruhvirtova came out hitting harder than any player at the tournament so far: generating enormous power off both hands.

She troubled Gauff at first and broke the American's serve to love in the third game of the first set.

Gauff immediately broke back in a game of 14 points to level the set at 2-2. After saving a breakpoint in her next service game, Gauff broke again to lead 4-2. She served for the first set at 5-3 and had to save a breakpoint before clinching the set in 40 minutes. Fruhvirtova tested Gauff with more high top-spin but Gauff came through and finished the set with an ace.

Gauff immediately broke Fruhvirtova in the first game of the second set as she began to find more depth in her returns. She also broke in third and fifth games and held her serve with confidence, highlighting her second service game with a 190 kph (118 mph) ace.

Gauff had to save two break points as she served for the match at 5-0 but managed to allay any threat with her sixth ace.

"I thought I played well," Gauff said. "She started really well and I was able to raise my level. I thought I served and I did better on my returns."

Fruhvirtova came into the match with a WTA ranking of 117.

"I thought she played a good match," Gauff said. "I've known her since she was 10 years old. We used to be in France, training at the same academy. Her and her sister (Brenda), we grew up playing or training beside each other and it's great to see her on tour. I'm sure she's going to go even further."

Gauff now will play eighth-seeded Varvara Gracheva of France in the quarterfinals on Friday. Gracheva beat Lulu Sun of Switzerland 6-3, 6-4.

Emma Raducanu's tournament ended when the 2021 U.S. Open champion was beaten 6-7 (5), 7-6 (3), 6-1 by second-seeded Elena Svitolina in the final match of the second round.

But Raducanu will head to the Australian Open beginning Jan. 14 confident of her fitness in her return tennis at the end of a nine-month injury break.

She played two marathon matches in Auckland and came through both unscathed, though she played with heavy strapping on her right thigh on Thursday. She took 2 hours, 27 minutes to beat qualifier Elena-Gabriela Ruse in her first match. Her match with Svitolina on Thursday was the most gripping of the tournament so far and lasted almost three hours.



Coco Gauff of United States plays a forehand return to Brenda Fruhvirtova of Czech Republic at the ASB Tennis Classic in Auckland, New Zealand, Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024. (AP)

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Company set up fan zone at Arabi vs. Qadisiya clash

Zain brings derby excitement closer to fans



Zain's fan zone at Sabah Al Salem Stadium.

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: In an exciting day for local football fans, and with over 25,000 spectators attending Sabah Al Salem Stadium, Zain celebrated the thrills of the Kuwait Premier League (Dawri Zain) derby between Arabi SC and Qadisiya SC in the 13th round's opening match. The company set up a dedicated fan zone to engage with fans of all ages during the most-anticipated clash in the league.

This step was part of the plan Zain outlined to engage with foot-

ball enthusiasts through its official sponsorship of the Kuwait Football Association's competitions for the 2022-2026 seasons. This partnership includes the biggest two contests: the Kuwait Premier League (Dawri Zain) and the Zain First Division League, and also includes extended support to H.H. the Amir's Cup, H.H. the Crown Prince's Cup, and the KFA Cup (Zain Cup).

For the exhilarating derby match between Arabi SC and Qadisiya SC, Zain dedicated a special fan zone at



Company engaged with fans of all ages.

Sabah Al Salem Stadium, with activities and fun programs starting two hours before the kick-off whistle. Scores of fans from both clubs joined the fan zone's activities, where Zain presented sports-themed games and distributed gifts and prizes.

Continuing its pledge to support athletes and promote excellence in the league, Zain has dedicated this season alone over KD 60,000 worth of cash prizes for players and fans, the biggest prize pool in the local league's history. The company re-

mains a strong supporter of local athletes and believes that such encouragement to athletes and engagement with fans contribute to elevating the league's quality.

