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# ARAB TIMES

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## Opinion

### Sheikh Mohammad Al-Sabah, be at par with people's elation

By Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

SHEIKH Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, there is no doubt that your biography is honorable. You are aware of all the circumstances that the country has gone through in recent years, and the hopes that people place on you.

Many Kuwaitis believe that you may be Kuwait's equivalent to Singapore's savior Lee Kuan Yew at this stage, especially since everyone remembers your position on corruption and bribery, and your withdrawal from office so as not to be tainted by that.



Al-Jarallah

However, we know without a doubt that you did not withdraw from Kuwait and its concerns.

Everyone also knows your regional and international relations, especially with the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and your distinguished presence in the Gulf, Arab and international circles. They know your political and economic lectures, and your refusal to return to the ministry in previous governments.

All this was aimed to avoid being a false witness to the crimes of corruption, the "looting" of public funds, and the clandestine deals that usually took place at night.

In this regard, His Highness the Amir was clear in his statement about his dissatisfaction with corruption, and he responded to some, but the workshop awaits you to complete what His Highness announced.

Sheikh Mohammad, welcome to the first executive position. As citizens, we say the country needs a lot of work to get out of the closed cycle of relying on oil and foreign investments in the national product.

As everyone knows, closing the country to investors as a result of the adoption of backward and strict laws and decisions has the nature of personal self-interest, far from scientific study and the interest of the country. It is one of the reasons that made Kuwait, par excellence, an investment repellent.

The neighboring countries, even those that were strict in this regard, changed their systems and laws and opened up to the world, because they believed it is the most important factor for stability and prosperity.

Today, Kuwait is suffering from the consequences of the absurd conflict between the two authorities - the legislative and the executive. The consequences of it have led to several crises that are painful for the people, especially since this was based on the principle of "grilling and questioning for a price."

We saw in the recent impeachment of the Prime Minister the ridiculous way it proceeded, how it was devised, and the deals that were concluded in a dark night for it.

Your Highness the new Prime Minister, we, as citizens and observers, have the right to say what is on our minds.

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Email: ahmed@aljarallah.com

Follow me on:



ahmedaljarallah@gmail.com

## NewsWatch

**ABU DHABI:** The United Arab Emirates' Vice President, Prime Minister and Dubai Ruler Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum Saturday announced a cabinet reshuffle, including some ministers.

On his "X" account, Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid said that Sheikh Maktoum bin Mohammed bin Rashid was appointed Deputy Prime Minister for economic and financial Affairs. (KUNA)

**CAIRO:** Egypt and the UAE got into a partnership to develop the Egyptian ports so as to boost yacht and cruises tourism, said Egyptian Transport Minister Kamel Al-Wazir Thursday.

This came in a news conference held by Al-Wazir following signing a contract by Egypt's Red Sea Ports Authority (RSPA) and Abu Dhabi Ports Group (AD Ports) to develop and operate tourist ships, and passengers terminals at the ports of Hurghada and Safage as well as Sharm El-Sheikh on the Red Sea. (KUNA)

**WASHINGTON:** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna yesterday and both sides stressed the importance of immediate end of illegal attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea by the Iranian-backed Houthis and the release of unlawfully detained vessels and crews.

They discussed the importance of measures to prevent the conflict in Gaza from expanding, including affirmative steps to de-escalate tensions in the West Bank and to avoid escalation in Lebanon and Iran, State Dept. Spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a press release on Thursday. (KUNA)

# MP appeals for expat staff amid Assembly TV layoffs

### Expert rules out dissolution in gov't formation

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6:** Constitutional expert Professor Muhammad Al-Fili has clarified that the Constitution does not specify the period for the new prime minister to form his government, but it stipulates the

accomplishment of this task as soon as possible.

He pointed out that the dissolution of the Assembly is not necessary in the event a new government is formed; but a new government is needed for a newly elected legislature. He reiterated that a new parliamentary term requires the formation of a new government, but the appointment of a new prime minister does not require a new legislature; hence, there is no need to dissolve the Assembly.

## 'Prioritize local firms with proven track records for road repairs'



Photo reveals the dismal state of Kuwait's roads along the 4th Ring Road.

Photo by Mohammad Morse

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6:** MP Abdul Wahab Al-Issa has proposed allowing local companies with a reputable track record to carry out road repair works, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Al-Issa pointed out that the decision of the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) to cancel road repair contracts in all governorates for international companies, in response to the Ministry of Public

Works' request, "is predictable from the outset."

He said: "We have opted to remain silent in the hope of being proven wrong, trusting that foreign companies would find it economically unfeasible to bring their heavy equipment and skilled labor for short-term contracts lasting from six months to a year. If they secured the contract, subcontracting with local companies would be inevitable due to the presence of

their equipment and labor in Kuwait. This was validated in the State Audit Bureau's reports when the estimated project costs soared by 200 percent."

He suggested "opting for local companies with a clean track record, as this approach ensures swifter completion, reduced costs, and enhanced scrutiny of sample testing throughout the implementation process."

## Bid to prevent regional conflagration

# Blinken in Turkey as Gaza war tensions grow

**ISTANBUL, Jan 6, (AP):** U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken kicked off his latest urgent Middle East diplomatic mission in Turkey on Saturday, as fears mount that Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza may explode into a broader conflict.

Blinken's fourth visit in three months comes amid worrying developments outside of Gaza, including in Lebanon, northern Israel, the Red Sea and Iraq, that have put intense strains on what has been a modestly successful U.S. push to prevent a regional conflagration in the weeks after the war began, and growing international criticism of Israel's military operation.

Blinken met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan to discuss what Turkey and others can do to exert influence, particularly on Iran and its proxies, to ease soaring tensions, speed up humanitarian aid deliveries to Gaza and begin in earnest to plan for reconstruction and governance of postwar Gaza, much of which has been reduced to rubble by three months of intense Israeli bombardments.

The immediate difficulty of Blinken's task was underscored just hours before his talks with Erdogan as Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah militia fired dozens of rockets at northern Israel, warning that the barrage was just an initial response to the targeted killing, presumably by Israel, of a top leader from the allied Hamas group in Lebanon's capital earlier this week.

Meanwhile, stepped-up attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels have disrupted international trade and led to increased efforts on the part of the U.S. and its allies to patrol the area and respond to threats, including possibly taking direct action against the group at its bases in Yemen. The Houthis have carried out at least two dozen attacks in response to the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza just since Dec. 19, which have further heightened tensions and raised risks for the global economy.

In Istanbul, U.S. officials said Blinken would be seeking Turkish buy-in, or at least consideration, of potential monetary or in-kind contributions to reconstruction efforts and some form of participation in a proposed multinational force that could operate in or adjacent to the territory. Turkey, and Erdogan in particular, have been harshly critical of Israel and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the prosecution of the war and the impact it has had on Palestinian civilians.

## Bid to prevent regional conflagration

# Lebanon's PM seeking to avert full-scale war

**BEIRUT, Jan 6, (Agencies):** The prime minister of the Lebanese caretaker government, Najib Mikati, said on Saturday that he is holding contacts with influential capitals to spare the country full-scale war.

Mikati speaking during a meeting in the Lebanese capital with Josep Borrel, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, warned that a full-scale "explosion of the situation in southern Lebanon might spill over to the whole region."

According to a statement re-

leased by the premier's press office, Mikati affirmed Lebanon's adherence to the UN resolution 1701, however he noted its implementation "warrants cessation of the Israeli breaches of the Lebanese sovereignty and withdrawing from the occupied Lebanese territories."

His remarks came amid escalating tension across the southern borders, with recurring tit-for-tat gunfire exchanges between the Lebanese resistance and the Israeli forces.

Earlier today, Lebanon's He-

zbollah militia fired dozens of rockets at northern Israel on Saturday, warning that the barrage was its initial response to the targeted killing, presumably by Israel, of a top leader from the allied Hamas group in Lebanon's capital earlier this week.

The rocket attack came a day after Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said that his group must retaliate for the killing of Saleh Arouri, the deputy political leader of Hamas in a Hezbollah stronghold south of Beirut.

'Famine looms'

# Gaza uninhabitable 3 mths into war: UN

**UNITED NATIONS, Jan 6, (AP):** The U.N. humanitarian chief described Gaza on Friday as "uninhabitable" three months into Israel's war with Hamas, warning that famine was looming and a public health disaster unfolding.

In a grim assessment of the devastating impact of Israel's military response to the horrific Hamas attacks on Oct. 7, Martin Griffiths said that Gaza's 2.3 million people face "daily threats to their very existence" while the world just watches.

He said tens of thousands of people, mostly women and children, have been killed or injured, families are sleeping in the open as temperatures plummet, and areas where Palestinians were told to relocate have been bombed.

"People are facing the highest levels of food insecurity ever recorded (and) famine is around the corner," Griffiths

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## US congratulates Kuwait's new PM

**WASHINGTON, Jan 6. (KUNA):** The United States congratulated Friday Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah on being appointed as Prime

Minister of Kuwait. In a statement, Spokesperson for the

Continued on Page 5

Meanwhile, National Assembly Secretary MP Osama Al-Shaheen recently met with Chairman of the Central Committee at Kuwait Democratic Forum (KDF) Bandar Al-Khairan and Deputy Secretary General of the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM) Esraa Al-Maatoouq.

During the meeting, Al-Shaheen honored the two groups and expressed his gratitude for the efforts they exerted in supporting the Palestinian cause; including the organization of the forum entitled, 'Palestine and Sustainability,' in coordination with the concerned entities and civil society organizations.

He called on the government to implement the recommendations presented in the special session on supporting Palestine; such as unifying efforts to support the issue, allowing Palestinian teachers in Kuwait to bring their spouses and children under family visa, allowing the injured Palestinians to undergo treatment in Kuwaiti hospitals, and filing a case against the Zionist entity. He asserted it is embarrassing to see South Africa filing a case against the Zionist entity at the International Criminal Court, while the Arab and Muslim countries have yet to take such a step. He urged the Arab and Muslim governments to take the necessary measures to match the action taken by Arab and Muslim peoples.

In another development, MP Fahd Al-Masoud confirmed holding a meeting with Assembly Speaker Ahmed Al-Saadoun who promised to revise the decision to terminate expatriate employees at the Assembly TV. He said he explained to Al-Saadoun that these employees are hardworking and some of them greatly contributed to the establishment of the Assembly TV. He also highlighted the humanitarian aspect of the issue, indicating these employees have financial obligations, and that they must provide for their families. He recommended granting them a grace period of six months in order to find new jobs or be reinstated to their posts at the Assembly TV in case a decision in this regard is issued.

Moreover, the parliamentary Environment, Food and Water Security Affairs Committee on Sunday will discuss the participation of Kuwait in the Doha Agriculture Exhibition 2023.

The Health, Social and Labor Affairs Committee will also meet on Sunday to discuss the bills on amending laws regarding medical services; and the proposed establishment of Dawakom Medical Zone for medical industries, the required storage and equipment, and repeated complaints of citizens against the Health Office in London. Representatives of

Continued on Page 5



A morgue worked to bring out the body of a Palestinian child killed in the Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip in Khan Younis, Saturday, Jan. 6, 2023. (AP)

## Prayer Timings

Fajr ..... 05:19 Asr ..... 14:46  
 Sunrise .. 06:43 Maghrib .. 17:04  
 Zohr ..... 11:54 Isha ..... 18:26

# Local

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

## Weather

**Expected weather for next 24 hrs:**  
**By Day:** Mild with light to moderate freshening at times northwesterly wind, with speeds of 12-42 km/h.  
**By Night:** Rather cold to cold with light to moderate northwest-

erly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of 08-35 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

**Station** Max Exp Min Rec  
 Kuwait City 23 13

Kuwait Airport	22	09
Abdaly	22	08
Jahra	22	12
Salmiyah	21	16
Nuwaisib	23	12
Wafra	22	10

## Farmers suffering from over decade: Al-Baddah

# Groundwater leakage sinking Wafra agricultural area: Kuwaiti farmer

By Abdul Nasser Al-Aslami

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6: A Kuwaiti farmer Muhammad Al-Baddah called on the authorities concerned with agriculture and agricultural areas in Kuwait to work seriously and sincerely to end the problem of groundwater leakage in some Wafra agricultural plots that many Wafra farmers have been suffering from for over a decade.

In an interview with Al-Seyassah newspaper, Al-Baddah said, "The groundwater seeping from the ground is drowning a large part of the farm of my father (May God have mercy on him). It is dear to me, and I continue to be dedicated to it as a farmer, despite the high financial cost I have to bear and the huge loss of time and effort as a result of this problem. How long will this problem continue, as many farmers are suffering from it?"

**Question:** How did you deal with the problem of groundwater leakage?

**Answer:** I tried, with a lot of my efforts and my own money to address this destructive problem in my farm in Wafra, Block 4, but to no avail.

**Q:** Did you manage to combat the problem with your money?

**A:** Yes, I paid thousands of dinars to fill some sparkling wells adjacent to my farm, and thousands more to bring sand.

It is not possible to confront this major problem without the cooperation of the concerned authorities scientifically, sincerely, seriously, and in the spirit of one team in order to find the location of the defect and treat it as quickly as possible.

**Q:** How did you address about this problem?

**A:** The Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources, the Ministry of Electricity and Water, the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, and Kuwait University.

**Q:** Did these parties respond to you?

**A:** The Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources did not

do justice to me as it did to my neighbor, who chose to leave his farm, which was next to mine, and received an alternative plot in Wafra. I am waiting to receive justice from the PAAAFR, as an official there promised me.

**Q:** Will the problem worsen?

**A:** Ignoring the problem of groundwater leakage in Block 4 will worsen it dangerously, as several parts of it have become swamps of stagnant water where harmful insects such as mosquitoes breed. It has also become a dumping ground for the farm wastes near and far from my farm. Due to the growth of aquatic plants there, reckless youth throw a lot of water at it in order to catch birds from high above. All of this causes inconvenience and exposes us to danger.

**Q:** How did you live with the problem and continue your agricultural efforts?

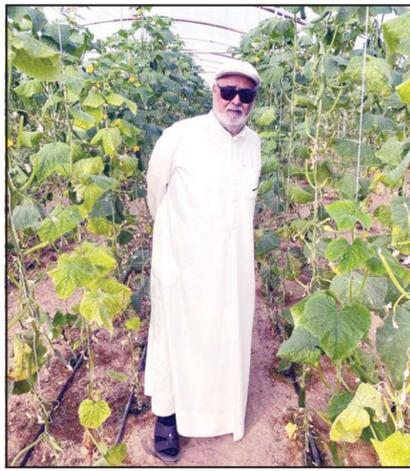
**A:** Agriculture is in my blood. In the second part of my farm in Block 4 where there are many fields and agricultural tunnels, I planted tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants. The high produce from them was good, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

**Q:** Do you normally produce large quantities of these types of vegetables?

**A:** Yes, large quantities are sent to the Sulaibiya market through the Agricultural Products Company. We also give large quantities to the farm patrons, as was the method followed during the era of my father Nasser Al-Baddah, one of the founders of the Al-Wafra Agricultural Area, the Farmers' Union, and the Al-Wafra Farming Association in the 1970s. This farm is our second home.

**Q:** Do you have any requests other than solving the problem of water leaks?

**A:** I would like to double my crops, especially in the fields, as I did before. I used to grow large quantities of potatoes annually, but the worsening problem of groundwater leakage in a large part of my farm prevents it from being fully planted this season.



Muhammad Al-Baddah



Groundwater leakage affecting the farms.

# 'Kuwait helps save lives'

'Contributions reach millions in times of need'

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6: Kuwait's contributions reached millions of people in need around the world during difficult times, reports Al-Qabas daily quoting Nour Al-Qattan -- an official at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the country and representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Kuwait Nisreen Rabiean.**

In a press statement, Al-Qattan and Rabiean stressed the United Nations' commitment to maintain a strong partnership with Kuwait in order to achieve humanitarian goals. They affirmed that Kuwait's support made a big difference in the lives of forcibly displaced people around the world, and contributed to improving the living conditions of hundreds of thousands of refugees and their host communities.

They said the slogan, "Kuwait is beside You," gives a glimmer of hope to all peoples going through crises around the world. Both officials expect to witness this year an urgent need for protection and humanitarian assistance for about 300 million people around the world due to conflicts, the effects of global climate change and economic challenges.

Rabiean praised Kuwait's humanitarian efforts and support that made a difference in the lives of forcibly displaced people in the world. She revealed that UNHCR's partners in the local public sector are the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Interior, as well as Kuwait Fund for Development, which provided government funding for some of UNHCR's major projects in Iraq, Jordan and Yemen, and helped improve the living conditions of hundreds of thousands of refugees and their host communities.

Rabiean stressed that the existing cooperation with Kuwait as a humanitarian partner has contributed to supporting humanitarian response efforts in a number of countries witnessing conflicts, wars and natural disasters like Pakistan, Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan and Ukraine. Kuwait was a major donor to the humanitarian appeal in the wake of the devastating earthquakes that struck Syria and Turkey, she concluded.

Al-Qattan talked about Kuwait's humanitarian contributions during the reign of HH the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah including the year 2023. She said Kuwait has been playing a major role in supporting afflicted peoples for decades with the participation of all sectors of the State; including the provision of humanitarian and development assistance to those affected by regional and global crises, while the humanitarian agencies provide life-saving assistance to those in need in different fields like health, food, shelter, protection and education.

She stated that the year 2023 witnessed a significant increase in humanitarian needs as a result of conflicts, natural disasters and the impact of climate change. "Kuwait responded immediately to emergency situations like the earthquakes in Turkey, Syria and Morocco; floods in Libya; the conflict in Sudan and the Gaza War. It built humanitarian air bridges to transport vital aid for the people who lost everything in Gaza," she added.

She also tackled the United Nations' partnership with Kuwait in 2023, stressing that OCHA is grateful for its partnership with Kuwait. "In 2023, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs financed the Central Emergency Response Fund, while the Kuwaiti Fund financed the Humanitarian Fund in Yemen. Due to this support, our funds have been able to provide life-saving assistance as soon as a crisis strikes.

We focused on proactive work for climate-related disasters, which allowed the humanitarian community to grant aid before the disaster occurred; thereby, reducing urgent needs and damages. OCHA also strengthened partnerships with non-governmental organizations; such as charitable societies, Kuwait Red Crescent Society and the private sector, especially in the fields of advocacy, training, qualification and resource development.

Talking about the humanitarian needs in 2024, Al-Qattan disclosed there will be an urgent need for protection and humanitarian assistance for about 300 million people around the world; taking into consideration the ongoing conflicts, effects of global climate changes and economic challenges.

She emphasized the need to give special attention to the Sudanese and Palestinian crises. In Sudan, the need for internal assistance has increased significantly due to the escalation of the conflict in 2023. This led to the displacement of a large percentage of the Sudanese population to neighboring countries. In the Gaza Strip, operational challenges have intensified due to the escalation of combat operations, instability, road closures, fuel shortages and reduced means of communication, she added.

## 'Kuwait keen on leading effective role during UNHRC membership'

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6, (KUNA):** 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. His remarks came upon Kuwait starting its three-year membership (2024-2026) at the Geneva-based Council.

It also reflects confidence of Kuwait when it comes to serving Arab and Islamic causes in relation to human rights, nonetheless on a global scale, he noted. This membership is yet another achievement throughout Kuwait's "balanced" foreign policy, Sheikh Salem said.

Last October, the UN General Assembly elected Kuwait, along with 14 other countries to serve on the Human Rights Council.

Kuwait, along with Albania, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burundi, China, Cote d'Ivoire, Cuba, Dominican Republic, France, Ghana, Indonesia, Japan, Malawi, and the Netherlands were elected to serve for three years, beginning January 1, 2024.

The Human Rights Council, the UN's premier rights body, is tasked with the responsibility to uphold and advance fundamental freedoms globally. It was created in 2006 and consists of 47 member States, elected via secret ballot by the majority of General Assembly members.

### Stability, security, peace

Kuwaiti Ambassador to Libya Ziad Faisal Al-Mashaan affirmed Thursday Kuwait's supportive position to efforts aiming to enhance stability, security and peace in that Arab country.

Al-Mashaan made the statement to KUNA after taking part in a meeting held by chairman of Libya's Government of National Unity (GNU) Abdul Hamid al-Dbeibeh with some Arab and Muslim ambassadors.

Al-Mashaan referred to the visit he

paid to the flood-affected city of Derna early September upon the directives of Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to be informed about the destruction in the city due to floods.

The visit showed Kuwait's backing to Libyans in their humanitarian plight, he noted.

During the meeting, al-Dbeibeh stressed that Libya appreciates deep-rooted ties with Kuwait, referring to his government's efforts aiming to boost them on all levels.

Al-Mashaan conveyed the congratulations of al-Dbeibeh to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on assuming office, wishing him every success in continuing the path of goodness and development to Kuwait.

Al-Dbeibeh also renewed his heartfelt condolences to Kuwait on the demise of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the ambassador said.

Meanwhile, the Libyan premier emphasized his government's endeavors to bolster stability and peace in the country that are topped with providing required support to the UN mission's efforts so as to hold parliamentary and presidential polls.

### UAE's role applauded

The State of Kuwait on Friday applauded UAE's mediation efforts in the Russia-Ukraine prisoner swap.

Lauding the UAE's diplomatic efforts in sustaining world stability and peace, a Foreign Ministry statement also reaffirmed Kuwait's support to all similar initiatives.

Furthermore, the ministry statement stressed Kuwait's position vis-a-vis the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which calls for adhering to principles of international law and the UN Charter of respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries.

'Report violations on hotline 135'

## 'Eggs, onions available in co-ops'

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6:** A team of technical employees tasked to supervise goods and determine their prices in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, headed by Faisal Al-Ansari, recently visited cooperative societies to ensure that the prices of 39 food commodities are the same as those registered in the ministry's system, reports Al-Anba daily.

In a statement to the daily, Al-Ansari disclosed that the team confirmed the availability of eggs and onions in cooperative societies.

He also said that Undersecretary of the ministry Ziyad Al-Najem will soon issue an administrative decision to form a committee, which will work for a period of two months to monitor the prices of Ramadan commodities in cooperative societies and central markets, as well as the stores selling meat, poultry, dates and in demand food products before and during the holy month of Ramadan.

He explained this committee is formed annually, coinciding with the

approach of Ramadan, as part of the ministry's commitment to protect consumers. He urged the public to report violations through hotline number 135, WhatsApp No. 55135135, official website of the ministry or the commercial centers. He affirmed the ministry is keen on addressing such reports in a bid to protect the consumers.

**Name change ordered:** Minister of Social, Family and Childhood Affairs Sheikh Firas Al-Saud recently issued Ministerial Resolution No. 260/2023 to change the name of the 'Charitable Societies and Charities Union' to 'Union of Charities and Foundations', reports Al-Anba daily.

Article Two of the resolution stipulates the official declaration of the Union of Charities and Foundations and any text contradicting the provisions of this resolution is considered null and void.

## Other Voices

### 'Let people rejoice, celebrate'

By Ahmad alsarraf

You don't have to be a Christian to enjoy Christmas. Regardless of your religious belief or not, Christmas is a beautiful holiday with its rituals and decorations, and is celebrated by billions of people every year, including Christians, Buddhists, damned atheists, and others.

Historically, the Romans, before Christ (PBUH), celebrated the coming of the sun by placing green branches in their homes.



alsarraf

Northern European priests also used to decorate their temples with green branches of trees as a symbol of eternal life.

It is said that the credit for placing Christmas trees in homes goes mainly to Germany, which began the current Christmas tree tradition with the advent of the sixteenth century, that is, 1,500 years after the birth of Christ, when religious Christians would bring decorated trees to their homes.

It is also widely believed that the Rev. Martin Luther, the founder of Protestantism, was the first to add lit candles to the tree, as he tied them to the tree's branches.

Until 200 years ago, Americans were opposed to placing a Christmas tree in the home, as it was a pagan symbol, and there was a law in Massachusetts that considered celebrating Christmas a criminal offense, but the situation in the West completely changed in 1846, when Queen Victoria was photographed standing with her family around the Christmas tree, and Americans became more accepting of its idea in the early twentieth century, and over time it became part of a global ritual, especially after the arrival of electricity.

From all of this, we discover that the Christmas tree has no religious connotations, or relationship to Christianity, and Christ (PBUH) was not born under a tree like what is portrayed by some these days.

The whole topic symbolizes joy and a happy event, while not forgetting the commercial aspect. Therefore, we find that dozens of countries, such as China, Korea, and Japan, celebrate Christmas

and place Christmas trees in their homes, shops, hotels, and public squares, as a symbol of joy, not as a religious symbol.

It is sad and disgusting that municipal inspectors, year after year, raided -- and the description is quite accurate -- many stores, confiscating their plastic Christmas trees, issuing tickets to their owners, and threatening them with fines and closure if they sold any of them.

These and other actions are immoral and illogical, and are often intended to anger people of other religions, prevent them from joy, make their lives devoid of all beauty, and increase the monotony of life and make it boring, beyond the misery it already is.

How can a sane person imagine that a plastic tree no more than two meters in length could affect a religion that has not stopped expanding for a year, since it came to light more than 1,400 years ago.

In 1988, Scorsese directed The Last Temptation of Christ, based on the 1955 novel by the controversial Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis of the same name, and starring unknown actors.

The film depicted the life of Christ and his struggle with various forms of temptation, including fear, doubt, depression, hesitation, lust, and his exposure to temptation. This at the time aroused the anger of some Christians, and Ramsay, the Archbishop of England at the time, stated that he was not opposed to showing the film. If a film was that weak, it poses a threat to Christianity, and this is not a defect in the film!

Let the people rejoice and celebrate, for it has been proven that the majority of those who called for extremism and fighting people of other sects were those with foreign agendas, and those who sought to conspire against their homelands, in cooperation with other countries, and among them were those involved in various suspicious relationships and dealings!

These are the source of danger, not a plastic Christmas tree!

**Note:** We extend our sincere congratulations to the followers of the Eastern churches on the occasion of the glorious Christmas of Christ, wishing them continued health and happiness.

