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Assembly caucus sets agenda for 2023-2024

Parliament speaker, PM pledge cooperation for Kuwait stability

KUNA photo

National Assembly Speaker Ahmed Al-Saadoun receives His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

By Abdul Rahman Al-Shammari
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and **Agencies**

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: Speaker of the National Assembly Ahmed Al-Saadoun received in his office Thursday His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

Al-Saadoun congratulated His Highness the Prime Minister on the formation of the new government, expressing his best wishes for success in serving the nation and its citizens.

Both sides confirmed their commitment to cooperation between the National Assembly and the government, aiming to achieve security, stability, and fulfill the aspirations of Kuwaiti people. Cooperation between the executive and legislative authorities would meet the leadership's guidelines and help achieve the aspirations of the Kuwaiti people, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah affirmed on Thursday.

Speaking to the press after meeting with National Assembly Speaker Ahmed Al-Saadoun, His Highness the Prime Minister stressed that the government was willing to extend its cooperation with the parliament in line with the constitution, which called for cooperation between the two sides.

Such cooperation would benefit citizens and residents and would help better address regional and international shifting challenges, he added.

He went on to say that the government would be addressing challenges facing economy and development, reviewing legislations and policies, which would enable the government to restructure and achieve reformation.

National Assembly Speaker Ahmed Al-Saadoun on Thursday opened the first meeting of the Parliamentary Caucus in the second round of the 17th legislative term.

During the meeting, MP Hamad Al-Matar was elected undersecretary of the Caucus through voice vote; in addition to MP Muhammad Al-Mahan as Secretary and MP Hamad Al-Obaid as Treasurer.

MPs Fahd bin Jamea, Shuaib Shaaban and Hani Shams were elected as members of the Executive Committee of the Caucus.

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M.O.I. HALTS 'AMNESTY' FOR VISA VIOLATORS

Kuwait deportation plan on

Over 2,000 expats seek status amendment this week

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: The Ministry of Interior announced the suspension of the decision to allow expatriates who violated the Residency Law before 2020 to pay the fines imposed on them and legalize their status, which was issued last week, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

A security source told the daily that the ministry is continuing its plan to deport residency violators from the country, as has been the practice throughout the past period.

He disclosed that since the beginning of this week, the residency affairs departments in the six governorates have so far received about 2,000 residency violators to amend their status and pay the fines imposed on them -- amounting to KD600 for each violator.

The decision issued by former Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled stipulated the cancellation of Resolution number 288 issued in 2020 -- during the Corona crisis -- regarding the rules for deporting foreigners who do not have residence permits or whose residence permits have expired, and allowing amendment of the status of violators after Jan 3, 2020.

Earlier, it was reported that the ministry issued Ministerial Decision No. 26/2024 to cancel Ministerial Decision number 288/2020 on deporting those who do not have residency permits or those whose residency has expired; thereby, allowing those who violated the Residency Law to legalize their status.

The daily obtained a copy of the decision, stating that "after reviewing Decree Law No. 38/1980 on issuing the Civil and Commercial Procedures Law, and Ministerial Resolution No. 288/2020 regarding the rules for deporting foreigners who do not have residence permits or whose residence permits have expired; and based on the proposal of the acting undersecretary, following are the articles of the new decision:

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PM Diwan photo

The Council of Ministers in a group photo. The Council of Ministers held its first Cabinet meeting under the chairmanship of His Highness the PM Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

'First-class technocrat'

Oil minister brings renewed hope for Kuwait's oil future

By Najeh Bilal
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: There is a glimmer of hope for the future of the oil sector in the country, as the oil portfolio this time is being carried by a first-class technocrat – the new Minister of Oil Dr. Emad Mohammad Al-Atiqi.

He has held several important positions in his field of specialization, as he was Dean of the College of Engineering and Petroleum at Kuwait University, and a member of the Supreme Petroleum Council in the State of Kuwait.

Dr. Al-Atiqi

He has conducted many researches in the oil field, which apparently fill his personal portfolio to the brim. He therefore has many responsibilities and burdens related to advancing the future of the oil sector in Kuwait. He needs to move many stagnant files, the most important of which is perhaps the necessity of revitalizing Kuwait's oil investments at the internal and external levels.

He must hold accountable those who contributed to Kuwait's involvement in the Vietnamese refinery and petrochemical complex, which incurred losses amounting to one billion dollars during the year 2023, as stated by the former Oil Minister Saad Al-Barrak.

Partnership with the private sector

The new Minister of Oil must redirect oil-related activities to those that are more sustainable and capable of diversifying sources of income. This can be done by paying attention to manufacturing industries in partnership with the private sector.

All indicators show that Kuwait is still at the bottom of economic growth as a result of its significant over-reliance on oil without realizing the risks of the future. Therefore, the new Minister of Oil must remove any unnecessary regulations and administrative requirements that hinder the activities of the private sector in the oil field.

Petrochemicals industry

One of the files of utmost importance that must be activated by the new minister is the removal of all obstacles that limit the expansion of the petrochemicals industry in Kuwait. The oil companies affiliated with the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation are still suffering from the difficulty in obtaining land due to the complications related to the procedures for allocating industrial lands. This is what hinders the progress of the petrochemicals industry in Kuwait.

Foreign investors

Opening the door further to the entry of foreign investors into the oil sector is perhaps an important matter for improving operational capacity in all areas of the oil sector due to the advanced technology possessed by foreign companies in this field. However, this requires removing the obstacles that hinder the entry of foreign investors into the country.

National employment

Among the vital issues that the new Minister of Oil must solve are the concerns and the problems that the national workforce of the oil sector suffers from.

He must restore confidence among the workers in the oil sector and the management of the companies operating in them, and work on opening new job opportunities for the Kuwaiti youth in the oil sector.

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Moody's confident on Kuwait budget

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: Moody's has expressed optimism regarding Kuwait's budget, foreseeing either a balanced performance or a modest financial deficit, reports Al-Anba daily.

The country is exploring the creation of a new sovereign wealth fund dedicated to local investments and according to reports Moody's anticipates the UAE and Qatar to achieve financial surpluses, while Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia may record modest financial deficits or maintain a balanced budget.

Moody's projects the average price of a barrel of oil for hydrocarbon-exporting nations to be $83 in 2024, remaining consistent with 2023 figures but surpassing the $68 level observed between 2018 and 2019. Despite OPEC+ production restrictions, the upward trend in oil prices contributes to a favorable financial environment.

Kuwait is actively pursuing income source diversification through its 2023-2027 development plan, which includes 103

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Kuwait's first non-royal Foreign Minister faces challenges amid regional tensions

By Fares Al-Abdan
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and **Agencies**

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya is the first foreign minister in the Kuwait government from outside the ruling family, which represents a challenge for him, given the tasks that this mission requires of him in light of the conditions the region is witnessing at both the regional and international levels.

Al-Yahya

There is no doubt that he will certainly live up to the responsibility, given that the trust of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah is granted only to those who deserve it.

The most prominent files facing Minister Al-Yahya is the Iraqi court's ruling regarding the unconstitutionality of the maritime navigation agreement with Kuwait, in addition to the file of the Durra field, which is shared with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In both files, Kuwait affirmed its sovereignty and its unwillingness to accept any violation in that regard.

In the first file, Kuwait confirmed the validity of the agreement signed with the Iraqi side, stating that it is subject to international conventions and treaties.

During the last period, Kuwait witnessed the mobilization of a number of efforts to support it in this file at the Gulf, Arab, and even international levels, indicating a lack of acceptance of the conversation or lack of recognition of this file.

In the Durra field file, Kuwait also confirmed with Saudi Arabia that the Durra field is a Kuwaiti-Saudi field and ownership of the natural resources in this field is shared between them only.

It called on Iran to negotiate the eastern border of the submerged area divided between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait as one negotiating party with the Iranian side.

Kuwait is also seeking to open new horizons with a number of Asian countries to work on a number of projects and agreements, especially those witnessed during the visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad to China during which a number of bilateral agreements were signed.

The region is witnessing instability that requires vigilance and caution over the accelerating events being witnessed, especially the war in Gaza, the Kuwaiti role in this file, and the lack of all efforts for the Palestinian issue either at the humanitarian level or at the level of supporting the issue in international forums, and the speed of making decisions, especially on important issues.

Minister Al-Yahya said Wednesday that he would work hard on enhancing Kuwait's leading role on both regional and international levels.

This came in a statement made by the newly appointed minister after the constitutional oath of the new cabinet led by His Highness the Prime Minister Dr. Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah before His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah earlier in the day.

"We will complete the mission of former foreign ministers, and follow the same diplomatic approach of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah," Al-Yahya said.

He noted that there are several dossiers on which "we will focus", including the regional and Gulf issues, and maintaining the Arabian Gulf, he noted.

He expressed hope for a continued consensus between the two authorities to get desired goals and achieve people's interests, upon the directives of His Highness the Amir.

The minister referred to continued efforts to allow Kuwaitis entry into Schengen states without visas.

KNPC asks private contractors to ensure workers 'decent housing'

By Najeh Bilal
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: The Kuwait National Petroleum Company has asked private contracting firms working on its projects to ensure comprehensive care is taken of both the national and foreign workers, particularly in terms of providing them decent housing.

The directive emphasizes adherence to the specifications outlined in the contracts between the KNPC and housing service providers for foreign workers.

In this regard they said, these sources revealed that the company conducted inspections of the accommodations for foreign workers at the Abdullah and Al-Ahmadi port refineries.

Additionally, leaflets amd posters have been printed in eight languages and distributed in buildings housing foreign workers in Mahboula and Fahaheel areas. The aim is to educate them not only about their housing rights but also about salary entitlements, vacations, and all privileges granted to them under the Kuwaiti Labor Law.

The KNPC had earlier established a social welfare committee dedicated to familiarizing both national and foreign workers employed by private contracting firms involved in its projects with their rights.

This initiative aims at ensuring awareness and compliance with the terms outlined in their contracts and Kuwaiti Labor Law.

The company is committed to actively monitoring the rights of both national and foreign workers in private sector companies engaged in its projects.

No word on whether medicines reached hostages

Israeli strike continues as war ripples across Mideast

RAFAH, Gaza Strip, Jan 18, (AP): An Israeli airstrike on a home killed 16 people, half of them children, in the southern Gaza town of Rafah, medics said early Thursday. The military continued to strike targets in areas of the besieged territory where it has told civilians to seek refuge.

There was meanwhile no word on whether medicines that entered the territory Wednesday as part of a deal brokered by France and Qatar had been distributed to dozens hostages with chronic illnesses who are being held by Hamas.

More than 100 days after Hamas triggered the war with its Oct. 7 attack, Israel continues to wage one of the deadliest and most destructive military campaigns in recent history, with the goal of dismantling the militant group that has ruled Gaza since 2007 and returning scores of captives. The war has stoked tensions across the region, threatening to ignite other conflicts.

More than 24,000 Palestinians have been killed, some 85% of the narrow coastal territory's 2.3 million people have fled their homes, and the United Nations says a quarter of the population is starving.

Hundreds of thousands have heeded Israeli evacuation orders and packed into southern Gaza, where shelters run by the United Nations are overflowing and massive tent camps have gone up. But Israel has continued to strike what it says are militant targets in all parts of Gaza, often killing women and children.

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Newswatch

Health center in Basra eyed

BAGHDAD, Jan 18, (KUNA): A delegation from Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) discussed with its Iraqi counterpart on Thursday the construction of a health center in Basra governorate.

KRCS Vice Chairman Anwar Al-Hasawi told KUNA after meeting Iraqi Red Crescent Society Yassin Ahmad that the main goal of the visit was to consider the purposed project in Basra as part of KRCS humanitarian projects in Iraq.

On his part, Yassin highly appreciated KRCS for its humanitarian support over the years for Iraqi people, pointing out that should the project be constructed, it would be funded by both societies.

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RIYADH: The Executive Council of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) concluded the 44th edition in **Jeddah** on Thursday by approving all documents, reports and projects submitted.

The council's adoption of all documents submitted is considered an incentive for ICESCO with all its sectors and departments to raise the organization's expectations and adopt immediate steps so as to fulfill relevant goals, said Director-General **Dr. Salem Almalik** during the concluding session. (KUNA)

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NEW DELHI: Following a drone strike in the Gulf of Aden, on Thursday, an Indian Navy ship reacted to a distress call from a merchant vessel flying the flag of **Marshall Islands**.

A statement from the Indian Defense Ministry said that Indian Naval Ship Visakhapatnam deployed in Gulf of Aden for anti-piracy operations swiftly responded to a distress call by MV Genco Picardy following a drone attack on January 17. (KUNA)

Prayer Timings

Fajr	05:20	Asr	14:54
Sunrise	06:43	Maghrib	17:14
Zohr	11:58	Isha	18:35

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Mild with light to moderate northwesterly wind, with speeds of 15-45 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

By Night: Rather cold to cold and partly cloudy with light to moderate northwesterly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of 08-32 km/h.

Weather

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	22	14
Kuwait Airport	22	11
Abdaly	22	08
Jahra	22	11
Salmiyah	20	15
Nuwaisib	24	11
Wafra	22	11

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

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

Fahad Yusuf Al-Sabah

Dr. Emad Mohammad Al-Atiqi

Abdulrahman Badah Al-Mutairi

Dr. Ahmad Abdulwahhab Al-Awadhi

Feras Saud Al-Sabah

Dr. Anwar Ali Al-Mudhaf

Dr. Salem Falah Al-Hajraf

Dawood Sulaiman Marafi

Dr. Adel Mohammad Al-Adwani

Abdullah Hamad Al-Jo'an

Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya

Brief CV's of Kuwait's newly-formed government

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18, (KUNA): The following are brief CVs of the new Cabinet lineup announced earlier today:

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh **Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah**. Born in 1955, he holds a PhD in economics from Harvard University and has previously served as Kuwait's ambassador to the US in 1993, in addition to tenures as foreign minister (2001, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2011), as well as deputy prime minister and acting oil minister.

Fahad Youssef Saud Al-Sabah - Deputy Prime Minister and Acting Interior and Defense Minister. Born in 1959, he graduated from the Kuwaiti military academy and previously served as an Amiri Guard officer.

Dr. Emad Mohammad Abdulaziz Al-Ateeqi - Deputy Prime Minister and Oil Minister. Holds a PhD in chemical engineering from Leahy Pennsylvania College and has previously served in numerous academic roles in Kuwait University, including research department chief.

Abdurrahman Badah Al-Mutairi - Minister of Information and Culture. He holds a BA degree in Psychology from Kuwait University. He served as a Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs since in the cabinets of December 2020, March 2021 and April 2023.

Dr. Ahmad Abdulwahab Al-Awadhi - Minister of Health. He holds PhD in Pediatrics (Kuwait Board) from the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization, a PhD in Medicine (MD) from the Arab Gulf University in the Kingdom of Bahrain, and BA in basic sciences from the same university. He served as a Minister of Health in the Cabinets formed in October 16, 2022 and April 9, 2023.

Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Sabah - Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs, Acting Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs. He served as Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of State for National Assembly Affairs.

Dr. Anwar Ali Abdullah Al-Mudhaf - Finance Minister and Minister of State for Economic and Investment Affairs. He holds a PhD in business management from Claremont College and has been the chairman of Kuwait's Al-Ahli United Bank since 2014.

Dr. Salem Falah Mubarak Al-Hajraf - Minister of Electricity and Water and Minister of Renewable Energy and Minister of State for Housing Affairs. He hold a PhD in mechanical engineering from the UK's Cranfield University and has completed more than 30 researches across scientific fields.

Dawood Sulaiman Marafi - Minister of State for the National Assembly Affairs, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Minister of State for Communications. He holds a Master's degree in business management and served in various roles in the banking sector and the global stock market.

Dr. Adel Mohammad Abdullah Al-Adwani - Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research. He previously served as professor in Kuwait University's faculty of Administrative Sciences.

Abdullah Hamad Abdullah Al-Jouaan - Minister of Commerce and Industry. He also serves as the chief of Kuwait's National Fund for the development of Small and Medium Enterprises.

Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Yahya - Minister of Foreign Affairs. Born in 1966, he holds a Bachelor's degree in business management from Western Oregon University in the US. Previously served as Kuwait's ambassador to a number of Latin American countries, including Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay.

Faisal Saeed Nafil Al-Ghareeb - Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. Born in 1958, he holds a bachelor's degree in law and Islamic Sharia from Kuwait University. He has been national carrier Kuwait Airways' deputy chief since 2020.

Dr. Nora Mohammad Khaled Al-Mashan - Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Municipality Affairs. She previously served as Associate Professor in the Department of Civil Engineering at the College of Engineering and Petroleum at Kuwait University.

Faisal Saeed Al-Ghareeb

Dr. Nora Mohammad Al-Mashaan

Citizens welfare top on list: Social Affairs minister

Priorities of health minister in renewed term

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi/ Fares Al-Abdan/Mohammad Ghanem/ Abdul Nasser Al-Aslami
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: The Ministry of Health witnessed a qualitative shift in the digital health services during the era of the Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi. With the renewed confidence in him and his selection in the new government formation, it has become obligatory for him to complete the digital health project as one of his most important priorities in the coming period. He must also work on implementing the government development plan for New Kuwait 2035 vision and confronting the observations of the State Audit Bureau, the recurring crises in the pharmaceutical sector, and other important files that require decisive ministerial decisions.

The expansion of electronic health services during the year 2023 imposed a new mechanism to move forward towards the digitization of all electronic services and the establishment of electronic links between all different clinics and hospitals in the country.

Many health services have been added to the unified government application for electronic services "Sahel" and efforts are ongoing for unified automated connectivity between different health sectors, in addition to expanding health projects.

The Ministry of Health's annual development plan's projects are considered one of the most important challenges facing Minister Al-Awadhi during the coming period. They are his top priorities. This is especially after the State Audit Bureau's repeated observations about the faltering development health projects, the low disbursement rates on some of them, and the delayed implementation of others, all of which the State Audit Bureau considered as indicators of the ministry's lack of seriousness in accelerating the implementation of those projects included in the development plan.

The health crisis and the issues in the pharmacy sector are at the forefront of crises that require effective solutions from Minister Al-Awadhi. In the last days before the government's resignation, Minister Al-Awadhi took the decision to stop granting and issuing private licenses, which led to dissatisfaction among many pharmacists and the threat of some of them to file lawsuits against the health department.

This indicates that the health sector is facing a new crisis with the pharmacy sector in the coming period. Wise health decisions are required to defuse the anticipated crisis.

The disbursement of front-line bonuses, the shortage of medicines, and controlling the prices of health services in the private sector, as well as the issue of supervisory positions, are among the most important challenges that need effective treatment in order to avoid compensatory issues that may burden the health sector and involve it in cycles of problems and financial burdens.