Zain firmly believes that the private sector has a vital and active role in developing the local sports and youth sectors, and the company makes this belief a reality by sponsoring and supporting some of the nation's biggest sports competitions, including this partnership with Kuwait's top football contest.

Hassan proposed to Kuwait Club

Franco emerges as contender for Al-Qadisiya coaching 'role'

By Hassan Musa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: In a surprising turn of events, Spanish coach Pablo Franco is now in contention to lead Al-Qadisiya for the remainder of the current season's competitions. This development comes after the resignation of the team's previous coach, Mohamed Ibrahim, who cited health reasons for stepping down in December.

Initially, Croatian coach Ante Misha was considered the primary candidate to take charge. However, his appointment faced resistance from



Farha Amouri and Daham celebrate Kuwait Club's second goal.

SOCCER

some members of the club's board of directors. Subsequently, former Al-Qadisiya coach Pablo Franco entered the negotiation process. The official announcement of the new coach is expected after the team's upcoming match against Al-Nasr on Sunday, concluding the fourteenth round.

In other football news, Kuwait regained the leading position in the Zain Premier League by securing a decisive 6-0 victory against Al-Shabab in the thirteenth round at Mohammed Al-Hamad Stadium. With this win, "Al-Abyad" now holds 30 points, topping the league table on goal difference ahead of Al-Arabi. Al-Shabab, on the other hand, remains in eighth place with 11 points.

Coach Nabil Maaloul, the Tunisian helm of Kuwait Club, expressed satisfaction with the team's performance, emphasizing the need for consistent efforts in upcoming matches. Maaloul hinted at keeping the option open for recruiting new players during the winter transfer period to bolster the team as needed. He affirmed the team's aspirations to compete across various championships and target all four ti-

ties this season, including the league, Prince Woolley Cup, Al-Ahed, and the Super Cup.

Reflecting on the league competition, Maaloul described it as "interesting" with a three-way rivalry between Kuwait Club, Al-Arabi, and Al-Qadisiya for the title. He praised the outstanding level of the "derby" match and Kuwait's convincing victories despite player absences.

Meanwhile, a Qatari player, Abdulkarim Hassan, has been proposed to Kuwait Club by a contractor. Nicknamed "Kemo," Hassan's contract with Al-Jahra is set to expire at the end of January.

Addressing the loss, Jaber Al-Zenki, head of the youth football team, expressed surprise and emphasized the need for the team to focus in upcoming matches to maintain hopes of remaining in the Premier League, citing previous instances where teams like Kazma had also suffered six-goal losses to Al-Abyad.

Pacers use 47-point 3rd quarter to beat Bucks for 5th straight victory

Kings outlast Magic in double-overtime



Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James, (right), shoots as Miami Heat forward Kevin Love defends during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Los Angeles. (AP)

INDIANAPOLIS, Jan 4, (AP): Tyrese Haliburton had 31 points and 12 assists and the Indiana Pacers pulled away with a 47-point third quarter, beating Milwaukee 142-130 on Wednesday night for their fifth straight victory and second over the Bucks in three days.

Benedict Mathurin added 16 points for the Pacers. Indiana ended Milwaukee's 15-game home winning streak Monday and is 4-1 against the Bucks this season.

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 26 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists for Milwaukee, falling just short of his fourth triple-double of the season. Damian Lillard added 23 points and five assists, and Khris Middleton overcame a sprained right wrist and a sore right knee to finish with 19 points and seven assists.

BASKETBALL

The Central Division foes have gotten awfully familiar, playing five times in 54 days - including the In-Season Tournament semifinal in Las Vegas. Four games have produced combined scoring totals of at least 247 points, and the series also became emotional and chippy. A dispute over a missing game ball led to a bizarre postgame scene in December when Antetokounmpo sprinted toward the Indiana locker room.

Pelicans 117, Timberwolves 106
In Minneapolis, Zion Williamson scored 27 points and New Orleans kept rolling with a victory over West-leading Minnesota.