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

# diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

## Optimism, glee as HH Amir appoints Sheikh Dr Muhammad new PM

"A truly happy weekend, not only for me, but I am certain that it is for every Kuwaiti who loves his country and is optimistic about the coming days, especially after the happy news when the Amiri Diwan announced the issuance of the decree by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad, may God bless and protect him, appointing Dr. Muhammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah to form the forty-fifth government in the history of Kuwait," columnist **Waleed Al-Jassem** wrote for **Al-Rai** daily.

"Dr. Muhammad, in addition to his high academic qualifications, his long experience, the multiplicity of his positions, and his extensive regional, Arab and international relations, which he will certainly harness for the benefit of Kuwait, Dr. Muhammad, in addition to all of that, is a man of praiseworthy character and conduct.

"He is a man who was able to distance himself from all the pollutants of politics, and was able to enter the world of politics. It is difficult and he left as he entered, in a clean white dress, not tainted by any objections or doubts, neither in his responsibility, nor in his competence, nor in his justice, nor in the sophistication of his morals, which always preserved his positions and enabled him to maintain a good reputation and purity of conduct.

"He did not practice paralysis, nor was he held accountable to anyone, nor was anyone held accountable to him. His calculations were always for Kuwait that he loved and the morals upon which he was raised.

"His love in the hearts was clear yesterday, immediately after the announcement of the Amiri decree, as if his love extended from the people's love for his father, who ruled Kuwait during a golden period in which the country witnessed the harvest of the fruits of the previous stages of Kuwait. Sabah Al-Salem was the Kuwait of scientific, economic, cultural, sports and artistic leadership. It was the ideal in region.

"Sabah Al-Salem's love was not limited only to the achievements and distinction that Kuwait achieved during his reign, but rather his reign was an era of blessing, and people feel true love and the exchange of love with those who love them, and his love for people is still unresolved.

"Today, after this Amiri decree, I see the conditions stimulating optimism and favorable for Kuwait to regain its leadership, with the firmness of our guardian, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal, may God protect and bless him, and his insistence on reform and justice, and with his selection of Dr. Muhammad Al-Sabah as Prime Minister capable of implementing the ruler's vision and agenda to return to leadership."



Waleed Al-Jassem

**Also:**

"There is a common thread between the nature of women and certain behaviors observed in childhood. In the actions of a child, one can observe traits such as extreme jealousy, quick temper, absorption in the immediate surroundings, limited vision of phenomena and appearances, and aversion to correction and guidance. The child also tends to imitate everything seen and relies on it in all matters. Additionally, there is volatility in situations, a curiosity to discover the secrets of homes, and a fascination with praise and flattery," as expressed by Dr. **Abdul Rahman Al Jeeran** in his article for **Al-Rai** daily.

"This inherent weakness in the daughters of Eve often leads them to heavily depend on others, shaping their perception of their value based on how others see them. Consequently, women may become attached to individuals who show indifference towards them, viewing such disinterest as a personal deficiency.

"In response to such situations, women may attempt to win over those who turn away from them, aiming to dispel any doubts about the strength of their beauty, youth, and authority. Woe to those who recognize the significant importance they hold in a woman's eyes, as her admiration becomes the sole goal, and once trust is established, she may move on to gauge the impact of her beauty on others.

"This dynamics sometimes results in a woman undervaluing herself with an immoral partner while looking down on a righteous spouse. If one overlooks these inherent differences between women and men and pursues equality without acknowledging the physiological disparities, it becomes evident that equality is impractical, unjustifiable, and unhelpful.

"The narrative shifts to Europe, where class barriers were dismantled, and people were deemed equal under the law, despite not being so in the eyes of nature. Women, with their childish nature, were the first to tread this path. The lowest of women began to imitate the highest in adornment, acquiring wigs and makeup, and embracing cosmetic procedures. The consequence was the emergence of the "third sex," resulting in permissibility of values, loss of morals, weakened trust between men and women, reluctance to marry, and an increase in divorces for trivial reasons.

"Wise men observed how a woman could use her apparent beauty to manipulate and achieve her desires, understanding that she had replaced the strength of a man with this weapon. Despite the pain from cosmetic procedures, women strive to maintain their appearance as they age, as it becomes a crucial tool to ward off harm and maintain influence.

"Man and woman, both originating from the same species, were created to coexist, with one of them having an advantage to regulate humanity between them. The determination of this advantage, as the author ponders, is it not the

Creator who declared, 'The male different from the female'?"



"The suspension of family and visit visas is an ill-considered decision. The Ministry of Interior's decision is regarded as 'treatment by amputation'. The Minister of Interior's response to a parliamentary question included illogical measures that do not address the problem in a manner befitting Kuwait's status as a humanitarian country in terms of dealing with expatriate workers," columnist **M. Adel Al-Jarallah Al-Khorafi** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"These workers are involved in important jobs and services, hence, the need to ease procedures for them rather than imposing restrictions. In his response to the above-mentioned parliamentary query, the Minister of Interior presented a number of justifications for his decision. Some have pointed out the good and bad aspects of the decision.

"They argued that if anyone manipulates the procedures for the issuance of family and visit visas, it does not mean generalizing the act, such that law-abiding individuals are deprived of these visas as well.

"This is not consistent with the character of Kuwait that has been known for being fair in dealing with expatriate workers. Considering the existence of an international entity tasked to oversee the implementation of international labor laws and their principles, we do not want our country to record positions and violations against them!

"If a minority took advantage of the justifications for the Minister of Interior's decision to exploit the country's capabilities and services, then the Ministry of Interior must conduct a study based on valid, accurate and correct data. It has all the required data to determine the dimensions of the problem and ways to address it without harming a committed majority. The decision is akin to banning the use of cars if someone wants to prevent motorists from crossing the red light.

"The decision made matters worse, as the country is now suffering from closure, difficulty in recruiting workers, scarcity of tourists, and inability to visit Kuwait for those who wish to visit relatives or friends or for those who wish to come here for personal investment. Is Kuwait intended to become a 'locked box' that is difficult to open or enter?

"Personally, I suffered from this. Due to my previous foreign duties, I have many acquaintances and friends abroad. They have been unable to visit me to offer condolences to my nearest and dearest people, as they could not obtain visas. Please, His Excellency the Minister of Interior, do not close the country and turn it into a prison with justifications that can be addressed, even if they require more study and effort."

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes

### Major events in Kuwait during 2023

#### Social Affairs, transport and public facilities

Jan 9: Kuwait Ports Authority announced that the cruise ship **ARTANIA MS**, carrying around 1,000 tourists from across Europe, docked in Kuwait as part of a tour of the wider Arab region.

Jan 15: The Fatwa and Legislation Department declared that a verdict in favor of Kuwait had been issued regarding the international arbitration presented by a consortium of Italian and Spanish companies.

Jan 17: Kuwait Airways announced the operation of scheduled commercial flights to Greek cities of Athens and Mykonos starting June 14.

Jan 22: Kuwaiti **Abdulrahman Al-Asfour** was chosen as Secretary General of the Arab Towns Organization (ATO) during an urgent meeting for the organization, Kuwait Municipality announced.

Jan 25: Minister of Social Affairs and Societal Development and State Minister for Women and Childhood Affairs, **Mai Al-Baghli**, headed Kuwait's delegation to the 42nd round of Arab ministerial meeting in Qatari capital, Doha.

Jan 26: Kuwait Airways declared a 10 percent increase in revenues accompanied by a significant improvement in profit margin of 40 percent as well as a decrease in losses by 48 percent in 2022, compared against 2019.

Jan 30: Kuwait Airways announced 20 summer and winter destinations for the year 2023.

Jan 31: Minister of Public Works and Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy **Dr. Amani Bugammaz** engaged in separate discussions with Qatari Municipality Minister **Dr. Abdullah Al-Subaei** and Minister of Transport **Jassem Al-Sulaithe** on bilateral ties and specialized issues in capital, Doha.

Feb 8: Ministry of Social Affairs and Societal Development held flag hoisting ceremony kickstarting the national holiday celebrations.

Feb 9: Minister of Social Affairs and Societal Development and State Minister for Women and Childhood Affairs, **Mai Al-Baghli**, inaugurated farmers' market "Nu-wair Market."

Feb 22: Minister of State for Municipal Affairs **Abdulaziz Al-Mojel** inaugurated the general secretariat's new building.

Feb 23: Minister of Public Works and Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy **Dr. Amani Bugammaz** headed Kuwait's delegation to the fourth meeting of commission concerned with high-speed railway link between Kuwait city and Riyadh.

March 7: The Central Statistics Directorate announced that Kuwait's population reached 4,385,717 in 2021 with Kuwaitis representing 34 percent of total population with 1,488,726 people.

March 9: The Middle East Psychological Association (MEPA) commenced its sixth annual conference in Kuwait.

March 13: Ministry of Social Affairs and Societal Development announced a total of approximately KD four million of donations to the quake-stricken areas in Turkey and Syria.

March 16: Kuwait Airways hosted celebrations on occasion of resumption of flights between Kuwait and Kuala Lumpur after a seven-year hiatus.

March 20: The Municipal council approved during session initiatives submitted

by local commercial banks to rebuild affected areas in Mubarakiya market fire as well as project of Shuwaikh beach development.

March 20: Kuwait Airways and Malaysian Airlines inked partnership agreement.

March 31: Kuwait Port Authority commenced project of redeveloping and reforming Shuwaikh port docks.

April 17: A container ship of Abu Dhabi Ports arrived at Shuwaikh Port, launching a direct cargo route from Khalifa Port in Abu Dhabi.

April 17: The Municipal Council approved a request by Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) to establish oil waste recycling projects.

April 20: Minister of Social Affairs **Mai Al-Baghli** said a campaign to help insolvent people collected KD 11.441 million (USD 37.3 million).

May 8: Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) launched a strategy to provide parking lots for people with disabilities.

May 14: Kuwait and Saudi Airways signed a code-sharing agreement.

May 18: Kuwait Airways received its eighth Airbus neo-320, naming it **Al Managesh**.

May 30: The Public Authority of Manpower said it was start receiving Filipino domestic workers after closure of an illegal shelter affiliated with the Embassy of the Philippines.

June 11: Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) agreed with Italian Leonardo company to install two KD 6.68 million (USD 21.4 million) radars at Kuwait International Airport.

June 20: Kuwait Airways won the world's most advanced airlines award from Skytrax company.

June 22: Kuwait Airways signed an agreement with Rolls Royce to provide Total Care maintenance service for Airbus 330-neo planes.

June 28: DGCA and South Korean civil aviation signed agreement to regulate operations.

July 31: Kuwait Airways achieved 30 percent growth in first half of 2023 compared to same period of last year.

Aug 10: Ministry of social affairs announced readiness of 12 ceremony halls ready to receive online bookings through designated app.

Aug 15: Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) issued decision on amending Internet speed and fees for home subscriptions.

Aug 20: Kuwait Airways diminishes losses from KD 107 million (approx. USD 347.1 million) to KD 55 million (approx. USD 178.4 million) in 2022 approximately a 50 percent decrease.

Aug 28: Public authority for civil information announced adding new service to Kuwait Finder to find diwaniyas.

Aug 31: Ministry of Commerce and industry inaugurated a specialized center with state-of-the-art technology to provide services to people with disabilities and get their paperwork done as efficiently as possible.

Sept 5: Kuwait Airways hosted meeting of Arab Air Carriers Organization (AACO) on digitalization and Artificial Intelligence.

Sept 9: Minister of Social Affairs, and Childhood and Family Affairs **Sheikh Firas Al-Sabah** directed all charitable societies to launch campaign providing relief to those affected by earthquake in Morocco.

Sept 12: State Minister for Municipal Affairs and State Minister for Communications Affairs **Fahad Al-Shulah** announced approving gulf building code and launching the electronic version.

Sept 17: State Minister for Municipal Affairs and State Minister for Communications Affairs **Fahad Al-Shulah** announced accomplishing 21 million services through Sahel app since its launch.

Sept 18: Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) announced the cut of international cable connecting Kuwait to international networks. The cable was promptly fixed and internet restored to normal pace.

To be continued

## 'Shift us to another area'

Jleeb 'plot 4' residents want escape from 'hell-hole'

By Najeh Bilal  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6: Government housing owners in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh's "Plot 4," are voicing their distress over the challenges posed by the presence of single individuals loitering in and out of the vicinity. Several residents shared their grievances, shedding light on issues such as crowded streets, broken infrastructure, and an abundance of grocery stores, leading them to call for urgent action and a potential relocation to another area.**

**Muhammad Al-Mutairi** highlighted the daily struggles faced by the residents, emphasizing the narrow entrances and exits causing congestion, especially during the morning rush. Despite repeated appeals to the Ministry of Works for expansion, there has been no tangible improvement.

**Youssef Al-Anzi** expressed concern over the transformation of the area into a hub for Asian families and singles. He pointed out the proliferation of grocery stores in violation of residential regulations, along with reports of illicit activities such as the operation of makeshift restaurants and potential drug-related issues. Al-Anzi urged authorities to relocate these individuals, citing the negative impact on the community.

**Deteriorating**

**Citizen Bufaisal** drew attention to the deteriorating condition of the streets in Plot 4, attributing the problem to the neglect of official authorities. He noted the prevalence of potholes and speed bumps, creating hazardous conditions for both pedestrians and drivers. Additionally, he lamented the increasing number of single individuals occupying housing originally designated for citizens.

**Muhammad Al-Kandari** questioned the lack of action by the Ministry of Public Works in addressing the disrepair of sidewalk tiles. He highlighted the presence of loose labor roaming the streets day and night, causing disturbances and instilling fear among children. Al-Kandari also expressed concerns about the area's negative reputation and the inconvenience faced by residents.

**Citizen Bou Abdullah** called for the relocation of singles from the area, emphasizing the discomfort felt by many Kuwaiti families due to the presence of singles loitering. He urged authorities to prioritize the protection of Kuwaiti families from potential threats to their stability.

**Burashid** raised concerns about abandoned cars cluttering the streets, mostly belonging to singles or non-Kuwaiti families. He criticized the lack of action by competent authorities to remove these vehicles, turning them into havens for stray animals and sources of environmental degradation. Burashid also highlighted the issues with expatriate workers crowding around association branches and ATMs.

In conclusion, the residents of Plot 4 in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh are making several demands, including the relocation of the area to a more suitable location, intensified inspection campaigns on homes rented to singles, the removal of abandoned cars, and increased security efforts to address illicit activities in the community. The population statistics underline the urgency of addressing these concerns for the overall well-being of the residents.



Sewage water puddles, too many singles, cars, crime makes Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh unlivable.

### Child dead, maids hurt in tent fire

## Camel kick kills Kuwaiti citizen

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6: The investigator of the Al-Qashaniya Police Station has been directed to launch an inquiry into the death of a Kuwaiti citizen, who reportedly passed away after being kicked by a camel, reports Al-Anba daily.**

Despite efforts to rescue the man, which included his transfer from the accident site in Abdali to Al-Jahra Hospital via an air ambulance, the attempts were unsuccessful. A misdemeanor case has been officially registered at Al-Qashaniya Police Station.

Providing additional details, a security source disclosed that an officer at Al-Qashaniya Police Station received a call from Al-Jahra Hospital, notifying them of the arrival of a citizen born in 1979. Despite the hospital's efforts to save him, the doctors' report attributed the cause of death to a camel kick.

The Al-Qashaniya Police Station investigations revealed the death occurred on a farm in the Abdali area, specifically at Kilo 56.

**Child dies in tent fire:** A child died and two domestic workers suffered burns following a camp fire in Subbiya, reports Al-Rai daily.

The security source said the two maids have been taken to a hospital. Meanwhile, the concerned authorities are working to determine the cause of the fire.



**Bullet injures 50s man:** A 53-year-old man has been admitted to the Jahra hospital with stomach injury, reports Al-Anba daily.

The daily added, the man was shot in the stomach in mysterious circumstances and that he was taken to hospital by his brother.

His condition is believed to be critical. Meanwhile, the security sources said police are investigating the incident.



**21 held in drugs seizure:** The General Department of Narcotics Control has arrested 21 people of different nationalities in 15 cases for possessing of about 13 kilograms of narcotic substances -- chemicals, crystal meth, hashish, marijuana, cocaine, 14,000 various types pills of psychotropic substances, and illegal firearms. Licensed and cash proceeds from the sale, reports Al-Rai daily.

The General Administration of Security Relations and Media at the Ministry of Interior stated in a statement that, "When the defendants were confronted with what was seized in their possession, they admitted that the seized items belonged to them for the purpose of trafficking and abuse, and they and the seized items were referred to the competent authority in order to take all necessary legal measures against them."

# SPIN & WIN

## HAPPY NEW YEAR 2024

### JANUARY REWARDS

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# Panel preps study on supporting SMEs during the camping period

Study referred to Municipal Council to take necessary action

By Inass Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6:** The Municipal Council's Public Cleanliness Committee prepared a study on the proposal to establish commercial activities for supporting small and medium enterprises during the camping period, and referred it to the Municipal Council to take the necessary action regarding the proposal.

The study, which was approved by the Deputy Director General for Municipal Services Affairs and Chairman of the Public Cleanliness Committee Mishal Al-Azmi, included the requirements for establishing commercial activities to support small and medium projects during the camping period. It includes the following conditions:-

■ The area of the facility should not exceed 1,500 square meters.

■ A distance of no less than 100 meters should be left between each facility and the nearest camp.

■ The facility should be at least 100 meters away from the main street.

■ The materials used to establish the facility should be materials that are easy to dismantle and install.

■ It is not allowed to establish any facility using constructional building materials.

■ It is not allowed to build any fences, barriers, or sandpiles to define the boundaries of any facility.

■ The facility should be away from high pressure lines and the boundaries of military installations by a distance of not less than 500 meters.

■ It is prohibited to use the facility for the purpose of renting to others.

■ Necessary security and safety measures must be provided in accordance with the requirements of the Kuwait Fire Service Directorate.

■ They must commit to cleaning the facility site after it is com-

pletely removed at the end of the camping period.

■ It is prohibited to throw, fill, or burn solid or liquid waste at the facility site.

■ They must commit to transporting the waste to treatment places in accordance with the ministerial resolution No. 354/2023 regarding the regulations for municipal waste management and public hygiene.

■ They must commit to establishing the facility only during the permissible period, which will be announced.

■ The practice of any activities or actions that would damage the natural environment, harm natural environmental life, or harm wildlife is prohibited.

■ They must adhere to the environmental protection law No. 42/2014, the article amended by law No. 99/2015, and the executive regulations of the law upon its issuance.

■ The Municipality has the right to remove the facility at any time based on the request of the concerned authorities or for any other reasons, without the owner having the right to object or demand any compensation.

The study also determined the maximum number of facilities and their location, in coordination

with the Kuwait Municipality's Camping Committee, such that their total number is 15 establishments, distributed evenly by five establishments in the northern, southern and central regions of the country each. It also identified five types of activities that are permitted, which are cafes, restaurants, sweet shops, supermarkets, and children's games. These establishments are allowed for a duration of four months during the period from November 15, 2023 to March 15, 2024.

The study set the fees for facilities at KD 4,000 for the entire four-month camping season, as well as a cleaning insurance fee of KD 500.

It is worth highlighting that the Technical Committee headed by the Municipal Council member Dr. Hassan Kamal had recommended, in its last meeting before the New Year holiday, that the proposal to establish commercial activities to support small projects during the camping period be returned to the executive body to prepare a study after coordinating with the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises Development, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Public Authority for Food and Nutrition, the Environment Public Authority and the Projects Sector of Kuwait Municipality.



Al-Azmi



Al-Rai photo

The diving team in action.

## 125 environmental tasks carried out in '23

### Kuwait diving team cleans seabed, removes 124 tons of debris: Al-Fadil

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6:** The head of the Kuwait diving team, Walid Al-Fadil, announced that the team has "recovered 9 ships, boats and marine vessels weighing 101 tons to protect the marine environment."

This is in addition to lifting 124 tons of discarded fishing nets and harmful waste to the marine and coastal environment from more than 30 locations along the coast and sea of Kuwait, reports Al-Rai daily.

Al-Fadil stated the team, which was formed 35 years ago, "carried out 125 environmental tasks and activities during the past year, and completed its comprehensive periodic maintenance of 107 marine anchors to ensure safe anchoring of boats and yachts around the islands and most importantly around coral reef sites."

"With regard to ensuring maritime navigation, he stated that "the team periodically monitors several sites in the Kuwait sea, to ensure the safety of navigational movement, and places warning signs when a boat sinks to avoid collisions, in addition to cleaning dangerous sites such

as concrete in the north of the South Island, the Jaber Bridge, the sea anchors on the Asherij coast, and the iron pillars on the Fintas coast and also removes floating objects, whether wooden or plastic, that cause navigational hazard."

He pointed out that "the team is conducting joint awareness campaigns with the regional office of the United Nations Environment Office in West Asia to enhance joint cooperation within the global campaign (Clean Seas) launched by the United Nations Environment Organization to protect the seas from plastic waste."

Al-Fadil stated the team has continued for the ninth year its weekly campaign (the mobile beach cleaning campaign), in cooperation with more than 9 governmental and private agencies, the most important of which are the Ministry of Education, the Kuwait Municipality, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Environment Public Authority, the Public Authority for Youth, Zain Telecommunications Company, and the National Bank of Kuwait.

## Primary, middle school exam results posted online

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6:** All educational districts have completed the process of posting the results of primary and middle school students on school websites, the ministry's official website, and the Sahel gov-

ernment application, reports Al-Rai daily quoting sources.

The sources affirmed that student certificates are now accessible on these platforms, facilitating their retrieval by students.

It is anticipated that secondary schools will follow suit by uploading the results of tenth and eleventh-grade students, along with their electronic certificates, on the above mentioned plat-

forms on Sunday, Jan 7.

The source explained that schools completing the approval of their results will promptly upload them without waiting for other schools in the region.

## 3 local offices meet evaluation percentages

### Bids for Sabah Al-Ahmad Medical City project said evaluated: MEW

By Mohammed Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6:** According to informed sources in the Ministry of Public Works, the ministry has finished the technical evaluation of the bids presented by local consultancy offices to carry out the design and licensing work, prepare plans and documents for the Medical City project in Sabah Al-Ahmad Residential City, and supervise its implementation.

They revealed that three local offices met the evaluation percentages, as follows: the first 90.37 percent, the second 88.60 percent, and the third 87.78 percent.

The sources explained that the Ministry of Public Works has referred the results of the technical evaluation of the bids to the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT), which studied them and approved the opening of the aforementioned bids. These financial offers will be evaluated by

the ministry again and then referred back to CAPT to take the decision to award the tender to the winning bid in accordance with the applicable regulations and laws.

The Medical City Project was scheduled to be implemented through the Ministry of Health, but the Council of Ministers decided in August last year to transfer the entire project to the Ministry of Public Works to implement it on behalf of the Ministry of Health.

The total time period scheduled for implementing the project is 68 months, divided into three stages - design: 18 months, proposal and award: 12 months, and implementation: 38 months.

The components of the aforementioned project were included in the terms of reference requested by CAPT for the purpose of appointing a local consulting office to design, license and prepare documents for tendering the city project and supervise its implementation, and accordingly the project requirements were updated.

## Major events in Kuwait during 2023

**Kuwait:**

Aug 5: Foreign Minister expressed Kuwait's dismay at the remarks of Lebanese minister of economic and commerce on the memory of Beirut port incident.

Aug 17: Foreign ministry succeeded in authenticating identity of two martyrs through DNA testing by forensics department at Interior Ministry.

Aug 29: Kuwait and the United Kingdom inked a memorandum of agreement on investment partnership.

Sept 4: Kuwait inked the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TaC) during the 43rd ASEAN summit in Indonesian capital of Jakarta.

Sept 5: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah headed Kuwait delegation participating in ministerial meeting for third edition of Arab Japanese political dialogue at the Arab League headquarters in Cairo.

Sept 12: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah welcomed the European Union announcement of allowing Kuwaiti citizens a multi entry Schengen visa for a duration of five years.

Sept 15: Kuwait took part in G77 + China meeting hosted in Havana, capital of Cuba.

Sept 15: The foreign ministry handed Iraqi ambassador to the country a memorandum protesting Iraqi federal courts rescinding the maritime agreement.

Sept 17: Representative of His Highness the Amir, Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, met with United Nations' Secretary General Antonio Guterres on sideline of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly.

Sept 18: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah participated in joint ministerial meeting between GCC and United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken, held on sideline of UNGA meeting.

Sept 20: Kuwait's membership in the international anti-terrorism forum was accepted.

Sept 21: Deputy foreign minister met with Russian foreign minister on sideline of UNGA to discuss latest developments relating to Iraqi federal courts decision.

Sept 25: Kuwait Foreign Ministry strongly condemned extremist group desecrating holy Quran copies in front of embassies in The Hague.

Oct 8: Kuwait ambassador to Jordan Hamad Al-Marri handed over Kuwait's contribution of USD two million to the United Nations Relief and Works agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Oct 10: Statement of the 27th GCC-EU Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting called for the complete demarcation of the Kuwait-Iraq maritime boundary reiterating importance of regulating maritime navigation in Khor Abdullah.

Oct 10: Kuwait elected to serve in United Nations' Human Rights Council.

Oct 10: The State of Kuwait handed over the presidency of the 11th session of the Women's Committee of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) to Lebanon after chairing the 10th session for two years.

Oct 11: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah headed Kuwaiti delegation participating in Arab League ministerial level in an extraordinary session to discuss developments in occupied Palestine and the Gaza Strip.

Oct 17: Foreign Minister took part in the 43rd extraordinary GCC held in the capital of Oman, Muscat.

Oct 22: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah announced the launch of Kuwaiti relief operations via an air bridge to Palestinians in Gaza.

Nov 3: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah met up with Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov and Speaker of the Russian Parliament (Duma) Vyacheslav Volodin separately for official talks.