The health insurance project for retirees, known as Afiya, is considered one of the most important projects awaiting the preparation of a new plan and strategy for its expansion, after adding four new categories for its beneficiaries during the current year. It included retired citizens registered with the Public Institution for Social Security, married Kuwaiti women subject to the Public Assistance Law, Kuwaiti widows subject to the Public Assistance Law or Kuwaiti widows who receive their share from their deceased husband in accordance with the Social Security Law and has reached 50 years of age, and divorced Kuwaiti women subject to the Assistance Law and are not not less than 50 years of age.

Social Affairs Ministry

The Ministry of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs is not new to the young minister Sheikh Firas Al-Malik Al-Sabah, who began to sense the needs of the ministry and its affiliated sectors, and had started to issue regulatory decisions that were in the interest of citizens throughout the past period.

The Ministry of Social Affairs is one of the ministries that includes several important sectors, most notably the cooperative sector, which is considered thorny because of its supervisory role over more than 70 cooperative societies and unions.

During the reign of Sheikh Firas Al-Malik, the ministry carried out re-elections for all cooperative societies after a long period of appointments in them, which was marred by some observations from other ministers.

Sheikh Firas made sure all boards of directors were elected at the end of the elections of the Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies so that the shareholders themselves could manage their cooperative societies. He assigned periodic inspection teams to conduct tours of all cooperative societies to follow up any observations or violations.

These rotating teams ensure that violations do not expand. An open-door policy was followed with all cooperative societies and all specialists to develop cooperative work. The ministry played a crucial role in the qualitative shift witnessed by the cooperative societies by standardizing supervisory functions in them and conducting the necessary tests.

Another important sector that should not be overlooked is the social development sector, which includes many important departments, namely the Department of Charitable Societies and Donor Foundations, which follows up the work of existing charity societies, foundations, and donations, and monitors all violations therein.

The department worked on mechanizing the services provided to these associations and ensuring violations are avoided due to their impact on Kuwait's reputation.

There is also another important department in the ministry, which is the Department of Civil Society Associations. It specializes in following up the public benefit associations and the role they provide.

This department witnessed a qualitative shift in the process of submitting and following up the online advertising applications. It is working on ensuring all services will be provided electronically in the future.

Another important department is the Family Care Department and the role they play in helping Kuwaiti families through provision of financial assistance in accordance with the regulatory decisions.

This file has been marred by a number of previous violations, but work is currently being done to avoid them under the guidance of Sheikh Firas.

Among Sheikh Firas' concerns is the file related to people with special needs. He has formed committees to investigate the violations witnessed by the Public Authority for the Disabled Affairs in the past period, and to hold negligent persons accountable. This requires a serious pause from him to clean up this sector affiliated with it, which witnessed negligence in the past period.

Public Works Ministry

The new Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan will be faced with many hot files in the Ministry of Public Works, as this ministry is responsible for implementing state service projects in the fields of roads, sanitary engineering, and construction projects, such as buildings for ministries and government agencies, and major projects like the Kuwait International Airport project and Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port.

The roads file is one of the most important files on the minister's agenda, especially after the failure of successive ministers since the flooding incident caused by large amounts of rain exposing poor infrastructure, especially the internal and highway roads and other files.

The new minister is required to establish a quick and urgent mechanism to issue and implement tenders for maintenance and treatment of roads that are suffering from an unprecedented deterioration in their conditions.

Among the important files before the minister is the need to expedite the pace of work on the Kuwait International Airport project, which is facing a delay of up to three years in its completion. She must also decide on the file of the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation by either continuing or canceling it, and merging it again into the Ministry of Public Works.

The completion of the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port project and the remaining stages are also a top priority, as it is one of the promising projects that will play a major role in achieving the New Kuwait 2025 vision.

Another important issue is the placement of leadership and supervisory positions in the ministry, which has not been decided for nearly two years for leadership and four years for supervisory.

The ministry and its projects suffer from slow decision-making and a lack of job stability for the leadership and supervisory employees who are responsible for managing matters within the ministry.

Ministry of Awqaf

The new Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and Minister of Justice Faisal Al-Ghareeb will be presented with many hot files in the corridors of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs.

There are many files in this ministry that must be opened, Kuwaitization must be applied to its functions fully, job opportunities must be created for graduates of the College of Islamic Sharia, whose numbers are increasing annually. This will close the door to the issue of the state losing huge sums of money.

In addition, the minister should develop appropriate solutions to the issue of teachers of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs regarding end-of-service indemnities and their fairness, open the files of overcrowding of workers in the corridors of Quran centers, find quick and appropriate solutions for the male and female employees there, and solve the problem of attendance and dismissal that these employees suffer from. There are thousands of employees in these departments, and the offices cannot accommodate their numbers. A large number of them could be transferred to work in the ministry instead of continuing with the ongoing congestion

Among the important issues are also overcoming the difficulties facing employees in the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, and finding a solution to the problem of compulsory transfer of some positions in the sector of Islamic studies and Quran affairs.

In this regard, a number of workers in the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs are demanding that the minister follow up on the problems facing employees, confirm the old supervisors and agents, both men and women, and have their names approved by the Civil Service Commission (CSC).

There are also other files awaiting appropriate solutions, most notably the problem faced by those with financial, legal, accounting, and technical specializations, as there is a mechanism to end this suffering, which lies in adding their work to their job descriptions in the studies sector centers.

Several employees also called for providing sufficient support for the excellent work budget of the administrative and educational bodies, and adopting a study subject department within the centers of Dur Al-Quran, Al-Otrojah, and Al-Siraj Al-Munir, as is the practice in the Ministry of Education.

PM Diwan photo
HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Al-Sabah chairs the cabinet meeting.

Warning against falling into abyss of obscenity

'Social media portrays wrong image'

By Abdel Nasser Al-Islami
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: Director of the Center for Promoting Moderation Dr. Abdullah Al-Sharika issued a press statement to warn Kuwaiti society against falling into the swamp of obscenity, slander and foolishness that is widespread on social media.

He said the posts published in series, programs and social media sites do not reflect the true image of Kuwaiti society, or of Kuwaiti girls and women.

Dr. Al-Sharika said, "Yes, we are not an angelic society. We have shortcomings and defects, but what prevails is good, praise be to Almighty Allah.

"The majority of Kuwaiti girls are like gold in their religion, morals, dignity and etiquette. They cannot be generalized based on a few bad apples.

"A person in our days goes through a great struggle in the soul in order to prevent it from being carried away by foolishness and naivety in search of fame or fleeting benefit."

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs devoted its sermon on Friday to warn about the dangers of social media.

The text of the sermon includes the following - "Among the great blessings of Almighty Allah upon us are these machines and programs that are in our hands. They have made lives easier for people, as it is something that the Almighty has made available to us and made for our service."

The message that used to take a month on a camel to reach now arrives in a few hours. The message that used to take days and weeks to reach the person to whom it was sent now arrives in a few minutes.

Among those means that were witnessed in this era is the so-called social media, which is both very useful and also very harmful at the same time.

In fact, its benefits and harm depend on its user.

Many people have used social media for spreading goodness, calling to the truth, conveying truthful news, exchanging useful information, connecting relatives, and communicating with friends, until this type of person became a preacher to the Almighty through passages, letters, writings, and messages created for this noble purpose.

On the other hand, some others misused it by making it a vehicle for spreading vices and using it as a means of broadcasting false news, transmitting false information, exchanging criminal clips and websites, transmitting scandalous pictures and forbidden competitions, and spreading obscenity, reprehensibleness, and evil among people.

These programs contain a lot of goodness and abundant knowledge, but using them in compliance with the rules of religion and morals may bring great evil to their owner. Everything that a person's hand traces, or his eye sees, or the tongue utters, will be subjected to accountability.

One of the most widespread evils of modern means of communication is the ease in spreading rumors and transmitting false news and information, to the extent that this matter has become a danger threatening the security of countries and the stability of societies.

Verdict upheld

10 years for 2 officials

By Jaber Al-Hamoud
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: During the court session presided over by Judge Saleh Al-Muraishid, the Court of Cassation upheld the ruling issued by the Court of Appeals to sentence a Municipal Council member and a former official of the Kuwait Municipality to ten-year imprisonment. It also sentenced a businessman to five-year imprisonment with hard labor. Both defendants were also fined large sums of money in the municipal bribery case.

Last March, the Criminal Court, presided over by Judge Nayef Al-Dahoum, sentenced a member of the Municipal Council and an employee to ten-year imprisonment, dismissed them from their jobs, and obliged them to pay fines. It also sentenced a businessman to five-year imprisonment with hard labor, after they were convicted of the crimes of bribery and abuse of office.

According to the case file, the court charged the Municipal Council member with abuse of office and bribery of KD 100,000 in order to vote on a transaction in the council related to a land area and register it in the name of a company.

diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

'Zionist entity moving toward God's promise and covenant'

"IT can be asserted that a notable distinction exists between 'Judaism,' a divine faith revealed by God Almighty to Prophet Moses (PBUH), and the 'Zionist element,' an occupying entity engaged in colonization," columnist **Muhammad Salem Al-Balhan**, wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"Many Arabs, Muslims, and people worldwide witnessed a substantial number of Jews expressing solidarity with Palestinians. They openly condemned and protested against the unjust and inhumane practices perpetrated by Zionists in Palestine. This serves as clear evidence of the disparity between Judaism and the Zionist agenda.

Al-Balhan

"Regarding the Zionist entity, it is widely known as a colonial construct utilized by colonial powers to fulfill their expansionist objectives and gain control over the geographical territories and natural resources in Arab and Muslim lands.

"Initially established through direct armed colonialism, the entity manipulated and occupied Arab lands at will. When faced with resistance, it retreated but later reappeared employing twisted colonial methods. Notably, it strategically positioned itself in the heart of the Arab nation, specifically in Palestine, to extend its influence and achieve its objectives.

"The colonialists openly supported the Zionist entity, defending it with naval fleets and formidable military arsenals. Despite the world witnessing the destructive attacks in Palestine and Gaza, colonial powers turned a blind eye to these actions, violating both the principles of humanity and the United Nations' legitimate laws.

"These oppressive practices extend beyond Palestine, impacting the entire Arab and Islamic nation. The Zionists not only engaged in killings but also deliberately desecrated the sanctities of the Islamic world in this revered land.

"Despite enduring oppression, the Zionist entity fails to comprehend that it is moving towards the fulfillment of God's promise and covenant."

Also:

"Bobby Knight, renowned American men's college basketball coach, dubbed "The General" for his remarkable achievements, once emphasized, "The important thing is not the desire to succeed. We all, without exception, have the desire for that. What is important is the desire to truly prepare for success," columnist **Dr Dhari Adel Al-Huwail** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"This statement encapsulates crucial concepts, serving as keys to success. Success isn't solely dependent on wishes; rather, it hinges on meticulous planning, systematic implementation, and, most crucially, a fervent belief in these plans -- propagating this belief contagiously within and beyond the institution or system. The real tragedy unfolds when those involved are oblivious to the plan and its intended goals.

"The governments, by their nature, formulate action plans and programs not merely as a manifestation of their desire for development and progress or to meet legislative requirements, but as practical steps towards realizing their objectives.

"The concern lies in the potential for plans to be mere eyewash or for showmanship. A well-prepared government action plan ensures a systematic effort to translate desires into tangible reality, boosting success prospects while mitigating risks of failure in achieving development and social well-being.

"These plans must outline priorities and measurable indicators for transparent progress monitoring. Undoubtedly, government action plans constitute a crucial foundation for sustainable development, especially given current challenges.

"These words are written during the early days of the administration of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Muhammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, a promising era for our beloved land.

"Optimism abounds for the best, as this nation and its honorable people deserve much. This moment presents an opportunity for these plans and genuine preparations for success to serve as a clear roadmap and true vision for Kuwait's revival and progress.

"This includes combating corruption, enhancing education, integrating environmental sustainability and public health into policies, and emphasizing digital transformation as a cornerstone for implementation and follow-up.

"Unfairly burdening the new government alone with the responsibility of desired change and development is unjust. While it currently dominates many aspects of life, each individual has a role to play. We are all accountable for our actions, impacting both the present and future generations.

"Change begins within each of us, without the need for empty slogans or futile debates. Vigilance in monitoring authorities' performance, coupled with constructive criticism, ensures correction of missteps, driven by a shared concern for Kuwait's well-being. The desire to succeed is indeed important, but even more crucial is the genuine preparation for success."

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"Optimism with caution … After I congratulated Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah on his appointment as Prime Minister, I tweeted a lot about the need to choose Council of Ministers members who are competent, experienced and are statesmen, not senior officials with the rank of minister," columnist **M. Adel Al Jarallah Al-Kharaffi** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"It is also important to prepare a realistic government action program and taking bold executive decisions that lift us from our current situation to a promising situation in which we see a bright light at the end of the tunnel.

"The truth of the matter is that there is nothing new in these tweets. They are ideas and wishes that we keep on repeating with the formation of every new cabinet. Perhaps, we will see something new that will take us to new heights.

"However, this time, I am optimistic, and the repetition stemmed from this optimism. This time, we are facing a Prime Minister with specifications and characteristics that we can describe as good, combining Science, knowledge, experience and courage, which we want at this stage. In fact, he has everything we need to face chronic challenges and recurring problems, which have resulted in a lot of inaction and missed opportunities.

"I must stress here that our problems are not without solution and the solutions do not require launching space missiles into the distant universe.

"Our problems and their solutions are known, possible and applicable, but through a ruling and capable government that possesses a sound compass by which it knows the directions of the solutions that the nation and the citizen need. We need a government that respects its powers and competencies and exercises them with boldness and self-confidence. It knows our national priorities and commits to them to revitalize the economy, improve the standard of living, develop services and infrastructure, housing, education reform, government administration, and other related priorities.

"These are the priorities of the citizen and the nation. Therefore, the compass of the new Council of Ministers must change towards these priorities. All of these are not difficult for a Prime Minister who has learned well, practiced politics, performed well, lived experiences, and gained experience and knowledge.

"If this is the case, there are many reasons for optimism, albeit cautious optimism.

May Allah the Almighty guide us all to what we aspire for...Oh Allah, Amen."

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"The decree on abolishing the local agent requirement was published in the Official Gazette and the law took effect! Some members of the National Assembly and the previous government consider the abolition of the local agent requirement a great achievement. They are proud of it on the basis that it is in the interest of the nation and the citizen. It serves Kuwait and its people!" columnist **Talal Al-Saeed** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"This is what we heard from them, but we, the groups of hardworking people whose job has become to count the days of the month, rejoice over the descent of the pension, especially when the increase is only KD20 every two years. We are threatened with the cancellation of our subsidies. We do not know at all what the cancellation of the local agent requirement means.

"More importantly, we do not know what benefit could we get from this law? What does it mean for us or the State? We do not know the validity of the entry of giant companies into the local market after the abolition of the condition that they consider an achievement. What is our benefit from all of this? Was the local agent a major obstacle to the entry of giant companies to the Kuwait market?

"Our government, which already left, did not explain the issue to us so that we could understand it, so that we could applaud it or applaud its departure! Will the next Council of Ministers, or the members of the current National Assembly -- if it is not dissolved soon, kindly explain the issue in full to us, so that we understand that there is an achievement as per the Council of Ministers of Employees who left unhappily or the current members of the National Assembly whose voters will ask them about their electoral promises? The most important electoral promise is that they will come up with solutions and practical steps to deal with the loans issue, which has exhausted citizens, or at least deal with the interest, so the member's answer to them will be: Have we canceled the local agent requirement, instead of canceling the loans or their interest?

"The citizen has the right to understand and it is the government's duty to explain the reasons for the issuance of this law. At the very least, it should hold a symposium on official television to discuss this issue and explain its dimensions, instead of broadcasting the programs of the remnants of the Muslim Brotherhood, which they are trying to impose on us until 'our hearts are lost'…."

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes

Municipality trucks busy at work in the Wafra desert.

330 tons Al-Wafra waste removed

'Need to identify, rectify negative practices'

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: The Kuwait Municipality said during a cleaning campaign in the Al-Wafra Agricultural Area the department has removed 330 tons of agricultural waste. The initiative, led by the Cleaning Department in Al-Ahmadi Governorate, employed advanced equipment and mechanisms for efficient execution of the campaign, according to reports from Al-Rai daily.

Nawaf Al-Mutairi, the Acting Director of the Al-Ahmadi Governorate Municipality Branch, disclosed that the campaign also targeted violations, resulting in the removal of 10 abandoned cars and 8 food trucks. Furthermore, 9 reports on road occupancy were issued during the operation.

Al-Mutairi underscored the core objective of these field inspection campaigns, which is to identify and rectify negative practices while imposing legal measures against violators. The supervisory team of the municipality, particularly in Al-Ahmadi, remains steadfast in elevating cleanliness standards in its designated areas.

Regular field tours are conducted by the team to address eyesores and road occupancy issues, preserving the visual appeal of the governorate. Al-Mutairi reaffirmed the municipality's commitment to executing legal measures against those who contravene regulations related to public cleanliness and road occupancy.

He highlighted the ongoing awareness initiatives, including the distribution of multilingual posters targeting Indian, Filipino, and English-speaking residents.

These educational materials aim to instruct residents on proper waste disposal practices, stressing the importance of securely closing waste bags and placing them inside containers.

The comprehensive campaign covered all areas within the Al-Ahmadi Governorate Municipality branch, encompassing activities such as monitoring public cleanliness, supervising the work of cleaning contractors and companies, regulating street vendors, and enforcing laws and decisions related to public cleanliness and road occupancy.

The municipality's unwavering commitment to fostering a clean and organized environment is evident through its sustained efforts and community-oriented awareness programs.

'Doctor' robs identity; story deceives fiction

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: The saying, "You will not be able to fool all people all the time," applies to an Arab doctor's story that turned out to be stranger than fiction; as the doctor, who underwent sex-change surgery, impersonated a citizen who frequented his clinic in his country and used the latter's passport, reports Al-Rai daily quoting sources.

Sources revealed that a Kuwaiti citizen traveled to an Arab country for treatment where he met the doctor, without knowing that the latter was originally a female who transformed into a male after undergoing sex-change surgery. Sources said the doctor underwent plastic surgery until he looked like the Kuwaiti patient who frequented his clinic. The matter did not stop there, as he impersonated the Kuwaiti, using his passport and documents, so he was able to enter Kuwait and other countries several times.

According to a security source, when the doctor arrived in Kuwait recently; the passport employee doubted him due to some differences between the photo on the passport and the holder. When asked about his identity, he showed signs of confusion, stressing that he is the rightful owner of the passport.