CJ McCollum added 24 points and Brandon Ingram had 19. The Pelicans pulled away in the second half for their fourth straight victory and ninth in 12 games.

On the second night of a back-to-back after beating Brooklyn 112-85, a game that allowed Williamson and Ingram to both play under 30 minutes, New Orleans went on the road and shot 55.6% from the field. Williamson and Ingram combined to shoot 18 of 26.

Heat 110, Lakers 96
In Los Angeles, Tyler Herro scored

Draw for the Federation Cup in Basketball held

Kuwait Club faces tough competition in Group A

By Khaled El Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: The draw for the Federation Cup in Basketball took place at the Federation's headquarters in the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex, setting the stage for intense competitions. The defending champion, Kuwait Club placed in Group A alongside Al-Nasr, Al-Tadamon, Al-

Sulaibkhat, and Kazma. Group B featured Al-Qadisiya, the runner-up in the previous edition, along with Yarmouk, Al-Qurain, and Al-Arabi.

The tournament will follow a knockout system, with notable matchups in the preliminary round, including Al-Nasr taking on Al-Tadamon, Al-Sulaibkhat playing Kazma, Al-Qadisiya locking horns with Yarmouk, and Al-

Arabi against Al-Qurain.

In the U-19 youth category, the draw unveiled exciting confrontations: Al-Qurain play Al-Yarmouk, Al-Tadamon meet Kazma, Al-Kuwait face Al-Qadisiya, and Al-Arabi versus Al-Jahra. The U-17 Federation Cup draw featured matchups like Yarmouk against Al-Nasr, Al-Jahra meet Al-Qadisiya, Al-Qurain face Kazma, and Al-Arabi versus Al-Sahel.

BASKETBALL

Moving to the U-15 Cubs category, the draw led to clashes between Kazma and Al-Arabi, Al-Qurain vs Al-Shabab, Al-Jahra vs Al-Sahel, and Al-Qadisiya vs Yarmouk.

Concluding the draw, the U-13 Federation Cup in the Al-Baraem category showcased matchups like Al-Arabi vs Sulaibkhat, Al-Nasr vs Kazma, Al-Sahel vs Al-Shabab, and Al-Qadisiya vs Yarmouk. It's worth noting that all age-level competitions will be conducted in a knockout system, promising exciting and competitive basketball matches.

time and Lauri Markkanen added 31 in Utah's overtime victory over Detroit. The Jazz sent the Pistons to their 30th loss in 31 games, winning for the ninth time in 12 games.

Bojan Bogdanovic scored a season-high 36 points for Detroit, making eight 3s. Cade Cunningham had 31 points and 12 assists. The Pistons have lost 17 in a row on the road.

Hawks 141, Thunder 138
In Atlanta, Jalen Johnson scored a career-high 28 points and Atlanta held off Oklahoma to end the Thunder's five-game winning streak.

Atlanta opened the game with 11 straight points and never trailed. Trae Young had 24 points and 11 assists, one of four Hawks players who scored more than 20. Bogdanovic added 23 points and Dejounte Murray had 22.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 33 points and 13 rebounds for Oklahoma City.



The draw for the Federation Cup in Basketball in progress.

21 points, Duncan Robinson had 11 of his 13 points in the fourth quarter and Miami beat Los Angeles.

Jaime Jaquez Jr. added 16 points, Nikola Jovic and Bam Adebayo scored 15 apiece AND Kevin Love had a season-high 14 rebounds along with 10 points. Miami was without Jimmy Butler for the sixth time in seven games because of irritation in his right foot.

Mavericks 126, Trail Blazers 97
In Dallas, Luka Doncic scored 30 of his 41 points in the first half, Kyrie Irving added 29 in his second game back from a bruised right heel and Dallas routed Portland.

The All-Star pair went a combined 23 of 40 from the field before sitting out the fourth quarter. They were just 12 of 34 during a 37-point loss at Utah in Irving's return after missing 12 games.