Nov 14: The World Association for Sustainable Development honored Kuwaiti ambassador to the UK and Northern Ireland, Bader al-Awadhi, for his contributions to achieving sustainable development goals in various parts of the world.

Nov 17: Kuwait gained unanimous support from executive council of the World Food Program to officially demand securing and ensuring the continued provision of food and humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip.

Dec 5: The State of Kuwait pledged USD one million to the UN Refugee Agency as part of its voluntary contributions to the agency's activities in 2024.

Dec 5: The 44th Session of the Supreme Council of GCC adopted the Doha Declaration underscoring importance of Iraq's respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kuwait.

Dec 19: Members of the UNSC stand for a moment of silence in mourning of late Kuwait Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Dec 20: UNGA paid tribute to the late Amir during special session.

To be continued



# January

## Room Promotion







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

Promo period from 1<sup>st</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024

Terms & conditions apply\*

## Hematology Department introduces new technique called 'therapeutic photopheresis'

# 42 stem cell transplants conducted on kids at NBK Hospital so far

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

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6: The Ministry of Health revealed that 42 stem cell transplants have been carried out on children at the National Bank of Kuwait Hospital so far, with a success rate exceeding 97 percent.

According to the Head of the Department of Hematology, Pediatric Cancer and Stem Cell Transplantation at the National Bank of Kuwait Specialized Hospital for Children

Dr. Sondos Al-Shraideh, the department introduced a new technique called "therapeutic photopheresis" for children suffering from anastomosis after stem cell operations.

In a televised interview, Al-Shraideh explained that the upcoming period will witness the introduction of cell-engineering therapy for children suffering from acute leukemia and who do not respond to chemotherapy. The therapeutic photopheresis technique is being used in cases

of inflammation affecting the skin, liver, or intestines.

Treatment using the therapeutic photopheresis technique has achieved impressive results. The future vision is the opening of cell engineering therapy, which is a qualitative leap in Kuwait and its success rate exceeds 95 percent in treating acute and difficult cases of leukemia that do not respond to chemotherapy or have difficult relapses.

## Businessmen upbeat on Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem's appointment as new Premier

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6: The Kuwaiti business community unanimously recognizes Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem for his exceptional leadership qualities.

His extensive experience within the ruling house, combined with his political acumen gained from various leadership roles, enhances his leadership persona. Additionally, his economic background, characterized by high academic qualifications and practical experience, is complemented by a broad and diverse network of international relations, reports Al-Rai daily.

Viewed through the lens of this political-economic amalgamation, optimism within the local business community grows.

There is a shared belief that creating conducive conditions for economic innovation, visions, and ideas, which contribute to the trajectory of sustainable economic and financial development, will be a top priority for the upcoming government. The business community expresses confidence in Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem's support in achieving this goal.

In separate discussions with Al-Rai, company board directors and CEOs affirmed that Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem's nomination as Prime Minister aligns with recent regional and global market changes. They view him as a leader capable of steering Kuwait's livelihood back on track amidst the economic challenges, with the prowess to address financial concerns through practical capabilities and specialized expertise.

Economists urge the Prime Minister to prioritize economic and financial development in the upcoming govern-

## Jahra Hospital's Surgery Dept to organize 11 workshops in 2024

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

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6: Head of the Surgery Department at Jahra Hospital Dr. Mohammed Al-Jasmi revealed that 11 workshops will be held by the department in the year 2024, with the participation of an elite group of international experts and consultants from Germany, Brazil, Italy, Greece, Spain, France and Egypt.

In a special statement to Al-Seyassah, Dr. Al-Jasmi highlighted the diversity of the workshops between gastrointestinal endoscopic surgeries, complex and advanced hernia surgeries, lower and anal colon surgeries, complex and advanced obesity surgeries using surgical laparoscopy, face

and neck surgeries, and treatment of gland tumors.

Two workshops will be held in February, the first under the title "Gastrointestinal Endoscopic Surgeries and Oncology" will be held from February 11 to 14 with the participation of German Professor Ayman Agha, and the second under the title "Lower Colon and Anus Surgeries" will be held from February 17 to 22 with the participation of Italian Professor Pier Carlo Minero.

Dr. Al-Jasmi stressed the importance of workshops to enhance the skills of local staff by exchanging experiences, qualifying and training doctors to enter the surgical board and raise the professional and technical level, as well as reduce sending patients for treatment abroad.

ment, emphasizing enhanced private sector participation to achieve targeted development goals. They stress the need for robust economic and financial growth rates to address fiscal challenges and rectify structural imbalances in the general budget.

Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Sabah, CEO of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, lauds Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem as a professional figure with diplomatic, political, and economic expertise. He believes that these qualities will contribute significantly to supporting the oil sector, particularly in the

face of global challenges and the ongoing energy transformation worldwide.

Al-Saud expresses the oil sector's anticipation of government support in confronting the challenges of energy transition, emphasizing the sector's projects to increase production and boost public income revenues. He underscores the importance of creating an attractive economic environment for investment and Kuwaiti youth, expressing high expectations for the Prime Minister's leadership given his informed perspective and extensive experience across multiple domains.

## Sheikh Mohammad

Continued from Page 1

Today, the country needs specialized ministers, not employee and quota ministers.

The country also needs open minds that understand well what must be done to serve Kuwait, and to correct the relationship between the two authorities so that they are based on cooperation, and at the same time, separation of power.

This is the same as the relationship in democratic countries. If it is a healthy relationship, it does not suffer from distortions that overshadow political and economic stability.

It is also necessary to amend the Constitution for the better as well as the backward laws that were put in place about 60 years ago and were not developed despite the change in the world, and destroy everything that was built on interests that serve a specific group.

In addition, the corruption that the country suffers from has made it appear as though it is running without a vision or purpose.

Therefore, welcome to the battlefield again. The task before you is great.

In this position, you may today remember the two verses of poetry that your father, the late Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem, narrated during an occasion - "My people and I are all united by one religion. The goal is to serve the people by putting their interest and that of the country above all considerations."

This is undoubtedly one of the challenges facing you, because what is popularly required is that you work by this rule.

As you enter the arena again on the back of a thoroughbred horse, it is your honorable biography and the great legacy you carry.

Finally, Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, be at par with people's elation.

## Gaza uninhabitable

Continued from Page 1

said. The few partially functioning hospitals are overwhelmed and critically short of supplies, medical facilities are under relentless attack, infectious diseases are spreading, and amidst the chaos some 180 Palestinian women are giving birth every day.

"Gaza has simply become uninhabitable," the U.N. undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs said.

He said the humanitarian community is facing an "impossible mission" - trying to help more than two million people while U.N. staff and aid workers from partner organizations are killed, communications blackouts continue, roads are damaged, truck convoys are shot at, and vital commercial supplies "are almost non-existent."

Griffiths reiterated U.N. demands for an immediate end to the war and the release of all hostages, declaring that "It is time for the international community to use all its influence to make this happen."

The Oct. 7 attack into southern Is-

rael by Hamas, which controls Gaza, killed around 1,200 people, and its fighters and other militants took some 250 people hostage. More than 120 remain in captivity.

Israel's air, ground and sea assault in Gaza, aimed at obliterating Hamas, has killed more than 22,400 people, two-thirds of them women and children, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory. The count does not differentiate between civilians and combatants.

The three-month conflict has displaced some 85% of Gaza's residents, and the United Nations has identified more than 37,000 structures destroyed or damaged in the war so far.

The U.N. children's agency UNICEF said Friday that most young children and pregnant women aren't getting enough nutrition, with fewer than 200 aid trucks entering Gaza every day - less than half the prewar level - and distribution hampered by the fighting.

A survey by UNICEF found that 90% of children under the age of two are eating two or fewer of the five essential food groups each day, mainly bread or milk. A quarter of pregnant women said they only eat one food group per day.

UNICEF says cases of diarrhea among children under the age of five have risen from 48,000 to 71,000 - an indication of poor nutrition. Normally, only 2,000 cases of diarrhea are reported each month in the Gaza Strip.

Israel cut off food, clean water, medicine, electricity and fuel deliveries to Gaza immediately after the Hamas attack. In response to U.S. pressure it allowed a trickle of aid in through Egypt in late October, and the number of trucks has increased from about 100 to up to 200 every day.

Israeli authorities have repeatedly said there is enough food in the territory, and that they have taken the necessary steps to allow aid in, blaming any shortages on U.N. bodies.

But U.N. associate spokesperson Stephanie Tremblay reiterated Friday that "the current response is only meeting a fraction of people's needs."

She repeated what U.N. Secretary-General said last month: "It's a mistake to quote the effectiveness of the humanitarian operation in Gaza based only on the number of trucks. An effective aid operation in Gaza requires security. It requires staff who can work in safety. It requires good logistical capacity and the resumption of commercial activity."

Tremblay said until those requirements are met, Gazans will not receive enough aid.

Nonetheless, the U.N. World Food Program reported that in December it reached 975,000 vulnerable people with food across Gaza and in the West Bank, she said.

In an indication of difficulties getting aid into Gaza, some international efforts are resorting to dropping supplies from planes. France announced Friday that French and Jordanian C-130 planes dropped a total of seven tons of medical aid to the Jordanian field hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis in a joint operation overnight.

"The humanitarian situation remains critical in Gaza," French President Emmanuel Macron said Friday on X, formerly Twitter. "In a difficult

context, France and Jordan delivered aid to the population and to those who are helping them."

The aidrop, a first from a Western country in the Gaza Strip, was agreed during Macron's recent visit to Jordan, where he met with King Abdullah II last month, the French presidency said.

## MP appeals

Continued from Page 1

the Ministry of Health, Public Authority for Industry and Pharmaceutical Importers Union are expected to attend the meeting.

The Budgets and Final Accounts Committee on Sunday will deliberate on the final account of the Ministry of Finance for fiscal 2022/2023, as well as the comments of the State Audit Bureau (SAB) about the financial violations mentioned in the first and second reports of the Bureau of Financial Controllers (BFC) regarding the final account of the ministry.

The Foreign Affairs Committee will meet on Sunday to discuss the decision of Kuwait to sign the treaty on the establishment of Asian Investment Bank for investing in infrastructure and a number of bills. Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah and Minister of Finance Fahd Al-Jarallah will attend the meeting.

## US congratulates

Continued from Page 1

US Department of State Mathew Miller said, "The State Department welcomes the appointment of Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah as the new Prime Minister of Kuwait.

"Sheikh Mohammad has a distinguished career of public service, including as Kuwait's Ambassador to the United States and as Foreign Minister," Miller said.

"He has long been a champion of the strategic partnership between the United States and Kuwait," Miller added.

"We look forward to deepening our partnership with Kuwait and Prime Minister Al-Sabah, as we seek a more peaceful and stable Middle East region," he concluded.

Meanwhile, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan congratulated Sheikh Mohammad Al-Sabah on the same occasion.

"I send my congratulations to Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah of Kuwait for his appointment as Prime Minister by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah," Sullivan said in a statement.

"The US-Kuwait relationship has been forged over decades to enhance peace and security in the Middle East.

"Kuwait is a major non-Nato ally of the United States, we look forward to continuing our work to deepen economic, cultural, political, security, and people-to-people ties," Sullivan added.

"Our historic partnership is essential to addressing shared challenges and building a more prosperous future for our peoples," he noted.

# MEW takes proactive steps to reduce power load in summer

Installing smart meters in all factories to resume

**By Mohammed Ghanem**  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6: According to informed sources at the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, the ministry has started taking proactive steps to reduce electricity load rates during the summer season this year in order to avoid the electricity shortage that is expected during that period.

The ministry, represented by the Customer Services Sector, started conducting a field survey of the facilities of the Ministry of Education, including schools and mosques, in preparation for establishing the necessary infrastructure to install smart electricity meters in their facilities. Through these meters, the ministry can control and reduce loads in schools and mosques during peak times.

Contribute

The sources highlighted the ministry's success in installing smart meters in the aforementioned facilities before the summer season, which would contribute significantly to reducing power consumption rates.

They revealed that the ministry will also resume installing smart meters in all factories in the country, indicating that the Customer Services Sector has installed more than 1,000 smart meters in a number of factories.

The sources stated that the ministry had previously requested avoiding factories to work during peak hours from 11:00 am to 5:00 pm with the aim of reducing electricity loads during this period.

They highlighted the absence of several visions among the various sectors of the ministry that would contribute, if implemented, to reducing electrical loads during the upcoming summer season.

The sources said, "During the past period, the ministry was suffering from a stagnation at the level of electricity production projects, either at the ministry level or at the level of the projects of the Public-Private Partnership Projects Authority, which has finally begun to witness a breakthrough regarding its electrical and water projects.

Meanwhile, the second phase of the smart electricity meter project valued at KD9.97 million started immediately after the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy obtained approval from the Central Agency for



Photo by Mohammad Morsi

Two women seen walking along the Gulf Road enjoying the cool weather.

## Exams run two weeks until Jan 18

# First semester exams begin today for 12 grade students

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6: About 43,000 male and female students in the 12th grade, including about 824 in religious education, are taking the exams today for the first academic semester, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Students in the scientific section will sit for the Mathematics exam, students in the arts section will sit for the French language exam, and the religious education students will sit for the interpretation exam.

The exams, which will last for two weeks until January 18, will begin at 8:00 am everyday. The ministry had approved a plan to rotate school administrations late last month.

According to educational sources, the ministry has taken all necessary preparations to ensure that the tests take place in a calm educational atmosphere. There will be no laxity in implementing the cheating regulations in accordance with the regulations.

In this regard, the official spokesman for the Ministry of Education Ahmed Al-Wahida announced in a statement posted on the ministry's X account that the ministry has completed all the preparations and equip-

ment required to receive the male and female 12th grade students. The total number of students sitting for the first semester exams in the scientific, arts and religious education sections is 43,370. The number of students of the scientific section is 27,540, those of arts section is 15,006, and those of religious education section is 824.

The Ministry of Education, as part of its awareness campaign under the slogan "We Strive with Our Knowledge" that will continue until the end of the first semester exams, has been posting daily messages on its social media accounts with general advice, guidance, and information on effective study methods and learning resources for each subject for the 12th grade students of scientific and literary sections.

It is worth highlighting that the Ministry of Education, last Thursday, completed the tests for the tenth and eleventh grades in the subjects of Islamic education and the Arabic language. The schools have begun correcting the tests in preparation for issuing certificates to students today after completing the monitoring and review process.

Public Tenders to award the tender to the lowest bidder that met the terms and conditions, reports Al-Anba daily quoting a reliable source.

The source stated that the second phase includes the supply of approximately 400,000 smart electricity meters; which will be installed in all

sectors -- investment, commercial, industrial or private housing.

On the other hand, the source said that the agency approved the ministry's request to cancel the supply of smart water meters, their accessories and their testing devices due to essential matters that required the exclusion of all bids.

## JOINT OPERATIONS WAFRA

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

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

Kuwaiti and Saudi Merchants, registered with either Company wishing to participate in any of the under-mentioned Tenders are invited to collect the Tender documents from Purchasing Section, Purchasing & Logistic Division, Administration Building, Ground Floor, Joint Operations, Wafra, during the official working hours from **7 JAN 2024** up to **28 JAN 2024** for a non-refundable fee mentioned against each tender. Tender Fees to be deposited in the National bank of Kuwait (NBK) Account No. 1001132057. Saudi Suppliers can collect the tender documents from Saudi Arabian Chevron office in Al-Khobar Telephone No.: (013) 8645104 - Fax No.: (013) 8985436

The closing date for the following tenders will be on **Monday, 5 FEB 2024 @ 09:00 A.M.**

S.NO.	TENDER NO.	MATERIALS	FEES ( IN KD )
1	008184	CONTROL VALVES	50
2	009669	SMART DIGITAL LCD & SIGNAGE DISPLAY	5
3	010123	FILTRATION CARTRIDGE (CAMFILL FARR - ZHANGJIAGANG)	15
4	010146	STUFFING BOX, SUCKER ROD, PONY ROD & COUPLING SUCKER ROD	25
5	010599	GATE VALVE	25
6	010725	FLARE KNOCK OUT DRUM	35
7	010727	PRODUCTION MANIFOLD ASSEMBLY	50
8	010728	PIG LAUNCHER / RECEIVER	35
9	010785	VALVES (GATE - BALL - CHECK - GLOBE - BUTTERFLY)	15
10	011107	LAB EQUIPMENTS	25

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

For additional information, you may contact: Telephone No.: **23983639** - Ext.: **2502 - 3477**

## World News Roundup

## Europe

## Limited challenge

## Moscow approves 2 challengers to Putin

MOSCOW, Jan 6, (AP) — Russia's national elections commission on Friday registered the first two candidates who will compete with President Vladimir Putin in the March election that Putin is all but certain to win.

The commission approved putting Leonid Slutsky of the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party and Vladislav Davankov of the New People Party on the ballot for the March 15-17 vote.

Neither poses a significant challenge to Putin, who has dominated Russian politics since becoming president in 2000. Both candidates' parties are largely supportive in parliament of legislation backed by Putin's power-base United Russia party.

Slutsky, as head of the lower house of parliament's foreign affairs committee, has been a prominent backer of Kremlin foreign policy that is increasingly oppositional to the West. In the last presidential election in 2018, the party's candidate tallied less than 6% of the vote.

Davankov is a deputy speaker of the lower house of parliament, the Duma. His party was established in 2020 and holds 15 seats in the 450-member Duma.

The Communist Party has put forth Nikolai Kharitonov as its candidate, but the elections commission has not formally registered him. Kharitonov was the party's candidate in 2004, finishing a distant second to Putin.

A Russian politician calling for peace in Ukraine was rejected last month from the presidential ballot.

The elections commission refused to accept Yekaterina Duntsova's initial nomination by a group of supporters, citing errors in the paperwork, including spelling. The Supreme Court then rejected Duntsova's appeal against the commission's decision.

Putin is running as an independent, and his campaign headquarters, together with branches of the ruling United Russia party and a political coalition called the People's Front, have collected signatures in support of his candidacy. Under Russian law, independent candidates must be nominated by at least 500 supporters, and must also gather at least 300,000 signatures from 40 regions or more.

**UK ex-minister quits conservatives:** Britain's former energy minister said Friday he is quitting the Conservative Party and stepping down as a lawmaker over the government's backtracking on its environmental commitments.

Chris Skidmore said he could not support a forthcoming bill that will authorize new North Sea oil and gas drilling and called the U.K.'s retreat from its climate goals "a tragedy."

Skidmore has been a Conservative lawmaker since 2010. He wrote a government-commissioned review published a year ago setting out how Britain could reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2050 while creating thousands of new green jobs.

He said that "as the former energy minister who signed the U.K.'s net zero commitment by 2050 into law, I cannot vote for a bill that clearly promotes the production of new oil and gas."

"To fail to act, rather than merely speak out, is to tolerate a status quo that cannot be sustained," he added in a statement.

He said he would step down when Parliament returns next week from its Christmas break.

Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has watered down some green goals that he said imposed "unacceptable costs" on ordinary people. He delayed a ban on selling new gas and diesel cars, scrapped a domestic energy-efficiency rule and greenlit hundreds of new North Sea oil and gas licenses. (AP)

**Belarus Prez grants self immunity:** President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus signed a new law Thursday that gives him lifelong immunity from criminal prosecution and prevents opposition leaders living abroad from running in future presidential elections.

The law theoretically applies to any former president and members of his or her family. In reality, it only is relevant to the 69-year-old Lukashenko, who has ruled Belarus with an iron fist for almost 30 years.

The new measure appears aimed at further shoring up Lukashenko's power and eliminating potential challengers in the country's next presidential election, which is due to take place in 2025.

The law significantly tightens requirements for presidential candidates and makes it impossible to elect opposition leaders who fled to neighboring countries in recent years. Only citizens of Belarus who have permanently resided in the country for at least 20 years and have never had a residence permit in another country are eligible to run.

Belarus was rocked by mass protests during Lukashenko's controversial re-election in August 2020 for a sixth term, which the opposition and the West condemned as fraudulent. At that time, Belarusian authorities detained more than 35,000 people, many of whom were tortured in custody or left the country.

Lukashenko also has been accused of involvement in the illegal transfer of children from Russian-occupied towns in Ukraine to Belarus.

According to the text of the new law, Lukashenko, were he to leave power, "cannot be held accountable for actions committed in connection with exercising his presidential powers."

The law also says the president and members of his family will be provided with lifelong state protection, medical care, life and health insurance. After resigning, the president would also become a permanent life-long member of the upper house of parliament. (AP)

**German hospital fire kills 5:** The death toll in a fire that broke out in a hospital in Germany this week has risen to five, with all of the victims patients, as investigators sought to understand the cause of the blaze.

The fire broke out late Thursday at the hospital in Uelzen, southeast of Hamburg. Emergency workers arrived to flames and calls for help. They evacuated several people, and were able to stop the fire from spreading any further, according to the dpa news agency, which cited police.

Firefighters and police, some using ladders, rescued several patients from their rooms.

The German news agency dpa reported late Friday that a fifth victim succumbed to injuries, raising the earlier death toll of four to five.

Six people were seriously injured and 16 others had lesser injuries, dpa reported, citing the hospital. The injured suffered smoke inhalation and burns.

The cause of the fire was still unclear on Saturday. (AP)



Putin



Audience members react as former President Donald Trump speaks during a commit to caucus rally, Friday, Jan. 5, 2024, in Mason City, Iowa. (AP)



Pope Francis presides over an Epiphany mass in St. Peter's Basilica, at the Vatican, Saturday, Jan. 6, 2024. (AP)

## Pope warns against ideological splits in Church

Amid resistance to some Vatican policy by more conservative factions of the Catholic church, Pope Francis on Saturday cautioned the faithful against fracturing into groups "based on our own ideas."

He issued the call to abandon "ec-

clesiastical ideologies" in his homily in St. Peter's Basilica during Epiphany Day Mass, the last major Christmas season holiday.

Francis also warned against "basking in some elegant religious theory" instead of finding God in the faces of

the poor.

Last month, Francis gave permission for priests to bless couples outside of marriage, including same-sex relationships, as long as the blessing was pastoral and not liturgical or part of some religious rite. (AP)

## Politics

## Biden warns against Trump reelection

## 'We nearly lost America'

BLUE BELL, Pa., Jan 6, (AP) — President Joe Biden has warned that Donald Trump's efforts to retake the White House in 2024 pose a grave threat to the country, the day before the third anniversary of the violent riot at the U.S. Capitol by then-President Trump's supporters aiming to keep him in power.

Speaking near Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, where George Washington and the Continental Army spent a bleak winter nearly 250 years ago, Biden said that Jan. 6 2021, marked a moment where "we nearly lost America - lost it all." He said the presidential race - a likely rematch with Trump, who is the far and away GOP frontrunner - is "all about" whether American democracy will survive.

## Democracy

The speech, the president's first political event of the election year, was intended to clarify the expected choice for voters this fall. Biden, who reentered political life because he felt he was best capable of defeating Trump in 2020, believes focusing on defending democracy to be central to persuading voters to reject Trump once again.

"We all know who Donald Trump is," Biden said. "The question we have to answer is who are we?" Biden, laid out Trump's role in the

Capitol attack, as a mob of the Republican's supporters overran the building while lawmakers were counting Electoral College votes that certified Democrat Biden's win. More than 100 police officers were bloodied, beaten and attacked by the rioters who overwhelmed authorities to break into the building.

"What's Trump done? He's called these insurrectionists 'patriots,'" Biden said, "and he promised to pardon them if he returns to office." He excoriated Trump for "glorifying" rather than condemning political violence.

At least nine people who were at the Capitol that day died during or after the rioting, including several officers who died of suicide, a woman who was shot and killed by police as she tried to break into the House chamber, and three other Trump supporters who authorities said suffered medical emergencies.

Biden said that by "trying to rewrite the facts of Jan. 6, Trump is trying to steal history the same way he tried to steal the election."

Trump, who faces 91 criminal charges stemming from his efforts to overturn his loss to Biden and three other felony cases, argues that Biden and top Democrats are themselves seeking to undermine democracy by using the legal system to thwart the campaign of his chief rival.

of the opposition leader. Under Senegal's electoral code, such a conviction makes one ineligible for a presidential race. (AP)

**Niger's ex-minister arrested:** The mili-



Sonko



Yacoubou

tary council, ruling in Niger, announced the arrest of Ibrahim Yacoubou - the former minister of energy who served under ousted president Mohammad Bazoum.

The ex-minister was arrested and put in civilian custody on Thursday evening upon his return to the capital city of Niamey, the council said in a statement on Friday.

Yacoubou has been away from his country since Brig.-Gen Abdourahmane Tchiani led the coup that overthrew Bazoum on July 26, 2023.

Based on his call for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to interfere in his country and reinstate the ousted president, the military council issued, in September arrest warrants for him and other former cabinet members, including the prime minister and the ministers of foreign affairs, industry and commerce. (KUNA)

## 'Danger to democracy'

## Trump 'ignites' Iowa campaign

SIOUX CENTER, Iowa, Jan 6, (AP) — Former President Donald Trump urged his supporters Friday evening not to be complacent in the face of a commanding polling lead as he kicked off the sprint to the Iowa caucuses with his first events of the election year.

"Ten days from now, the people of this state are going to cast the most important vote of your entire lives," Trump told several hundred supporters gathered in Sioux Center. He implored them to turn out on caucus night, warning, "Bad things happen when you sit back."

Trump held a pair of commit-to-caucus events, one in the far northwest corner of the state on the border with South Dakota and one in north-central Mason City. He'll spend Saturday in Newton in central Iowa before heading to Clinton in the state's far east.

The visit came the day before the third anniversary of Jan. 6, 2021, when a violent mob of Trump's supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol as part of a desperate bid to keep him in power after his 2020 election loss. Trump did not acknowledge the date Friday, but railed against the treatment of those who have been jailed for participating in the riot, labeling them "hostages" and saying it will "go down as one of the saddest things in the history of our country."

More than 1,230 people have been charged with federal crimes for their participation, including felonies like assaulting police officers and seditious conspiracy.