This prompted the employee to refer him to the airport detectives, the source revealed.

The source added, "During investigation, the surprising secret was revealed as it turned out that the person is a female doctor who underwent sex-change surgery and took hormone pills until the beard grew and other male features emerged. She took advantage of her close resemblance to her patient, so she used his passport to travel.

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Bootleggers with their tools to manufacture liquor.

Booze factory busted in Jleeb

Liquor peddler nabbed in Fintas

By Mansour Sultan
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times staff and **Agencies**

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: Personnel from the Criminal Investigation Department have arrested an unidentified person and seized from him 900 bottles of locally manufactured booze. The arrest took place when the suspect who was sitting behind the wheel of a mini bus, attempted to drive away when he saw a police vehicle. CID men intercepted the bus, forced it to stop, and arrested the driver. This happened in Fintas.

During interrogation the Asian admitted to manufacturing booze and selling each bottle for 11 dinars. Consequently, both the suspect and the confiscated alcohol were handed over to the Directorate-General for Drugs and Alcohol Control.

Meanwhile , the security authorities have busted a local booze manufacturing facility and took into custody three persons and seized bottles of booze ready for sale, distillation equipment and manufacturing tools in the Jleeb area, reports Al-Anba daily.

During the inspection campaigns organized by the General Administration of Residence Affairs Investigations the inspectors have also arrested 200 violators of residence and labor laws.

In a separate incident, three expats have been arrested for consuming drugs.

Devices installed

Biometrics for army

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: The Office of the Assistant Undersecretary for Public Security Affairs at the Ministry of Interior has started installing fingerprint devices for its military personnel, reports Al-Anba daily quoting a security source.

According to the source, the fingerprint devices will be installed at police stations and the six public security directorates later.

The source clarified that fingerprint devices have been installed in many sectors of the ministry, but these are for the civilian employees. He said several ministries and other public institutions have adopted the fingerprint attendance system to regulate the work mechanism and instill discipline among the employees.

Meanwhile , the Public Authority for Disabled Affairs (PADA) has announced that acting Director General of the authority Al-Humaidi Al-Mutairi will receive visitors every Wednesday -- from the beginning until the end of the work day -- to address their concerns, reports Al-Anba daily.

Gulf Cooperation Council strengthening ties

UAE and Bahrain Foreign Ministers 'congratulate' Kuwaiti counterpart

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18, (KUNA): Foreign Minister of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan phoned Kuwait's Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya Wednesday to congratulate him on the new post.

During the call, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed wished Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya all success in his post.

He stated that he looks forward to cooperating with the Kuwaiti minister to strengthen the bilateral fraternal relations, serve common interests and enhance joint action of the Gulf Cooperation Council member states.

Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya received a phone call on Thursday from Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain Dr. Abdullatif Al-Zayani, congratulating him on the new post.

During the call, Al-Zayani expressed his best wishes for Al-Yahya, saying he looks forward for cooperation that strengthens the bilateral relations, serves the interests of both countries and enhances joint Gulf action.

Sustainable plans for healthy environment

EPA and KFAS discuss partnership

KUNA photo

EPA's Deputy Director General of Technical Affairs Dr. Abdullah Al-Zaidan with Scientific Center officials.

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18, (KUNA): The Kuwait Environment Public Authority (EPA) and the Scientific Center of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences' (KFAS) discussed, Wednesday, means to reduce pollution and promote methods creating a healthy and vibrant ecosystem.

The over-a-decade strategic partnership with the Scientific Centre included several environmental projects that aimed to preserve the environment, as well as spread the environmental awareness as a shared societal responsibility, said EPA's Deputy Director General of Technical Affairs Dr. Abdullah Al-Zaidan to KUNA

The current joint project aims to promote biodiversity, protection of natural habitats, cultivating coral reefs in Kuwait, and other environmental projects, added Al-Zaidan.

KFAS's General Manager Musaed Al-Yaseen told KUNA that the partnership reflected keenness on spreading environmental awareness via developing sustainable plans for a healthy and safe environment.

Al-Mutairi addresses PWD concerns

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: Al-Humaidi Al-Mutairi, the Acting Director General of the Public Authority for the Affairs of People with Disabilities, designated Wednesdays to meet persons with disabilities, reports Al-Anba daily.

He will be available throughout the entire working day, and people can either schedule appointments through the "Meta platform" or walk in without prior notice.

During these meetings, Al-Mutairi attentively listen to the concerns of the clients and work towards streamlining their affairs, addressing challenges, and overcoming obstacles they may face.

Unknown circumstances delay reopening of Al-Hareem Souq

Anticipation builds as stalls await allocation

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: Souq Wajaf, also known as Souq Al-Hareem, is distinguished as one of Kuwait's renowned markets and has been in operation over the past 70 years, alongside other heritage markets in Souq Al-Mubarakiya and evolved through various stages, with the latest phase witnessing development, organization, and a new design, reports Al-Anba daily.

The name "Hareem Market" stems from customers where women vendors would sit on the floor, sell their locally crafted merchandise -- mainly produced by Kuwaiti women.

During this period, the municipality allocated stalls to eligible widows and divorcees. Despite the there has been a delay in distributing the stalls pending completion, prompting questions about the reasons for the holdup from concerned authorities.

In a recent visit to the market by the daily, several people shared their perspectives. Umm Muhammad, a second-generation Kuwaiti citizen with 40 years of experience in the market, emphasized the historical significance of the Harem Market, expressing anticipation for the impending distribution of the stalls.

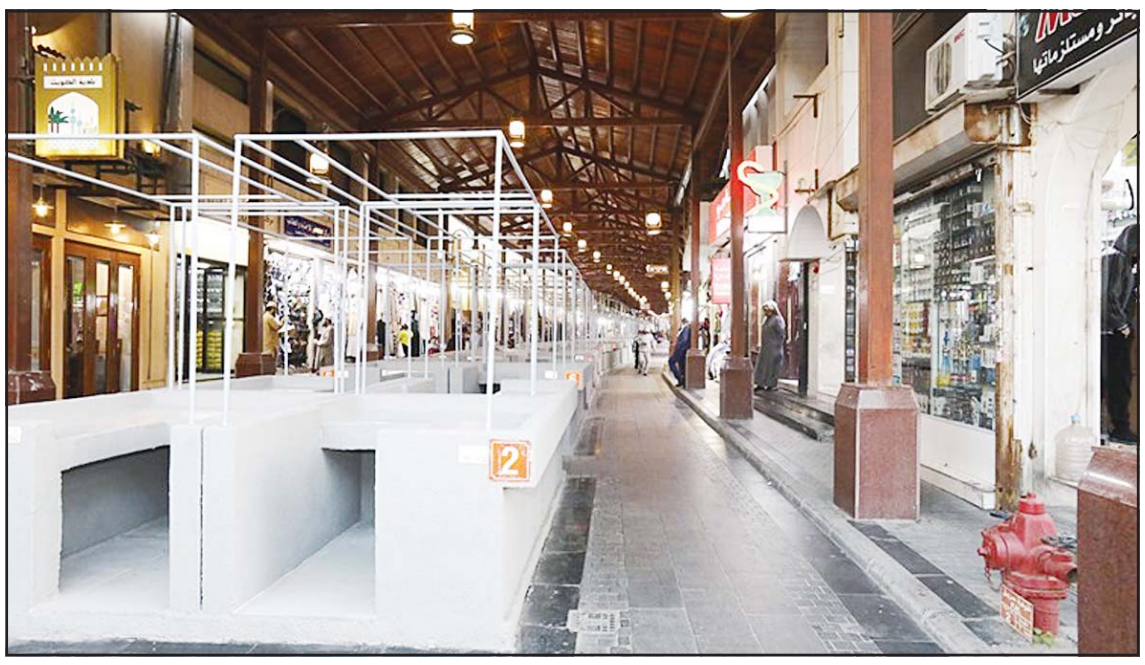
She mentioned that the company responsible for the market's development had handed it over to the municipality months ago, and the stalls, which number about 86, are awaiting distribution.

Reflecting on the market's past, Abdullah Al Balushi recalled its unique role as one of the cheapest markets, exclusively staffed by Kuwaiti women. He expressed hope that the stalls would soon be allocated to Kuwaiti women.

Salman Al-Rashoud from Saudi Arabia praised the Harem Market for its traditional offerings at unbelievable prices, highlighting Kuwait's enduring charm.

Muhammad Abdel Karim expressed his yearning for the reopened Harem Market and questioned the reasons for the delay in distributing stalls to deserving individuals. Another participant emphasized the Harem Market's historical role as a marketplace for grandmothers and mothers, recalling its simplicity, abundance of goods, and nominal prices.

Finally, Muhammad Al-Harbi acknowledged the Harem Market as a heritage market portrays Kuwait's history. He expressed hope for its reopening, suggesting that in its organized and developed form, it would regain its former splendor within the Mubarakiya market.



Souq Al-Hareem, Kuwait's renowned market place.

'Need for sustainable practices urgent'

Ministry launches second Gulf Forum to tackle rising environmental challenges

By Mohammed Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: The Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Eng. Maha Al-Asousi affirmed that the rates of wastage and environmental pollution have increased, something that most countries of the world suffer from, led by the Arab countries, as a result of the tremendous technological progress in all fields.

One of the most prominent dangers of this phenomenon is that it causes the spread of diseases, disruption in the ecosystem, subsequent climate change, desertification and global warming.

Eng. Al-Asousi said this during the launch of the Second Gulf Forum for Development and Sustainable Project Management by the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy yesterday morning under the patronage of the Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and the Minister of Public Works Dr. Jassim Al-Ostad at the Radisson Blu Hotel.

She stressed the need to work on developing the waste management system, raising the level of awareness, highlighting the latest methods in waste management, energy production and recyclable materials, supporting the idea of community participation to preserve the environment, and encouraging investment in the field of renewable energy and clean water.

Eng. Al-Asousi explained that this forum serves as an affirmation of the great interest that Kuwait attaches to achieving sustainable development, as well as to the issue of recycling waste, reducing its quantities, reusing it, generating energy, creating green smart cities, improving the quality of work outcomes that accompany it, and ensuring a system for risk and safety management, in accordance with the strategy of the State of Kuwait, and the New Kuwait 2025 vision.

Environmental catastrophe at Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh.

The forum aims to find the best solutions and technologies for the impacts resulting from population growth and the urban and economic development witnessed by the State of Kuwait and the Gulf countries.

The recycling process contributes to preserving the environment, reducing pollution, conserving resources and energy, reducing consumption, and raising the efficiency of production processes. It also protects the lands from harmful substances.

The forum also aims at raising the quality of work, and reducing risks related to occupational safety.

Eng Al-Asousi said, "We hope this forum and the activities held on its sidelines will yield the desired benefits, and that its lectures, presented by a group of scholars and local and international experts, will be of benefit."

Joint efforts for engineering excellence

KSE and PAAET reaffirm commitment to ensure 'constructive' cooperation

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: The Kuwait Society of Engineers (KSE) and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) have reaffirmed their commitment to ensure fruitful and constructive cooperation in the interest of both parties, and to enhance their role in serving the engineers and staff of the teaching and training institutions, reports Al-Anba daily.

KSE Chairman Eng Faisal Al-Atl revealed after his meeting with PAAET Director General Dr Hassan Al-Fajjam recently: "We are happy over this understanding and renewed interest in cooperation within the framework of the memorandum of cooperation between the authority and the Society. We highly appreciate the effort to meet the demand to include the location allowance for the employees of the authority in the salary certificate, provided the concerned engineer submits his application to PAAET."

Al-Attal added: "We are pleased with the Director General's interest in cooperating with the Society and his keenness to meet the demands of fellow engineers, especially those working in the training entity, in accordance with the decisions to disburse their allowances and develop the mechanisms for this disbursement. We highly appreciate the Director General's sponsorship of the lecture, "How to Build Your House?" that KSE will launch next March; as well as the first traffic safety forum, which the Society is organizing in cooperation with the Civil Engineering Department at the College of Technological Studies. We are happy that the Director General responded to the invitation of KSE to the upcoming Engineering Arbitration Conference and the Ninth International Engineering Workshop for the Health and Safety of Buildings, which the Society will hold in cooperation with the international organization 'ASHME' in February. I briefed the Director General of on the activities of the Society, their previous cooperation, and our readiness to strengthen this cooperation in accordance with the existing memorandum of cooperation between us in order to improve performance and support the provision of professionals that meet the manpower needs of the labor market and contribute to reducing dependence on non-Kuwaiti workers."

Talks led to six recommendations stressing importance of unified efforts

Women's society leads closed discussions on domestic violence laws

By Enas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: The Women's Cultural and Social Society recently organized closed discussions at its headquarters on the mechanisms for implementing and activating the law on protection from domestic violence in Kuwait, with the participation of all parties concerned with the law.

The discussions resulted in the formation of six recommendations, all of which emphasize the need for concerted efforts.

They were related to developing a mechanism for reporting domestic violence, increasing community awareness about the relevant law, enhancing organized and coordinated cooperation from all official bodies with the Supreme Family Council, generalizing the work according to its role and avoiding duplication between ministries, developing the preventive approach in dealing with issues of domestic violence, and activating codes for women and children in the law.

The participants in the discussions included the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, the Ministry of Interior's Community Police Sector, the Ministry of Health's Child Protection Office, the Ministry of Education's Department of Social and Psychological Services, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Department of Human Rights Affairs, and the National Assembly's Women and Family Affairs Committee.

Awareness

They highlighted the importance of the role of the Ministry of Information in raising community awareness about the law and providing protection for individuals.

They also stressed the importance of the role of the Ministry of Education in educating young people about the principles of human rights and instilling respect for the freedom, rights and safety of individuals, and rejecting violence as a disciplinary measure for any individual, regardless of their age or gender.

In a related development, the Secretary General of the Supreme Family Council Dr. Maryam Al-Azmi revealed that the closed session held at the invitation of the Women's Cultural and Social Society aimed at discussing ways to activate the domestic violence law No. 16/2020 and the executive regulations that were issued to implement what was stated in the law in September 2023.

She explained that the Supreme Family Council's participation in the session was aimed to clarify the mechanism adopted by the Supreme Family Council to implement the articles of the law and the council's commitment to the executive regulations.

It presented the achievements of the Supreme Family Council in compliance with the international obligations required to improve the indicators of the State of Kuwait on issues related to women and domestic violence.

In a press statement, Dr. Al-Azmi stressed that the council faced many challenges in its implementation of the domestic violence law.

Challenges

She said, "It is a natural thing for any law issued in any country, as there must be flaws in it or challenges facing it. With implementation, these flaws and challenges appear, but the council is in the process of overcoming them."

Dr. Al-Azmi highlighted the establishment of the domestic violence fund in record time and the controls and conditions that the Protection Department and the Supreme Council for Family Affairs must adhere to, adding that this aspect was discussed with the Women and Family Affairs Committee of the National Assembly, the Ministry of Finance and the General Secretariat for Family Affairs.

She added that coordination meetings were held with the Ministry of Finance to prepare the fund after addressing the points raised by the Ministry of Finance. Dr. Al-Azmi affirmed that the protection law covers all family members and is not directed only to women, adding that it includes foster children and orphans.

Indicating that there are clear definitions in the law, she stressed that the statistics are variable and not fixed, and the shelter home is a temporary home for care, adding that there are some cases that suffer from oppressive circumstances that take a longer time until all forms of care are provided by the Protection Department of Family Affairs.

Meanwhile, a member of the Women's Cultural and Social Society Haifa Al-Mousa said the problem of domestic violence exists in Kuwaiti society like it does in other societies.

She stressed that neglecting this problem for a long period becomes difficult to address according to the correct foundations, especially since the law is considered relatively recent as it was issued in 2020.

Al-Mousa explained that the society's panel discussion will contribute to better implementation of the law, especially since it includes all parties concerned with the law. The open discussion will enrich the mechanisms and programs for activating the law and applying it in the appropriate and best manner.

She emphasized the danger of violence in any society, based on the conviction that violence is a cycle that cannot be closed if it begins and will soon expand to fragmenting any society, due to which the problem of violence must be addressed from its beginning because violence is contagious.

KUNA photo

A meeting between KUNA Director-General Dr. Fatima Al-Salem and Peruvian Ambassador.

KUNA chief discusses media co-op with Peru, Turkiye envoys

Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Dr. Fatima Al-Salem on Thursday discussed with Peruvian and Turkish Ambassadors to the country modes of bolstering media cooperation and bilateral ties.

Dr. Al-Salem, meeting with each Ambassador separately, affirmed KUNA's intent on strengthening media cooperation with sisterly and friendly countries, contributing to the state's foreign policy.

On his part, Ambassador of Peru Carlos Mendiola hailed the Kuwaiti culture underling the necessity to extending cultural bridges between nations.

As for the Turkish Ambassador, Tuba Sonmez, she noted that this year marks the 60th anniversary of Kuwaiti-Turkish diplomatic relations, indicating that relations between the two nations are in constant state of development across various fields. (KUNA)

524 vacant leadership and supervisory positions in the educational institutions

New education minister faces long-standing issues

By Abdul Rahman Al-Shammari

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: The number of vacant leadership and supervisory positions in the educational institutions is approximately 524, the most important of which are the positions of undersecretaries, assistant undersecretaries, and directors.

With every new ministerial formation, educational institutions wait for someone to put them back on the right track, correct mistakes, and select competent people who are responsible for education and learners.

The new Minister of Education and Higher Education Dr. Adel Al-Adwani will be faced with the same chronic issues that these institutions suffer from, especially the vacancy file.

Educational sources called on the minister to resolve the issue of vacant positions, as it had contributed to mismanagement and confusion in managing educational tasks due to the lack of necessary leaders and employees in the required positions

The sources explained that the decision-maker in the education sector is the one who will decide to resolve the outstanding files.

This of course is linked to the extent of the minister's ability to end the wide vacancy file, which includes education leaders such as undersecretary and assistant undersecretaries, and reduce its negative impact on the completion of many other hot files due to the absence of leaders.

Among them are also the vacancies for supervisory positions, which urgently requires the creation of a different work mechanism during the next stage.

The most prominent features in this mechanism are harmony and joint cooperation, instead of individual work and unilateral decision-making, which resulted in severe harm to all pillars of the educational process.

Appointment

The sources stated that the Ministry of Education can be managed by appointment in these vacant leadership and supervisory positions, as filling them constitutes an important factor in the stability of the work and management of the ministry's affairs.

In addition, there are vacant positions for general directors in three educational zones - Jahra, Mubarak Al-Kabeer, and Farwaniya, which are central departments that gain great importance due to the responsibility of each of them for thousands of students, teachers, administrators, and hundreds of schools.