Kings 138, Magic 135, 2OT
In Sacramento, Malik Monk scored

37 points, Domantas Sabonis had 22 points, 23 rebounds and 12 assists for his seventh triple-double of the season and Sacramento outlasted Orlando in double-overtime.

Sacramento overcame a hot shooting night by the short-handed Magic, who made 25 3-pointers to break the franchise record. That helped them come back from a 13-point deficit in the third quarter to take the lead in the fourth.

Clippers 121, Suns 122
In Phoenix, Paul George scored 33 points, Kawhi Leonard added 30 and Los Angeles beat Phoenix for its fourth straight victory and 13th in 15 games.

George shot 8 of 14 from the field, going 5 of 10 from 3-point range. James Harden had 22 points and 11 assists to help Los Angeles end Phoenix's four-game winning streak.

Jazz 154, Pistons 148, OT
In Salt Lake City, Jordan Clarkson scored 29 of his 36 points after half-

Kuwaiti Show Jumping Equestrian League's third round commences

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: The Kuwaiti Show Jumping Equestrian League's third round, proudly sponsored by Zain Company, is set to commence today at 8:30 am at the Hunting and Equestrian Club in the Subhan area.

This exciting event features competitions at varying heights, starting at 90 cm and progressing to 135 cm today. Tomorrow's continuation on Saturday, beginning at 11:00 am, will include four rounds with heights ranging from 110 to the grand prize height of 140 cm. The top performers will be vying for a generous prize of 10,000 Dinar for first place in each category.

EQUESTRIAN

International Wisdom Nabila Al-Ali, Secretary of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation, emphasized the intense competition among both male and female riders in the third edition of the Kuwaiti Equestrian League. She highlighted the season's structure, consisting of 8 rounds, providing ample opportunities for participants to showcase their skills and vie for victory.

Expressing gratitude, Al-Ali extended thanks to the government and private sectors for their unwavering support of equestrian sports. She acknowledged the significant impact this support has on inspiring passion among male and female riders, encouraging families to attend and cheer for their favorites in local competitions.



Secretary of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation, Nabila Al-Ali.

In the current standings, Kuwait Club's Ali Al-Kharafi shares the lead with Abrar Al-Musallam from the Hunting and Equestrian Club, both accumulating 45 points. Abdul Rahman Al-Fuzai' follows closely with 35 points, and Ghazi Al-Jariri holds 28 points. Kuwait Club dominates the club standings with 217 points, leading ahead of the Shooting Club (116 points), Subhan Club (112 points), and Hawally Club (100 points). The league promises continued excitement and competition as riders vie for top honors in the coming rounds.

Best of the Rest

Reguilon returns to Spurs: Manchester United ended its loan deal for Tottenham defender Sergio Reguilon on Thursday.

The Spanish left back moved to Old Trafford in August on a season-long loan. But United has exercised a break clause in the contract and Reguilon will return to Spurs. "With fewer games in the second half of the season and injured players returning, there will be less opportunity for Sergio to play," United said. "It was decided it was in the best interests of all parties for Reguilon to return to Spurs." (AP)



Reguilon

Timo joins Cologne as coach: Cologne has appointed Timo Schultz as coach in a bid to climb away from the Bundesliga relegation zone.

Schultz takes over from Steffen Baumgart and will prepare the team for its next game against promoted Heidenheim on Jan. 13, Cologne said on Thursday.

The 46-year-old Schultz previously coached FC Basel in Switzerland and St. Pauli in the German second division.

"He has personality and the competence to raise the performance potential of our squad," Cologne managing director Christian Keller said. "If we take on everything with complete conviction and all our efforts in every area together with Timo Schultz, then we will stay up." (AP)

Hašek returns as Czech coach: Ivan Hašek was appointed as the Czech Republic's new coach for the European Championship on

Roma to 'set' up derby with Lazio

ROME, Jan 4, (AP): Romelu Lukaku and Paulo Dybala each scored and Roma came back from a goal down to beat Cremonese 2-1 and set up a derby with Lazio in the Italian Cup quarterfinals.