Trump also asked at one point in Sioux Center whether there was anyone in the friendly room who wasn't planning to vote for him, but then quickly warned them not to raise their hands.

"They're going to say he incited an insurrection," he said to laughs.

And over and over, he repeated his false claims that the 2020 election was stolen - the same lies that motivated the rioters.

Trump also spent much of the night lashing out at President Joe Biden, who earlier Friday delivered a speech warning that Trump's efforts to retake the White House pose a grave threat to the country and democracy.

"We all know who Donald Trump is," Biden said near Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, where George Washington and the Continental Army spent a bleak winter nearly 250 years ago. "The question we have to answer is: Who are we?"

Biden said Jan. 6 marked a moment where "we nearly lost America - lost it all."

## Overtun

Trump, who faces 91 criminal charges stemming from his efforts to overturn his loss to Biden and other state and federal cases, continued to argue that it is, instead, Biden who poses the threat.

"He is a danger to democracy," Trump charged in Mason City.

The former president and his campaign have spent months accusing Biden and other Democrats of using the justice system to damage their chief political rival. There is no evidence that Biden has influenced the investigations led by state officials or the Justice Department - which has also indicted his son, Hunter Biden, twice.

"Joe Biden's record is an unbroken streak of weakness, incompetence, corruption, and failure," Trump told the crowd in Sioux Center. "That's why Crooked Joe is staging his pathetic fear-mongering campaign event in Pennsylvania today."

Trump's team is hoping for a knockout win in Iowa on Jan. 15 that will deny his rivals an opportunity to seize momentum and set the table for him to lock up the nomination by the spring. They also hope to turn out a wave of new voters who have never caucused before in a show of strength ahead of an increasingly likely general election rematch against Biden.

"You have to get out and vote because it sets the tone. It even sets the tone, frankly, for November," Trump said in Mason City.

While he remains far ahead in Iowa and other early state and national polls, Trump also continued to lash out at his top Republican rivals, unleashing some of his most pointed attacks to date against former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley, who has seen growing support in recent months following a series of well-reviewed debate performances.

Trump tried to cast both her and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who was once the only rival he criticized, as "establishment pawns," alleging they would "sell" voters "out." DeSantis, who has staked his campaign on Iowa, entered the race with sky-high expectations but has struggled to gain traction against Trump.

"Sadly, the establishment losers and sellouts lagging far behind us in the Republican primary cannot be trusted on taxes, on trade, or anything else," Trump charged. "They'll betray you just like they betrayed me."

Haley's campaign has been celebrating Trump's recent attention - including a new attack ad - arguing it reflects his growing concern that she is gaining on him.

DeSantis and Haley needed each other at their own events in Iowa Friday, with DeSantis leaning into his opponent's flippant comment about the role of Iowa among the early-voting states. DeSantis, appearing with Texas Rep. Chip Roy and Kentucky Rep. Thomas Massie, hounded Haley for "insulting" Iowans by suggesting New Hampshire voters could "correct" the caucus results.



Trump

## Koreas

## Agreement violation

## Provocative drills could up tensions

SEOUL, Jan 6, (AP) — The rival Koreas fired artillery rounds into the sea as part of provocative drills along their disputed sea boundary Friday, in violation of the fragile 2018 inter-Korean agreement, and threatened strong responses against each other if provoked.

The development is expected to escalate tensions on the Korean Peninsula. The last two years have seen North Korea performing a record number of missile tests and South Korea and the U.S. expanding their defense exercises in a tit-for-tat cycle. Experts say North Korea will likely intensify a run of weapons tests ahead of the U.S. presidential election in November.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said North Korea fired more than 200 rounds in the waters north of their western sea boundary on Friday morning. It was North Korea's first front-line maritime firing exercise in about a year.

Joint Chiefs of Staff spokesperson Lee Sung Joon told a televised briefing that the North's artillery firing was "an act of provocation that threatens peace and heightens tensions on the Korean Peninsula." Lee said South Korea suffered no damage.



Jong Un

In a corresponding step, South Korea's Defense Ministry said it had its troops on two border islands fire artillery rounds south of the sea boundary later Friday. Local media said South Korea fired 400 rounds. A Defense Ministry statement said the military will maintain a firm readiness to strongly punish any provocations by North Korea.

North Korea's military later said that its firing drills were "a sort of natural countermeasure" against the South's other military drills earlier this week. It said "the military gangsters" of South Korea must not shift blame for tensions to the North.

"If the enemies commit an act which may be regarded as a provocation under the pretext of so-called counteraction, the (North) Korean People's Army will show tough counteraction on an unprecedented level," the KPA's General Staff said in a statement.

## Evacuation

Ahead of the South Korean drills Friday, authorities blared broadcasts via street loudspeakers and sent text messages to residents on the five major border islands, asking them to evacuate to safe places. They worried North Korea could conduct a new round of firing training in response but lifted the evacuation order a few hours later as they detected no suspicious activities by the North's military, according to local officials.

The Koreans' poorly marked western sea boundary witnessed bloody naval clashes in 1999, 2002 and 2009. The North's alleged torpedoing of a South Korean warship killed 46 South Korean sailors in March 2010, and the North's artillery bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island - one of the five border islands where the evacuation order was issued on Friday - killed four South Koreans in November 2010.

The 2018 agreement - reached during a short-lived era of reconciliation between the two Koreas, requires them to halt live-fire exercises and aerial surveillance in buffer and no-fly zones established along their border. But the deal is in danger of collapsing after both Koreas took steps to breach the accord amid bickering over the North's first successful military spy satellite launch in November.

South Korea resumed front-line aerial surveillance in protest at the North's satellite launch. North Korea responded that it would deploy powerful weapons at the border and won't abide by the 2018 deal any longer. South Korea later accused North Korea of restoring front-line guard posts that it had dismantled under the 2018 deal.

South Korea has previously accused North Korea of having already breached the deal numerous times with firing drills at the buffer zones, including one as recently as December 2022 off the Korean Peninsula's east coast.

"North Korea is now in the stage of finding a justification for provocation after scrapping the 2018 military agreement," said Lee Sang Sook, a research professor at the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security. "There is a possibility for North Korea to ramp up provocation steadily, so big and small provocations along the western sea boundary and the land border are expected this year."

In a recent key ruling-party meeting, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un fired off fierce, derivative rhetoric against South Korea, saying South Korea must not be considered as a partner for reconciliation or unification. He ordered the military to use all available means - including nuclear weapons - to conquer South Korea in the event of a conflict.

## Concessions

Experts say Kim likely believes that a boosted military capability would increase his chances of wresting U.S. concessions if former President Donald Trump is reelected in the U.S. presidential election. In the ruling party meeting, Kim vowed to expand the country's nuclear arsenal and launch three additional military spy satellites this year.

Earlier Friday, North Korea's state media said Kim ordered authorities to increase production of mobile launch vehicles for missiles during a visit to a munitions factory. Kim said the role of the factory producing transport erector launchers, or TELs, is "very important" in bolstering North Korea's national defense because of a looming military showdown with its rivals.

Mobile launch vehicles give North Korea the ability to move missiles around its territory, making it more difficult for adversaries to detect their launches in advance.

Yang Uk, an analyst at Seoul's Asan Institute for Policy Studies, said that North Korea is estimated to have more than 200 such launch vehicles, about 20-30 of them likely for intercontinental ballistic missiles designed to attack the U.S. mainland.

Kim's factory visit may also be related to the North's purported shipments of conventional arms to Russia for its war in Ukraine in return for receiving high-tech Russian weapons technologies.

U.S. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Thursday that recently declassified intelligence showed that North Korea has provided Russia with ballistic missile launchers and several ballistic missiles. The U.S. and South Korea have previously accused North Korea of supplying ammunitions and artillery to Russia.



Rescuers inspect the wreckage after a collision between two trains in Cicalengka, West Java, Indonesia, Friday, Jan. 5, 2024. The trains collided on Indonesia's main island of Java on Friday, causing several carriages to buckle and overturn, officials said. (AP)

## Trains collide on Indonesia's main island of Java, killing at least 4 people

Two trains collided on Indonesia's main island of Java on Friday, causing carriages to buckle and overturn and killing at least four people, officials said.

The accident happened about 500 meters (yards) from Cicalengka train station in West Java province, said Ayep Hanapi, a spokesperson for PT Kereta Api Indonesia, the national railways.

He said the Turangga express train carrying 287 passengers was traveling from Surabaya, the capital of East Java province, when it plowed into a Bandung Raya commuter train with 191 passengers heading to Padalarang from Haurpugur station at

about 6:03 a.m.

"All passengers of the two crashed trains have been evacuated safely," Hanapi said, adding that 37 people were injured and treated at several hospitals. By Friday afternoon, only two passengers were still hospitalized, he said.

Passenger Heri Aliyudin said the lights were knocked out in his cabin in the third carriage of the Turangga train. He recalled suitcases and bags fell onto several passengers. Those who were still asleep were thrown from their seats.

"I was so shocked, I couldn't move for a moment, it was total confusion," Aliyudin told Kompas TV

in an interview, "Then I grabbed my suitcase and shoved my way outside."

West Java Police spokesperson Ibrahim Tompo said at least four train crew members were killed - the driver and his assistant on the commuter train and a steward and a security guard on the express train.

Television video showed several carriages overturned or badly mangled. One carriage plunged into a nearby rice field. People screamed as panicked passengers tried to get out of the train. Some walked through the fields carrying suitcases and other items as ambulances evacuated the injured. (AP)

## Japan

## Experts search for voice data of JAL airliner

## Quake death toll rises to 126

WAJIMA, Japan, Jan 6, (AP) — After-shocks threatened to bury more homes and block roads crucial for relief shipments, as the death toll from the earthquakes that rattled Japan's western coastline this past week rose to 126 on Saturday.

Among the dead was a 5-year-old boy who had been recovering from injuries after boiling water spilled on him during Monday's 7.6 magnitude earthquake. His condition suddenly worsened and he died Friday, according to Ishikawa prefecture, the hardest-hit region.

Officials warned that roads, already cracked from the dozens of earthquakes that continue to shake the area, could collapse completely. That risk was growing with rain and snow expected overnight and Sunday.

The death toll on Saturday rose to 126. Wajima city has recorded the highest number of deaths with 69, followed by Suzu with 38. More than 500 people were injured, at least 27 of them seriously.

The tremors left roofs sitting haplessly on roads and everything beneath them crushed flat. Roads were warped like rubber. A fire turned a neighborhood in Wajima to ashes.

More than 200 people were still unaccounted for, although the number has fluctuated. Eleven people were reported trapped under two homes that collapsed in Anamizu.

For Shiro Kokuda, 76, the house in Wajima where he grew up was spared but a nearby temple went up in flames and he was still looking for his friends at evacuation centers.

"It's been really tough," he said. Japan is one of the fastest-aging societies in the world. The population in Ishikawa and nearby areas has dwindled over the years. A fragile economy centered on crafts and tourism was now more imperiled than ever.

In an unusual gesture from nearby North Korea, leader Kim Jong Un sent

a message of condolence to Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, the official Korean Central News Agency reported Saturday.

Japan earlier received messages expressing sympathy and promises of aid from President Joe Biden and other allies.

Japanese government spokesman Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters that Japan was grateful to all the messages, including the one from North Korea. Hayashi said the last time Japan received a condolence message from North Korea for a disaster was in 1995.

Along Japan's coastline, power was gradually being restored, but water supplies were still short. Emergency water systems were also damaged.

Thousands of troops were flying and trucking in water, food and medicine to the more than 30,000 people who had evacuated to auditoriums, schools and other facilities.

The nationally circulated Yomiuri newspaper reported that its aerial study had located more than 100 landslides in the area, and some were blocking lifeline roads.

The urgency of the rescue operations intensified as the days wore on. But some have clung to life, trapped under pillars and walls, and were freed.

## Also:

**TOKYO:** Transport safety officials searched for a voice recorder from the severely burned fuselage of a Japan Airlines plane, seeking crucial information on what caused a collision with a small coast guard plane on the runway at Tokyo's Haneda airport.

On Saturday, heavy machinery worked for a second day to remove debris of the burned Airbus A320 for storage in a hangar to allow the runway to reopen. Transport Minister Tetsuo Saito said officials were aiming to reopen the runway Monday. Wreckage

of the Japan Coast Guard plane had been cleared.

Saito said the airport's traffic control operation would create a new position for monitoring aircraft movement on runways beginning Saturday. There has been speculation traffic controllers might not have paid attention to the coast guard plane's presence on the runway when they gave the JAL plane permission to land.

Six experts from the Japan Transport Safety Board on Friday walked through the mangled debris of the Airbus A350-900 that was lying on the runway searching for the voice data recorder.

JTSB experts have so far secured both the flight and voice data recorders from the coast guard's Bombardier Dash-8 and a flight data recorder from the JAL plane to find out what happened in the last few minutes before Tuesday's fatal collision.

All 379 occupants of JAL Flight 516 safely evacuated within 18 minutes of landing as the aircraft was engulfed in flames. The pilot of the coast guard plane also escaped, but its five other crewmembers died. The coast guard aircraft was on a mission to deliver relief goods to survivors of powerful earthquakes in central Japan that killed at least 100 people.

New details have also emerged from media footage at Haneda airport. NHK television reported footage from its monitoring camera set up at the Haneda airport showed that the coast guard plane moved on to the runway and stopped there for about 40 seconds before the collision.

In the footage, the coast guard aircraft is seen entering the runway from the C5 taxiway, then shortly after the passenger plane touches down right behind and rams into it, creating an orange fireball. The JAL airliner, covered with flames and spewing gray smoke, continues down the runway before coming to a stop.

The resolution urged the Commission to promptly implement the postponement and ensure that all necessary arrangements are in place to facilitate the smooth conduct of election on the revised date. (KUNA)

## Sri Lanka declares moratorium:

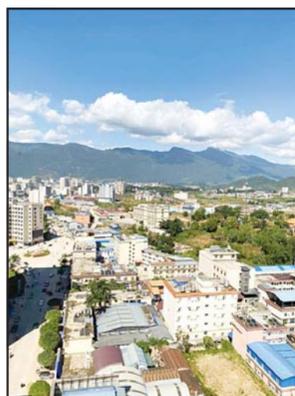
Sri Lanka has declared a moratorium on foreign research ships entering its waters for a year amid concerns from India over Chinese research vessels docking in its neighborhood.

Though the moratorium comes ostensibly for capacity building it is seen as a reaction to growing concerns in India.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Niluka Kadurugamuwa told The Associated Press on Friday that the moratorium relates to all countries and will allow local researchers to build capacity by a par with their foreign counterparts in joint researches.

Chinese ships have docked in Colombo in recent years for research based on agreements between agencies in China and Sri Lanka.

Last October, Chinese research ship Shi Yan 6 docked in Colombo port for several days, while in 2022 the navy vessel Yuan Wang 5 docked at Hambantota in southern Sri Lanka. There were fears in India that these vessels could be used to monitor the region. (AP)



This photo provided by Kyaw Ko Lin shows a view of Laukaing city in Shan state, Myanmar, Nov. 20, 2023. An alliance of ethnic armed groups in northeastern Myanmar has reportedly achieved one of the main goals it set when it launched an offensive last October by taking control of Laukaing, a key city on the border with China, according to local residents and independent media accounts on Friday Jan. 5, 2024. (AP)



Zia



Khan

## Subcontinent

**B'desh opposition starts strike:** Bangladesh's main opposition party on Saturday started a 48-hour general strike on the eve of a general election, calling on people to boycott the vote because it says the government of incumbent Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina can't guarantee its fairness.

Hasina is seeking to return to power for a fourth consecutive term. The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party, led by former premier Khaleda Zia, has vowed to disrupt the election through the strike and boycott.

On Saturday morning, a small group of party supporters marched across the Shahbagh neighborhood in the capital, Dhaka, calling on people to join the strike. Another rally by about 200 left-wing protesters took place outside the National Press Club to denounce the election.

The Election Commission said ballot boxes and other election supplies had been distributed in preparation for the vote on Sunday in over 42,000 precincts. There are more than 119 million registered voters.

Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, a BNP senior official, repeated his party's demand for Hasina to resign, calling the election "skewed." (AP)

**Pak parl't passes resolution:** The Upper House of the Pakistani Parliament on Friday passed a resolution demanding the election schedule for February 8 be postponed to facilitate effective participation.

A resolution was moved by Senator Dilawar Khan alluding to cold weather conditions in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces and surge in terror incidents in the country.

It stressed the delay aims to protect and uphold the constitutional rights to political participation. The Election Commission of Pakistan has announced it will hold general elections in the country on February 8. The resolution noted that

conducting elections without addressing legitimate concerns, facilitating sufficient opportunities for the election campaign and guaranteeing the safety of politicians

and citizens would amount to violation of the fundamental rights to vote and political participation as safeguarded by the constitution of Pakistan.



Security officers carry ballot boxes for distribution in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Saturday, Jan. 6, 2024. An apparent arson on a train in Bangladesh's capital killed four people late Friday and added to the country's extreme tension ahead of Sunday's parliamentary elections that the opposition is seeking to boycott and disrupt with a general strike. (AP)

## Kuwait oil drops

Price of Kuwait oil dropped by 93 cents to settle at USD 79.80 per barrel on Friday via a vis USD 80.73 pb on Thursday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation said on Saturday.

In international markets, forwards of the Brent crude oil rose by USD 1.17 to reach USD 78.76 pb while those of the West Texas Intermediate crude climbed by USD 1.62 to settle at USD 73.81 a barrel. (KUNA)

The Biden administration is providing \$162 million to Microchip Technology to support the domestic production of computer chips - the second funding announcement tied to a 2022 law designed to revive U.S. semiconductor manufacturing.

The incentives announced Thursday include \$90 million to improve a plant in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and \$72 million to expand a factory in Gresham, Oregon, the Commerce Department said. The investments would enable Microchip Technology Inc., which is based in Chan-

## Biden administration provides \$162m to expand computer chip factories

der, Arizona, to triple its domestic production and reduce its dependence on foreign factories.

Much of the money would fund the making of microcontrollers, which are used by the military as well as in autos, household appliances and medical devices. Government officials said they expected the investments to create 700 construction and manufacturing jobs over the next decade.

Lael Brainard, director of the White House National Economic Council, emphasized that the funding would help to

tame inflation.

"Semiconductors are the key input in so many goods that are vital to our economy," said Brainard, adding that greater U.S. production of chips would have reduced the supply problems that caused the cost of autos and washing machines, among other goods, to rise as the country emerged from the coronavirus pandemic in 2021.

The inflation rate has since eased, but the scars caused by the sudden price increases have damaged President Joe Biden's public approval.

In August 2022, the Democratic president signed the bipartisan CHIPS and Science Act, which provides more than \$52 billion to boost the development and manufacturing of semiconductors in the United States.

In December, the Commerce Department announced the first grants by saying it reached an agreement to provide \$35 million to BAE Systems, which plans to expand a New Hampshire factory making chips for military aircraft, including F-15 and F-35 jets. (AP)

## Market Movements

06-01-2024

	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts		
UAE	- DFM	+0.02	4,087.99	PAKISTAN	- KSE 100	-0.18	64,537.19
JAPAN	- Nikkei	+0.27	33,377.28	EGYPT	- EGX 30	-0.23	25,350.28
PHILIPPINES	- PSEi	+0.41	6,629.64				
SAUDI	- Tadawul	+1.82	12,145.45				

# Business

## Development a sign of continued economic strength

# US employers add a surprisingly strong 216,000 jobs

WASHINGTON, Jan 6, (AP) - The nation's employers added a robust 216,000 jobs last month, the latest sign that the American labor market remains resilient even in the face of sharply higher interest rates.

Friday's government report showed that December's job gain exceeded the 173,000 that were added in November. The unemployment rate was unchanged at 3.7% - the 23rd straight month that joblessness has come in below 4%.

Some details of the report, though, may disappoint the inflation fighters at the Federal Reserve, who might now be inclined to delay any cuts in their benchmark interest rate. Average hourly wages rose 4.1% from a year earlier, up from a 4% gain in November, which could make it harder for the Fed to slow inflation back to its 2% target.

Still, taken as a whole, the December jobs report reflected a healthy economy, with steady job growth, rising wages and cooling inflation. It provided the latest evidence that the Fed may be able to achieve a notoriously difficult "soft landing," in which the central bank would conquer inflation without causing a steep recession.

Yet despite the low unemployment and easing inflation, polls show that many Americans are dissatisfied with the economy. That disconnect, which will likely be an issue in the 2024 elections, has puzzled economists and political analysts.

A key factor is the public's exasperation with higher prices. Though inflation has been falling more or less steadily for a year and a half, the lingering financial and psychological effects of the worst bout of inflation in four decades have soured many Americans on the economy. Prices are still 17% higher than they were before the inflation surge began and are still rising.

Pollsters and economists say there has never been as wide a gap between the underlying health of the economy and public perception. A poll conducted in November by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, about three-quarters of respondents described the economy as poor. Two-thirds said their expenses had risen.

Asked why many Americans remain dissatisfied with the economy, Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su said Friday that "part of the unfortunate reality is we live in polarized times."

Many of the Biden administration's domestic policies, including its investment in infrastructure, are "wildly popular," Su said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Despite their stated discontent with the economy, Americans have kept spending. Average hourly pay has outpaced inflation over the past year, leaving consumers with more money to spend. Indeed, as they did for much of 2023, consumers, a huge engine for U.S. economic growth, hit the stores in November, shopped online, went out to restaurants or traveled.

Friday's jobs report did contain some cautionary notes. Paul Ashworth, chief North America economist at Capital Economics, noted that the government revised down its previous estimate of job gains for October and November by a combined 71,000. And just as in November, December's job growth was concentrated in just a few industries: Leisure and hospitality companies added 40,000, healthcare 38,000 and governments 52,000.

Indeed, from October through December, private-sector employers have added just 115,000 jobs a month, the lowest three-month average since companies were laying off workers in mid-2020 during COVID-19 lockdowns.

In addition, the proportion of people who either have a job or are looking for one fell in December to 62.5%, the lowest level since February.

The Fed prefers having more people in the labor force to help ease pressure on employers to sharply boost pay to attract or retain workers. Companies typically

# US applications for unemployment benefits fall again as job market continues to show strength

WASHINGTON, Jan 6, (AP) - The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits fell last week as the labor market continues to show resilience despite elevated interest rates.

Jobless claims fell to 202,000 for the week ending Dec. 30, down by 18,000 from the previous week, the Labor Department reported Thursday. The four-week average of claims, which evens out some of the week-to-week volatility, fell by 4,750 to 207,750.

Overall, 1.86 million Americans were collecting jobless benefits during the week that ended Dec. 23, a decrease of 31,000 from the previous week and the fewest in two months.

Weekly unemployment claims are a proxy for lay-

offs. They have remained at extraordinarily low levels in the face of high interest rates.

In an effort to extinguish the four-decade high inflation that took hold after an unusually strong economic rebound from the COVID-19 recession of 2020, the Federal Reserve raised its benchmark rate 11 times since March of 2022.

Inflation has eased considerably during the past year, but remains slightly above the Fed's 2% target. The Fed has left rates alone at its last three meetings and is now signaling that it could cut rates three times next year.

When the Fed started raising rates, it was widely predicted that the U.S. economy would slide into recession. But the economy and the job market re-

mained surprisingly resilient. The unemployment rate has been below 4% for 22 straight months, the longest such streak since the 1960s.

The number of job openings has fallen, but remain at historically healthy levels. On Wednesday, the government reported that America's employers posted 8.8 million job openings in November, down slightly from October and the fewest since March 2021. However, demand for workers remains strong by historical standards.

The combination of decelerating inflation and low unemployment has raised hopes that the Fed is managing a so-called soft landing: raising rates just enough to bring down prices without causing a recession.

pass their higher labor costs on to consumers by raising prices. In December, the number of Americans in the labor force actually fell by 676,000, the sharpest such drop since January 2021.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell had warned of hard times ahead after the central bank began jacking up interest rates in the spring of 2022 to attack high inflation. Most economists predicted that the much higher borrowing costs that resulted would cause a recession, with layoffs and rising unemployment, in 2023.

Yet the recession never arrived, and none appears to be on the horizon. The nation's labor market is still producing enough jobs to keep the unemployment rate near historic lows. For all of 2023, employers added 2.7 million jobs, a healthy gain but down from 4.8 million jobs added in 2022.

"I anticipate 2024 is going to continue to be a bit of a (job) candidate-driven market, with more openings than we have candidates," said Amy Glaser, senior vice president at the staffing firm Adecco.

Still, Glaser suggested, as hiring slows, employers won't likely have to resort to the signing and retention bonuses that were needed in the past few years to attract or keep employees.

Since March 2022, the Fed has raised its benchmark interest rate 11 times, lifting it to a 22-year high of about 5.4%. Those higher rates have made borrowing costlier for companies and households, but they are on their way toward achieving their goal: Defeating inflation.

Consumer prices were up 3.1% in November from a year earlier, down drastically from a four-decade high 9.1% in June 2022. The Fed has been satisfied enough with the progress so far that it hasn't raised rates since July and has signaled that it expects to make three rate cuts this year.

Still, Friday's robust jobs and wage figures could lead the Fed to push back the

start of any interest rate cuts if it decides that inflation will take longer to tame.

"Today's report speaks to the bumpy road ahead for the Fed's journey back to 2% inflation," said Andrew Patterson, senior international economist at Vanguard.

Patterson suggested that the Fed might have to wait for the second half of the year to start cutting rates, longer than many investors had expected.

In the meantime, many employers are still finding it hard to fill jobs. They include Isidore Kharasch, who runs Hospitality Works, which provides consulting services to restaurants, bars and hotels.

Kharasch said his restaurant clients are finding it easier to find servers than they did a year ago. But hiring culinary workers, including chefs and front line cooks remains difficult. Many such workers didn't like their hours and have taken other types of jobs. That trend, Kharasch said, has forced some restaurants to simplify menus or reduce their selection.