There are also no actual directors. The positions of Director of the Human Resources Department, Director of the Coordination Department, Director of the Supply and Warehousing Department and Director of the Public Services Department, and several other educational supervisory positions are actually vacant.

These positions are filled on acting capacity, and are awaiting a decision to fill them permanently.

Among the hot issues that the new minister must resolve is the vacancy of the position of director of the National Center for Educational Development, which has remained vacant for years despite the importance of the tasks included in the decree establishing it.

It is relied upon to formulate and develop education policies, but he has remained absent from the educational scene and requires activating his role and benefiting from the powers assigned to him by the decree establishing it. Likewise, we should not ignore the position of Secretary General of the Supreme Education Council, which also remained vacant.

The sources confirmed that the vacancies in Kuwait University, the Ministry of Higher Education, and the Higher Institute for Dramatic Arts, which are bodies under the responsibility of the new minister, require decisive and detailed decisions in order to ensure safety in each of these bodies.

It is a great responsibility, and Minister Dr. Al-Adwani is relied upon to address its parties and resolve

Long-standing and neutral diplomacy

Bangladesh envoy lauds Kuwait's influential and humanitarian role

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: Ambassador of Bangladesh to Kuwait Major General MD Ashikuzzaman has affirmed the strength, depth and durability of Bangladeshi-Kuwaiti relations; which he described as excellent and historic, considering their development at all levels and various fields of cooperation for the benefit of their citizens, reports Al-Anba daily.

In an exclusive interview with the daily, Ashikuzzaman pointed out that Kuwait, with its long-standing and neutral diplomacy, plays an influential role in resolving conflicts and promoting peace regionally and internationally. He praised Kuwait's humanitarian role in alleviating the pain of victims of natural and humanitarian disasters, stressing this role is appreciated by the international community.

He affirmed: "Kuwait has always been generous and active on the humanitarian front, and its contributions to alleviating the pain and suffering of those affected by natural and humanitarian disasters in various parts of the world are globally appreciated, and we highly appreciate its efforts in helping Bangladesh."

He asserted that Bangladesh and Kuwait share common values and visions on many files and issues in the regional and international arenas, while supporting each other in international forums. He said the total volume of trade exchange between the two countries amounted to $154 million, admitting this amount does not meet the level of ambition and the embassy is striving to increase it.

He also disclosed that the total volume of projects implemented by Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) in Bangladesh amounted to $900 million; confirming that military cooperation with Kuwait is distinguished and that more than 5,000 Bangladeshis are working with the Kuwaiti Army.

He added: "We have 18 agreements and memorandums of understanding that govern bilateral relations between the two countries and represent the legal framework for them, covering various areas of bilateral cooperation. During the past months, we signed a memorandum of understanding in the field of medical care with the Ministry of Health to provide physician assistants and paramedics from Bangladesh, as per the request of Kuwait. We also offered to provide female domestic workers. As soon as Kuwait submits its request, we will prepare a memorandum of understanding to supply female domestic workers. This will be studied thoroughly and all the elements of protection will be provided to the workers."

He said the Consular Section at the embassy issued 900 visas for different nationalities, not Kuwaitis, from January 2023 till date. "In terms of supporting and promoting tourism in Bangladesh, we intend to organize a tourism event in March to bring more tourists to Bangladesh and help Kuwaitis discover Bangladesh, which boasts of attractive nature and ancient historical places," he revealed.

He also praised the long-standing and neutral Kuwaiti diplomacy, pointing out that Kuwait plays an influential role regionally and internationally through its pioneering mediation in resolving conflicts and bringing peace. "Kuwait took the initiative to recognize Bangladesh as an independent State, which opened the way for us to obtain recognition from other Gulf states," he concluded.

Parliament speaker,

Continued from Page 1

The Assembly endorsed the authorization of the Executive Committee to approve the final accounts of the Caucus for the period from Jan 1, 2023 to December 31, 2023; as well as its budget that began on Jan 1, 2024 and will end on May 31, 2025; and the reports of conferences and meetings that took place during the period from July 2023 to Dec 2023.

Meanwhile, MP Khaled Al-Mounis has affirmed his commitment to push for the approval of bills and proposals scheduled for the current session, in agreement with the previous government.

Addressing His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Al-Mounis said: "If you or your government have something better than these previously agreed-upon bills, we will welcome them, and we will support their approval. If not, you and the government must cooperate with us and adhere to our specific legislative schedule for approving bills included in the parliamentary agenda. We all hope to achieve progress for the nation and prosperity for the citizen. We remind you that we came bearing popular demands and entitlements that we see as enforceable rights, and we no longer have the luxury of waiting for their approval. Therefore, by virtue of your position as Prime Minister, and by virtue of our political position as representatives of the will of the nation, we are committed to their approval."

He also stressed the need to put combating corruption on top of the new government's priorities.

In addition, MP Marzouq Al-Ghanim called on His Highness the Prime Minister to combat corruption, expose it and consider it one of his top priorities, and to start with the actions of the Prime Minister and his office, especially the financial before the administrative ones.

He asked HH the Prime Minister about the total appropriations for the 'secret special expenses' item allocated for the Office of His Highness the Prime Minister in the budget of the Secretariat General of the Council of Ministers for fiscals 2022/2023 and 2023/2024) for each fiscal year separately, and the total amounts expended as a deduction from the item for each of the aforementioned fiscal years until the date of responding to the query. He also inquired about the number and date of the disbursement form, indicating the value for which it was allocated must be clearly stated.

He also inquired: When disbursing the 'secret special expenses' item, was there a commitment not to exceed the limits of the appropriations? If yes, please provide the total amount disbursed and the ways of disbursement. He requested for copies of the approved rules and procedures for disbursing the appropriations under this item.

He asked: Who ordered the disbursement? What is the organizational unit, according to the organizational structure of the Secretariat General of the Council of Ministers, which is responsible for auditing, verifying the authenticity and safety of disbursement, and applying the approved rules and procedures for disbursement? Were the amounts deducted from the item spent for the purposes for which they were allocated and in line with public interest and the rules of implementing the budget? Were the amounts taken from the item spent for people, entities or news accounts on social media sites? If yes, please provide the names of the people, entities or news accounts; and amounts disbursed to each of them, along with a statement of the purpose of the disbursement and justifications.

He continued inquiring: Were your Highness reassured of the soundness of the procedures for what was disbursed from the item, and that what was disbursed was within the limits of the financial appropriation established and approved in the budget and that the disbursement was consistent with the purposes stated in the budget? In the event of non-compliance and deviation from the purposes, he requested for the total amount disbursed and the aspects of their disbursement, the legal measures taken against the person responsible for this, and whether new rules have been established for disbursing secret private expenses in order to avoid the recurrence of such violations and deviations in the future.

He inquired about the total amount disbursed from the item in the period starting from the issuance of the Constitutional Court's ruling to annul the 2022 Assembly on March 19, 2023 until the opening session of the 2023 Assembly on June 20, 2023? He requested for details of disbursement, their justifications, the people and entities to whom those amounts were spent. He asked about the total amount disbursed from the item within the period from the time MP Muhalhal Al-Mudhaf submitted a grilling motion to His Highness the former Prime Minister on Nov 16, 2023 until the interrogation was discussed on Nov 28. He requested for details of disbursement, their justifications, and the persons and the parties to whom these amounts were disbursed.

He asked: Did the Office of His Highness the Prime Minister disburse any amounts deducted from the financial appropriations allocated to government agencies included in the general budget of the State? Were they disbursed by His Highness's Office for the same purposes allocated under the item?

Oil minister

Continued from Page 1

The Durra offshore field, which contains a high amount of gas reserves estimated at about 20 trillion cubic feet, needs important attention and faster activation by the new minister through discussion and consultation with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia because it will be one of the most important sources of income for the country in the next stage. There is also the necessity to thwart any chances for any parties to claim a right to this field.

Moody's confident

Continued from Page 1

projects in non-oil sectors, as per Al-Anba daily.

In general, the financial situation appears stable for most Middle East and North Africa governments. While some may experience slight deficits or surpluses, weaker sovereigns could encounter financial and liquidity challenges, particularly with high interest rates and restricted capital flows to emerging markets.

Sovereign government debt burdens are expected to remain stable, except for Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar. Oman and Qatar prioritize debt repayment, while Kuwait lacks new public debt legislation in 2024.

Kuwait deportation

Continued from Page 1

Article One: Resolution No. 288/2020 shall be cancelled.

Article Two: The acting Undersecretary must implement this decision."

Meanwhile, reliable sources clarified that the decision to cancel the resolution issued in 2020 on not allowing violators of the Residency Law to amend their legal status excludes violators of various types of visas -- family visits or others, and they must pay the fines imposed on them and leave the country.

Sources explained that the decision allows violators of the Residency Law to amend their legal status and obtain a valid residency permit, provided they pay the fine imposed on them – maximum of KD600.

Sources disclosed security campaigns carried out last year resulted in the arrest of about 43,000 violators of the Residency Law and a directive has been issued for their deportation. Sources clarified that about 120,000 violators of the Residency Law will benefit from this decision as they will be allowed to amend their status.

Israeli strike

Continued from Page 1

Dr. Talat Barhoum at Rafah's el-Najjar Hospital confirmed the death toll from the strike in Rafah and said dozens more were wounded. Associated Press footage from the hospital showed relatives weeping over the bodies of loved ones.

"They were suffering from hunger, they were dying from hunger, and now they have also been hit," said Mahmoud Qassim, a relative of some of those who were killed.

Internet and mobile services in Gaza have been down for five days, the longest of several outages during the war, according to internet access advocacy group NetBlocks. The outages complicate rescue efforts and make it difficult to obtain information about the latest strikes and casualties.

The war has rippled across the Middle East, with Iran-backed groups attacking U.S. and Israeli targets. Low-intensity fighting between Israel and Hezbollah militants in Lebanon threatens to erupt into all-out war, and Houthi rebels in Yemen continue to target international shipping despite United States-led airstrikes.

The Israeli military said it fired an interceptor at a "suspicious aerial target" - likely a drone or missile - approaching over the Red Sea on Thursday, triggering air raid sirens in the southern Israeli coastal city of Eilat. The Houthis have launched drones and missiles toward Israel that mostly fell short or were intercepted and shot down.

Iran has meanwhile launched a series of missile attacks targeting what it described as an Israeli spy base in Iraq and militant bases in Syria as well as in Pakistan, which carried out reprisal strikes against what it described as militant hideouts in Iran early Thursday.

It was not clear if the strikes in Syria and Pakistan were related to the Gaza war. But they showcased Iran's ability to carry out long-range missile attacks at a time of heightened tensions with Israel and the U.S., which has provided crucial support for the Gaza offensive and carried out its own strikes against Iran-allied groups in Syria and Iraq.

Israel has vowed to dismantle Hamas to ensure it can never repeat an attack like the one on Oct. 7. Militants burst through Israel's border defenses and stormed through several communities that day, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 hostage.

Israel has also vowed to return all the hostages remaining in captivity after more than 100 - mostly women and children - were released during a November cease-fire in exchange for the release of scores of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Family members and supporters were marking the first birthday of Kfir Bibas, the youngest Israeli hostage, in a somber ceremony Thursday in Tel Aviv.

The red-haired infant and his 4-year-old brother Ariel were captured along with their mother, Shiri, and their father, Yarden. All four remain in captivity.

World News Roundup

Europe

Li visits Ireland

Russia FM rejects US offer to resume talks

MOSCOW, Jan 18, (AP): Russia's top diplomat dismissed the United States proposal to resume a dialogue on nuclear arms control, saying Thursday that it's impossible while Washington offers military support to Ukraine.

Speaking at an annual news conference, **Sergey Lavrov** accused the West of fueling global security risks by encouraging Ukraine to ramp up strikes on the Russian territory and warned that Moscow will achieve its goals in the conflict regardless of Western support for Kyiv.

Commenting on a US proposal to resume contacts in the sphere of nuclear arms control, Lavrov said that Moscow has rejected the offer. He said that for such talks to be held, Washington first needs to revise its current policy toward Russia.

Lavrov

Lavrov charged that Washington's push for the revival of nuclear talks has been driven by a desire to resume inspections of Russia's nuclear weapons sites. He described such U.S. demands as "indecent" in view of Ukraine's attacks on Russian nuclear-capable bomber bases during the conflict.

"Amid a 'hybrid war' waged by Washington against Russia, we aren't seeing any basis, not only for any additional joint measures in the sphere of arms control and reduction of strategic risks, but for any discussion of strategic stability issues with the US," he said. "We firmly link such possibility to the West fully renouncing its malicious course aimed at undermining Russia's security and interests."

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China and Ireland seek stronger ties: Ireland's prime minister extended a warm welcome to visiting Chinese Premier Li Qiang on Wednesday, saying his country wanted a "strong and constructive relationship" with China despite not agreeing on some issues.

Prime Minister Leo Varadkar and Li, China's No. 2 leader and a close confidant of Chinese President Xi Jinping, struck an upbeat note after a bilateral meeting.

"There is huge potential in our cooperation," Li said.

Troops formed a guard of honor outside Ireland's state guest house to greet Li. A military band played as he inspected the soldiers.

Ireland was the third European country Li has visited since he was appointed as China's top economic official last March.

He made the European Union the destination for his first trip abroad last summer, visiting Germany and France, Europe's leading economies, amid growing calls for the European Union to "de-risk" - avoid overreliance on Chinese trade - and tensions over Beijing's stance on Russia's war in Ukraine.

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Charles to have prostate op next week: King Charles III and the Princess of Wales are both dealing with medical issues that will force them to delay previously planned public engagements over the coming weeks.

Charles will undergo a "corrective procedure" for an enlarged prostate next week, Buckingham Palace said on Wednesday. The palace said the king's condition is benign.

Moments earlier, the princess' office announced that Kate would remain at a private hospital in London for up to two weeks after undergoing planned abdominal surgery. The princess, formerly Kate Middleton, is the wife of Prince William, the heir to the throne.

While it is somewhat unusual for members of the royal family to release details about their health, the twin announcements may help to avoid speculation if events featuring Charles or Kate have to be postponed or canceled over the coming weeks.

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Lawmakers pass bill to send migrants to Rwanda: UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak quelled a Conservative Party rebellion and got his stalled plan to send some asylum-seekers on a one-way trip to Rwanda through the House of Commons on Wednesday.

Lawmakers voted 320 to 276 to back a bill intended to overcome a UK Supreme Court block on the Rwanda plan. But the contentious immigration policy on which Sunak has staked his authority still faces political and legal hurdles. And Sunak remains at the helm of a divided and demoralized party that is lagging in the polls.

The vote came a day after some 60 members of Sunak's governing Conservatives rebelled in an effort to make the legislation tougher. The dissent cost Sunak two party deputy chairmen, who quit in order to vote against the government.

But when it came to a vote on the bill as a whole, the rebellion melted away, and only 11 Conservatives voted against the legislation.

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Immigration challenges talks to form govt: Delicate talks to create a new Dutch government around anti-Islam firebrand Geert Wilders suffered a setback Wednesday when a lingering immigration issue divided the parties involved in brokering a coalition.

"We have a problem," Wilders told reporters in The Hague, the morning after a decision by senators from a key Dutch political party involved in the coalition talks to back legislation that could force municipalities to house asylum-seekers.

People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) senators threw their support behind the proposal Tuesday night. The lower house of parliament already has approved the plan, known as the "Distribution Law," that aims to more fairly spread thousands of asylum-seekers around the country. Wilders strongly opposes it.

Wilders' Party for Freedom, or PVV, won the most seats in the election, putting him in the driving seat to form a new coalition after four previous administrations led by outgoing VVD leader Mark Rutte.

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Ethnic Serbs hold petition drive: Ethnic Serbs in northern Kosovo held a signature drive Wednesday in hopes of securing enough to oust four ethnic Albanian mayors whose elections last year sent tensions between Serbia and Kosovo soaring.

Groups of people were seen going to sport halls or other areas to sign petitions in the municipalities of Northern Mitrovica and Leposavic. The drive is expected to start soon Zvecan and Zubin Potok, two other municipalities in the north where most of Kosovo's ethnic Serb minority lives.

Supporters of new municipal elections need the signatures of at least 20% of eligible voters.

Jose Peralta, with the Oregon Department of Forestry, uses a chainsaw to cut a downed tree into smaller pieces after it fell on a car and a home on Jan 13, in Portland, Ore. (AP)

Power line falls on car during Oregon ice storm, killing 3 and hurting a baby

A power line fell on a parked car in northeast Portland, Oregon, on Wednesday, killing three people and injuring a baby during an ice storm that turned roads and mountain highways treacherous in the Pacific Northwest.

Shortly before noon, dispatchers started receiving frantic calls about a downed power line and people appearing to be electrocuted, according to a statement from the city's fire department. A branch had fallen on a power line, causing it to fall onto an SUV, the statement said.

As the chaotic situation unfolded, a resident grabbed the baby from one of the people lying in the street in a bid to save its life, according to the statement. The three killed - two adults and one teenager - were found dead upon firefighters' arrival, and the baby was taken to a hospital. It is believed the victims were electrocuted after they got out of the vehicle, the statement said.

The power company later deenergized the line, the statement added without specifying which company.

Around Portland, driving and even walking were virtually impossible as slick ice coated roads and sidewalks. Icicles dangled from roofs and cars, and ice encased branches, plants and leaves like thick glass.

A large swath of the region was under warnings Wednesday for as much as 1 inch (2.5 centimeters) of ice, promising only to add to the damage wrought by a deadly, powerful storm that hit over the weekend. The warning area was reduced later in the morning to parts of southwest Washington and northwest Oregon, including Portland, and further limited to the western edge of the Columbia River Gorge in the afternoon. (AP)

Chinese Premier Li Qiang, (right), is greeted by Ireland's President Michael D. Higgins at his official residence Aras an Uachtarain, during a visit to Dublin, Ireland, on Jan. 17. Li is visiting for talks on China's relations with the European Union and other global and bilateral issues. (AP)

Kaplan

Mack

America

Judge threatens to boot Trump: Donald Trump was threatened with expulsion from his Manhattan civil trial Wednesday after he repeatedly ignored a warning to keep quiet while writer E. Jean Carroll testified that he shattered her reputation after she accused him of sexual abuse.

Judge **Lewis A. Kaplan** told the former president that his right to be present at the trial will be revoked if he remains disruptive. After an initial warning, Carroll's lawyer said Trump could still be heard making remarks to his lawyers, including "it is a witch hunt" and "it really is a con job."