The Serie B team had eliminated Roma in the quarterfinals last season and it looked like it might be a repeat when Frank Tsjadout put Cremonese ahead late in the first half.

But Dybala came on after half-time and set up Lukaku's score before converting a penalty five minutes from time.

Roma captain Lorenzo Pellegrini had hit the crossbar midway through the first half. The derby with Lazio will be played next week, with Lazio having eliminated Genoa last month.

Also, Charles De Ketelaere scored two goals and set up another to lead Atalanta to a 3-1 win over Sassuolo and a quarterfinal matchup with AC Milan.

Milan eliminated Cagliari on Tuesday.

Thursday.

Hašek was hired to November 2025 with an option to extend his contract to the 2026 World Cup if the team qualifies, said Petr Fousek, the Czech Football Association head.

He returns as coach after taking charge for five games in 2009-10. Hašek, aged 60, replaces Jaroslav Šilhavý, who resigned on Nov. 20 after the final game in Euro 2024 qualifying, a 3-0 victory over Moldova. The result secured an eighth straight qualification for the Euros for the Czechs. (AP)



Cristiano Ronaldo waves to fans prior to Saudi soccer league match.

Sports

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This win is a great feat for us: captain Sharma

India dominate South Africa in shortest ever Test and draw series

PSG win Champions Trophy

CAPE TOWN, South Africa, Jan 4, (AP): India beat South Africa by seven wickets in the shortest Test match in cricket history on Thursday.

India crossed the finish line 12 overs after lunch on day two. Chasing 79, they scored 80-3.

Only 642 legitimate deliveries were bowled across four-plus sessions. The previous shortest Test - 656 balls - was in 1932 at Melbourne between Australia and South Africa.

India's first win at Newlands tied the two-match series 1-1. South Africa won in Centurion by an innings and 32 runs.

"This win is a great feat for us," captain Rohit Sharma said. "We had to learn from our mistakes in Centurion. We came back very well, especially our bowlers. We knew it was going to be a short game where every run mattered. We applied ourselves with the bat and got nearly a 100-run lead."

Fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah's 6-61 helped to negate Aiden Markram's brilliant 106 to bowl out South Africa out for 176 runs in their second innings by lunch.

That gave India a tricky chase of 79 on a pitch of variable bounce.

Opener Yashasvi Jaiswal scored a quickfire 28 off 23 balls, with six boundaries. He was caught at long leg off Nandre Burger.

Sharma survived two dropped catches, and was unbeaten in the end with 17 not out.

Kagiso Rabada bowled Shubman Gill for 10, and finished the short series with 11 wickets.

CRICKET

Marco Jansen nicked off Virat Kohli for 12 runs when India was four runs from only their fifth win on South African soil.

Earlier, Markram's counterattacking century helped the Proteas improve from 111-7 to finish on 176, when lunch was called.

After 23 wickets fell on an extraordinary first day, South Africa resumed on 62-3 in their second innings and were immediately in more trouble when David Bedingham was caught behind for 11 off Bumrah.

Kyle Verreyne scored 9 and pulled to mid-on four overs later, again off Bumrah.

Jansen was out caught, a return catch to Bumrah, then Keshav Maharaj was caught at gully.

Bumrah earned his ninth five-wicket haul in test cricket and South Africa was down to 111-7 in 25.2 overs.

The game looked like ending in the morning session with India chasing an innings victory. But Markram stepped up.

The opener scored 51 off 38 balls with tailender Rabada for the eighth wicket, and reached his hundred off 99 balls. Markram hit 17 fours and two sixes in his 103-ball knock.

The next highest score was Dean Elgar's 12. Apart from Markram, only three batters reached double digits.