"It's constantly adjusting the menu to fit where our staff is at any one time," he said.

Kharasch said he thinks the minimum wage increases that are taking effect this year in some states will result in more automation, increased prices and a reduction in hours of operation to save money. Beginning April 1, California will require fast food companies to pay their workers at least \$20 an hour.

Krystle Phillips, owner of Roll Ice Cream LLC in St. Petersburg, Florida, which sells rolled ice cream machines, ingredients and supplies to ice cream trucks and stores, is struggling to find workers willing to work full time. Job candidates are demanding higher pay.

Short of help, Phillips, who considers herself an expert in refrigeration and logistics, has had to get up to speed on writing recipes and accounting.

"It's been hard to hire these specialized positions," she said.

# KUFPEC completes the sale of Norway assets and exit of KUFPEC (China) Inc.

### Norwegian authorities approve deal

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6: Kuwait Foreign Petroleum Exploration Company, k.s.c.c. ("KUFPEC") is pleased to announce that the divestment of KUFPEC Norway AS ("KNAS") assets has been completed after being approved by the Norwegian authorities with an effective date of 1 January 2023.

At the end of 2023, KUFPEC achieved another milestone through the successful exit of KUFPEC (China) Inc. from the People's Republic of China.

KUFPEC Chief Executive Officer Mohammad Salem Al-Haimer stated that "KUFPEC works relentlessly to optimize its current portfolio and maximize the value of its assets through successful divestments, and intensifying efforts to enhance projects' organic growth and exploration activities to meet the Com-



Mohammad-Salem-Al-Haimer

pany's strategic objectives.

During our decade long-business journey in Norway, we achieved various monetary and technical achievements in terms of value addition and knowledge transfer to the Kuwaiti oil sector. In China, we also achieved a successful exit which was completed in one year.

This achievement contributed to reducing the expected costs due to the exceptional efforts and efficiency of KUFPEC's teams.

In both Norway and China, we have aimed to provide valuable contributions to the Norwegian and Chinese oil and gas sectors, and we thank the Norwegian and Chinese governments for these opportunities to have been part of their respective growth strategies", stated the CEO.

KUFPEC is an international upstream company engaged in exploration, development and production of crude oil and natural gas outside the State of Kuwait and is a wholly owned subsidiary of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation.

# Fed minutes: Officials saw inflation cooling but were cautious about timing of rate cuts

WASHINGTON, Jan 6, (AP) - The Federal Reserve's policymakers concluded last month that inflationary pressures were easing and that the job market was cooling. In response, the officials chose to leave their key interest rate unchanged for the third straight time and signaled that they expected to cut rates three times in 2024.

According to the minutes of their Dec. 12-13 meeting released Wednesday, Fed officials indicated in their own interest-rate forecasts that a lower benchmark rate "would be appropriate by the end of 2024" given "clear progress" toward taming inflation.

But they "stressed the importance" of remaining vigilant and keeping rates high "until inflation was clearly moving down sustainably" toward their 2% target. And though Chair Jerome Powell indicated at a news conference after the meeting that the Fed was likely done raising rates, the minutes show that Fed officials felt the economic outlook was uncertain enough that that further hikes were still "possible."

Powell had also suggested at his news conference that the Fed's policymakers discussed rate cuts during their meeting, a remark that helped ignite a stock market rally. Over the next few days, though, some other Fed officials tried to steer investors away from expecting any imminent cuts. Wednesday's minutes provided no explicit mention about a discussion of

rate cuts.

Still, Paul Ashworth, chief North America economist at Capital Economics said "there is nothing in these minutes to dissuade us that the Fed will start to cut interest rates from this March onwards."

In the minutes of their meeting, the policymakers sounded optimistic about the outlook for inflation. They mentioned the end of supply chain backlogs that had caused shortages and higher prices, a drop in rents that is beginning to move through the economy and an increase in job seekers, which makes it easier for companies to fill vacancies without having to raise pay aggressively.

The central bank began raising rates in March 2022 to combat an unexpected resurgence in consumer prices that had begun nearly a year earlier. The Fed has since raised its benchmark rate 11 times to a 22-year high of about 5.4%.

The anti-inflation campaign has made steady progress, allowing the Fed to leave its benchmark rate unchanged since July. Consumer prices were up 3.1% in November from a year earlier - down from a four-decade high 9.1% in June 2022.

Higher rates were widely expected to trigger a recession in the United States, the world's largest economy. But the economy and the job market have proved unexpectedly resilient.

The U.S. gross domestic product - the economy's total output of goods and services - grew at a robust 4.9% annual rate from July through September on strong consumer spending and business investment. At their meeting last month, some Fed officials noted that toward the end of 2023, the economy appeared to have slowed.

American employers added a healthy 232,000 jobs a month through November last year. The December jobs report, which the government will issue Friday, is expected to show that the economy added 155,000 jobs last month and that unemployment rose slightly to 3.8%. It would mark the 23rd straight month it's come in below 4%, longest such streak since the 1960s.

Hiring has decelerated, and the Labor Department reported Wednesday that job openings had fallen in November to the lowest level since March 2021. The Fed sees a reduction in job openings as a painless way - compared with layoffs - to reduce pressure on companies to raise wages to attract and keep workers, which can lead to higher prices.

The combination of decelerating inflation and a sturdy economy has raised hopes that the Fed can engineer a so-called soft landing - slowing economic activity just enough to tame inflation without causing a recession.

## They've been so many times before

# Wall Street's hopes for rate cuts may be too optimistic

NEW YORK, Jan 6, (AP) - Even when everyone agrees the interest-rate cuts that Wall Street craves so much are coming, there's still room for potential disappointment.

Since the Federal Reserve hinted last month its drastic rate hikes to get inflation under control may be done, bets have built on how much the Fed will lower its main interest rate in 2024. Inflation has eased back to 3.1% at the consumer level, down from its peak above 9%. That will hopefully give the Fed freedom to take it easier on rates.

Cuts to rates can supercharge financial markets, and stock and bond prices have already jumped in anticipation of such moves. The S&P 500 closed 2023 with a ninth straight winning week, for example. That's its longest such streak since January 2004.

As it stands, traders on Wall Street are forecasting a nearly three-in-four chance the Fed will cut its main interest rate by at least 1.50 percentage points through the year, according to data from CME Group. That would take it down from its current perch, sitting in a range of 5.25% to 5.50%, which is its highest since 2001. But for much of the past two years,

almost since the Fed began its harshest rate-hike campaign in decades, Wall Street has been quick to forecast an approaching easing of rates, only to be disappointed by false peaks as inflation proved to be stronger and more stubborn than expected.

Investors "have repeatedly priced in aggressive rate cuts just to walk them back," according to Jean Boivin and other strategists at BlackRock Investment Institute. "All this shows markets may extrapolate a lot from one piece of data or central bank comment."

Inflation has of course retreated and is nearing the Fed's target of 2%. But it's still to be determined whether inflation will continue a steady, downward trend. That raises the risk that the market may once again be overzealous in trying to front-run the Fed. Fed officials themselves see only half as many cuts to rates happening in 2024 as Wall Street does, based on the median projection of officials as of December.

Of course, no one has a perfect track record on this. Not even the Fed. Policy makers at the central bank famously dismissed rising inflation in 2021 as "transitory."

# SpaceX accused of unlawfully firing workers who were critical of Musk

NEW YORK, Jan 6, (AP) - A U.S. labor agency has accused SpaceX of unlawfully firing employees who penned an open letter critical of CEO Elon Musk and creating an impression that worker activities were under surveillance by the rocket ship company.

A Los Angeles-based regional director for the National Labor Relations Board on Wednesday filed a complaint that consolidates eight unfair labor practice charges against SpaceX. The cases stem from the company's alleged actions following the circulation of the employees' letter back in June 2022.

The letter, among other workplace concerns, called on executives to condemn Musk's public behavior on X - the platform then-known as Twitter - and hold everyone accountable for unacceptable conduct. Musk's actions included making light of sexual harassment allegations against him, which the billionaire denied.

"As our CEO and most prominent spokesperson, Elon is seen as the face of SpaceX - every tweet that Elon

sends is a de facto public statement by the company," the open letter said at the time. The letter also referred to Musk's actions as a "frequent source of distraction and embarrassment."

A total of nine employees were soon terminated for their involvement in the letter, according to a November 2022 filing made on behalf of one of the employees to the NLRB, although only eight are included in Wednesday's complaint.

In addition to the firings, the complaint accuses SpaceX of interrogating other workers about the letter, announcing that employees were terminated for their participation in the letter and "inviting employees to quit if they disagreed with the behavior of Chief Executive Officer Elon Musk."

The complaint also alleges that some were shown screen shots of communications between employees about the letter, which "created an impression among (SpaceX's) employees that their protected concerted activities were under surveillance."

## BUSINESS

## Germany softens contentious cost-cutting plan for upset farmers

The German government on Thursday watered down cost-saving plans that have infuriated farmers, announcing that it is giving up a proposal to scrap a car tax exemption for farming vehicles and will stagger cuts to tax breaks for diesel used in agriculture.

The cuts were part of a package agreed last month by leaders of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's unpopular three-party coalition to fill a 17 billion-euro (\$18.6 billion) hole in the 2024 budget.

Farmers staged a protest with tractors in Berlin and called for more demonstrations

this month, and even Agriculture Minister Cem Özdemir spoke out against the cuts being implemented in full. He said farmers have no alternative to diesel.

The budget revamp was necessary after Germany's highest court annulled an earlier decision to repurpose 60 billion euros (almost \$66 billion) originally meant to cushion the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic for measures to help combat climate change and modernize the country. The maneuver fell afoul of Germany's strict self-imposed

limits on running up debt.

A government statement Thursday said Scholz, Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck and Finance Minister Christian Lindner have now agreed to maintain the car tax exemption for farming vehicles in order to save those concerned "in some cases significant bureaucratic effort."

The tax breaks on diesel will no longer end all at once, giving farmers "more time to adapt," it added. They will be cut by 40% this year, with another 30% being cut in each of the next two years. (AP)



Farmers with tractors take part in a protest rally organized by the German Farmers' Association in Berlin, Germany, on Dec. 18, 2023. (AP)

## Could it delay interest rate cuts?

## Europe's inflation climbs up after months of decline

FRANKFURT, Germany, Jan 6, (AP) — Inflation plaguing Europe rose to 2.9% in December, rebounding after seven straight monthly declines as food prices rose and support for high energy bills ended in some countries. The rise in price levels fueled debate over how soon interest rate cuts could be expected from the European Central Bank.

The figure released Friday was up from the 2.4% annual inflation recorded in November - but is well down from the peak of 10.6% in October 2022.

ECB President Christine Lagarde warned that inflation could tick up in coming months, taking a detour from its recent downward path. The central bank for the 20 European Union countries that use the euro currency has raised its benchmark interest rate to a record-high 4% and says it will keep it there as long as necessary to push inflation down to its goal of 2% considered best for the economy.

The faster-than-expected fall in inflation over the last months of 2023 had led some analysts to predict the

central bank would start cutting interest rates as early as March.

The December rebound, however, was grist for analysts who predict that rates wouldn't start to come down until June.

"The increase serves as a reminder that interest rate cuts in the first quarter are unlikely, but this shouldn't dispel expectations of cuts later in the year," said Bert Colijn, senior eurozone economist at ING bank.

## Differed

Views differed on the significance of the higher inflation number. December's increase was a "just a blip" that would be reversed in January, said Jack Allen-Reynolds, deputy chief eurozone economist at Capital Economics. He foresees a first rate cut in April.

Inflation in December got a boost from the end of energy subsidies in Germany and France that had lowered prices a year ago.

Core inflation, which excludes volatile fuel and food prices, eased to 3.4% from 3.6% in November, according to European Union statistics agency Eurostat. The figure is closely watched by



A tram drives past the European Central Bank building in Frankfurt, Germany, on May 2, 2023. Inflation plaguing Europe rose to 2.9% in December, rebounding after seven straight monthly declines. The rise in price levels cast doubt on predictions for speedy interest rate cuts from the European Central Bank. The figure released Friday Jan. 5, 2024 was up from the 2.4% annual inflation recorded in November - but is well down from the peak of 10.6% in October 2022. (AP)

the ECB.

Food prices have fallen from pain-

ful double digits in several months last

year, but still increased by an annual

6.1% in December.

Higher food costs led global supermarket chain Carrefour to announce this week that it will stop selling PepsiCo products in its stores in France, Belgium, Spain and Italy. The French chain pointed to price increases for popular items like Lay's potato chips, Quaker Oats, Lipton tea and Pepsi soda.

The ECB and central banks around the world have rapidly raised interest rates to fight inflation. They work by raising the cost of borrowing for consumer purchases, particularly of houses and apartments, and for business investment in new offices and factories.

That lowers demand for goods and relieves pressure on prices - but it also can limit growth at a time when it's in short supply in Europe. The economy shrank 0.1% in the July-to-September quarter.

Inflation itself, however, has been a key challenge to economic growth because it robs consumers of purchasing power. The ECB said raising rates quickly was the best way to get it under control and avoid even more dras-

tic measures later.

Officials at the U.S. Federal Reserve also stressed the importance of keeping rates high until inflation is "clearly moving down," according to minutes of their Dec. 12-13 meeting released Wednesday. The Fed has signaled three rate cuts this year.

U.S. consumer prices were up 3.1% in November from a year earlier.

Inflation spiked around the world as the rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic strained supplies of parts and raw materials, then as Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, raising costs for food and energy.

Europe has since found other supplies of natural gas outside Russia to generate electricity, power factories and heat homes, so energy prices have eased.

Europe - and the rest of the world - is facing a possibility of new delays and higher prices for consumer products as attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels have scared away the world's largest container shipping companies and energy giant BP from sailing through the Red Sea and Suez Canal.



Junior doctors and members of the British Medical Association (BMA) demonstrate outside Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle, England, on Jan. 3, 2024, as they take to picket lines for six days. (AP)

## Government stands firm

## UK doctors' strike intensifies amid growing concerns over patient care

LONDON, Jan 6, (AP) — The longest scheduled strike in the history of Britain's state-funded National Health Service entered its second of six planned days Thursday with doctors in England at loggerheads with hospitals over requests for some to leave the picket line to cover urgent needs during one of the busiest times of year.

The strike is the ninth organized by doctors in the early stages of their careers in just over a year amid an increasingly bitter pay dispute with the British government. Junior doctors form the backbone of hospital and clinic care in England, and plans were laid out before this week's walkout for them to return to work if hospitals got overwhelmed.

The British Medical Association, the union that represents the bulk of the 75,000 or so striking doctors, had agreed with NHS managers on a system for so-called derogations, in which junior doctors return to work in the event of safety concerns about emergency care. Hospitals were expected to show they had "exhausted" all other sources of staffing before recalling the newer physicians.

## Incidents

On Wednesday, the first day of the strike, hospitals made 20 requests for junior doctors to return to work due to patient safety fears. A number of hospitals declared critical incidents, and others warned of significant waits in emergency rooms. None of the requests were granted.

It's unknown how many more appeals came from hospitals on Thursday.

The BMA said the refusal of hospitals to provide the necessary data "is fundamentally undermining the derogation process." The NHS Confederation, which represents hospitals, said the form-filling took time and could undermine patient safety.

During the strike, senior doctors, known as consultants, are providing some of the care that their juniors usually provide. But there's not enough of them to fill the gap and NHS managers have said that tens of thousands of appointments and operations will be postponed because of the walkout.

The strike is taking place at a time when hospital admissions for flu and COVID-19 cases are running at their highest rate this winter, according to figures from the U.K. Health Security Agency.

"This latest round of strike action will not only have an impact on this week but will have an ongoing effect on the weeks and months ahead as we struggle to recover services and cope with heavy demand," NHS England National Medical Director Stephen Powis said.

Britain has endured a year of rolling strikes across the health sector as staff

## Judicial blow

## Argentina suspends labor rule 'changes'

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina, Jan 6, (AP) — President Javier Milei suffered a judicial blow Wednesday as a court suspended labor rule changes he recently announced as part of sweeping deregulation and austerity measures aimed at reviving Argentina's struggling economy.

The ruling by a three-judge court came on a legal challenge brought by the main union group, the General Labor Confederation, which argued that the changes affected workers' rights.

Milei's decree announced in December established several changes in labor rules, including increasing job probation from three to eight months, reducing severance compensation and allowing the possibility of dismissal for workers taking part of blockades during some protests. Alejandro Sudera, one of the three judges, said the administration went beyond its authority to decree labor changes, which first needed to be discussed and approved by Congress.

Milei's government said it would appeal the court's ruling. The union confederation applauded the court, saying the decision "puts a stop to the regressive and anti-worker labor reform."

Labor activists have questioned whether Milei, a self-described anarcho-capitalist who has long railed against the country's "political caste," can impose the measures using emergency decree bypass the legislature.

On Dec. 20, a few days after taking office as the new president, Milei announced sweeping initiatives to transform Argentina's economy, including easing government regulation and allowing privatization of state-run industries. The libertarian economist made about 300 changes.

sought pay rises to offset the soaring cost of living.

The BMA says newly qualified doctors earn 15.53 pounds (about \$19) an hour - the U.K. minimum wage is just over 10 pounds (nearly \$12.6) an hour - though salaries rise rapidly after the first year.

Nurses, ambulance crews and consultants have reached pay deals with the government, but negotiations with junior doctors broke down late last year.

## Global food prices declined from record highs in 2022, the UN says

## Rice and sugar prices surge

ROME, Jan 6, (AP) — Global prices for food commodities like grain and vegetable oil fell last year from record highs in 2022, when Russia's war in Ukraine, drought and other factors helped worsen hunger worldwide, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization said Friday.

The FAO Food Price Index, which tracks monthly changes in the international prices of commonly traded food commodities, was 13.7% lower last year than the 2022 average, but its measures of sugar and rice prices growing in that time.

Last month, the index dropped some 10% compared with December 2022. The drop in food commodity prices in 2023 comes despite a difficult year for food security around the world.

Climate effects like dry weather, flooding and the naturally occurring El Niño phenomenon, combined with fallout from conflicts like the war in Ukraine, bans on food trade that have added to food inflation and weaker currencies have hurt developing nations especially.

While food commodities like grain have fallen from painful surges in 2022, the relief often hasn't made it to the real world of shopkeepers, street vendors and families trying to make ends meet.

## Food insecurity

More than 333 million people faced acute levels of food insecurity in 2023, according to another U.N. agency, the World Food Program.

Rice and sugar in particular were problematic last year because of climate effects in growing regions of Asia, and prices have risen in response, especially in African nations.

With the exception of rice, the FAO's grain index last year was 15.4% below the 2022 average, "reflecting well supplied global markets." That's despite Russia pulling out of a wartime deal that allowed grain to flow from Ukraine to countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia.



A farmer harvests rice crop in a paddy field on the outskirts of Guwahati, India, Tuesday, June 6, 2023. Global prices for food commodities like grain and vegetable oil fell last year from record highs in 2022, when Russia's war in Ukraine, drought and other factors helped worsen hunger worldwide, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization said Friday, Jan. 5, 2024. Inset: Freshly baked bread is displayed in Babushka Bakery in Budapest on Tuesday, April 11, 2023. (AP)

Countries buying wheat have found supply elsewhere, notably from Russia, with prices lower than they were before the war began, analysts say.

The FAO's rice index was up 21% last year because of India's export restrictions on some types of rice and concerns about the impact of El Niño on rice production. That has meant higher prices for low-income families, including places like Senegal and Kenya.

Similarly, the agency's sugar index last year hit its highest level since 2011, expanding 26.7% from 2022 because of concerns about low supplies. That followed unusually dry weather damaging harvests in India and Thailand, the world's second- and third-largest exporters.

The sugar index improved in the last month of 2023, however, hitting a nine-month low because of strong supply from Brazil, the biggest sugar exporter, and India lowering its use for ethanol production.

## Major push for affordable housing

## NM proposes a 10% spending rise amid 'windfall' from oil production

SANTA FE, N.M., Jan 6, (AP) — New Mexico's governor is proposing a nearly 10% general fund spending increase for the coming fiscal year to shore up housing opportunities, childhood literacy and health care access, with additional payouts for electric vehicles purchases.

Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham on Thursday published the \$10.5 billion budget plan for the fiscal year running from July 2024 through June 2025. It would increase general fund spending by roughly \$950 million over current annual obligations.

The Democratic-led Legislature develops its own competing spending plan in advance of a 30-day legislative session that begins Jan. 16. Lujan Grisham can veto any and all budget provisions approved by legislators.

## Surplus

The nation's No. 2 oil-producing state anticipates a multibillion-dollar surplus for the coming fiscal year, driven largely by oil and natural gas production in the Permian Basin that underlies southeastern New Mexico and western Texas.

The governor has signaled affordable housing as a major priority, proposing one-time spending of \$500 million to expand opportunities through down-payment assistance, and to finance affordable housing and related infrastructure. The state separately would use \$40 million to launch a statewide homelessness initiative.

In November, voters signaled frustration with surging home prices in fast-growing Santa Fe by approving a tax on mansions to pay for affordable-housing initiatives.

Spending on public education would

increase by \$283 million, or 6.8%, to nearly \$4.5 billion - the single largest chunk of annual general fund appropriations.

One goal is to bolster specialized literacy programs, while founding a state literacy institute. Additional funds would help extend annual instructional time at public schools across the state. Republicans in the legislative minority oppose the push to expand public school calendars.

The Lujan Grisham administration hopes to add 2,000 slots for infant and toddler childcare and expand early preschool by 1,380 slots through increased state spending, while also bolstering aid to children being raised by grandparents.

Legislators have expressed frustration in recent months with the results of sustained spending increases on public education. Statewide, the share of students who can read at their grade level is 38%. Math proficiency is at 24%. The state's high school graduation rate hovers at 76% - well below the national average of 87%.

Lujan Grisham pledged in a statement to "continue to spend within our means, responsibly and with an eye toward accountability."

Her budget proposal includes a 3% increase in pay for workers at executive agencies and public schools statewide - and larger increases of 8% for corrections officers and 14% for state police.

Economists for state agencies say New Mexico's income surge is slowing down, but far from over, as lawmakers wrestle with how much to spend now or set aside for the future in case the world's thirst for oil falters.

## WORKFORCE INNOVATION

## Business Plus



US invented shopping malls, but China writing their next chapter

## China malls lead in urban transformation



In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, tourists tour the Harbin Ice-Snow World in Harbin in northeastern China's Heilongjiang Province, Friday, Jan. 5, 2024. (AP)

By John Rennie Short

University of Maryland, Baltimore County

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



The distinction between public and private spaces is being reconfigured as vendors set up stalls in areas that once were open space

On a recent research trip to China, I wandered through the Oasis Mall in suburban Shanghai. Like many Chinese shopping centers, this complex was filled with empty stores that reflected the end of China's 30-year-long economic expansion. But there also were surprises.

Along a stretch of the mall's interior walkway, a cluster of parents and grandparents sat on chairs. They were looking through a plate glass window, watching a dozen 5- to 7-year-old girls practice ballet steps, carefully following their teacher's choreography. A space initially designed for retail had been turned into a dance studio.

From 1990 through 2020, large, shiny shopping malls embodied China's spectacular economic

growth. They sprouted in cities large and small to meet consumer demand from an emerging middle class that was keen to express its newfound affluence. These centers look familiar to American eyes, which isn't surprising: U.S. architectural firms built 170 malls in China during this period.

Like their U.S. counterparts, many Chinese malls have fallen on hard times. The COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of online shopping have devastated foot traffic, leaving the nation with a huge overhang of retail space. But many Chinese malls are being re-imagined by owners and users as palaces of experience - civic areas for communities to meet and interact, with new configurations of public and private space.

As a longtime urban policy scholar, I was fascinated by the new uses I saw for malls in China. In my view, these experiments could become models for new, creative uses of retail space in the U.S., where the mall was invented.

China opened up to foreign trade

and investment less than 50 years ago. Since then, it has become the world's second-largest economy, surpassed only by the U.S.

Rising incomes and a massive population shift from rural areas to cities have created a growing middle class with significant purchasing power. GDP per capita increased from US\$293 in 1985 to \$12,500 by 2021.

Today, approximately 350 million Chinese - 25% of the total population - can be considered middle class. More recent economic growth has generated growing income inequality that now is equivalent to U.S. levels.

Malls became a motif of modernity during the country's economic expansion. They offered consumers year-round protection from heat, humidity, cold and frost, as well as from busy streets and polluting traffic. Malls were safe environments where the steadily increasing numbers of more affluent Chinese families could shop and eat, stroll and meet.

Over the past 30 years, China's malls have faced economic booms

and slumps. For example, the New South China Mall in Dongguan - which is twice the size of Minnesota's Mall of America, its largest U.S. counterpart - opened in 2005. But most of its 2,300 storefronts remained closed for over a decade as China fought off recession after the 2008 world financial crisis.

China weathered that downturn through aggressive economic stimulus policies, and within a decade it replaced the U.S. as the world's top driver of economic growth. This expansion buoyed its retail sector, including shopping centers. By 2018, a renovated and modernized New South China Mall was near full occupancy.

Then COVID-19 struck in 2020. The Chinese government adopted a rigid zero-COVID policy, in which local governments could impose lockdowns after detecting just a few cases. Hundreds of millions of people were restricted to their homes for weeks or months at a stretch.

This policy was lifted only in late 2022. China's economy has yet to fully recover, and many

experts argue that it will never again reach its previous rates of growth. An aging population, trade wars with the U.S. and a government focused on centralizing power under the Communist Party are all acting as drags on the economy, and online shopping is drawing consumers away from stores.

As a result, Chinese media reports abound with stories about well-known stores and venerable malls closing. In China, as in the U.S., what scholars once described as the "magic of the mall" has become an "allure of ruins."

But the Chinese are making creative use of excess mall space. New users are filling nonretail areas, such as indoor walkways and atriums that now house café tables. Others have become children's play spaces filled with giant inflatable figures. The Raffles City Mall in Shenzhen has a rooftop pet playground, a stage, an art display area and a sun-shaded lawn.