"Mr Trump, I hope I don't have to consider excluding you from the trial," Kaplan said in an exchange after the jury was excused for lunch, adding: "I understand you're probably very eager for me to do that." (AP)

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Man kills self after killing 4: A man fatally shot his estranged wife and three other relatives, including his 8-year-old niece, at a home in suburban Houston over the weekend before killing himself, authorities said Wednesday.

Alrick "Shawn" Barrett, 46, opened fire at the home just before 7 a.m. Saturday after returning his young child from a visit, Fort Bend County Sheriff Eric Fagan said at a news conference. Fagan said that after arriving at the home, Barrett told his estranged wife that he wanted to reunite, but she refused.

Deputies responded to the home after getting a call from a 13-year-old boy in the home, Fagan said. The sheriff's office said the teen is Barrett's nephew. (AP)

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Politics

DNC drama, Biden write-ins promise primary to remember

DeSantis shifts campaign away from NH

HAMPTON, NH, Jan 18, (AP): Ron DeSantis has decided to shift his presidential campaign away from New Hampshire just six days before the state's first-in-the-nation Republican primary while his leading super PAC executes another round of layoffs, moves that reflect the Florida governor's rapidly shrinking path to the 2024 GOP nomination.

DeSantis won't ignore the state completely over the coming days, but he's reallocating the majority of his staff to South Carolina, the home state of rival Nikki Haley, with its primary in just over a month. That's according to senior campaign officials who spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity to share internal discussions.

Strategy

At the same time, the pro-DeSantis super PAC Never Back Down has transferred several of its Iowa staffers to other early states, while laying off the rest. It's unclear exactly how many people were laid off, although a super PAC official speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal strategy said those who lost their jobs would be paid through the end of January.

The strategic shifts by DeSantis' operation underscore his weakness in the 2024 Republican nomination race after he finished a distant second to front-runner Donald Trump in Iowa's caucuses Monday. DeSantis had made Iowa the centerpiece of his White House bid, yet Trump bested him by 30 percentage points there. Haley finished 2 percentage points behind DeSantis.

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Is a New Hampshire primary without the frontrunner on the ballot and no delegates up for grabs still a New Hampshire primary? Depends on who you ask.

On Tuesday, voters in the Granite State will once again help kick off the presidential primary season, on the heels of the Iowa caucuses that began the nomination process on the Republican side Monday. But this year, there's something different about the traditional first-in-the-nation primary, at least on the Democratic side.

For starters, the Democratic National Committee (DNC), which has the ultimate say in how its presidential nominee will be picked, says state party officials violated national party rules by scheduling its contest earlier than allowed. As a result, the primary will have zero delegates at stake on Tuesday. Normally, the contest would have determined how the state's original allotment of 23 pledged delegates to the presidential nominating convention in Chicago this summer would be allocated to the various candidates.

Biden talks Ukraine aid & border deal with congressional leaders at the WH

WASHINGTON, Jan 18, (AP): US President Joe Biden hosted top congressional leaders at the White House to underscore Ukraine's security needs as it continues to fight Russia's nearly two-year-old invasion, hoping to add momentum to efforts to pass $110 billion in stalled aid to Ukraine, Israel and other US allies.

Speaker Mike Johnson, in one of his few direct encounters with the president, used the face-to-face moment to push Biden for tougher border security measures, with the speaker telling him that GOP lawmakers were demanding "substantive policy change" and insisting that the White House's executive actions on immigration had weakened the border.

The dueling focus from the two leaders highlighted the precarious nature of the complicated talks to unlock Ukraine aid, which is hinging on negotiations to enact tougher measures at the U.S.-Mexico border to satisfy Republicans who are otherwise hesitant about sending more aid abroad.

While Biden, Johnson and other lawmakers who went to the White House agree broadly on continuing to support Kyiv and implementing restrictions at the border, the two sides have remained at odds on details, with the speaker pushing the White House and Senate negotiators on immigration measures that go beyond what Biden is willing to accept.

14 workers hospitalized: Blood tests of a construction worker who collapsed Wednesday outside a building owned by Yale University led emergency crews to uncover potentially lethal levels of carbon monoxide inside. Another 13 people were hospitalized, but the discovery may have prevented a much larger catastrophe, officials said.

"There was a disaster averted here," said Rick Fontana, New Haven's emergency operations director. "You could have had a lot more sick or a lot more death had this gone on for a longer period of time."

Emergency crews initially thought they were responding to a "regular medical call" Wednesday morning when they brought the collapsed unconscious man to the hospital, Fontana said. However, an hour-and-a-half later, the hospital informed them that the worker had extremely high levels of carbon monoxide in his bloodstream. (AP)

A woman cries as she leaves the Uvalde Civic Center on May 24, 2022, in Uvalde, Texas, after a mass shooting. A federal report into the halting and haphazard law enforcement response to a school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, was scheduled to be released on Jan 18, reviving scrutiny of the hundreds of officers who responded to the 2022 massacre but waited more than an hour to confront and kill the gunman. (AP)

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Woman gets 26 years: An American woman who pleaded guilty to helping kill her own mother and stuffing the body in a suitcase during a luxury vacation in Bali was sentenced in Chicago Wednesday to 26 years in prison.

Federal prosecutors had recommended a 28-year prison sentence for **Heather Mack** for conspiring with her boyfriend to kill Sheila von Wiese-Mack in 2014.

Mack's attorney Michael Leonard said he expects Mack, 28, will be locked up for roughly 20 years including good behavior credits available to all federal prisoners. His estimate also accounts for the judge giving Mack credit for the two-plus years she spent in custody in Chicago after completing a jail term in Indonesia. She was deported to the U.S. in 2021.

Before her sentence was read, Mack apologized to her mother's siblings through tears. (AP)

Tourists take a picture with the skyline of Singapore, on Nov. 6, 2023. Singaporean Transport Minister S. Iswaran was charged on Jan 18, in the first ministerial corruption case ever seen in the Asian financial hub known for squeaky clean government. (AP)

Lat/Am

Prosecutor killed

US bars Guatemala ex-prez from entry

GUATEMALA CITY, Jan 18, (AP): The US State Department barred former Guatemalan president **Alejandro Giammattei** from entering the United States, accusing him of "significant corruption" three days after he left office.

The Biden administration had become increasingly critical of Giammattei's administration as Guatemalan prosecutors sought to head off Sunday's inauguration of new President Bernardo Arévalo, who has vowed to crack down on corruption.

"The State Department has credible information indicating that Giammattei accepted bribes in exchange for the performance of his public functions during his tenure as president of Guatemala, actions that undermined the rule of law and government transparency," State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement.

Giammattei

Corruption allegations swirled around Giammattei for much of his term, but prosecutors who received the accusations were pushed out by Attorney General Consuelo Porras - herself already sanctioned by the US government - and the inquiries did not advance.

Warned

The US assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Brian A. Nichols, had warned last week that the US government would continue identifying and holding accountable those who tried to undermine Guatemala's democracy.

Giammattei had maintained in the months before the inauguration that the prosecutors' cases against Arévalo and his party were not politically motivated and that because of the separation of powers he could not intervene. Publicly he said the transition of power was advancing.

Critics said that during Giammattei's four-year term, much of the more than decade of work by a United Nations-supported anti-corruption commission and Guatemalan prosecutors was undone. The local prosecutors and judges who worked with the UN became the hunted, with dozens fleeing the country and those who didn't getting locked up and facing charges.

The US government has sanctioned hundreds of Guatemalan officials and private citizens accused of undermining the country's democracy. Earlier in President Joe Biden's term, Vice President Kamala Harris visited Guatemala and said unchecked corruption was a factor driving Guatemalans to emigrate.

A number of public legal complaints were filed against Giammattei during his administration alleging corruption, especially around the opaque purchase of Russian Covid-19 vaccines during the pandemic.

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Prosecutor killed in Guayaquil: A prosecutor investigating a dramatic attack on the set of a public television channel last week was shot to death Wednesday in Guayaquil, the most dangerous city in Ecuador.

Prosecutor César Suárez, who had carried out other high-profile investigations in the past, was shot while driving a vehicle, Attorney General Diana Salazar said.

"Organized crime groups, criminals, terrorists will not stop our commitment to society," she said in a video broadcast on X, formerly Twitter.

Thirteen alleged perpetrators have been arrested in the assault at TC Television, which was broadcast live and led President Daniel Noboa to declare that Ecuador is in an "internal armed conflict" amid a surge of killings and other crimes tied to drug trafficking.

Suárez was also in charge of the Metastasis case involving an Ecuadorian drug lord who allegedly received favorable treatment from judges, prosecutors, police officers and high officials.

Ecuadorian police said they were working to find those responsible for the murder of Suárez.

Ecuador has been rocked by a series of attacks, including the abductions of several police officers, in the wake of a notorious gang leader's apparent weekend escape from prison.

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Trinidad police probe shooting: A shooting on the eastern Caribbean island of Trinidad left three people dead and five others wounded, police said Wednesday.

The violence occurred late Tuesday in the northwest town of Morvant when a van drove up to a group of men gathered outdoors and opened fire, police told reporters.

The conditions of the wounded weren't immediately known. It wasn't immediately clear what led to the shooting, although police are investigating whether it was gang-related. No arrests have been made.

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Blue Adventures owner launches probe: The owner that operates a diving experience in the Bahamas where a 10-year-old boy from Maryland was attacked by a shark this week said late Wednesday that an internal investigation is underway.

Stuart Cove, of Blue Adventures, said in a statement that his company is cooperating with police and that the diving experience has temporarily closed.

"Incidents like this involving interactions with marine life, even with the species of sharks included in this experience, are rare and never acceptable," he said.

Police said the unidentified boy was bitten on his right leg Monday and was taken to a hospital for treatment.

Cove said a dive instructor and a dive guide were in the water when the incident occurred and that they provided immediate medical attention.

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Gunmen abduct volunteer searcher: Gunmen burst into a home in central Mexico and abducted one of the volunteer searchers looking for the country's 114,000 disappeared and killed her husband and son, authorities said Wednesday.

Search activist Lorenza Cano was abducted from her home in the city of Salamanca, in the north central state of Guanajuato, which has the highest number of homicides in Mexico.

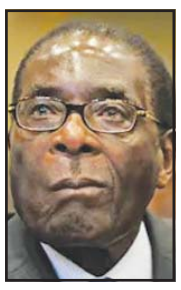
Cano's volunteer group, Salamanca United in the Search for the Disappeared, said late Tuesday the gunmen shot Cano's husband and adult son in the attack the previous day.

State prosecutors confirmed husband and son were killed, and that Cano remained missing.

At least seven volunteer searchers have been killed in Mexico since 2021. The volunteer searchers often conduct their own investigations -often relying on tips from former criminals - because the government has been unable to help.

Rescue workers sit on the rubble of a building at the site of an explosion in Ibadan, Nigeria, on Jan. 17. Three people died and 77 others were injured overnight when an explosives rocked more than 20 buildings in one of Nigeria's largest cities, authorities said Wednesday. (AP)

Erdelmann



Mugabe

Africa

2.7m Zimbabweans need food aid: The UN World Food Program said Wednesday that it was working with Zimbabwe's government and aid agencies to provide food to 2.7 million rural people in the country as the El Nino weather phenomenon contributes to a drought crisis in southern Africa.

Food shortages putting nearly 20% of Zimbabwe's population at risk of hunger have been caused by poor harvests in drought-ravaged areas where people rely on small-scale farming to eat. El Nino is expected to compound that by causing below-average rainfall again this year, said **Francesca Erdelmann**, WFP country director for Zimbabwe.

El Nino is a natural and recurring weather phenomenon that warms parts of the Pacific, affecting weather patterns around the world. It has different impacts in different regions.

When rains fail or come late, it has a significant impact, Erdelmann told a news conference.

January to March is referred to as the lean season in Zimbabwe, when rural households run out of food while waiting for the next harvest.

More than 60% of Zimbabwe's 15 million people live in rural areas. Their life is increasingly affected by a cycle of drought and floods aggravated by climate change.

Dry spells are becoming longer and more severe. For decades, Zimbabwe's rainy season reliably ran from October to March. It has become erratic in recent years, sometimes starting only in December and ending sooner.

Once an exporter of food, Zimbabwe has relied heavily on assistance from donors to feed its people in recent years. Agricultural production also fell sharply after the seizures of white-owned farms under former president **Robert Mugabe** starting in 2000 but had begun to recover.

The United States Agency for International Development, the US government's foreign aid agency, has estimated through its Famine Early Warning Systems Network that 20 million people in southern Africa will need food relief between January and March. Many people in the areas of highest concern such as Zimbabwe, southern Malawi, parts of Mozambique and southern Madagascar will be unable to feed themselves into early 2025 due to El Nino, USAID said.. (AP)

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Kenya embarks on huge 'project': Kenya has embarked on its biggest rhino relocation project and began the difficult work Tuesday of tracking, darting and moving 21 of the critically endangered beasts, which can each weigh over a ton, to a new home.

A previous attempt at moving rhinos in the East African nation was a disaster in 2018 as all 11 of the animals died.

The latest project experienced early troubles. A rhino targeted for moving was successfully hit with a tranquilizer dart shot from a helicopter but ended up in a creek. Veterinarians and rangers held the rhino's head above water with a rope to save it while a tranquilizer reversal drug took effect, and the rhino was released.

Wildlife officials have stressed that the challenging project will take time, likely weeks.

The black rhinos are a mix of males and females and are being moved from three conservation parks to the private Loisaba Conservancy in central Kenya, the Kenya Wildlife Service said. They are being moved because there are too many in the three parks and they need more space to roam and, hopefully, to breed.

Rhinos are generally solitary animals and are at their happiest in large territories.

Kenya has had relative success in reviving its black rhino population, which dipped below 300 in the mid-1980s because of poaching, raising fears that the animals might be wiped out in a country famous for its wildlife.

Kenya now has nearly 1,000 black rhinos, according to the wildlife service. That's the third biggest black rhino population in the world behind South Africa and Namibia.

There are just 6,487 wild rhinos left in the world, according to rhino conservation charity Save The Rhino, all of them in Africa. (AP)

Asia

SKorea, US condemn NKorea's military provocations

China, Philippines agree to lower tensions

BANGKOK, Jan 18, (Agencies): China and the Philippines said they have agreed to work on lowering tensions after a year of public and tense confrontations in the South China Sea between their ships that have raised concerns of armed engagement in the region.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Thursday that the two sides agreed to continue to improve communication and use friendly negotiations to manage their differences at sea, "especially to manage well the situation at Ren'Ai reef."

Ren'Ai reef is the Chinese name for what the Philippines call Ayungin Shoal and the US calls the Second Thomas Shoal, the site of multiple confrontations between the two countries' ships in recent months.

Dangerous

In November, Manila said that a Chinese coast guard ship and accompanying vessels conducted dangerous maneuvers and blasted a Philippine supply ship with a water cannon in disputed waters. China disputed the account, saying it acted appropriately.

China and the Philippines said they agreed to limit tensions at a meeting on the South China Sea on Wednesday in Shanghai, the eighth in a series that began in 2017.

"The two sides had frank and productive discussions to de-escalate the situation in the South China Sea and both sides agreed to calmly deal with incidents, if any, through diplomacy," the Philippines' Department of Foreign Affairs said in a statement Wednesday.

The territorial disputes in the South China Sea are widely seen as a potential flashpoint for armed conflict. Multiple countries have claimed waters in the South China Sea, including Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam, Malaysia and China.

Whether efforts to lower tensions last is to be seen.

China is angry after Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr congratulated the winner of Taiwan's recent presidential election on Monday. Taiwan, a self-ruled island claimed by China, chose a candidate from a party that considers Taiwan independent. China's Foreign Ministry summoned the Philippine's ambassador to lodge their complaints.

China objects to any official engagement with Taiwan's government, viewing it as an acknowledgement of sovereignty.

Philippine Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs Theresa Lazaro and Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Nong Rong held the eighth meeting to discuss the bilateral consultation mechanism on South China Sea disputes and to alleviate and manage the ongoing tensions between both countries.

The meeting, held in the Chinese city of Shanghai yesterday, Thursday, followed the November 2023 agreement in San Francisco between Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr and Chinese President Xi Jinping, with a subsequent phone call between Foreign Ministers Enrique Manalo and Wang Yi in December 2023, the Philippine Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement.

Also:

TOKYO: The chief nuclear envoys of South Korea and the US condemned **North Korea**'s continued military provocations and belligerent rhetoric on Thursday, Seoul's foreign ministry said, according to Yonhap News Agency.

The meeting in Seoul between **South Korea**'s Special Representative for Korean Peninsula peace and security affairs **Kim Gunn** and **US** Special Representative for North Korea **Jung Pak** took place ahead of their trilateral meeting with their Japanese counterpart **Hiroyuki Namazu** set for later in the day.

"They vowed stern responses based on the firm bilateral alliance and agreed to act sternly with the international community against the military cooperation between Pyongyang and Moscow that jeopardizes global security," the ministry said in a press release.

The talks came as the North has been stepping up bellicose rhetoric, such as leader **Kim Jong-un** denouncing the South as an "invariable enemy" and threatening to completely occupy the South in the event of war earlier this week.

S'pore min charged with corruption, accused of taking tickets to F1 races

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia, Jan 18, (AP): Singaporean Transport Minister S. Iswaran was charged Thursday in the first ministerial corruption case ever seen in the Asian financial hub known for squeaky clean government.

The Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau said in a statement that Iswaran, 61, faces 27 charges: two for corruption, 24 for receiving gifts as a public servant, and one for obstructing the course of justice. Iswaran said after leaving court that he had resigned from his post on Tuesday, and denied the charges.

He was alleged to have received goods worth nearly SG$385,000 ($286,000) between 2015 and 2022 from Malaysian property tycoon Ong Beng Seng, some in return for helping the Singapore-based businessman advance his business interests.

The gifts included free tickets for Singapore's Formula 1 Grand Prix, as well as football matches and musicals in the U.K. Ong owns the right to the local F1 race, and Iswaran was chairman of and later advisor to the Grand Prix's steering committee.

Also:

ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan: Turkmenistan's president fired the country's chief prosecutor for failing to properly fulfill his duties, the official daily reported Wednesday.

President **Serdar Berdymukhamedov** announced the dismissal during Tuesday's meeting of the State Security Council that reviewed the performance of the Central Asian country's military and law enforcement structures.

Berdymukhamedov announced that he was firing Prosecutor General **Serdar Myalikguliyev** for "the failure to properly fulfill his duties and the low level of organization of the prosecutor's office work," according to the government daily Neutral Turkmenistan. He didn't elaborate further.

❑ ❑ ❑

MUEANG SUPHAN BURI, Thailand: Rescue workers carried out the grim task Thursday of recovering the remains of the 23 apparent victims of a fireworks factory explosion in central Thailand.