Before Markram's masterclass, the best individual score in the game was Kohli's 46 in India's first innings.

Markram was caught off Mohammed Siraj, who picked up his first wicket of the second innings after taking 6-15 in the first innings.

Prasidh Krishna also claimed his maiden test wicket after another poor outing in his debut series.

Bumrah wrapped up South Africa's innings before lunch when Lungi Ngidi was caught at slip for 8. It was his third six-wicket haul in test cricket.

He finished the series with 12 wickets and was named joint player of the series with Elgar, who scored 201 runs across four innings.

Elgar, who led South Africa at Newlands in the absence of the injured Temba Bavuma, announced his retirement pre-series.

"I would have liked to do more in this test, but I am still proud of my performance in Centurion," said Elgar, who scored 185 in the first innings there.



PSG's players celebrate after winning the French Super Cup final soccer match between Toulouse and Paris Saint-Germain at the Parc des Princes in Paris. PSG won 2-0. (AP)

Mbappé gives PSG glimmer of hope

PARIS, Jan 4, (AP): Kylian Mbappé and Lee Kang-in both scored as French league champion Paris Saint-Germain beat French Cup winner Toulouse 2-0 to win the Champions Trophy.

Lee put PSG ahead in the third minute after being set up by Ousmane Dembélé's first-time pass.

Toulouse left back Gabriel Suazo missed a chance to equalize in the 18th when he failed to meet a pass over the defense from midfielder Aron Donnum.

Dembélé and fellow winger Bradley Barcola also went close for PSG before Toulouse's Dutch striker Thijs Dallinga hit the post.

PSG made the most of that reprieve in the 44th when Mbappé collected Barcola's pass and beat 18-year-old goalkeeper Guillaume Restes from near the penalty spot. It took Mbappé's overall tally to 22 goals in 23 matches this season and extended his PSG scoring record to 234 since joining in the summer of 2017.

SOCCER

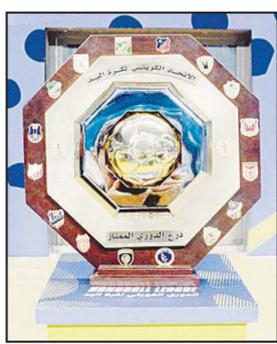
The Champions Trophy has been held abroad in recent years as a pre-season curtain raiser. This year's edition was scheduled to be held in Bangkok in August but was switched in June when the local organizer backed out.

The French league decided to hold the match on home soil at PSG's stadium in Paris rather than in Saudi Arabia or Qatar as had been expected.

Meanwhile, Mbappé gave Paris Saint-Germain a glimmer of hope he might stay by insisting he has not yet decided on his future.

Mbappé's contract runs out in June, and last year he caused a stir by refusing to sign a 12-month contract extension, meaning he can leave on a free transfer at the end of this season. The France star is also authorized to talk to clubs in January and sign a pre-contract agreement.

It was widely considered that Mbappé would see out this season and leave Real Madrid is favored to sign him after twice failing with previous bids. But speaking late Wednesday after PSG's victory against Toulouse in



The General League Championship trophy.

the Champions Trophy, Mbappé cast doubt on that.

"I am very motivated for this season. It's very important, we have trophies to win. Beyond that, no, I haven't made my decision," Mbappé said.

PSG has insisted he will not leave for free.

"With the agreement I reached with the (PSG) president this summer, never mind what decision I take, we managed to protect the serenity of the club for the challenges ahead," Mbappé said. "That's the most important thing."

Mbappé has been in a similar position before, making PSG wait until the end of his then-contract before signing a new one in May 2022 when Madrid was aggressively pursuing him.

He said he was unsure when he will announce his decision this time.

"I have no idea. It was made at the end of May in 2022 because I didn't know until May," Mbappé said. "If I know what I want to do (now), why wait around? But the most important thing is winning trophies. We're determined, and the team is focused on that."