China's informal economy of food stalls and sidewalk merchants is also filling the void. Although street vending has a long history in China, government officials sought to suppress it in recent years, calling it unsanitary and a throwback to pre-modern times. Now, however, they are encouraging it as a way to reduce growing unemployment, especially among young people, which currently exceeds 20%.

During my trip, I saw small-scale entrepreneurs selling produce, street food and crafts in mall parking lots and around public entrances. The distinction between public and private spaces is being reconfigured as vendors set up stalls in areas that once were open space.

Empty store spaces are also being repurposed. Some have been converted into electric vehicle showrooms, art museums and children's play centers with dance studios, paddling pools, small skating rinks, gyms and yoga centers. Others have been redesigned as sites for art or cooking classes, or for multiplayer electronic gaming and virtual reality experiences. The Dream Time Mall in Wuhan contains an indoor snow center that offers ski lessons, ice mazes and tubing.

I see these experiments as a shift in the meaning of the mall. What began as a cathedral of retail consumerism is becoming a place where people can connect and enjoy individual and collective experiences that aren't available online.

Some U.S. malls are moving in this direction, but China is doing it on a much larger scale. Just as former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping once asserted that his government was pursuing its own version of socialism, with "Chinese characteristics," the U.S.-designed mall is being rewritten with Chinese characters. (AP)

Career growth opportunities, work-life balance key factors in employee loyalty

## Mideast job market to get more competitive

DUBAI, Jan 6: Bayt.com, the Middle East's #1 job site, released the results of the Middle East Career Insights Poll 2023, providing key insights into the preferences and experiences of professionals in the region. According to the poll, 74.4% of respondents believe that a diverse and inclusive workplace is important when considering a job opportunity, highlighting the significance of diversity and inclusion in organizations across the Middle East.

"Workplace diversity is not just a buzzword; it is a fundamental pillar of successful organizations in the Middle East," said Ola Haddad, Director of Human Resources at Bayt.com. "Awareness is growing, and MENA professionals are recognizing the inherent value of diverse and inclusive workplaces. Survey results confirm that embracing diversity

helps to create an environment that fosters innovation and drives success."

The survey sheds light on various aspects of the job market, including job search strategies, loyalty to current employers, work-life balance assessment, and more. When it comes to staying updated about industry-specific job openings and trends, 55% of respondents rely on job search websites, making them the most popular source of information. On the other hand, 15.6% attend professional networking events, while only 3.7% depend on industry-specific publications.

The poll findings indicate that career growth opportunities and work-life balance are key factors in employee loyalty in the Middle East. When it comes to factors that make professionals loyal to their

current employers, career growth opportunities (29.8%) and work-life balance (24.4%) are among the top priorities. Competitive salary (21.1%) and positive company culture (20.4%) also play significant roles in attracting employee loyalty. Employers who prioritize these aspects can enhance employee satisfaction and retention.

In terms of work-life balance, 45.1% of professionals rated the balance offered by their current employer as excellent, while 33.6% considered it to be good. Only 4.1% believe their employer provides a poor work-life balance.

The survey also delved into the competitiveness of the job market in the Middle East - 72.9% of respondents believe that the job market has become significantly more competitive, while 18.6% see a slight increase in competi-

tion. The job market is witnessing a significant shift as professionals display a growing willingness to relocate for better career prospects. A majority of respondents (62.2%) are willing to relocate anywhere, showing a high level of mobility within the region. Meanwhile, 21.5% are willing to relocate within the Middle East, and 12.2% state that they would only consider relocating for exceptional opportunities.

Job seekers need to equip themselves with relevant skills and stand out from the competition to secure lucrative career opportunities. Regarding upskilling and further education, 80.1% of professionals expressed a high interest in advancing their careers through these means, while only 1.4% show a lack of interest. When it comes to professional networking, employment-focused

social media platforms emerges as the leading platform, with 79.5% of respondents using them to enhance their network. Online Networking Groups and Industry Conferences were also mentioned, at 7.1% and 3.6% respectively.

Finally, the survey revealed the top challenges facing job seekers in the Middle East today. 36.6% believe that lack of suitable job opportunities is their main hurdle, followed by 24.2% who highlighted visa and work permit issues.

Data for the Middle East Career Insights Poll 2023 was collected online from November 28 to December 27, 2023. Results are based on a sample of 2,271 respondents from the following countries: UAE, KSA, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Sudan, and others.

editor's choice



# Jo Koy ready to fulfill childhood dream of hosting Golden Globes

LOS ANGELES, Jan 6, (AP): Jo Koy remembers watching major award ceremonies like the Golden Globes with his mother on their living room sofa trying to guess the winners.

It was a ritual that Koy cherished as a child. Since then, he's grown as a comedian with various stand-up specials and several acting credits including last year's film "Easter Sunday."

On Sunday, Koy will live out his childhood dream of hosting the Globes - which is looking to return to form after being tarnished following years of scandal. He calls his upcoming duties a "very big moment."

"This is a throwback to my childhood, and now I'm the guy who's onstage," said Koy, the second Asian host in Globes history. (Sandra Oh emceed the show in 2019.) He wants to the inspire those from the Asian community in his first major hosting gig.

"As a kid and watching TV and not having that many role models to kind of indirectly inspire me, that's what this means to me," said the Filipino American actor, whose "Easter Sunday" film became the first big studio movie with an all-Filipino ensemble. He's released five stand-up specials on Comedy Central and Netflix, including his most recent Netflix special, "Live From The Los Angeles Forum."

"I know there's kids out there that will be watching the

Globes," he said. "And now when they see this, it's like 'Oh, it's possible. I can do this.' Things aren't so gray anymore. It's not just two colors on the palette. Sometime three. Every color is on the palette. This is a beautiful moment. I really want to make sure I knock this out of the park."

Koy hopes to leave a positive mark on the Globes, which are the first major broadcast of awards season. It airs live beginning at 5 p.m. Pacific on CBS and Paramount+ for users with a Showtime subscription.

## Celebration

The show is known for being a celebration of television and film with a more party-like atmosphere compared to their Academy Award counterparts.

But the Globes faced tremendous backlash after a 2021 report in the Los Angeles Times found there were zero Black members in the group that only had 87 foreign journalists. The membership has since been revamped with a voting body of 300.

All indications point to a starry show, which will include presenters such as Michelle Yeoh, Will Ferrell, Angela Bassett, America Ferrera and Amanda Seyfried.

Greta Gerwig's "Barbie" leads the Globes nominations with nine including for best picture musical or comedy as well as

acting nominations for Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling and three of its original songs. It is closely followed by its release date and meme companion "Oppenheimer," which scored eight nominations, including for best picture drama, best director for Christopher Nolan and nods for actors Cillian Murphy, Robert Downey Jr. and Emily Blunt.

Koy gave praise to Dick Clark Productions, the awards' producer, and an owner of the Globes' longtime home, the Beverly Hilton.

"This production company has been nothing but top notch," he said. "The relationship with CBS is beautiful. It's fun to see this because this is how things should be ran. We need to start moving forward. That's what this is. We're moving forward now. You learn from the past and you make sure it doesn't happen again."

Koy said he's anxious to hit the Globes stage to deliver his brand of relatable humor.

"They're giving me the blessing to be me," he said. "I want to bring my style to the Globes. Of course, I'm going to have fun. But most importantly, I want to make sure everyone's happy. I'm going to make fun of myself. If I can do that, I can make fun of other people."

People

## Variety

# Features

ARABIC TIMES

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This image released by Ketchup Entertainment shows Jessica Chastain in a scene from 'Memory.' (AP)

## Film

Chastain, Sarsgaard reflect on gray areas in new film

# 'Memory' probes love, consent in new light

LOS ANGELES, Jan 6, (AP): When Jessica Chastain first read the script for "Memory," she was struck by the flurry of unanswered questions left swirling around in her head about issues pertaining to love, and consent - which might be antithetical to what some audiences expect from a movie.

"Sometimes I think films can be seen as like lectures of the right way of being," she says.

But the Oscar winner does not subscribe to that philosophy of cinema. And it was writer and director Michel Franco's willingness to probe gray areas and leave questions unanswered that ultimately persuaded Chastain to star in "Memory," in theaters across US from Friday.

"Memory" follows Sylvia (Chastain), who is hired by the family of a man named Saul (Peter Sarsgaard) to keep him company as he navigates early onset dementia. Although her background in caretaking is a plus, Saul's family mostly wants someone to spend time with him - until Sylvia is suspected of developing romantic feelings for Saul.

"It felt like a film that would be impossible to make within a studio system because there'd be so many people, especially in the political environment we're in, coming out of MeToo," Chastain explains. "Everyone would be so afraid of making a mistake, of saying the wrong thing."

Franco opted instead for an independent production and a budget so small that both Chastain and Sarsgaard laughed at its mention.

"If you drove by our set, you wouldn't know there was a movie being shot," Sarsgaard chuckles. "The production design was frequently whatever was in the house when we got it. Actors provided a lot of their own clothes and, in circumstances, did their own makeup."

But their performances were not hindered by the austere sets and minimal dialogue, thanks in part, no doubt, to Chastain's and Sarsgaard's experiences in theater.

"If you get rid of all the B.S., you know, all the extra stuff, and you just go right down to the essentials, then you can tell these more complicated stories," Sarsgaard says.

In the film, Saul's brother eventually recants support for the arrangement, telling Sarsgaard's character that he's not able to make rational decisions.

"I don't know what you're doing. I don't want to

know," the brother says to Sylvia after discovering the pair in a kind of embrace while watching a movie.

"When I thought of it as a love story, I knew it was meant to be like a forbidden love story. I thought of them almost as teenagers," Franco says. "I like the idea of broken people that are challenging society."

As she deliberates on her relationship to Saul, Sylvia is also reckoning with her own past. Though she has for years said she was sexually assaulted in high school, her family members maintain she lied and poke holes in her stories - making the film's title not just a reference to Saul's condition.

## Concept

"I was a little surprised about that because I didn't develop it as a concept. I started writing and then when I read the outline, I learned that 'Memory' had to be the title because it was about both of them," Franco says. "The ways memories can be reshaped or the stories you tell yourself."

The film premiered at the Venice Film Festival and is being distributed by Ketchup Entertainment. Heading into awards season, Chastain has already snagged an Independent Spirit Award nomination for best lead performance.

After signing on, Chastain recommended Franco cast Sarsgaard, whose recent credits include "The Batman" and "The Lost Daughter," a 2022 Oscar-nominated drama directed by his wife, Maggie Gyllenhaal.

"I have spent a long time watching Peter's work and, as an audience member, really being moved by what he's done," Chastain says. "I didn't know Peter would want to do it, but I knew that he was someone that would bring so much to it without vanity. And that was important to me."

After saying yes to the role, Sarsgaard did extensive research prior to filming, an experience which he found illuminating.

"I talked to two guys on the phone weekly who had dementia when I was preparing for this, and you would almost never have known they had dementia," he recalls. "Occasionally there would be signs of it, but it was not constant."

He said a priority in making the film was to not make light of serious issues like dementia, sexual assault or addiction - and to not construct caricatures of the people

who deal with them.

"The first step in doing that is not to think of the trauma or the dementia as the character," Sarsgaard says. "These are the obstacles that the characters face."

## Also:

LOS ANGELES: Houston, we have a problem: Where's Kevin?

Perhaps the ultimate coming-home movie, "Apollo 13," and the ultimate staying-home one, "Home Alone," are both being honored this year, selected for preservation in the National Film Registry. They're part of an annual group of 25 that this year spans more than 90 years of filmmaking.

The 2023 collection includes the sci-fi sequel "Terminator 2: Judgment Day," the Disney animated classic "Lady and the Tramp," and the searing, Oscar-winning drama "12 Years a Slave." Just in time for the holidays, "The Nightmare Before Christmas" is included.

The oldest film is from 1921: "A Movie Trip Through Filmland," a very early look at the impact of movies. The newest are both from 2013: "12 Years a Slave" and the Oscar-winning documentary "20 Feet From Stardom," about backup singers.

The registry is housed at the Library of Congress, which since 1988 has selected movies for preservation based on their cultural and historic importance. The current picks bring the registry to 875 films - some, but not all, among the 2 million items in the library's collection. Turner Classic Movies will host a TV special on Thursday, screening a selection of this year's movies.

"The Wedding Banquet" (1993): **Ang Lee's** romantic comedy about a gay man from Taiwan trying to hide his orientation from his family, featuring an over-the-top wedding banquet.

"Bamboozled" (2000): **Spike Lee's** stinging satire about race in entertainment, with **Damon Wayans** as a program executive at a cable network.

"Maya Lin: A Strong, Clear Vision" (1994): **Freda Lee Mock's** Oscar-winning documentary about the artist who created two famous memorials.

"Apollo 13" (1995): **Ron Howard's** impeccably told chronicle of the near-tragedy involving US astronauts trying to get back to Earth, featuring **Tom Hanks** and the famous (and slightly altered) quote: "Houston, we have a problem."

LOS ANGELES: Actor **Shia LaBeouf**, known for his off-screen troubles as well as his film roles, has converted to Catholicism after being confirmed on New Year's Eve at a Mass presided over by Capuchin Franciscan friars.

The Capuchin Franciscans - Western American Province announced the news on its Facebook site where it posted images of a smiling LaBeouf receiving Communion, kneeling with his eyes shut in prayer at Mass and hugging

friars who attended the ceremony.

The sacramental ceremony was held at Old Mission Santa Inés Parish in **Solvang, California**, the same friary where LaBeouf - who has acknowledged alcoholism and faced abuse allegations - trained for months for his role as one of Italy's best-known and most revered saints in the 2022 film, "**Padre Pio**."



Cher



LaBeouf

"The Capuchin Franciscan friars are overjoyed to welcome him into the fold and witness his deep commitment to his faith journey," the Catholic religious order said.

LaBeouf "has embarked on a profound spiritual journey that has led him to embrace the teachings of the Catholic Church," the order said. "His decision to fully

enter the Church is a testament to his sincere desire to grow in his relationship with God and live out the Gospel values."

LaBeouf first gained fame as a teenager on the Disney Channel show "Even Stevens," and is best known for his roles in 2007's "Transformers" and in 2008's "Indiana Jones and the Crystal Skull."

He also starred in the 2019 film "The Peanut Butter Falcon."

He has had several run-ins with the law during his career, including a 2017 New York City arrest for public drunkenness and disorderly conduct that was captured on a livestreamed video. He was sent to court-mandated rehabilitation. (AP)

## People &amp; Places

## In Memoriam

## Year in review

## Influential people who died in 2023

LOS ANGELES, Jan. 6, (AP): **Judy Heumann**, 75. A renowned activist who helped secure legislation protecting the rights of people with disabilities. March 4.

**Gary Rossington**, 71. A co-founder and last surviving original member of Lynyrd Skynyrd who helped write the classic answer song "Sweet Home Alabama" and played unforgettable slide guitar on the rock anthem "Free Bird." March 5.

**Traute Lafrenz**, 103. She was the last known survivor of a German group known as the White Rose that actively resisted the Nazis. March 6.

**Peterson Zah**, 85. A monumental Navajo Nation leader who guided the tribe through a politically tumultuous era and worked tirelessly to correct wrongdoings against Native Americans. March 7.

**Robert Blake**, 89. The Emmy award-winning performer who went from acclaim for his acting to notoriety when he was tried and acquitted in the killing of his wife. March 9.

**Jiang Yanyong**, 91. A Chinese military doctor who revealed the full extent of the 2003 SARS outbreak and was later placed under house arrest for his political outspokenness. March 11.

**Bud Grant**, 95. The stoic and demanding Hall of Fame coach who took the Minnesota Vikings and their Purple People Eaters defense to four Super Bowls in eight years and lost all of them. March 11.

**Dick Fosbury**, 76. The lanky leaper who revamped the technical discipline of high jump and won an Olympic gold medal with his "Fosbury Flop." March 12.

**Pat Schroeder**, 82. A pioneer for women's and family rights in Congress. March 13.

**Gloria Bosman**, age unknown. A smooth-voiced South African jazz musician who was lauded for her contribution to the country's music industry in a career spanning more than two decades. March 14.

**Lance Reddick**, 60. A character actor who specialized in intense, icy and possibly sinister authority figures on TV and film, including "The Wire," "Fringe" and the "John Wick" franchise. March 17.

**John Jenrette**, 86. The former US congressman was a colorful politician who was convicted in the Abscam bribery scandal in the late 1970s and whose wife talked to Playboy about an in-session dalliance on the US Capitol steps. March 17.

**Fito Olivares**, 75. A Tejano musician known for songs that were wedding and quinceañera mainstays, including the hit "Juana La Cubana." March 17.

**Ryuichi Sakamoto**, 71. A world-renowned Japanese musician and actor who composed for Hollywood hits such as "The Last Emperor" and "The Revenant." March 28.

**Hedda Kleinfeld Schachter**, 99. A bridal industry pioneer and Holocaust survivor who decided over a half century ago that brides deserved better than cookie-cutter dresses. March 29.

## April

**Nigel Lawson**, 91. The tax-cutting UK Treasury chief under the late Margaret Thatcher and a lion of Conservative politics in the late 20th century. April 3.

**Ben Ferencz**, 103. The last living prosecutor from the Nuremberg trials, who tried Nazis for genocidal war crimes and was among the first outside witnesses to document the atrocities of Nazi labor and concentration camps. April 7.

**Elisabeth Kopp**, 86. An advocate of equal rights and the environment who was the first woman elected to Switzerland's seven-member executive branch. April 7.

**Michael Lerner**, 81. The Brooklyn-born character actor who played a myriad of imposing figures in his 60 years in the business, including monologuing movie mogul Jack Lipnick in "Barton Fink," the crooked club owner Bugsy Calhoun in "Harlem Nights" and an angry publishing executive in "Elf." April 8.

**Anne Perry**, 84. The best-selling crime novelist known for her Thomas Pitt and William Monk detective series, and for her own murderous past that inspired the movie "Heavenly Creatures." April 10.

**Al Jaffe**, 102. Mad magazine's award-winning cartoonist and ageless wise guy who delighted millions of kids with the sneaky fun of the Fold-In and the snark of "Snappy Answers to Stupid Questions." April 10.

**Mary Quant**, 93. The visionary fashion designer whose colorful, sexy miniskirts epitomized Swinging London in the 1960s and influenced youth culture around the world. April 13.

**Richard Riordan**, 92. A wealthy Republican businessman who served two terms as Los Angeles mayor and steered the city through the Northridge earthquake and the recovery from the deadly 1992 riots. April 19.

**Todd Haim**, 66. He led the Roundabout Theatre Company from an off-off-Broadway company teetering on the edge of bankruptcy into a major theatrical force with works on five stages - including three Broadway theaters - and dozens of Tony Awards. April 19.

**Barry Humphries**, 89. A Tony Award-winning comedian internationally renowned for his garish stage persona Dame Edna Everage, a condescending and imperfectly-veiled snob whose evolving character delighted audiences over seven decades. April 22.

**Len Goodman**, 78. A long-serving judge on "Dancing with the Stars" and "Strictly Come Dancing" who helped revive interest in ballroom dancing on both sides of the Atlantic. April 22.

**Harry Belafonte**, 96. The civil rights and entertainment giant who began as a groundbreaking actor and singer and became an activist, humanitarian and conscience of the world. April 25.

**Carolyn Bryant Donham**, 88. The white woman who accused Black teenager Emmett Till of making improper advances leading to his lynching in Mississippi in 1955. April 25.

**Jerry Springer**, 79. The onetime mayor and news anchor whose namesake TV show featured a three-ring circus of dysfunctional guests willing to bare all - sometimes literally - as they brawled and hurled obscenities before a raucous audience. April 27.

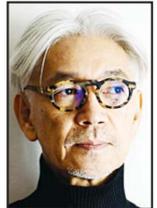
## May

**Gordon Lightfoot**, 84. The legendary folk singer-songwriter known for "If You Could Read My Mind" and "Sundown" and for songs that told tales of Canadian identity. May 1.

**Tori Bowie**, 32. The sprinter who won three Olympic medals at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games. May 2. Complications of childbirth.

**Vida Blue**, 73. A hard-throwing left-hander who became one of baseball's biggest draws in the early 1970s and helped lead the brash A's to three straight World Series titles before his career was derailed by drug problems. May 6.

To be continued



Sakamoto



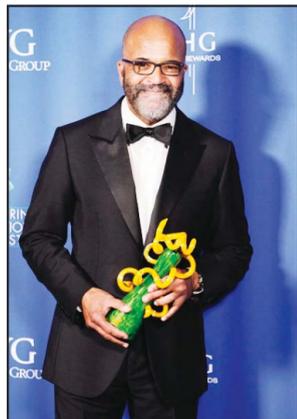
Cara Jade Myers (from left), Chad Renfro, Talee Redcorn, William Belleau, Bradley Thomas, Yancey Red Corn, Julie O'Keefe, Geoffrey Standing Bear, Robert De Niro, Martin Scorsese, Leonardo DiCaprio, Lily Gladstone, Jesse Plemons, Tatanka Means, Tantoo Cardinal, Jillian Dion, Ja'Naë Collins, and Lawren 'Lulu' Michele Goodfox, winners of the vanguard award for 'Killers of the Flower Moon', pose in the press room at the 35th annual Palm Springs International Film Festival Awards Gala on Thursday, Jan. 4, in Palm Springs, Calif. (AP)



Emma Stone, winner of the desert palm achievement actress award for 'Poor Things', poses with award. (AP)



Meryl Streep (left), and Carey Mulligan, winner of the international star award for 'Maestro', pose with award. (AP)



Jeffrey Wright, winner of the career achievement award for 'American Fiction', poses in the press room at the 35th annual Palm Springs International Film Festival Awards Gala on Thursday, Jan. 4, in Palm Springs, Calif. (AP)



Johns



Oliver

## Variety

**LONDON:** Actor-singer **David Soul**, a 1970s heartthrob who co-starred as the blond half of the crime-fighting duo "Starsky & Hutch" and topped the music charts with the ballad "Don't Give Up on Us," has died at the age of 80.

His wife, **Helen Snell**, said Friday that "David Soul - beloved husband, father, grandfather and brother - died yesterday after a valiant battle for life in the loving company of family."

"He shared many extraordinary gifts in the world as actor, singer, storyteller, creative artist and dear friend," Snell said in a statement. "His smile, laughter and passion for life will be remembered by the many whose lives he has touched."

Born **David Solberg**, Soul was a Chicago native whose acting career dated back to the 1960s, when he joined the avant-garde Firehouse Theater in Minnesota. He continued to appear on stage and screen well into the 20th century, but he was best known for his work in the 1970s. (AP)

**NEW YORK:** Glynis Johns, a Tony Award-winning stage and screen star who played the mother opposite **Julie Andrews** in the classic movie "Mary Poppins" and introduced the world to the bittersweet standard-to-be "Send in the Clowns" by **Stephen Sondheim**, has died. She was 100.

**Mitch Clem**, her manager, said she died Thursday at an assisted living home in Los Angeles of natural causes. "Today's a sad day for Hollywood," Clem said. "She is the last of the last of old Hollywood."

Johns was known to be a perfectionist about her profession - precise, analytical and opinionated. The roles she took had to be multi-faceted. Anything less was giving less than her all.

"As far as I'm concerned, I'm not

## Film

## Palm Springs Film Festival kicks off

## Stars celebrate top films, Stone's legacy

PALM SPRINGS, Calif., Jan. 6, (AP): Emma Stone reflected on her career highlights and Meryl Streep praised Billie Eilish and "Barbie" with saving the movie industry Thursday during one of the first stops of Hollywood's awards season.

Stone, Streep, Leonardo DiCaprio, and Cillian Murphy were among the A-listers who descended on the desert for the Palm Springs International Film Festival's annual opening gala. Stars were in an upbeat, and generally grateful, mood at the gala after a tumultuous year for their industry that included two strikes and rapid changes to the theatrical and streaming landscape.

Stone, who snagged a best actress nomination for Sunday's Golden Globes for her performance in "Poor Things," accepted the career achievement award, which was presented by her co-stars Mark Ruffalo and Willem Dafoe.

"I'm grateful that I get to keep trying new things and for the opportunity to make choices when it comes to work because I know how rare and fleeting it can be to choose what you want to do or who you want to work with as an actor," she said.

Colman Domingo, Paul Giamatti and Da'Vine Joy Randolph were

among the honorees who fought back tears as they praised film's distinct ability to express what it means to be human.

"The more I do this, the more I think acting may be a kind of teaching," Giamatti said as he accepted his award. "It's how we learn how to be human. It's how we learn about our common humanity."

## Breakthrough

Sandra Oh introduced her "Sideways" co-star, but Giamatti got back up on stage later in the evening to present the night's breakthrough award to Randolph, who stars alongside Giamatti in "The Holdovers" - his latest performance in an Alexander Payne flick.

Randolph echoed her co-star's sentiment, saying cinema is a medium uniquely poised to "illuminate the human condition."

Domingo, who was being recognized for his performance in "Rustin," also became emotional as he shared with the room his understanding of his work.

"Faith is what brought me here," he said. "When we have faith in one another, what an extraordinary world we could build. To channel that humanity and let that speak of the complex ex-

perience is what I consider my service as an artist."

This year's awards season comes on the heels of the summer's historic strikes and news that 2023 resulted in the best year-end box office seen since the pandemic.

"You saved the movies last summer and all of our jobs," Streep said to recording artist Billie Eilish and her brother and collaborator, Finneas O'Connell - a reference to their song in the record-breaking box office blockbuster, "Barbie."

The pair accepted their own award for "What Was I Made For," the final song and unofficial theme in the Greta Gerwig-directed film.

"You've delivered joy to countless generations and genders of people. And you should surf that wave, kids," Streep said, before presenting Carey Mulligan's honor.

The night concluded with Martin Scorsese, DiCaprio, Lily Gladstone and a host of other stars from "Killers of the Flower Moon" accepting one of the night's top honors.