Only part of the building frame stood at the site of the devastated factory in an otherwise-empty rice field in rural **Suphan Buri** province the day after the blast.

The damage to the site and the condition of the bodies made the number of victims difficult to determine.

Police present to the press arrested men who the police identify as the previous day's attackers on the TC Television station, at police headquarters in Guayaquil, Ecuador, on Jan 10. No one was killed in Tuesday's attack and authorities say 13 attackers were arrested and would be charged with terrorism. (AP)

oil falls

The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by USD 1.05 to USD 78.93 per barrel (pb) on Wednesday, compared to USD 79.98 pb a day earlier, announced Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Thursday.

In international markets, Brent crude forward dropped 41 cent to USD 77.88 pb, while West Texas Intermediate crude went up 16 cents to USD 72.56 pb (KUNA)

Aramco expands global venture capital

Aramco, one of the world's leading integrated energy and chemicals companies, has allocated an additional $4 billion to its global venture capital arm, Aramco Ventures. It will more than double the capital allotted to Aramco Ventures, increasing its total investment allocation from $3 billion to $7 billion.

It will take Aramco's overall venture capital allocation to $7.5bn, which also includes the $500 million venture capital fund Wa'ed Ventures that focuses on the start-up ecosystem in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The decision reflects the growing significance of Aramco's venture capital program in enabling the development of disruptive new technologies, creating diversification opportunities for Aramco, and paving the way for collaborations with innovative start-ups. In doing so, it aims to help advance the company's long-term strategy, which includes a focus on new energies, chemicals and transition materials, diversified industrial businesses, and digital technologies. (PR newswire)

OPEC chief: Congo plays pivotal role in region

OPEC Secretary General Haitham Al-Ghais has said that the Republic of Congo has played a pivotal role in the region and in supporting global oil markets stability since it joined the organization in 2018.

Al-Ghais's statement to KUNA came after his arrival in Brazzaville, the capital of Congo, during a visit as part of the OPEC's secretariat vital communication with member states. "I look forward to constructive discussions with the Congolese leadership," he said.

"My visit to the Republic of the Congo is part of my regular visits to OPEC Member Countries and the vital outreach programme of the Secretariat," he added.

He indicated that his visit is long overdue, and it has been rescheduled multiple times due to logistical reasons.

The mission will include a number of high-level engagements, including meetings with Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of the Congo; Bruno Jean-Richard Itoua, Minister of Hydrocarbons; and other government officials and members of the parliament. (KUNA)

Market Movements 18-01-2024

			Change	Closing pts
EGYPT	-	EGX 30	+0.32	26,842.67

			Change	Closing pts
UAE	-	DFM	-0.93	4,052.78
JAPAN	-	Nikkei	-0.03	35,466.17
PAKISTAN	-	KSE 100	-0.49	63,259.21
PHILIPPINES	-	PSEi	-0.94	6,510.87
SAUDI	-	Tadawul	-0.86	11,959.07

Business

Americans showed continued willingness to spend

US retail sales increased strongly in December

NEW YORK, Jan 18, (AP): Americans stepped up their spending at retailers in December, closing out the holiday shopping season and the year on an upbeat tone and signaling that people remain confident enough to keep spending freely.

Retail sales accelerated 0.6% in December from November's 0.3% increase, the Commerce Department reported Wednesday. Because spending by consumers accounts for nearly 70% of the U.S. economy, the report suggested that shoppers will be able to keep fueling economic growth this year.

Among last month's overall retail purchases, sales at stores that sell general merchandise rose 1.3%. Sellers of clothing and accessories reported a 1.5% increase, as did online sellers. By contrast, furniture and home furnishings businesses declined 1%, reflecting a struggling housing market. Sales at restaurants were unchanged in December.

Economists had expected consumers to pull back on spending in the final three months of the year under the weight of credit card debt and delinquencies and lower savings. Yet despite those challenges, along with higher borrowing costs, tighter credit conditions and price increases, household spending is being fueled by a strong job market and rising wages.

The healthy rise in purchasing last month also highlights an apparent contradiction at the heart of the economy: Surveys suggest that Americans feel sour about the economy overall and exasperated by the increased cost of food, rent, cars and other items over the past two years. Yet the ongoing strength of their spending speaks for itself, indicating confidence in the economy and their own finances.

Inflation has cooled significantly since peaking at 9.1% in mid-2022. But costs can still flare. Higher energy and housing prices boosted overall U.S. inflation in December, a sign that the Federal Reserve's drive to slow inflation to its 2% target will likely remain a bumpy one.

"The U.S consumer continues to hold up well, which is a positive for the economy," said Larry Tentarelli, chief technical strategist at Blue Chip Daily Trend Report.

But Tentarelli said the latest data, along with other recent signs that the economy remains solid overall, does lessen the likelihood that the Federal Reserve will cut interest rates soon.

On Wednesday, Christopher Waller, a key member of the Fed's Board of Governors, said that as long as the economy remains healthy, the central bank can proceed cautiously as it determines when and by how much to cut its benchmark interest rate. His remarks were seen by economists and investors as downplaying the potential for a rate cut as early as March, which Wall Street investors and economists had expected.

Meanwhile, polls show many Americans are still pessimistic. That disconnect, a likely hot topic in the 2024 elections, has confounded economists and political analysts. A major factor is the lingering financial and psychological effects of the worst bout of inflation in four decades. Much of the public remains exasperated by prices that, despite falling inflation, remain 17% higher than they were before prices began to surge.

Yet the holiday shopping season, the most critical for retailers, has turned out to be a decent one, according to some recent data.

The National Retail Federation, the nation's largest retail trade group, said Wednesday that holiday sales rose 3.8% for the November and December period compared to the same year-ago period. That was in line with its forecast for 3% to 4% growth. It also surpasses the average annual holiday increase of 3.6% from 2010 to 2019 before the pandemic created outsized spending.

Mastercard SpendingPulse said last month that holiday sales from the beginning of November through Christmas Eve climbed 3.1%. Mastercard SpendingPulse tracks all kinds of payments including cash and debit cards.

While that's less than half the 7.6% increase from a year earlier, this year's sales are more in line with what is typical during the holiday season.

Stephen Lebovitz, CEO of mall operator CBL Properties, said that a last-minute shopping surge helped many tenants post sales increases for the holiday season, based on a spot check of tenants. He noted that shoppers are still coping with high interest rates and still high inflation but unemployment is low and wages are growing.

"I think 2024 is going to be similar (to 2023)," he said. "It's not going to be robust growth. But I think it will be solid."

Lebovitz also added that demand for leasing is strong, and he doesn't expect any pickup in retail bankruptcies after the holidays.

Ted Rossman, senior industry analyst at Bankrate.com, noted that consumer spending was "remarkably strong" during the holidays, but he added, "I do worry, however, how people are paying for all of this stuff. "

Rossman noted that credit card balances and rates were already at record highs even before the holiday splurge. And buy now, pay later plans- which let shoppers break up the cost of an item over time - have spiked from last holiday season.

Big retailers are also monitoring potential disruptions to shipping in the Red Sea.

Attacks by Houthi rebels on cargo ships don't pose major near-term implications because shipping during this time of the year for retailers is lighter, said Balika Sonthalia, senior partner and Americas co-lead in the operations and performance practice of global strategy and management consultancy Kearney. But if the attacks become a long-term issue, it could be different story.

Local banks see 2.2 pct dip in construction sector financing

Decrease worth 36.5 mln dinars

By Ahmad Fathi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: During the first 11 months of 2023, local banks experienced a decline of 2.2 percent in consolidated financing provided to the construction sector, worth 36.5 million dinars. This decrease brought the total from 1.628 billion dinars in the corresponding period of 2022 to 1.591 billion dinars in 2023.

The monthly statistics from the Central Bank of Kuwait for November reveal a 29.6 percent month-on-month decrease in construction financing, totaling 53.3 million dinars.

This decline was notable compared to the 179.9 million dinars recorded in October. On an annual basis, construction financing dropped by 29.7 percent, equivalent to 53.5 million dinars, compared to 180.1 million dinars in November 2022.

This reduction in construction financing coincided with an overall decrease of approximately 552.3 million dinars (2.6 percent) in new credit facilities across all sectors during the first 11 months of 2023.

The facilities also witnessed a monthly decline of 3.8 percent, falling from 1.875 billion dinars in October to 1.803 billion dinars in November.

Contrasting the situation, construction financing experienced a surge of 57.4 percent in total financing provided during 2022, reaching 635.2 million dinars, up from 1.105 billion dinars in 2021 to 1.741 billion dinars in 2022.

Throughout 2023, construction financing exhibited fluctuations, starting at 112.8 million dinars in December and increasing to 118.2 million dinars in January, 147.1 million dinars in February, and 217.9 million dinars in March.

However, it decreased to 92.1 million dinars in April, rose again to 110.1 million dinars in May, and further to 123.9 million dinars in June. July saw an increase to 158.3 million dinars, followed by 162.5 million dinars in August, a dip to 155.1 million dinars in September, and a rise in October to 179.9 million dinars.

The accumulated balance of construction financing provided by local banks witnessed an annual increase of 15.7 percent, totaling 355.9 million dinars. This brought the balance from 2.269 billion dinars in November 2022 to 2.624 billion dinars in the same month of the following year. However, this balance experienced a monthly decline of 0.3 percent, totaling 8.5 million dinars, after reaching its highest level in two years at 2.633 billion dinars in October.

Simultaneously, the balance of total cash credit facilities provided by banks across all sectors increased by 1.9 percent during the first 11 months of 2023, amounting to 1.015 billion dinars. This growth took the balance from 52.447 billion dinars in December to 53.463 billion dinars by the end of November.

The construction sector in Kuwait confronts several challenges, including a decline in project offerings and awards, contract signings, and delayed government payments to contractors over the last five years. Additionally, the sector grapples with the worsening issue of rising construction costs due to a shortage of labor, resulting in unprecedented wage increases.

Real estate experts point out that the problem extends beyond quantity to the quality of labor, with many experienced workers leaving the market in the past two years. The daily wage of a construction worker has increased significantly, rising from 10 dinars before the "Corona" pandemic to 30 dinars currently, reflecting the demand-supply dynamics in the labor market.

Saudi Arabia's Minister of Economy and Planning, HE Faisal F. Alibrahim, signs agreement with OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann to expand cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the OECD, at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2024 in Davos, Switzerland. – Photo: AETOSWire

Saudi Arabia, OECD agree to boost co-op on wide range of public policy initiatives

DAVOS, Switzerland, Jan 18, (Business Wire): The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) today signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance cooperation on a wide range of public policy initiatives in areas including the economy, tax, corporate governance and sustainability.

The strategic partnership, signed during the World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting 2024 in Davos, Switzerland, reflects the Kingdom's solutions-oriented approach to multilateralism and its willingness to build balanced and collaborative institutional frameworks for sustained prosperity.

His Excellency Faisal F. Alibrahim, Minister of Economy and Planning, said the Saudi-OECD partnership would further boost the Kingdom's thriving investment landscape through collaborative policies and regulations that promote competitive private sector participation in Saudi Arabia's rapidly diversifying economy.

"International partnerships with organizations such as the OECD are key to continuously enhancing our institutional capabilities and facilitating knowledge and technology transfers. Under this partnership with the OECD, we will further develop robust public policies that align with international best practices and can further drive the momentum of Saudi Vision 2030."

The collaboration will take various forms, including joint research, information exchange, the sharing of statistical data, the organization of meetings and events, and support for Saudi Arabia's alignment with OECD standards, which includes evaluation and comparative analyses of policy practices.

Saudi Arabia already participates in nine OECD committees and adheres to seven OECD legal instruments. The collaboration will deepen the Kingdom's cooperation with the organization in policy areas including public governance and regulatory policy, skills and education, corporate governance and finance, investment policy, anti-corruption, and trade facilitation.

Air quality enhanced

KIPIC in collaboration with KPC ensures consistent supply of 'low-sulfur' fuel oil

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC), in collaboration with Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, has successfully ensured a consistent, stable, and secure supply of low-sulfur fuel oil across all its northern and southern stations, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

"This accomplishment aligns with the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy's broader efforts for a comprehensive shift towards cleaner energy sources.

Abdullah Fahad Al-Ajmi, the official spokesperson for KIPIC, stated that this achievement is the result of collaborative endeavors between KIPIC, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, and the Ministry.

The complete transition to low-sulfur fuel oil underscores the ministry's effective contribution to environmental preservation, reduction of environmental impact, and the enhancement of air quality in Kuwait.

The adoption of low-sulfur fuel oil is a strategic move to diminish sulfur emissions, address air pollution concerns, and support global initiatives against climate change. This transition also reaffirms Kuwait's commitment to environmentally sustainable practices in its energy sector.

Al-Ajmi emphasized that the cooperation between KIPIC and Kuwait Petroleum Corporation not only ensures a reliable supply of low-sulfur fuel oil but also marks a significant milestone in the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy's pursuit of an environmentally friendly energy framework and national self-sufficiency.

Additionally, there is an increased demand for air freight due to the crisis in the Red Sea, with manufacturing companies seeking alternative routes after attacks on cargo ships.

The international shipping reservation platform "Fretos" reported a 91% weekly increase in shipping prices from China to Europe.

Despite the disruptions, the impact on the global economy is currently considered minimal, according to International Monetary Fund Director Kristalina Georgieva, who warned of potential negative consequences if the situation escalates further.

USD stabilizes at KD 0.307

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18, (KUNA): The exchange rate of the US dollar stabilized at KD 0.307 and the Euro at KD 0.334 on Thursday, compared to Wednesdays rates.

Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced in the daily bulletin on its website that the British Pound exchange rate increased by 0.47 percent to KD 0.389, while the Swiss Franc rate went down by 0.28 percent to KD 0.335. The Japanese Yen stood at KD 0.002.

Currency prices, declared by the CBK, only reflect average rates, rather than actual buying and selling rates.

Data for 11 months of 2023 shows

5 Arab states exported 18.687 mln barrels of oil to US

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: Official data shows the total crude oil exports of five Arab countries -- Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Libya, Kuwait, and the Emirates -- to the United States of America are in the range of 18.687 million barrels worth $17.64 billion during the 11 months of 2023, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

According to the Ministry of Commerce, Kuwait ranked fourth in oil exports to the United States during this period, with a value of $547.25 million and quantities totaling 6.66 million barrels. In November 2023 a total 651 thousand barrels were exported worth around $53.425 million.

Kuwait had not exported oil to the US in October. In September, it exported 759 thousand barrels worth $64.58 million, and in August, 1.62 million barrels valued at $149.51 million.

Saudi Arabia led the list of oil-exporting countries, with exports valued at $9.886 billion and quantities reaching around 118.588 million barrels. Iraq came second with exports valued at about $5.477 billion and quantities amounting to 74.233 million barrels. Libya secured the third spot with exports of about 15.041 million barrels valued at $1.3 billion.

The United Arab Emirates ranked fifth, exporting approximately 5.124 million barrels with a value of about $434.152 million during the specified period.

The total oil imports in the United States during the 11 months of 2023 amounted to about 2.130 billion barrels, worth $151.248 billion. In November alone, oil imports reached 201.455 million barrels, valued at $15.485 billion.

Meanwhile, Chevron's CEO, Michael Wirth, highlighted the risks to oil flows and prices due to the crisis in the Red Sea.

Yellen says current economic growth 'vindicates' Biden's COVID-19 pandemic stimulus spending

WASHINGTON, Jan 18, (AP): Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen is pushing back against Republican criticism of the Democrats' big coronavirus pandemic response package and making an election-year pitch that the current state of the U.S. economy "vindicates" the steps taken in 2021 to "get our economy back on track."

With falling inflation, unemployment at 3.7% and the U.S. apparently defying predictions of a recession, Yellen defended the $1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan in remarks Wednesday at a U.S. Conference of Mayors meeting in Washington.

The stimulus package, which was passed into law without a single GOP vote, is regularly cited by Republicans as the cause for two years of accelerating price spikes that hurt millions of American households.

"Many had argued that this rescue plan wasn't needed. But I believe seeing where we are today vindicates the approach we took," Yellen said. "President Biden and I believed that the most dangerous risk was in going too small."

British oil giant BP names current interim boss as permanent CEO

British oil giant BP said Wednesday its interim chief executive, Murray Auchincloss, will be given the job on a permanent basis to replace Bernard Looney, who quit after it emerged that he had failed to disclose to the board past relationships with company colleagues.

Auchincloss, a 53-year-old Canadian who was BP's chief financial officer for more than three years, took on the top job in September after Looney's surprise resignation. Auchincloss joined BP when it took over oil firm Amoco in 1998. "Since September, BP's board has undertaken a thorough and highly competitive process to identify BP's next CEO, considering a number of high-caliber candidates in detail," BP chairman Helge Lund said.

Lund said the board was in "complete agreement" that Auchincloss was the "outstanding candidate and is the right leader for BP."

Auchincloss said he was honored to lead BP and that the company's strategy to diversify away from oil to become an "integrated energy company" does not change.

Biraj Borkhataria, an analyst at RBC Capital Markets, called the appointment the best possible outcome for shareholders, as hiring someone from outside the company would have brought "further uncertainty on the direction of the business and potentially more noise around another strategy shift."

However, Charlie Kronick, senior climate adviser at environmental group Greenpeace U.K., criticized the move as "business as usual for a company that is still failing to transition away from fossil fuels at anything like the pace required."

Kronick said a change at the top was "an opportunity for a different approach that redirects significant spending towards the cheap, clean renewables we need to power us through the rest of the century."

Looney, who had spent his working life at the firm, having started as a drilling engineer in 1991, quit after he acknowledged he had not been "fully transparent" in providing details of all relationships to the board.

He was denied 32.4 million-pound ($41 million) worth of salary, pension, bonus payments and shares, after BP said he had committed "serious misconduct" by misleading the board.

BP does not ban relationships between staff, but its code of conduct says employees must consider conflicts of interest, for example in having an "intimate relationship with someone whose pay, advancement or management you can influence."

BP has had four different bosses over the past 15 years. Prior to Looney's appointment in 2020, Bob Dudley served nearly a decade as chief executive, stepping in to turn the business around after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. (AP)

Pentagon will install rooftop solar panels

Biden pushes clean energy in federal buildings

WASHINGTON, Jan 18, (AP): The Defense Department will install solar panels on the Pentagon, part of the Biden administration's plan to promote clean energy and "reestablish the federal government as a sustainability leader."

The Pentagon is one of 31 government sites that are receiving $104 million in Energy Department grants that are expected to double the amount of carbon-free electricity at federal facilities and create 27 megawatts of clean-energy capacity while leveraging more than $361 million in private investment, the Energy Department said.

Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks and Brenda Mallory, chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, announced the projects Wednesday at the Pentagon.

The solar panels are among several improvements set for the Pentagon, which also will install a heat pump system and solar thermal panels to reduce reliance on natural gas and fuel oil combustion systems

Brendan Owens, assistant secretary of Defense for energy, installations and environment, said the projects will improve energy resilience and reliability at the Pentagon and other military sites in the U.S. and Germany. He called energy use "central to everything we do.''

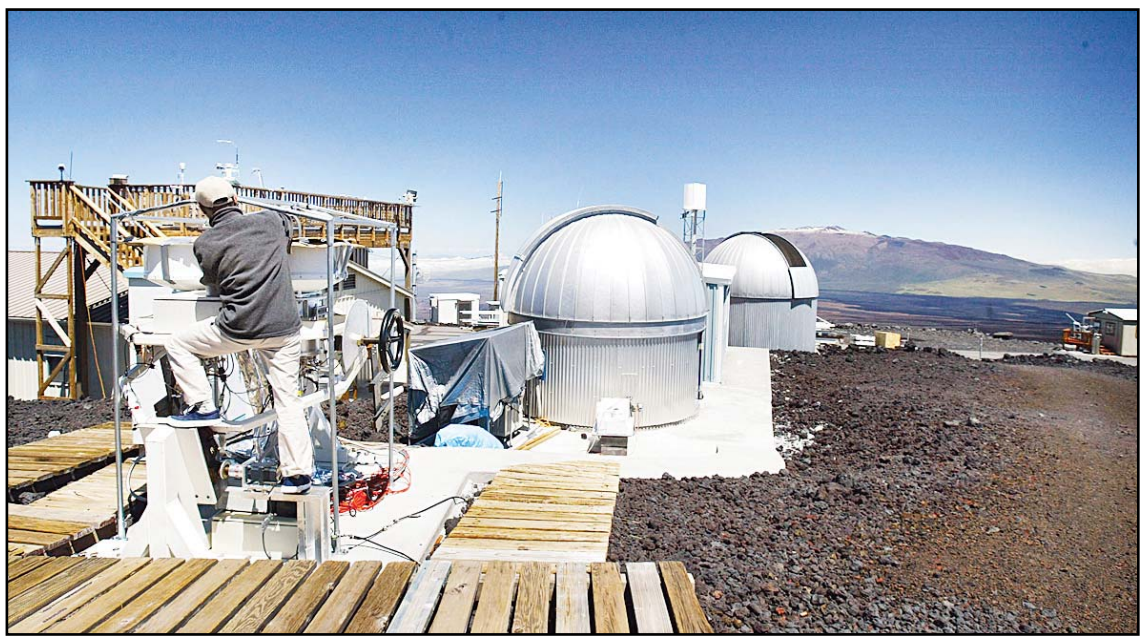
Cyberattack

Solar panels will provide "an uninterrupted power source'' at the Pentagon in case of a cyberattack or other outage to the bulk grid, as well as reduce strain on the building's power load, Owens said in an interview.

Because of the Pentagon's "relatively congested air space" outside Washington, solar panels were the best option for clean energy, he said. The building is a nationally registered historic landmark, so officials will work with local officials to ensure the panels meet all requirements.

The grant program also includes energy upgrades at Naval bases in Georgia and Washington state, as well as the Naval Support Activity Mid-South in Tennessee.

In addition to the Defense Department, projects also include installation of thermally efficient windows at the Energy Department headquarters in Washington, as well as efficiency upgrades to the Commerce and Transportation departments.



A scientist works at Hawaii's Mauna Loa Observatory at 3,396 meters (11,141 feet), March 19, 2004. Solar panels will be installed on the Mauna Loa Observatory as part of a Biden administration plan to promote energy conservation and clean energy. The program will make the Mauna Loa Observatory a net-zero emissions facility. (AP)

Other agencies selected for projects include the Interior and Veterans Affairs departments, as well as the General Services Administration, Office of Personnel Management and Social Security Administration.

The program also will make the Mauna Loa Observatory in Hawaii a net-zero emissions facility. The site run by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ceased all measurements and radio transmissions in late November after a lava eruption of the Mauna Loa volcano cut the power line and buried over a mile of the access road to the observatory. Since November, access to the site has been limited to costly weekly visits by helicopter to collect limited atmospheric data, officials said.

The grant program will install solar panels and batteries at the observatory to make the facility a net-zero site for carbon emissions, bring atmospheric science instrumentation back online and significantly improve the site's climate resiliency, officials said.

"As the observatory is considered the definitive source for documenting the increased atmospheric burden of fossil fuel emissions, this project has the unique ability to eliminate 100% of the combustion of fossil-fueled electrical power to make those critical measurements,'' the Energy Department said.

The funding announced Wednesday is the first of three disbursements expected from the Assisting Federal Facilities with Energy Conservation Technologies or AFFECT program included in the 2021 infrastructure law. A total of $250 million was awarded to the program, which was established in 1992 to help agencies cut energy consumption.

The projects align with Biden's 2021 executive order that called for a 65% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from federal operations by 2030 and a net-zero building portfolio by 2045.

The projects also include installation of solar panels at the U.S. Army Garrison in Wiesbaden, Germany, as well as energy and water efficiency improvements and solar panels at the Maui Air Traffic Control Tower in Kahului, Hawaii.

In a related development Wednesday, the Interior Department announced it is updating and expanding an Obama-era plan to promote solar power on public lands in the West. The Bureau of Land Management's 2012 Western Solar Plan identified areas in six states - Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah - with high solar potential and few conflicts over natural resources or cultural or historical sites. The new plan adds five states north of the current solar zone for potential solar development: Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington and Wyoming.

The agency's preferred alternative identifies about 22 million acres of land open for solar development, "giving maximum flexibility to reach the nation's clean energy goals,'' the BLM said in a statement.

Public comments on the draft plan are open through April 18.

Safety rock-hard

Japan Airlines names 1st woman president

TOKYO, Jan 18, (AP): Japan Airlines has named Mitsuko Tottori as its first woman president following a collision between one of its planes and a coast guard aircraft during Japanese New Year holidays that left five dead.

Tottori - currently senior managing executive officer of JAL and the first woman to climb the ranks from cabin attendant to the company's new head - vowed Wednesday in a press conference to stick to her commitment to aviation safety and making it a priority.

She will take office in April and replace JAL president and CEO Yuji Akasaka, who will take over from Yoshiharu Ueki as chairman of the airline.

Tottori's appointment came two weeks after the fatal collision at Tokyo's busy Haneda airport that was mostly seen as a result of human error.

Tottori

On Jan.2, JAL's Airbus A350-900 carrying 379 passengers and crew landed right behind the coast guard's much smaller Bombardier Dash-8 preparing to take off on the same seaside runway. The crash engulfed both aircraft in flames.

All passengers of the JAL airliner were safely evacuated in 18 minutes, but five of six coast guard flight crew died.

Tottori also praised the JAL Flight 516 cabin attendants' commitment to safety, evacuating everyone on board, and thanked the passengers for their cooperation. "But there was an accident and that means there are things we still need to improve."

An ongoing probe into the collision has focused on whether the coast guard aircraft was given the green light for takeoff. A partial release of the air traffic control transcript showed no clear takeoff approval was given to the Bombardier, which was on a mission to deliver relief supplies to the residents in Japan's north-central region hit by a magnitude 7.6 quake on New Year's Day and hundreds of aftershocks.

Safety risk

JAL's serving president, Akasaka, said that he hopes the investigation would provide "lessons to be learned." He also pointed out that an analog element of relying on voice communication between pilots and traffic control has been an industry-wide safety risk internationally.

"I believe the analog voice communication is definitely one of the major risks," said Akasaka, in his first news conference since the Jan. 2 collision.

Tottori, seated next to Akasaka, said her commitment to safety was rock-hard. She started her career as a flight attendant in 1985 when JAL Flight123 crashed into a mountain north of Tokyo. It was the world's worst single-aircraft disaster, killing 520 people. Only four survived.

Cutting interest rates too soon in Europe risks progress against inflation: Lagarde

ECB intends to keep benchmark rate high

FRANKFURT, Germany, Jan 18, (AP): Cutting interest rates too soon could threaten Europe's progress in battling the inflation that has ravaged the economy, the head of the European Central Bank said Wednesday amid widespread speculation that the bank soon will lower rates from record highs.

Christine Lagarde, faced with market expectations for rate cuts as soon as March or April and a bank meeting next week, underlined the ECB's intent to keep its benchmark rate high for "as long as necessary" until it's clear that inflation is back to the goal of 2%.

Speaking at a Bloomberg News event during the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, she acknowledged concerns the bank had gone too high too fast with borrowing costs.

"I know some people argue that maybe we are overshooting, maybe we're taking risks," Lagarde said.

But the bigger risk would be letting inflation get loose again and have to launch rate hikes again, she said.

Speculation that central banks including the ECB and the U.S. Federal Reserve are about to start cutting rates helped spark a surge in stock market indexes over the last weeks of 2023.

Lower rates boost business activity and can make conservative holdings such as bank deposits less attractive compared with riskier stocks. Stock prices have eased somewhat this year as the initial enthusiasm about possibly lower rates has faded and was tempered by worries about weak economic growth and geopolitical disruption such as the Israel-Hamas war.

Recent comments from senior Fed officials suggest that the central bank remains on track to begin cutting its key rate likely by midyear. In December, Fed policymakers collectively forecast that they would cut their rate three times this year. Wall Street investors and many economists expect the first cut in March.

Inflation in Europe has fallen from a peak of 10.6% in October 2022 but has since made a modest rebound, rising to 2.9% in December from 2.4% in November.

Driven

Consumer price increases have diminished as energy prices driven by Russia's war in Ukraine have fallen and supply chain bottlenecks seen during the pandemic have eased. But higher prices have spread through the economy in the form of high prices for services and higher wages.

Meanwhile, sluggish economic growth and the impact of higher interest rates on economic activity have sparked bets on rate cuts. Higher rates are the typical antidote to high inflation because they make it more expensive to borrow and buy things, reducing demand for goods.

But higher interest rates can also squelch economic growth, which has been in short supply in the 20 European Union member countries that use the euro currency and where the ECB sets rates. The economy shrank by 0.1% in the July-September quarter, the last for which figures are available.

European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde, left, speaks with Netherland's Finance Minister Steven Van Weyenberg during a roundtable meeting of eurogroup finance ministers at the European Council building in Brussels, Monday, Jan. 15, 2024. Eurogroup finance ministers on Monday will discuss, among other issues, competitiveness, energy prices and the 2024 work program. (AP)

The bank's meeting on Jan. 25 will be closely scrutinized by analysts and investors for clues about the timing of rate cuts. While Lagarde has made clear that a rate peak has been reached, observers may not get much further guidance, said Carsten Brzeski, chief eurozone economist at ING bank.

"The first question for next week's European Central Bank meeting is how the bank will react to current market pricing," Brzeski wrote in a preview of the meeting. "The second, however, is why should the ECB react to current market pricing" of future cuts?

"We expect the ECB to stay on hold and give very little indication about the timing of any upcoming rate cut," he said.

Frigid weather can cut electric vehicle range and make charging tough

PITTSFIELD TOWNSHIP, Michigan, Jan 18, (AP): For nearly a week, frigid temperatures from Chicago to northern Texas have made life painful for electric-vehicle owners, with reduced driving range and hours of waiting at charging stations.

In Oak Brook, Illinois, near Chicago, on Monday, television reporters found Teslas that were running out of juice while in long lines for plugs at a Supercharger station. The temperature hit a low of minus 9 Fahrenheit (-23 Celsius).

Outside of Ann Arbor, Michigan, Teslas were plugged in at six of eight charging stations Wednesday as the wind howled with a temperature of 7 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 14 Celsius). At least one driver was nearly out of juice.

It's well known that EVs lose some of their travel range in the cold, especially in subzero temperatures like those that hit the nation's mid-section this week. Studies found that range loss varies from 10% to 36%.

EVs also don't charge as quickly in extreme cold. Some Tesla owners near Chicago told reporters their cars wouldn't charge at all.

Experts acknowledge that cold weather can be hard for EVs, but they say with some planning and a little adjustment, owners should be able to travel pretty much as normal.

Ankita Bansal prepares to charge her Tesla, Wednesday, Jan. 17, 2024, in Ann Arbor, Mich. A subzero cold snap across the nation has exposed a big vulnerability for electric vehicle owners. It's difficult to charge the batteries in single-digit temperatures. (AP)

Inside EV batteries, lithium ions flow through a liquid electrolyte, producing electricity. But they travel more slowly through the electrolyte when it gets cold and don't release as much energy. That cuts into the range and can deplete a battery faster.

Problem

The same happens in reverse. Since electrons move more slowly, the battery can't accept as much electricity from a charging plug. That slows down charging.

The problem is that when temperatures plunge, batteries have to be warm enough for the electrons to move. And they have to be even warmer at fast-charging stations like Tesla's.

"Pretty much anything that's a chemical substance slows down when you get to a low temperature," said Neil Dasgupta, associate professor of mechanical and materials science engineering at the University of Michigan. "That's just something that nature has given us, and we have to deal with that."

At a Supercharger station in Pittsfield Township, Michigan, just south of Ann Arbor, the battery in Ankita Bansal's Tesla had only 7% of its charge left. She plugged in, but the car wouldn't take electricity. Instead, the display said the battery was heating up. After it hits the proper temperature, it would take an hour and 50 minutes to get to a full charge, the display said.

"I have a long way to go," said Bansal, a University of Michigan graduate student who wanted to get to a full charge because she doesn't have a charging station at home.

Bruce Westlake, president of the Eastern Michigan Electric Vehicle Association, said most EVs are programmed to warm the battery if the driver tells vehicle's navigation system that a trip to the charging station is coming.

Many of those who think their cars won't charge are new to EVs and don't know how to "precondition" their batteries, said Westlake, who has two Teslas.

Enhanced teamwork and bonding, attended by executive management

Zain staff compete for top spot in fourth padel tournament

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: After a thrilling two-day race at OCEAN Padel Academy in Salmiya, Zain successfully concluded its fourth padel tournament for staff. The yearly competition enhanced the spirit of teamwork and out-of-office bonding between members of the Zain family and witnessed the participation of the executive management team.

The tournament was joined by Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO Bader Nasser Al Kharafi. Among the spectators were Zain Kuwait Acting CEO Nawaf Algharabally, OCEAN Padel Academy Co-founder & Manager Abdullatif Al Asfour, along with Zain executives and employees who eagerly followed the exciting matches and cheered their colleagues on.

Zain organizes many sports competitions for its employees under the umbrella of its internal strategy communications that closely focuses on promoting health and sports programs. The company remains committed to the wellbeing of its staff by organizing similar programs throughout the year to promote an active and healthy lifestyle, while also enhancing the teamwork spirit and out of office bonding between members of the Zain family.

Al Kharafi, Algharabally, and Al Asfour with the participants.

Bader Al Kharafi and Nawaf Algharabally award the first place winners.

The competition strengthened out-of-office bonding.

The fourth season of the competition witnessed great reception from Zain employees. The matches continued for two consecutive days at OCEAN Padel Academy's courts in Salmiya, where 18 two-player teams competed for the title. Returning champions 'team ZAIN' won the title, while team Heavyweights came in second place and team KOBE came in third place.

Last year, Zain partnered with OCEAN PADEL Academy, a local sports club with world-class facilities, to support the academy's various programs and services offered to padel enthusiasts in Kuwait, including fully equipped courts and facilities, kids camps, seasonal championships, and special tournaments for employees.

The Academy covers over 3000 square meters and overlooks the Arabian Gulf Street. It boasts several indoor and outdoor courts, the Zain Center Court with seats for 120+ spectators, state-of-the-art health and sports facilities, international trainers, and more.

Zain spares no efforts to organize activities and programs that cater to its employees' talents and interests. The company is keen on encouraging employees to pursue healthier lifestyles and take part in different sports and health programs all year round.

Phoenix Cricketers celebrate after winning the KCC Emerging Cup 2023 title.

AlMuzaini Exchange powers final showdown

Phoenix Cricketers captures KCC Emerging Cup '23 title

Man of the Finals awarded to Jaison George.

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: Kuwait Cricket Club is the official governing body for the game of cricket in association with Public Authority of Sports, Olympic Committee of Kuwait and the International Cricket Council (ICC - the world's governing body for cricket) and Asian Cricket Council (ACC - Operating under ICC)

KCC Emerging Cup 2023 Powered by AlMuzaini Exchange Grand Final took place at the Sulaibiya Cricket Ground on Friday 12th of January 2024.The final clash was between Phoenix Cricketers & Chennai Fire Boys. After winning the toss, Phoenix Cricketers chose to bat first and set a total of 200 runs for the loss of 3 wickets in their allotted 20 overs.

Chennai Fire Boys in their run chase managed only to get 179 for 9 wickets in 20 overs

Jaison George was awarded the Man of the Finals for his brilliant batting performance of 102 runs from 59 balls.

Congratulations to Phoenix Cricketers and hard luck Chennai Fire Boys who played well throughout the tournament.

Institute advocates prevention efforts

DDI conducts diabetes awareness outreach

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: Dasman Diabetes Institute, founded by Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, recently organized an awareness outreach at the Scientific Center.

On this occasion, Tarek Aleryan, Director of Public Relations and Media Services at Dasman Diabetes Institute, stated that the Institute participated with its mobile clinic, to conduct various preventative medical testing such as blood glucose, pressure, and vital signs, as the Institute believes in the importance of conducting early checks and spreading awareness on diabetes to contribute to the prevention of this disease and its complications.

In addition, booklets, leaflets, flyers, and other material on educational topics such as the healthy plate, intermittent fasting, how to prevent diabetes, insulin doses and several other subjects were distributed to the staff. Aleryan added, "The Institute spares no effort in spreading awareness among all segments of society, noting the importance of the role played by the Institute through these awareness outreach".

Spreading awareness on diabetes with educational materials.

Dasman Diabetes Institute with its mobile clinic.

Guide to passenger rights

Navigating flight cancellations amidst winter storm woes

A winter storm made its way across the eastern half of the United States on Wednesday, snarling traffic in the air and on the highways.

By early afternoon in the East, more than 1,000 U.S. flights had been canceled and 4,000 others were delayed, according to FlightAware. The brunt of cancellations stretched from Denver to Chicago, down to Nashville and east to Buffalo, New York.

Airlines can't control the weather, but they are still required to provide refunds for customers whose flights are canceled. Here's what to know about your rights, and what to know when cancellations start piling up:

Watch the weather forecast

When airlines expect bad weather to create problems for flights, they often give travelers a chance to reschedule their trip by a few days at no extra fee. Google your airline and "travel alerts" or similar phrases to see the offers.