Mbappé's goal in the 2-0 victory over Toulouse took his overall tally to 22 in 23 matches this season and extended his PSG scoring record to 234 since joining in the summer of 2017.

But he failed to score or make an impression when PSG lost 4-1 at Newcastle and 2-1 at AC Milan in the Champions League, scraping into the last 16 in second place in the final round of games.

Kuwait handball teams preparations in full swing

General League Championship draw set for Monday

By Khaled El Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 4: The Competitions Committee of the Handball Federation will conduct the draw for the 2023-2024 General League Championship on Monday. The event is scheduled to take place at the Federation's headquarters in Daiya at 7:00 pm.

The league is anticipated to kick off next month, following the conclusion of the first national team's participation in the 21st Asian Championship "2025 World Cup Qualifiers" set to be held in Bahrain from January 11-25.

HANDBALL

The league's delayed commencement is attributed to the packed handball tournament calendar for the current season. The national team's involvement in the Asian Games in China last September, Kuwait Club's participation in the Super Globe Club World Championship in Dammam, and the "Blue" team's participation in the Asian qualifiers for the 2024 Paris Olympics in Qatar last November have contributed to the schedule challenges. Furthermore, both Kuwaiti and Al-Qadisiyah clubs participated in the 26th Asian Club Championship hosted by "Al-Asfar" in November.

The General Sports Authority's rejection of the handball refresher tournament at the Sheikh Saad Al Abdullah Complex's hall in December prompted the federation to postpone the event.

Simultaneously, the national handball team is currently engaged in its fourth match during the ongoing camp in Slovenia, facing the Georgia national team. This friendly match follows two encounters with the first Slovenia national team and one with the Saudi team. The team is preparing for the 21st Asian Championship in Bahrain this month, with the delegation expected to return to the country next Sunday.

In parallel, the under-15 national team and the under-13 Al-Baraem national team continue their training at the Martyr Fahd Al-Ahmad Center in Daiya. Led by Hungarian coach Stefan Kovacic, the training regimen focuses on physical conditioning, ball sense recovery, muscle building exercises, and attaining the required physical and mental levels for the players.

Cristiano Ronaldo clinches Maradona Award for Best Scorer at Dubai Globe Soccer Awards 2023

DUBAI, Jan 4: Portuguese football icon Cristiano Ronaldo clinched the prestigious Maradona Award for Best Scorer of the Year 2023 at the Dubai Globe Soccer Awards, supported by the Dubai Sports Council. The 14th edition awards ceremony is set to take place at the Atlantis Hotel and Resort on January 19.

Ronaldo secured the accolade by surpassing competition from Kylian Mbappe, Harry Kane, and Erling Haaland. This achievement adds another feather to Ronaldo's cap of individual successes, as he notched an impressive 54 goals in 59 matches. It marks his highest goal tally in a single year since 2017 when he played for Real Madrid, scoring 53 goals. This feat solidifies Ronaldo's position as the Best Scorer of the Year, ahead of Kylian Mbappe (52 goals in 53 matches), Harry Kane (52 goals in 57 matches), and Erling Haaland (50 goals in 60 matches for

Manchester City).

This award is a crowning moment for Ronaldo's remarkable career in the past year, particularly considering his age of 38. He scored 34 goals for Saudi team Al-Nasr, contributing to their pursuit of the Saudi Professional League title. Despite his age, Ronaldo remains a strong contender for the Best Player award in the tournament, the world award, the best player in the Middle East, and the fans' best player award. Notably, Ronaldo holds the title of the game's all-time top scorer, boasting over 873 goals.

The final round of voting for the Dubai Globe Soccer Awards saw an impressive participation of football fans globally, with over 50 million votes recorded across 11 main categories, six digital categories, and the inaugural Italian League Awards, including the Italian League.



South Africa, (left) and India, (right), tie the Freedom Series 1-1, Cape Town, South Africa. (AP)