While Scorsese conceded he has made a lot of movies, the acclaimed director said this one stood out. "It was an experience that I'll always treasure. One of the greatest times in my life," he said.



Lawren 'Lulu' Michele Goodfox (right), presents the vanguard award to Martin Scorsese for 'Killers of the Flower Moon' at the 35th annual Palm Springs International Film Festival Awards Gala on Thursday, Jan. 4, in Palm Springs, Calif. (AP)

Director **Hal Prince** suggested she and co-star **Len Cariou** improvise a scene or two to give book writer **Hugh Wheeler** some ideas.

"Hal said 'Why don't you just say what you feel,'" she recalled to the AP. "When Len and I did that, Hal got on the phone to **Steve Sondheim** and said, 'I think you'd better get in a cab and get round here and watch what they're doing because you are going to get the idea for Glynis' solo.'"

Johns was the fourth generation of an English theatrical family. Her father, **Mervyn Johns**, had a long career as a character actor and her mother was a pianist. She was born in Pretoria, South Africa, because her parents were visiting the area on tour at the time of her birth. (AP)

**SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico:** US actor **Christian Oliver** and his two daughters died in a plane crash near a tiny private island in the eastern Caribbean, according to police in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

The crash occurred Thursday just west of **Petit Nevis** island near **Bequia** as the plane headed for nearby **St. Lucia**, police said in a statement.

They identified the daughters as **Madita Klepser**, 10, and **Annik Klepser**, 12, adding that the pilot, **Robert Sachs**, also died.

It wasn't immediately clear what caused the crash, according to police.

Oliver had dozens of crediting film and television roles, including in the 2008 film "Speed Racer" film and "The Good German," a 2006 World War II film by **Stephen Soderbergh** that starred **George Clooney** and **Cate Blanchett**.

He appeared throughout season two of the 1990s series "Saved by the Bell: The New Class," playing a Swiss transfer student named **Brian Keller**. (AP)

## Study unravels the mystery of sudden unexplained child deaths

## Crib videos point to seizures in mysterious child deaths

NEW YORK, Jan 6, (AP) - The last bedtime of 17-month-old Hayden Fell's life was heartbreakingly normal. Crib video shows the toddler in pajamas playing happily as his parents and sister sang "Wheels on the Bus" with his twin brother.

The next morning, Hayden's dad couldn't wake him. The tot had become one of several hundred seemingly healthy US toddlers and preschoolers each year who suddenly die in their sleep and autopsies can't tell why. But Hayden's crib cam was recording all night - and offered a clue.

Seizures during sleep are a potential cause of at least some cases of sudden unexplained death in childhood, or SUDC, researchers at NYU Langone Health reported Thursday after analyzing home monitoring video that captured the deaths of seven sleeping toddlers.

## Research

Similar to SIDS in babies, SUDC is the term when these mysterious deaths occur any time after a child's first birthday. Little is known about SUDC but some scientists have long suspected seizures may play a role. In addition to some genetics research, scientists also have found that a history of fever-related seizures was about 10 times more likely among the children who died suddenly than among youngsters the same age.

The new study is very small but offers the first direct evidence of a seizure link. Five of the toddlers died shortly after movements deemed to be a brief seizure by a team of forensic pathologists, a seizure specialist and a sleep specialist. A sixth child probably also had one, according to findings published online by the journal *Neurology*.

"It's hard to watch," said Dr. Orrin Devinsky, an NYU neurologist and the study's senior author. "We have video which is in some ways the best evidence we may ever get of what's happened to these kids."

The recordings can't prove fevers triggered the seizures but researchers noted several toddlers had signs of mild infections. One, Hayden, previously had such febrile seizures when he'd catch childhood bugs.

That raises a big question: Fever-related seizures are hugely common in young children, affecting 2% to 5% of tots between ages 6 months and 5 years. While scary, they're hardly ever harmful. So how could anyone tell if occasionally, they might be a warning of something more serious?

"I thought he would be fine and it was just a matter of letting this run its course," said Justin Fell, explaining how multiple doctors told the Bel Air, Maryland, family not to worry whenever Hayden had a fever-sparked seizure. Instead, "it was every parent's nightmare."

Laura Gould, one of the NYU researchers, understands that agonizing frustra-

tion. In 1997 she lost her 15-month-old daughter Maria to what later was named SUDC - the toddler woke up one night with a fever, was her usual happy self the next morning but died during a nap. Gould later co-founded the nonprofit SUDC Foundation and helped establish NYU's registry of about 300 deaths - including the first seven videos offered by families - for research.

Gould doesn't want families to be scared by the new findings - they won't change advice about febrile seizures. Instead, researchers next will have to determine if it's possible to tease out differences between those very rare children who die and the masses who are fine after an occasional seizure.

"If we can figure out the children at risk, maybe we can change their outcome," she said.

It's hard for autopsies to find evidence of a seizure so using video from home monitors to reevaluate deaths "is actually very clever," said Dr. Marco Hefti, a neuropathologist at the University of Iowa who wasn't involved with the study but has also investigated SUDC.

"It's not that parents need to be stressing out, panicking about every febrile seizure," he cautioned. But Hefti said it's time for additional research, including animal studies and possibly sleep studies in children, to better understand what's going on.

SUDC is estimated to claim over 400 lives a year in the U.S. Most occur during sleep. And just over half, about 250 deaths a year, are in 1- to 4-year-olds.

Sudden death in babies occurs more often and gets more public attention - along with more research funding that in turn has uncovered risk factors and prevention advice such as to put infants to sleep on their backs. But SUDC happens to youngsters long past the age of SIDS. The Fells had never even heard of it until Hayden died.

## Disorders

Hayden experienced his first seizure shortly before his first birthday, when a cold-like virus sparked a fever. Additional mild bugs triggered several more but Hayden always rapidly bounced back - until the night in November 2022 when he died.

Other recent studies, at NYU and by a team at Boston Children's Hospital, have hunted genetic links to SUDC - finding that some children harbored mutations in genes associated with heart or brain disorders, including irregular heartbeats and epilepsy.

Heart problems, including those mutations, couldn't explain the deaths of the toddlers in the video study, Devinsky said. He cautioned that far more research is needed but said epilepsy patients sometimes experience difficulty breathing after a seizure that can lead to death - and raised the prospect that maybe some SIDS deaths could have seizure links, too.



From left, Justin Fell and Katie Czajkowski-Fell sit for a photo with their children, Leonore and Cameron, at home in Bel Air, Md., on Dec. 4, 2023. 'I thought he would be fine and it was just a matter of letting this run its course,' says Justin, explaining how multiple doctors told the family not to worry whenever their late son, Hayden, had a fever-sparked seizure. Instead, 'it was every parent's nightmare.' (AP)

## Obesity and diabetes risk factors

## Wegovy &amp; Ozempic have lower risk of suicidal thoughts vs older drugs: study

NEW YORK, Jan 6, (AP) - People taking the popular diabetes and obesity drugs Ozempic and Wegovy had a lower risk of suicidal thoughts than those taking other medications to treat the same conditions, a new federal study finds.

The research, funded by the National Institutes of Health, was published Friday and comes as European and US regulators look into anecdotal reports that people taking the drug, semaglutide, had thoughts of self-harm.

NIH and Case Western Reserve University researchers analyzed electronic medical records from more than 1.8 million patients prescribed semaglutide or another drug to treat obesity or diabetes between 2017 and 2022. They included about 240,000 patients treated for obesity or being overweight and nearly 1.6 million patients treated for diabetes.

They found that people taking semaglutide had a 49% to 73% lower risk of first-time or recurring suicidal thoughts than those taking another drug for those conditions during a six-month follow-up period.

## Evaluation

The researchers called for closer evaluation of reports of suicidal thoughts linked to the drugs and for patients to be followed for a longer period of time. Their review only considered patients taking semaglutide or another drug for diabetes or obesity, not those taking semaglutide in the general population.

Study co-author Dr. Rong Xu, of Case Western, also noted obesity and diabetes are risk factors on their own for suicidal thoughts. But the study wasn't designed to determine if the GLP-1 drugs reduced those thoughts.

The scientists launched the review after the European Medicines Agency said in July that it was reviewing about 150 reports of possible cases of self-injury and suicidal thoughts linked to semaglutide and other drugs known as GLP-1 receptor agonists. The drugs work by targeting the hormones in the gut and brain that regulate appetite and feelings of fullness. Older weight-loss drugs work differently.

In December, the EMA's drug watchdog group said it would seek more data from drugmaker Novo Nordisk about the reports.

The US Food and Drug Administra-

tion also is investigating unconfirmed reports of suicidal thoughts or actions in people taking the GLP-1 drugs.

Millions of people in the US are taking semaglutide, which has soared in popularity since Wegovy was approved to treat obesity in June 2021.

A spokesperson for Novo Nordisk said the new study reflects the company's data collected from large clinical trials and since the drug has been on the market - all of which showed no "causal association" between semaglutide and thoughts of suicide or self-harm.

## Also:

**AUSTIN, Texas:** Restore Hyper Wellness, the US's largest provider of science-backed, personalized therapies with 225+ locations, has announced its new weight management program for safe and effective weight loss.

Using clients' unique health data, active ingredients from FDA-approved weight loss medications and world-class therapies, Restore creates a personalized plan for each of its clients to achieve safe and sustainable weight loss. This program was developed with rigorous standards in partnership with Restore's Chief Medical Officer, **Dr. Rich Joseph**, a practicing MD specializing in obesity and metabolic health.

Unlike other weight management programs, interested clients schedule a consultation that includes an InBody scan to determine body fat percentage and skeletal muscle mass. The consultation will also evaluate metabolic health with a blood panel, followed by a telemed call with a Nurse Practitioner.

"Our goal is to increase access to effective weight management medications, employ and evaluate rigorous clinical standards based on body composition, and provide the education to empower supportive lifestyle behavioral changes," Dr. Rich Joseph shared.

These active ingredients from FDA-approved weight loss medications work by decreasing food cravings, improving appetite signaling and increasing feelings of satiety. In addition to weight loss, these medications aid in improving blood sugar control, providing a comprehensive approach to improving clients' overall health. The new Weight Management Program launched in select studios nationwide.



A sign for Eli Lilly & Co. stands outside their corporate headquarters in Indianapolis on April 26, 2017. Eli Lilly has launched a unique website to connect US patients seeking obesity treatment to doctors, dietitians and its new weight-loss drug, Zepbound. (AP)

## Navigating obesity care

## Lilly launches website to connect patients with obesity, other drugs

NEW YORK, Jan 6, (AP) - Eli Lilly has launched a unique website to connect US patients seeking obesity treatment to doctors, dietitians and its new weight-loss drug, Zepbound.

The drugmaker said Thursday it will use the site, called LillyDirect, to pair visitors with third-party mail-order pharmacies for prescriptions and to care providers through a virtual medical weight-loss clinic.

The site also offers a directory for in-person care and help with insulin and migraine treatments.

Lilly says the doctors connected through the website are independent and not paid to promote its products, and the drugmaker also isn't paid to send referrals to them.

In November, U.S. regulators approved Zepbound, a version of the popular diabetes treatment Mounjaro, to be used as a weight-loss treatment. The drug joins Novo Nordisk's Wegovy in a hot field for care, chronic weight management.

At least 100 million adults are considered obese in the United States.

Indianapolis-based Lilly started its site to eliminate some of the complexity in the US health care system

that people face when they manage a chronic disease, Lilly CEO David Ricks said in a statement.

Drugmakers frequently offer coupons for their drugs or other help getting prescriptions, said Caitlin Donovan, a senior director for the non-profit Patient Advocate Foundation, which helps patients deal with serious or chronic health problems.

Pairing that prescription help with access to doctors in one location is unique, she added.

"Anything that's going to streamline any type of process is good because we have the least streamlined healthcare system in the world," Donovan said.

Telemedicine grew popular during the COVID-19 pandemic, and more companies have started offering virtual help directly to consumers for specific conditions, often through subscription plans. This trend has drawn concern from some doctors who see it simply as a push to sell more drugs.

Lilly says the care providers available through LillyDirect will use their own judgement in deciding treatment, and that may not include medication use.

## More misery expected: CDC

## US flu and COVID infections got worse over the holidays

NEW YORK, Jan 6, (AP) - The flu season in the US is getting worse but it's too soon to tell how much holiday gatherings contributed to a likely spike in illnesses.

New government data posted Friday for last week - the holiday week between Christmas and New Year's - show 38 states with high or very high levels for respiratory illnesses with fever, cough and other symptoms. That's up from 31 states the week before.

The measure likely includes people with COVID-19, RSV and other winter viruses, and not just flu. But flu seems to be increasing most dramatically, according

to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"We expect it to be elevated for several more weeks," said the CDC's Alicia Budd. So far, though, this is a moderate flu season, she said.

Interpreting flu reports during and after the holidays can be tricky, she noted. Schools are closed. More people are traveling. Some people may be less likely to go see a doctor, deciding to just suffer at home. Others may be more likely to go.

The flu season generally peaks between December and February; CDC Director Dr. Mandy Cohen said she expects it to peak by the end of this

month. Officials say this season's flu shots are well-matched to the strain that is spreading the most.

According to CDC estimates, since the beginning of October, there have been at least 10 million illnesses, 110,000 hospitalizations, and 6,500 deaths from flu so far this season. The agency said 27 children have died of flu.

COVID-19 illnesses may not be as escalating as quickly as flu this winter. CDC data indicates coronavirus-caused hospitalizations haven't hit the same levels they did at the same point during the last three winters. Still, COVID-19 is putting more people in the hospital than flu, CDC

data shows.

Lauren Ancel Meyers of the University of Texas, said the nation is seeing a second rise in COVID-19 after a smaller peak in September.

"There is a lot of uncertainty about when and how high this current surge will peak," said Meyers, who runs a team that forecasts COVID-19, flu and RSV trends.

A new version of the coronavirus, called JN.1, is accounting for nearly two-thirds of U.S. cases, according to a CDC estimate. But health officials say there's no evidence that that it causes more severe disease than other recent variants.

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# Pacers have franchise-record 50 assists, rout Hawks



Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry (30) scores against the Detroit Pistons during the third quarter during an NBA basketball game in San Francisco on Friday, Jan. 5, 2023. (AP)

## Akron sees off Bowling Green

# No. 9 USC rallies in 4th quarter to deal Oregon State 1st loss, 56-54

LOS ANGELES, Jan 6, (AP): JuJu Watkins was able to rally Southern California into the lead early in the fourth quarter Friday night against Oregon State. It was up to the rest of her Trojan teammates to make sure they held on for the win.

Watkins scored 28 points, but none in the final 9:50. Kayla Padilla connected for two crucial 3-pointers in the fourth quarter and the defense got a couple of crucial late stops as ninth-ranked USC defeated Oregon State 56-54 and dealt the Beavers their first loss.

"I think one of the best parts of our team is everyone who steps onto the floor is a threat both offensively and defensively. So when someone is struggling, the next person steps up and that person happened to be me in terms of a shooting tonight," said Padilla, who had 14 points, including four 3-pointers, and has scored in double figures in three of the last four games.

Watkins is second in the nation in scoring, averaging 27.0 points per game. She scored the Trojans' first nine points and then had a run of nine unanswered points in the second half to get USC (11-1, 1-1 Pac-12) back in the game.

There was a four-minute stretch though during the fourth quarter when Watkins wasn't on the floor due to fatigue.

Even though Watkins missed her last six shots, and was 11 of 33 for the game, she had two blocked shots, an offensive rebound and an assist on Padilla's jumper from the perimeter that gave USC a 56-51 advantage with 2:17 remaining.

It would be the Trojans last basket though. Oregon State got within a basket on a 3-point play by Rees with 1:34 remaining. It had a chance to send it into overtime, but Raegan Beers had a layup blocked by Rayah Marshall with one

tick on the clock to preserve the win.

"I wouldn't consider myself like an all offensive player. When it comes down to it, I'm able to make plays and basically do whatever I need to do," Watkins said. "What was good about tonight is that it was a gritty win."

Talia von Oelhoffen led Oregon State (12-1, 1-1) with 18 points and Donovan Hunter added 13.

"USC did a nice job making life tough around the rim for us. But I thought we got a lot of good looks and we executed well for a relatively young team," Oregon State coach Scott Rueck said.

A pair of free throws by von Oelhoffen put Oregon State up 42-36 with 3:44 remaining in the third quarter before Watkins took control with nine straight points to give the Trojans a 45-42 advantage early in the fourth quarter.

Watkins' run included two baskets that were the result of USC's defense forcing turnovers. The best series of plays came at the start of the run. After Roxane Makolo forced a turno-

ver in the paint, Watkins grabbed the loose ball, drove down the court on a fast break and drew a foul while making a layup. She made the free throw to complete the 3-point play.

"JuJu is special. She's going to get her points. I thought we made her work, but she was timely in her scoring, and that was a big run," Rueck said.

Oregon State regained the lead with five straight points but a 3-pointer by McKenzie Forbes put the Trojans back on top for good.

Oregon State: Beers came in averaging a double-double, but had only eight points and six rebounds after getting into early foul trouble.

USC: The Trojans won despite going 22 of 68 from the field, their third straight game where they have shot under 35%. In two Pac-12 games, their shooting rate is 32.8%.

## Akron 83, Bowling Green 67

In Akron, Ohio, Enrique Freeman's 24 points helped Akron defeat Bowling Green 83-67 on Friday.

Freeman also contributed 11 rebounds and three blocks for the Zips (10-4, 2-0 Mid-American Conference). Greg Tribble scored 16 points while going 7 of 8 (2 for 3 from 3-point range). Shammah Scott shot 4 for 7, including 2 for 4 from beyond the arc to finish with 10 points, while adding three steals.

Marcus Hill led the Falcons (10-4, 1-1) in scoring, finishing with 19 points. Jason Spurgin added 14 points and four assists for Bowling Green. In addition, Rashaun Agee had 12 points and six rebounds. The loss ended an eight-game winning streak for the Falcons.

Both teams next play Tuesday. Akron visits Ball State and Bowling Green plays Ohio at home.

## Magic edge Nuggets 122-120

INDIANAPOLIS, Jan 6, (AP): Tyrese Haliburton had 18 of Indiana's franchise-record 50 assists and the Pacers routed the Atlanta Hawks 150-116 on Friday night for their sixth straight victory.

Haliburton, the NBA assists leader at 12.8 per game, also had 10 points and eight rebounds in just over 25 minutes. Myles Turner led Indiana with 27 points, Benedict Mathurin had 18, Bruce Brown 17 and Aaron Nesmith 15.

The NBA's highest-scoring team, Indiana reached 150 points against the Hawks for the second time this season after setting a league season high in a 157-152 victory in Atlanta on Nov. 21.

Dejounte Murray led the Hawks with 30 points. Trae Young missed his first seven shots and finished with 13 points on 4-of-18 shooting. He was 1 of 11 from 3-point range.

The Pacers shot 71% in the first half and led 78-54 at the break. Indiana shot 64% overall while Atlanta was at 43%. Indiana was 19 of 39 from 3-point range.

## Magic 122, Nuggets 120

In Denver, Paolo Banchero hit a pair of go-ahead free throws with 9.7 seconds remaining and had his first career triple-double to help short-handed Orlando beat Denver.

Banchero finished with 32 points, 10 rebounds and 11 assists. He hit four free throws in the last 34.6 seconds in a game where the Magic trailed by 18 points in the third quarter. Jamal Murray had a chance to tie the game but his 10-foot shot rimmed out at the buzzer.

Nikola Jokic led Denver with 29 points.

The game was the reverse of the night before for the Nuggets, who rallied from an 18-point deficit in the fourth quarter to beat the Golden State Warriors on Jokic's buzzer-beating 40-footer.

## Celtics 126, Jazz 97

In Boston, Jayson Tatum scored 30 points and hit five 3-pointers to help NBA-leading Boston run past Utah for its seventh victory in eight games.

Boston never trailed, led by 36 points in the first half and made 17 3s for the night. Kristaps Porzingis added 19 points and Jrue Holiday had 14.

Lauri Markkanen had 17 points for Utah. The Jazz had won three straight.

## Timberwolves 122, Rockets 95

In Houston, Anthony Edwards scored 24 points, Karl-Anthony Towns had 22 and Western Conference-leading Minnesota beat Houston.

Edwards had a relatively quiet game considering he entered the night averaging 36.3 points in his previous four games. He had scored at least 25 points in 10 straight games but went 8 for 17 from the field in 32 minutes Friday.

Jalen Green led Houston with 20 points. The Rockets are 2-4 on a seven-game homestand.

## Warriors 113, Pistons 109

In San Francisco, Stephen Curry scored 12 of his 26 points over the final 1:32 with a pair of 3-pointers, emphatically answering after Bojan Bogdanovic's go-ahead 3 with 1:41 to play, and Golden State held on to beat last-place Detroit.

Detroit's Cade Cunningham made a driving reverse layup with 2:10 to play that tied it at 100 and wound up with 30 points. He also scored five straight points down the stretch to pull the Pistons to 95-94 at the 4:20 mark of the fourth.

Warriors guard Chris Paul fractured his left hand and will have surgery next week. The 38-year-old Paul had eight points, six rebounds and four assists in 23 minutes. He's expected to return this season.

## Grizzlies 127, Lakers 113

In Los Angeles, Jaren Jackson Jr. hit five 3-pointers and scored 31 points, Marcus Smart added 29 points with a season-high eight 3-pointers and Memphis extended Los Angeles' woes.

Desmond Bane had 24 points and 13 assists while Ja Morant scored 21 points for Memphis, whose starting lineup combined for 21 of a season-high 23 3-pointers on the way to just its second win in six games.

LeBron James scored 32 points and Anthony Davis had 31 in the Lakers' fourth straight loss and 10th loss in 13 games since winning the inaugural In-Season tournament.

## Knicks 128, 76ers 92

In Philadelphia, Jalen Brunson hit four 3-pointers and scored 29 points to lead New York past Philadelphia.

Quentin Grimes added 19 points and Isaiah Hartenstein had 17 to help the Knicks to their third straight victory. Donte DiVincenzo also made four 3s and scored 14 points.

Joel Embiid had 30 points and 10 rebounds for the 76ers. Embiid extended his franchise records to 16 straight 30-point games and 15 in a row of 30 points and 10 rebounds.

## Nets 124, Thunder 115

In New York, Spencer Dinwiddie and Nic Claxton each scored 23 points and Brooklyn beat Oklahoma City to snap a five-game losing streak.

Cam Thomas broke out of a 0-for-20 shooting slump with 19 points, including 16 in the Nets' most dominant first half of the season. They led 75-47 at the break and by 32 in the third quarter.

## BASKETBALL

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 34 points, nine assists and six rebounds for Oklahoma City. The Thunder have dropped two straight after a five-game winning streak.

## Suns 113, Heat 97

In Phoenix, Grayson Allen made a career-high nine 3-pointers to tie the Phoenix record and scored 31 points, Bradley Beal added 25 points and the Suns beat Miami.

The Suns have won five of their last six games. Miami has dropped three of four.

All was sensational in the first half, scoring 23 points on 7-of-10 shooting from long range. The sixth-year player was acquired in an off-season trade, came into the game averaging a career-high 13 points. He was 9 of 14 on 3s and 11 of 19 overall from the field.

Bam Adebayo led Miami with 28 points and 11 rebounds.

## Clippers 111, Pelicans 95

In New Orleans, Paul George made six 3-pointers and scored 24 points, Kawhi Leonard added 19 points and nine rebounds and surging Los Angeles beat New Orleans.

James Harden had 13 assists and eight points in 29 minutes for the Clippers. They led by 31 points in the fourth quarter and won for the 14th time in 16 games.

Jonas Valanciunas had 13 points and 11 rebounds for the Pelicans, whose four-game winning streak was snapped. Jordan Hawkins also scored 13 points.

## Mavericks 139, Trail Blazers 103

In Dallas, Kyrie Irving scored 24 points with fellow All-Star Luka Donic sidelined by a sore ankle and Dallas swept a two-game home set against Portland.

The Mavericks were missing six other players besides Donic. But they led from the middle of the first quarter on, two nights after never trailing in a 29-point win over the Blazers.

Jerami Grant scored 18 points for Portland.

## Kings 135, Raptors 130

In Sacramento, Calif., Domantas Sabonis had 24 points, 15 rebounds and 11 assists for his second consecutive triple-double and Sacramento held off Toronto.

Sabonis has eight triple-doubles this season and three in his last four games. He notched the latest one with an alley-oop pass to Malik Monk early in the fourth quarter.

De'Aaron Fox also scored 24 for the Kings. They have won four of five.

Immanuel Quickley and Scottie Barnes paced Toronto with 20 points apiece.

## Bulls 104, Hornets 91

In Chicago, Coby White had 22 points, 10 rebounds and six assists and Chicago welcomed back Zach LaVine and Nikola Vucevic with a victory over Charlotte.

LaVine scored 15 points while playing almost 30 minutes in his first game since Nov. 28. Vucevic had 11 points and seven rebounds in 25 minutes while also playing as a reserve. LaVine was sidelined for 17 games because of inflammation in his right foot. Vucevic missed the past five games with a strained left adductor.

Miles Bridges scored 28 points for Charlotte. The Hornets were 1-5 on a six-game trip.

## Cavaliers 114, Wizards 90

In Cleveland, Donovan Mitchell scored 26 points and Cleveland rolled to its second easy win in three nights over Washington.

The Cavs had a little tougher time against the Wizards than in their 140-101 blowout on Wednesday night, when Cleveland reached season highs in points, rebounds, assists and 3-point percentage.

Tyus Jones had 16 points for Washington.

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Detroit Pistons guard Alec Burks (14) shoots against Golden State Warriors forward Jonathan Kuminga (00) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in San Francisco, Friday, Jan. 5, 2024. (AP)

## Tournament slated for next Saturday

## Kuwait prepares for Asian Shooting Shotgun Championship



Obaid Al-Osaimi (4th from left), the tournament director and club secretary with other officials.

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6, (KUNA): The Chairperson of the Kuwait Shooting Federation, Duajj Al-Otaibi, announced on Saturday that the eagerly awaited Asian Shooting Shotgun Championship hosted by Kuwait is set to commence in the country next Saturday.

This nine-day competition will see the participation of male and female shooters representing 26 national teams. Al-Otaibi shared the details during a press conference held at the club headquarters, confirming that the tournament would take place at the Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Range Complex. The event will feature skeet and trap competitions for both men and women, along with mixed couples and junior categories. Of significant note, the tournament serves as a qualification opportunity

for the upcoming Summer Olympics scheduled for Paris next summer, offering eight coveted seats each for both men and women. The Kuwaiti team is gearing up for active participation, with a lineup of 19 male and female shooters.

## SHOOTING

Speaking at the press conference, Obaid Al-Osaimi, the tournament director and club secretary, assured that all preparations for the event have been successfully completed. The stage is set for an exciting and competitive tournament showcasing the prowess of shooters from across the Asian continent.

## Grenier takes rain-marred GS

## Odermatt dominates to win WC giant slalom in the fog at home

ADELBODEN, Switzerland, Jan 6, (AP): Swiss ski star Marco Odermatt is unstoppable in giant slaloms and proved it again Saturday racing through fog at his home World Cup classic.

Odermatt dominated in a wire-to-wire win at Adelboden to join skiing greats Ingemar Stenmark and Hermann Maier by winning in three straight years on the storied Chuenisbärgli course that is a rolling cow pasture in summer.

He celebrated with a body-surfing leap onto the finish-area safety barrier, sliding across the padded fence on his back.



Switzerland's Marco Odermatt celebrates with the team after winning an alpine ski, men's World Cup giant slalom race, in Adelboden, Switzerland. (AP)

## SKIING

Odermatt added to his huge 1.04-second lead from the first run to finish 1.26 ahead of Aleksander Aamodt Kilde. Filip Zubcic was third, trailing Odermatt by 1.77.

Kilde already was assured of a career-best result in giant slalom as he smiled and laughed in the finish area watching Odermatt's peerless run and exuberant celebration.

Odermatt sealed victory in worsening visibility yet his second-run time was beaten only by River Radamus of the United States who finished fourth after placing 20th in the first run.

"It was amazing," Odermatt said. "It was obviously not an easy nice race today."

Fog sitting across the top of the Chuenisbärgli hill forced organizers to shorten a course that typically takes about 1 minute, 20 seconds to a 58-second run.

A 29th career win in World Cup races for the 26-year-old Odermatt was an 18th in his preferred giant slalom discipline - including seven in a row since March - where he is the current Olympic, world, and World Cup champion.

Odermatt extended his lead in the overall World Cup standings as the strong favorite for a third straight season-long title. The 2020 overall champion Kilde is his nearest, and distant, active challenger after Marco Schwarz suffered a season-ending knee injury in downhill last month while leading the standings.

The Adelboden giant slalom has been a World Cup fixture since the first week of men's racing in January 1967. In those 67 years, only Stenmark and Maier won Switzerland's sig-

nature giant slalom in at least three straight years. Stenmark won four in a row through 1982 and Maier won all three that could be raced between 1998 and 2001.

Odermatt's 18 World Cup giant slalom wins is tied for fifth all time, with Stenmark far ahead on 46. Ted Ligety of the United States is third on the career list with 24 wins.

Canadian skier Valerie Grenier won her second career World Cup giant slalom Saturday, a year after she triumphed at the same Slovenian resort.

In the rain-marred race, Mikaela Shiffrin finished in ninth position, nine days after the American won the previous GS in Austria.

Saturday's result was the American's worst in 15 giant slaloms since finishing 13th in Killington, Vermont, in November 2022.

Looming in fourth, Grenier posted the best time in the second run and saw the three fastest racers from the opening leg all fail to beat her.

"I feel like I have no words. I am just so happy, so proud. It's crazy," Grenier said.

Grenier also won the race last year, when she became the first Canadian to win a women's World Cup giant slalom in 49 years. She ended the season with a GS podium at the World Cup finals in Soldeu, Andorra.

Grenier, who was the junior world champion in downhill in 2016, has no World Cup podiums in other disciplines.

Lara Gut-Behrami came closest as the Swiss skier trailed Grenier by 0.37 seconds.

## Inter edge relegation-threatened Verona, move 5 pts clear of Juve

Frattesi's stoppage-time winner proves decisive

ROME, Jan 6, (AP): It's only the season's midpoint and Inter Milan may already have its lasting image of what is looking more and more like a Serie A title run.

The moment came when Davide Frattesi leaped on top of a yellow fence lining the field and erupted in celebration toward the San Siro crowd as his teammates mobbed him so wildly that they pulled down his shorts.

## SOCCER

Frattesi's stoppage-time winner proved decisive in a frenetic finish, Lautaro Martinez marked his return from injury with his league-leading 16th goal of the season, and Inter beat relegation-threatened Hellas Verona 2-1 on Saturday to secure the mid-season lead in Serie A.

"I would have done much worse but I didn't want to get another yellow card for celebrating," said Frattesi, who came on 10 minutes before he scored.

The game wasn't won, though, until a penalty kick 10 minutes into added time from Verona striker Thomas Henry hit the post.

Then it was back to celebrating as Inter moved five points clear of Juventus, which visits last-place Salernitana on Sunday.

Inter had drawn its previous match and was eliminated from the Italian Cup by Bologna in late December. The



Inter Milan's Lautaro Martinez, (right), and Verona's Diego Coppola challenge for the ball during the Serie A soccer match between Inter Milan and Hellas Verona at the San Siro Stadium in Milan, Italy. (AP)

dramatic victory put Simone Inzaghi's team back on track for its title pursuit and the chance to stitch a second star onto its shirt to signify what would be a 20th Italian championship.

Juventus, with three stars and a record 36 Serie A titles, is the only club in Italy with more than one star.

"The tough games to win are the dirty ones - but they're also the ones that enable you to go all the way," Frattesi said.

The match started as expected, with Lautaro finishing off a swift vertical move.

Marcus Thuram used one touch with his back to the goal to leave the ball for Henrikh Mkhitaryan, who sent a diagonal pass toward Lautaro. The Argentina international, who had missed two games with an injured left thigh, then controlled with his right foot and used the outside of the same foot to

slot the ball in past Verona goalkeeper Lorenzo Montipò.

But Inter couldn't add to the advantage and Henry equalized seconds after coming on by using his knee to redirect in a cross in the 74th.

Inter forward Marko Arnautovic wasted more chances when he accidentally blocked a shot from going in and then missed a header from point-blank range.

## Gauff to face Svitolina in Auckland Classic final

## Sabalenka sets up a Brisbane final vs Rybakina

BRISBANE, Australia, Jan 6 (AP): Almost a year after contesting the Australian Open final, Aryna Sabalenka and Elena Rybakina will meet in the title match of a key tune-up event for the first major of 2024.

Top-seeded Sabalenka overpowered her compatriot and two-time champion Victoria Azarenka in a 6-2, 6-4 win Saturday that earned her a spot in the Brisbane International final against Rybakina, the 2022 Wimbledon winner.

The win extended top-seeded Sabalenka's streak to 15 on Australian soil, including a title run in Adelaide last year before her Grand Slam breakthrough at Melbourne Park.

That 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 victory in the Australian Open final last January was the highlight of Sabalenka's five wins over Rybakina in their seven career meetings.

The Australian swing last year set Sabalenka on course for a career-best season, reaching the semifinals or better at all four majors, gaining the No. 1 ranking and finishing the year at No. 2.

Sabalenka fired 10 aces and hit 35 winners against Azarenka, who won back-to-back Australian Open titles in 2012 and '13 and is also a two-time champion in Brisbane.

She broke her 34-year-old former Fed Cup teammate's serve three times and saved all three break points she faced.

Azarenka appeared to hurt her right knee late in the match, but later said it wasn't a major concern.

Sunday's final will be the first to feature the top two seeds in Brisbane since 2015, when No. 1 Maria Sharapova held off No. 2 Ana Ivanovic in three sets.

Rybakina had 26 winners, eight aces and committed just 10 unforced errors as she advanced 6-3, 6-2 over 19-year-old Linda Noskova.

She has conceded just 12 games across four straight-set wins and said she felt like she was gaining momentum ahead of the Australian Open, which starts Jan. 14.

The men's final also will feature the top two seeds.



Grigor Dimitrov of Bulgaria plays a shot in his semi-final match against Jordan Thompson of Australia during the Brisbane International tennis tournament in Brisbane, Australia. (AP)

No. 1 Holger Rune advanced with a 6-4, 7-6 (0) win over Roman Safiullin and No. 2 Grigor Dimitrov, the 2017 champion, beat Jordan Thompson 6-3, 7-5.

"It's exactly how I wanted it to be, to get the most amount of matches as possible," Rune said of his run in Brisbane. "It's a great challenge tomorrow to try to see where I'm at when it really matters."

## TENNIS

Since opening with a tough win over Andy Murray, Dimitrov hasn't dropped a set en route to his third final in Brisbane.

He rallied from 0-40 down in the seventh game of the second set, saving four break points, to hold his own serve and then broke Thompson's serve in the 11th game to set up the victory.

Thompson was coming off the biggest upset of the tournament. He saved three match points and rallied to beat

22-time major winner Rafael Nadal in an almost 3 1/2-hour quarterfinal on Friday night.

Coco Gauff will defend her title at the Auckland Classic against Elina Svitolina after beating fellow American Emma Navarro 6-3, 6-1 in a semifinal.

Gauff needed only 62 minutes to sweep past fourth-seeded Navarro and now has won 18 straight sets and nine consecutive matches over two years in Auckland. She has lost only 15 games in four matches so far this year.

Gauff's win in Auckland last year was the start of a golden run which culminated when she won her first major title at the U.S. Open. She seems in similar, compelling form this year, dominating matches with her serve and powerful ground shots.

She set down 10 aces in 12 games in beating Navarro.

Gauff broke Navarro in the opening game of the second set and went on to win the set in 32 minutes in a controlled and dominating performance. Her deep ground shots allowed her to follow to the net where she dominated and used her powerful forehand with accuracy.

Gauff's opponent in Sunday's final will be second-seeded Svitolina, who needed two medical timeouts on her way to a 2-6, 6-4, 6-3 win over Wang Xiyu of China.

Svitolina dropped her serve in the third game of the first set and again, to love, in the fifth game to trail 4-1.

She received courtside treatment for a lower back injury then left the court for a medical timeout. When she returned, she immediately broke Wang's serve but lost her own and lost the set 6-2.

Svitolina took the second set with a solitary break in the 10th game. She called for another medical timeout at the start of the third set but returned to hold serve and to break Wang for 3-1 and 5-1 leads.

Wang broke back in the seventh game but Svitolina rallied and served out the set in the ninth game which included two aces.

## Al-Qadisiya face Al-Nasr

## Al-Mutawa aims to equal all-time scoring record in league

By Hassan Musa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff  
KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6: Awaiting positive developments, Al-Qadisiya and former Kuwait standout Badr Al-Mutawa is on the brink of potentially clinching the coveted title of all-time top scorer in the local league during the fourteenth round of the Zain Premier League.

Currently, Syrian striker Firas Al-Khatib holds the record with 162 goals amassed throughout his illustrious career with Al-Nasr, Al-Arabi, Al-Qadisiya, Al-Kuwait, and Kazma clubs.

In the previous round, Al-Qadisiya netted a goal against Al-Arabi, initially credited to Youssef Bin Souda but later awarded to Al-Mutawa after video technology review by Romanian referee Mane Istvan Kovacs.

This goal elevated Al-Mutawa to the leading scorer in "derby" matches with an impressive tally of 17 goals.

## SOCCER

Al-Mutawa now requires just one more goal to match Al-Khatib's record. The crucial opportunity awaits as Al-Qadisiya faces Al-Nasr at 8:00 pm in the kickoff of the fourteenth round. Simultaneously, Kuwait Club contends with Khaitan at Nasser Al-Osaimi Stadium at 5:35 pm.

As the league unfolds, Kuwait Club presently leads the standings with 30 points, maintaining a goal difference advantage over second-placed Al-Arabi.

Al-Qadisiya secures the third spot with 29 points, followed by Al-Nasr with 21 points.

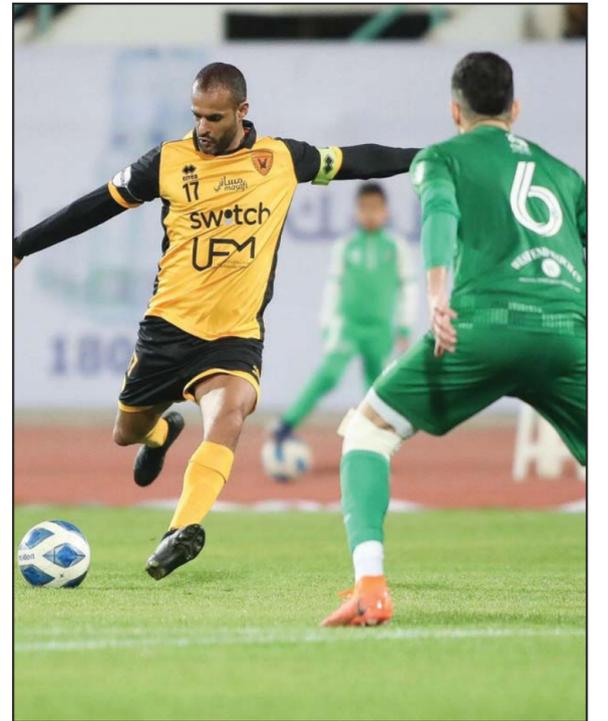
The tour continues with two matches tomorrow, including Al-Shabab vs. Kazma and Al-Arabi against Al-Fahaheel, with a final clash the day after tomorrow featuring Salmiya against Al-Jahra.

In today's crucial clash, front-runner Kuwait Club strives to secure another victory, learning from the previous draw with Al-Salmiya in the twelfth round, allowing Al-

Arabi to temporarily reclaim the top spot.

Meanwhile, Al-Qadisiya faces a challenging task despite a previous victory over Al-Nasr, as recent performances have showcased a decline in form.

Both teams aim to navigate through a competitive round to maintain or improve their league positions.



Badr Al-Mutawa prepares to shoot as an opponent defends.



Newcastle United's Joelinton, (right), crosses the ball past Sunderland's Luke O'Nien into the box to set up a own goal by Sunderland's Daniel Ballard for the first goal of the game during the FA Cup, third round soccer match between Sunderland and Newcastle United at the Stadium of Light, Sunderland, England. (AP)

# Sports

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'One of the biggest legends of the sport'

## Former Kuwait and Brazil coach Mario Zagallo dies at age 92

RIO DE JANEIRO, Jan 6, (Agencies): Mario Zagallo, who won two World Cups as a player, one as a coach and another as an assistant coach for Brazil, has died. He was 92.

The first person to win the World Cup both as a player and a manager, Zagallo is for many Brazilian soccer fans synonymous with patriotism, grit and glory. Zagallo's coaching career extended beyond Brazil's national team, as he also took charge of other national squads, including Kuwait during the 1976-1977 season.

The only person to ever win four World Cup titles was also the last living member of Brazil's starting team in its first championship victory in the tournament in 1958.

Zagallo died late Friday night of multiple-organ failure as a consequence of multiple comorbidities. Hospital Barra D'Or in Rio de Janeiro said in a statement. Local media reported he was hospitalized after Christmas.

Brazilian soccer confederation president Ednaldo Rodrigues said in a statement in the early hours of Saturday confirming Zagallo's death that Zagallo "is one of the biggest legends" of the sport. The funeral will take place Sunday at the confederation's headquarters.

"We offer solidarity to his family members and fans in this moment of grief for the departure of this great hero of our soccer," Rodrigues said. Several Brazilian clubs where Zagallo played and coached also expressed their sorrow for his death.

Zagallo's social media channels called him "a dedicated father, a loving grandfather, a caring father-in-law, a loyal friend, a victorious professional and a great human being."

"A gigantic hero. A patriot that leaves us a legacy of great achievements," the text added, without giving more details about Zagallo's death.

One of the most charismatic and superstitious figures in Brazilian football, he also was known for his fondness of the No. 13 and constant use of the phrase "You will have to put up with me" - voiced loudly at critics.

He said 13 was his lucky number because it carries the last two digits of his birth year: 1931. He always highlighted any link, however coincidental, between 13 and his football successes.

Zagallo played a role in nearly every major chapter in Brazilian football history, from its first World Cup title in 1958 to the tournament it hosted in 2014. For-

## HH Amir's Soccer Cup preliminary round to kick off on Jan 26

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6: The Football Association has officially announced the commencement dates for the qualifying rounds of His Highness the Amir's Soccer Cup for the 2023-2024 sports season. The preliminary round is scheduled to kick off on January 26, featuring matches between Al-Arabi and Al-Sulaibkhat, as well as Al-Nasr against Al-Sahel.

### SOCCER

The same round will conclude on January 27 with fixtures including Al-Fahaheel versus Al-Shabab and Al-Qadisiya against Yarmouk. Additionally, Al-Salmiya will face Khaitan, and Kazma will take on Burgan on January 28. The pre-

liminary round wraps up on January 29 with a match between Al-Jahra and Al-Tadamon. Looking ahead, the quarter-final matches for the Emir's Cup are set for February 1 and 2, while the semi-finals are scheduled for February 7.

The Football Association has also outlined the schedule for the remaining rounds of the Zain Premier League competition. The 15th round is slated to commence on February 11, followed by the 16th round on the 16th of the same month, the 17th round on March 1, and the 18th round on March 6.

In an additional update, Al-Ittihad disclosed that two Super Cup matches will take place on February 22. Al-Qadisiya will face Al-Kuwait, while Al-Arabi will compete against Kazma. The winners of these matches will subsequently meet in the final on February 26.

Named national team coach in 1970, just before the World Cup in Mexico, he inherited a squad that included Pelé, Jairzinho, Gerson, Roberto Rivellino and Tostão. Brazil crushed Italy 4-1 in the final, becoming the first three-time champion.

He also coached Brazil in 1974, but without Pelé, the team finished in fourth place.

Zagallo was assistant coach to Carlos Alberto Parreira when Brazil won

the 1994 World Cup in the United States, again beating Italy in the final. Parreira many times said he felt as if the team had two coaches, such as Zagallo's influence in his squad.

And he was back at the helm four years later for the World Cup in France, when Brazil lost 3-0 to the hosts in a final marked by striker Ronaldo's unexplained convulsions before the game. Zagallo was criticized for letting Ronaldo play.



A file photo of Mario Zagallo (right), who won two World Cups as a player, one as a coach and another as an assistant coach for Brazil, has died. He was 92.



Burnley's Josh Brownhill, (left), heads the ball past Tottenham's Jamie Donley during the English FA Cup third round soccer match between Tottenham Hotspur and Burnley at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London. (AP)

## Warner leads Australia to win over Pakistan in his farewell Test match

Aussies complete 3-0 sweep

SYDNEY, Jan 6, (AP): It wasn't quite a fairytale finish for David Warner, but it was very close.

Warner scored 57 runs to help lead Australia to an eight-wicket victory over Pakistan on Saturday in his final Test match, ending a 112-test career as a winner on his home ground.

With Australia needing only 11 runs to claim its third consecutive victory in the three-Test series, and with a chance to score the winning runs, Warner was out lbw off the bowling of Sajid Khan. He walked off the Sydney Cricket Ground to a standing ovation as he waved to the crowd.

As he headed to the lockerroom, he was embraced by his former Test captain Steve Smith. Warner handed his Australia batting helmet and gloves to a young fan at the players' gate and walked off into test retirement.

"It's pretty much a dream come true," Warner said in a post-game TV interview, after walking back onto the field, with a pink stump in his hand and a tattered original baggy green cap on his head, along a line of teammates and Pakistan players shaking hands and hugging. "Win 3-0 and cap off what's been a great 18 months for the Australian cricket team: World Test Championship win, Ashes series, the World Cup and then we come here and win 3-0. I'm just proud to be here with a bunch of great cricketers."

### CRICKET

Pakistan captain Shan Masood presented Warner with one of Babar Azam's shirts signed by the touring team as a gesture of congratulations.

Australia captain Pat Cummins, voted player of the series after taking 19 wickets - including three consecutive five-wicket hauls - said it's going to be hard to replace Warner.

"He's basically played very game for the last dozen years. He's a huge personality. He really sets the game up with the game he plays," Cummins said. "We'll enjoy the next couple of days while we've still got him around."

Warner had nominated the SCG test as his last before retirement as soon as Australia's summer schedule was finalized, before he was guaranteed a spot in the starting XI.

It generated plenty of conjecture about his form ahead of the series but selectors stuck with the veteran and he delivered against Pakistan, opening the series with a big century - the only hundred of the series - and tallying 299 runs at an average of 50.

Warner played his first test in 2011, against New Zealand, shunning off speculation he was only suited to the limited-overs versions of the game. He also overcame the infamous "sandpapergate" scandal in South Africa in 2018 that resulted in him being barred from representing Australia for a year, returning to the national team in August, 2019.

Warner maintained his attacking style throughout his career in all formats of the game, and finished with 8,796 test runs at an average of 44.59.



Australia's players pose with their trophy after winning on the fourth day of their cricket Test against Pakistan match in Sydney, Australia also won the series 3-0. (AP)

Al-Moussawi's stellar performance sparks interest from Mallorca

## Kuwait conclude external camp for Asian Handball Championship

By Khaled El Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 6: Kuwait team delegation is set to return today following the conclusion of its external camp, named the "Blue" camp, held in Slovenia and Croatia. This preparation was geared towards their participation in the 21st Asian Handball Championship, which also served as the "2025 World Cup Qualifiers," scheduled to take place in the Kingdom of Bahrain from January 11-25. The team is placed in the first group alongside Qatar, Oman, and China Taipei.

During the European camp, Kuwait engaged in several trial matches against the Slovenian Olympic team, the Saudi team, and the Georgian team. The technical staff, led by Algerian Saeed Hegazy and Mohamed Masoudan, worked diligently to finalize the lineup for the team's opening match against Oman on the 12th.

This process included focusing on both physical and technical aspects, as well as strategic plans for offensive and defensive plays.

Faisal Siwan, the director of the national teams in the Handball Federation, commended the Euro-

pean camp, highlighting the players' commitment and the collective

### HANDBALL

effort of the entire team, includ-



A file photo of Kuwait's Al-Moussawi celebrating after scoring a goal.

ing players, technical, and administrative staff. Their goal is to make the most of the camp to present a strong performance in the upcoming Asian Championship and vie for a qualification spot in the 2025 World Cup.

In a separate development, the Spanish club Mallorca has submitted a loan request for Saleh Al-Moussawi, a prominent player from both the national team and Kuwaiti handball club. This request comes on the heels of Al-Moussawi's outstanding performances in recent tournaments, including the Asian Games in China, the 2024 Paris Olympics qualifiers in Qatar, the World Club World Cup in Dammam, and the Asian Club Championship in Kuwait.

Al-Moussawi, recognized as one of the top wingers in Asia, has garnered numerous personal awards for his exceptional contributions, being consistently named the best player in matches and securing a spot in the best squad at various tournaments.

## Spurs, Fulham earn narrow FA Cup wins

## Newcastle end slump

LONDON, Jan 6, (AP): Newcastle avoided an FA Cup upset by beating local rival Sunderland 3-0 in the third round of the iconic knockout competition on Saturday.

Alexander Isak scored twice at the Stadium of Light after Dan Ballard's

own goal had given Newcastle a first-half lead.

Eddie Howe's team went into the game having won just once in its past eight games - a slide that included being eliminated from the Champions League and League Cup. A derby against second-division Sunderland had been seen as a difficult encounter, but the visitors comfortably advanced to the fourth round.

Howe will hope victory provides a platform to turn the season around with the team 11 points adrift of the top four and Champions League qualification.

In front an intimidating Sunderland crowd, Newcastle was given an early advantage through Ballard's own goal in the 35th minute.

Isak doubled the lead in the 46th - finishing from inside the box after Miguel Almiron's assist - and completed the scoring with a penalty in the 90th.

It was the first derby between the teams since 2016 and the first time Newcastle has beaten Sunderland since 2011.

Leicester, which won the cup in 2021, beat Millwall 3-2 to advance to the fourth round.

### SOCCER

The 2016 Premier League champions are enjoying an impressive season after being relegated from the top flight last year. Enzo Maresca's team looks set to be promoted after building a 10-point lead atop division two and victory against Millwall was its 24th in 30 games in all competitions.

Non-league Maidstone can dream of a date with one of the giants of English soccer after beating third-division Stevenage 1-0.

Sam Corne's penalty in the 45th settled the match.

Tottenham and Fulham won through to the fourth round of the FA Cup while fellow English Premier League sides Brentford and Wolves will endure a replay after they drew 1-1.

Spurs won with a late goal from Pedro Porro, while Fulham overcame Rotherham 1-0 with a first-half strike from Bobby De Cordova-Reid. In London, Wolves played almost the entire match with 10 men but came from behind to earn a replay against Brentford.

Spurs hasn't won the FA Cup since 1991 and it made heavy work of a home tie against a side second to last in the league. Although Ange Postecoglou's team was on top throughout, Burnley defended stoutly and it wasn't until the 78th minute that Porro got the breakthrough.

His shot from 25 meters out was a worthy match winner and one of several spectacular strikes among the three games.

Only five league places separate Wolves and Brentford so, on paper, their fixture was one of the most evenly matched.

Brentford gained the momentum after just nine minutes when João Gomes was sent off for a bad foul. It took the lead shortly before halftime when Neal Maupay controlled a loose ball in the penalty box and fired home.

Although Brentford dominated in terms of possession and shots on goal, Wolves never looked beaten and it drew level 19 minutes into the second period when Tommy Doyle's screamer gave Brentford goalkeeper Thomas Strakosha no chance.

Fulham dispatched struggling Rotherham more easily than the one goal suggested.