Check before going to the airport

It's better to be stuck at home or in a hotel than to be stranded in an airport terminal, so use the airline's app or flight websites to make sure that your flight is still on before heading out to the airport. Airlines usually cancel flights hours or even days before departure time.

My flight was cancelled. Now what?

If you're already at the airport, it's time to multi-task to find another flight. Get in line to speak to an airline representative, and call or go online to connect to the airline's reservations staff. It also helps to reach out on X, the site formerly known as Twitter.

Most airlines will rebook you on a later flight for no additional charge. That depends, however, on the airline having empty seats. The good news for travelers this week is that they stand a better chance of finding space in January than during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday periods, when passengers can wait days for an open seat.

Can I ask to be booked on another airline?

You can, but airlines aren't required to put you on another carrier's flight. Some airlines, including the biggest ones except Southwest, say they can put you on a partner airline, but even then it's often hit or miss. Jeff Klee, CEO of CheapAir.com, recommends researching alternate flights while you wait to talk to an agent.

Am I owed a refund?

If you no longer want to take the trip, or found alternative means of getting where you're going, the airline is legally required to pay a refund, even if you bought a non-refundable ticket. It doesn't matter why the flight was canceled.

"They can't stick you with a voucher, you can get your money back," says Kyle Potter, executive editor of Thrifty Traveler. "That means you have to cancel your entire reservation, but that could be an easy option for some travelers - especially if you wind up booking a flight on another carrier."

You are also entitled to a refund of any bag fees, seat upgrades or other extras that you didn't get to use.

Can I get compensation?

U.S. airlines are not required to pay compensation, even if the cancellation is their fault - such as the lack of a crew, a mechanical problem that grounds the plane, or a computer outage that brings the airline to a halt. However, the Transportation Department is working on a proposal to change that when the airline is at fault.

"I know how frustrated many of you are with the service you get from your U.S. airlines," President Joe Biden said. "That's why our top priority has been to get American air travelers a better deal."

What else will airlines cover?

There is no federal requirement that airlines pick up the costs of hotel rooms or meals for stranded passengers. Each airline has its own policy.

The U.S. Department of Transportation has a site that lets consumers see the commitments that each airline makes for refunds and covering other expenses when flights are canceled or significantly delayed.

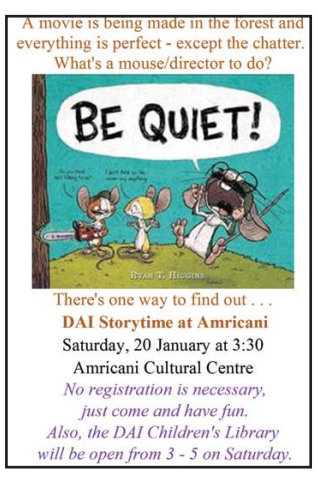
Other tips

If the weather forecast is troubling, consider booking a backup flight, says Potter, the Thrifty Traveler editor. He says Southwest and Delta stand out as potential backups because they let customers cancel for a full refund as long as they cancel within 24 hours of booking. "Others only allow that when you book at least two or even seven days in advance," he says.

If you are in a group and one person belongs to a higher level of the airline's frequent-flyer program, use the number associated with that person to call the airline, says Kurt Ebenhoch, a travel consumer advocate and former airline spokesman.

If lots of flights are canceled, airline agents will soon be swamped. Try calling your airline's international help number - usually available online - those agents can make changes in your itinerary too.

Be nice. The agent you're talking to is probably dealing with lots of other frustrated travelers too, and screaming at the agent won't make them want to help you. The cancellation isn't their fault. (AP)



DAI flyer

Deadline for submissions until 2nd Feb

TMA to conduct Essay writing competition

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: By the Grace and Blessings of Almighty, Tamilnadu Muslim Association (TMA), a Subsidiary of Indian Muslim Association (IMA) Kuwait conducting an Essay writing competition for the Tamil speaking diaspora living in Kuwait as a part of Tamil Cultural Festival Pongal.

The topics for the program have been designed very uniquely and that can express their love for the society and to contribute for the social harmony.

Competition has been conducted in below topics,

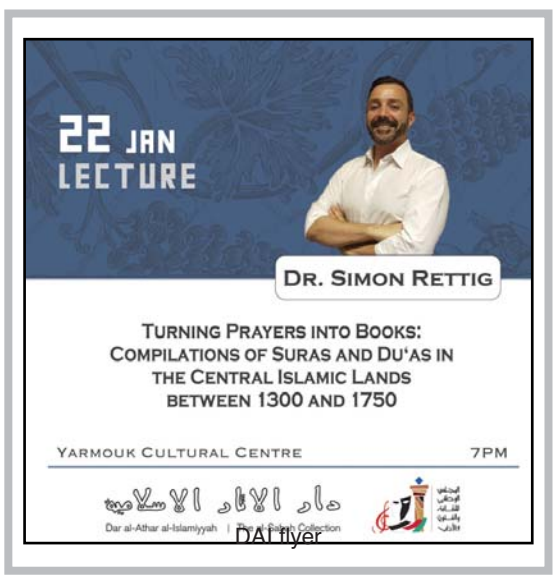
1. Love to do virtue.
2. Impact of Gulf life in my life.
3. A Measure of patriotism
4. Equality of Human Beings
5. Why I born?

Criteria:

1. There is no age limit/gender to participate in this essay writing competition.
2. Articles should be in A4 sheet and should not exceed more than 4 pages
3. Final decision by the TMA authorities
4. Last date for submission 2nd Feb 2024.
5. Articles can be sent via email or watsapp numbers given below.
6. Prizes shall be distributed for the winners on the final program to be conducted on 9th Feb 2024.

Email: kuwaittma@gmail.com

Whatsapp number: 99155105



DAI flyer

Awards

'20 Days in Mariupol' nominated for best documentary

'Oppenheimer,' 'Poor Things' lead race for BAFTA film awards

LONDON, Jan 18, (AP): Atom-bomb epic "Oppenheimer" leads the race for the British Academy Film Awards, with nominations in 13 categories including best film.

Gothic fantasia "Poor Things" received 11 nominations on the list announced Thursday, while historical epic "Killers of the Flower Moon" and Holocaust drama " The Zone of Interest" had nine each.

Other leading contenders include French courtroom drama "Anatomy of a Fall," boarding school comedy "The Holdovers" and Leonard Bernstein biopic "Maestro," with seven nominations each. Exploration of love and grief "All of Us Strangers" was nominated in six categories and class-war dramedy "Saltburn " in five.

" Barbie," one half of 2023's "Barbenheimer" box office juggernaut, also got five nominations but missed out on a best picture nod.

The winners will be announced at a Feb. 18 ceremony at London's Royal Festival Hall hosted by "Doctor Who" star David Tennant.

The prizes - officially the EE BAFTA Film Awards - are Britain's equivalent of Hollywood's Academy Awards and will be watched closely for hints of who may win at the Oscars on March 10.

The best film race pits "Oppenheimer" against "Poor Things," "Killers of the Flower Moon," "Anatomy of a Fall" and "The Holdovers."

"Poor Things" is also on the 10-strong list for the separate category of best British film, an eclectic slate that includes "Saltburn," imperial epic "Napoleon," south London romcom "Rye Lane" and chocolatier origin story "Wonka," among others.

The best leading actor nominees are Bradley Cooper for "Maestro," Colman Domingo for "Rustin," Paul Giamatti for "The Holdovers," Barry Keoghan for "Saltburn," Teo Yoo for "Past Lives" and " Cillian Murphy for "Oppenheimer."

"Oppenheimer" also received nominations for supporting performers Emily Blunt and Robert Downey Jr., as well as for Christopher Nolan's direction and screenplay.

Recognized

"I couldn't be happier that the British Academy recognized so many of my collaborators on 'Oppenheimer,' especially Chris Nolan," Murphy said. "Working on the film was an experience I'll never forget."

The best leading actress contenders are Fantasia Barrino for "The Color Purple," Sandra Hüller for "Anatomy of a Fall," Carey Mulligan for "Maestro," Vivian Oparah for "Rye Lane," Margot Robbie for "Barbie" and Emma Stone for "Poor Things."

Harrowing Ukraine war documentary "20 Days in Mariupol," produced by The Associated Press and PBS "Frontline," is nominated for best documentary and best film not in the English language.

Britain's film academy introduced changes to increase the awards' diversity in 2020, when no women were nominated as best director for the seventh year running and all 20 nominees in the lead and supporting performer categories were white.

The voting process was rejigged to add a longlist round in the selection before the final nominees are voted on by the academy's 8,000-strong membership of industry professionals.

Under the new rules, the director longlist had equal numbers of male and female filmmakers, but there is only one woman among the six best-director nominees, Justine Triet for "Anatomy of a Fall." She is up against Andrew Haigh for "All of Us Strangers," Alexander Payne for "The Holdovers," Bradley Cooper for "Maestro," Christopher Nolan for "Oppenheimer" and Jonathan Glazer for "The Zone of Interest." "Barbie" director Greta Gerwig was a notable omission.

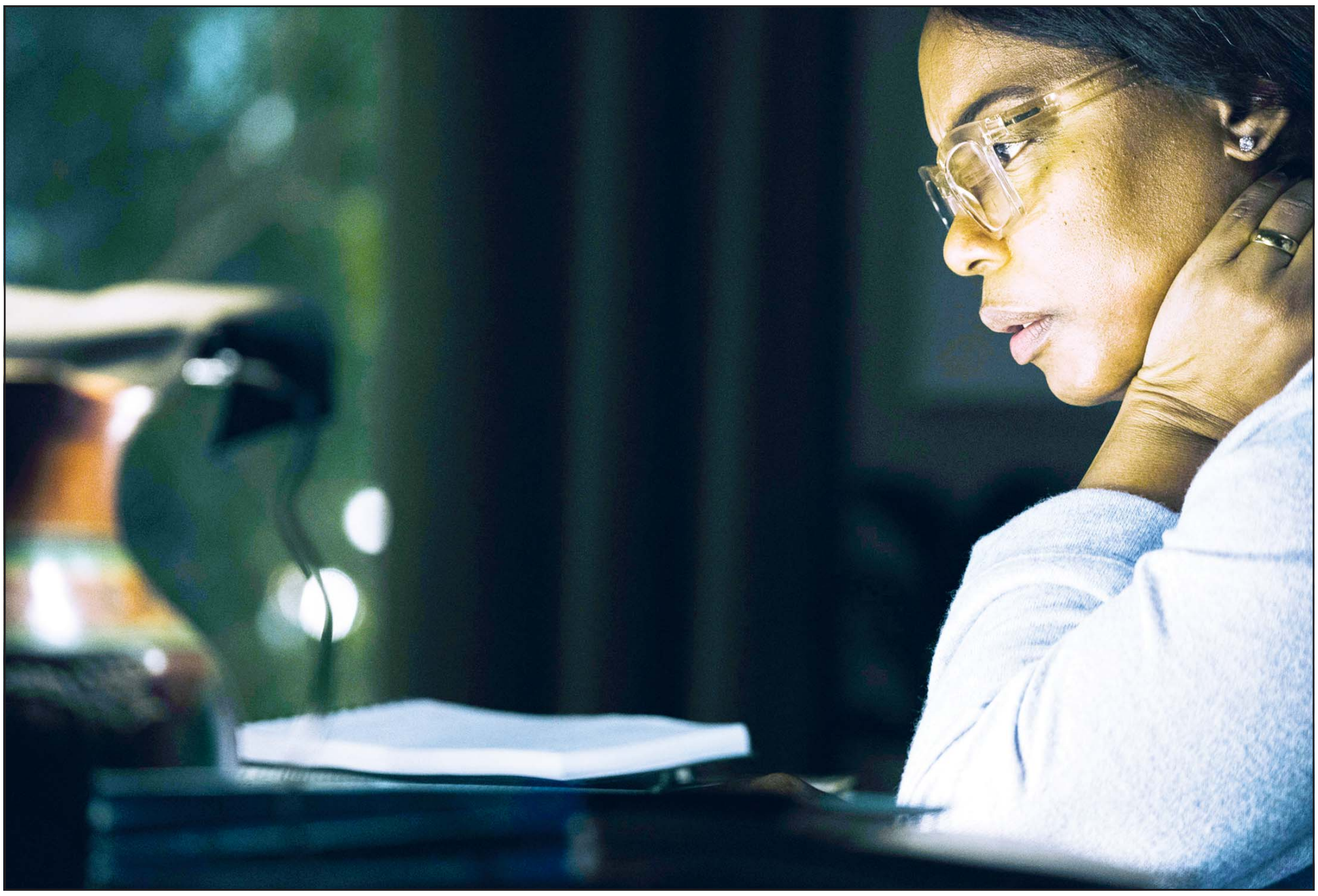
BAFTA chair Sara Putt said she was proud of the academy's work on diversity, but "the playing field is not level."

"We're coming at this from a world that is not level, in that sense," she said. "For every one film made by a woman, there are three films made by a man.

"So there's a really long journey to go on."

Variety

Features



This image released by Neon shows Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor in a scene from 'Origin.' (AP)

Film

A cinematic hero's journey through caste and history

DuVernay's 'Origin' traces racism's roots

NEW YORK, Jan 18, (AP): Ava DuVernay kept hearing she had to read "Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents." She had Isabel Wilkerson's book in galleys before it was published in 2020. Oprah Winfrey kept telling her to read it. But she put it off. It seemed an imposing read. Copies kept proliferating in her home.

"At one point, a high-profile director said to me, 'I heard you got the book,'" DuVernay says. "And I was like, 'Yeah, I got a couple copies.' He said, 'No, I heard you're doing it.' I said, 'As in doing a movie?' So I said I better read this."

But even once she cracked Wilkerson's book open, it took DuVernay a few reads before it really sunk in. "Caste," a best-seller released shortly before the death of George Floyd, reframed American racism through historical stratifications of caste. "Race, in the United States, is the visible agent of the unseen force of caste," wrote Wilkerson. "Caste is the bones, race the skin."

For DuVernay, whose films ("The 13th," "Selma") have illuminated American history with rigor and passion, the thesis of "Caste" was eye-opening.

"I was so wrapped up with the idea of race as a Black woman. That was the lens through which I see myself and the world sees me," says DuVernay. "That's what I thought."

"Origin," DuVernay's new film, isn't a direct adaptation of Wilkerson's book. DuVernay, who wrote the script, centers it on Wilkerson (Aunjaneu Ellis-Taylor), following the author while she researches the book and navigates her own personal joys and tragedies. The film takes a heavyweight work of historical and sociological inquiry and transforms it into a deeply humanistic drama and a globe-trotting detective story.

"She's Indiana Jones. She's going around the world in search of the holy grail," says Ellis-Taylor. "She's on this process of discovery and then in the middle of that worldwide hunt, she loses, and her loss is immeasurable. But she's still searching. That is a hero. That is a cinematic hero."

DuVernay and Ellis met for an interview last month in the downtown offices of Neon, which is releasing "Origin" theatrically Friday. They had only just begun talking about their still-fresh experience making the film. Ellis-Taylor hadn't yet seen it and wasn't sure she was going to. "It was so personal for me," she said. "I don't want to share it with anybody yet."

Some have overlooked "Origin" since its Venice Film Festival debut. DuVernay has lamented Ellis-Taylor's absence thus far from the pomp of award season. But underestimating "Origin" would be a mistake. The film, which made numerous 10 lists including this critic's, is audaciously original in how it fuses big ideas with emotional warmth.

If "Caste" sought to describe some of the man-made hierarchies that repeat throughout history, "Origin" - which DuVernay and her producing partner, Paul Garnes, gathered financing for independently - is itself a work that boldly and beautifully transcends conventional Hollywood limitations.

Experience

DuVernay and Garnes raised $38 million with the help of philanthropists - including the Ford Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation - many of whom had little Hollywood experience but believed in the movie. Melinda Gates is a producer. NBA stars like Chris Paul invested.

"We are in an industry and a society where everything has a label. If there's a Black woman director and a Black woman lead, it has to be about things they care about," DuVernay says. "My hope is that we can somehow break caste."

"Origin" opens with a dramatic recreation of the shooting of Trayvon Martin and later dips into historical vignettes including Nazi Germany, Jim Crow-era Mississippi and the experience of the Dalits in India. It steps into stories from history while capturing Wilkerson's life with her husband (Jon Bernthal) and mother (Emily Yancy) - intimate dramas that touchingly counter and clarify some of the social structures Wilkerson traces while seeking the roots of racism.

"I wanted something where her intimate personal journey ran alongside, mirrored, challenged and actually complemented this huge universal truth that we don't really know," DuVernay says. "And I felt like somewhere in there, there were touch points where they could complement each other. One doesn't always lead perfectly into other, but that they were in a conversation."

Ellis-Taylor, the Oscar-nominated co-star of "King Arthur," had acted in DuVernay's 2019 miniseries "When They See Us," about the 1989 Central Park jogger case. She signed on to "Origin" without a script. "I had read 'The Warmth of Other Suns,'" she says, alluding to Wilkerson's prior book. "So how bad could it be?"

DuVernay describes the making of "Origin" as centered on her work with Ellis-Taylor, a collaboration founded on their mutual personal connection to the material.

"These things that she speaks about in her pillars of caste, that's stuff I lived with. They're not abstract ideas. That's my reality," says Ellis-Taylor, who was raised in Mississippi.

Seeing race as a caste was, to Ellis-Taylor, a revelatory new paradigm.

"That excites me. That sets me on fire," she says. "And I believe this film is a dangerous film. If it does the work that I want it to do in theaters, it should make people angry. It should make people mad. I felt myself as being a soldier in that battle."

DuVernay, too, describes herself as ready for "ugly feedback" to the film. A prominent proponent of inclusivity in cinema and the first African American woman to direct a $100 million-budgeted live-action film, she's accustomed to the cultural battles that often accompany frank discussions of race.

"I am used to it. But on 'Selma' I was unprepared and it hurt me. It hurt me when people came at me about LBJ (on 'Selma') and that I'm tearing down people's legacy and that I'm wrong and how dare I do this and that when I was advancing the perspective of a group of people that usually don't have a story told from their point of view," says DuVernay. "It seems whenever I do that, I'm wrong. I've felt that vitriol and felt that anger."

"In this, I'm prepared for it in a way I hadn't been before," DuVernay adds. "And my preparation involves: Deal with it. I'm not going to fight you. It's in there. Have at it."

Yet the most common reaction to "Origin" from audiences has been an outpouring of emotion. Moviegoers often come out of the theater drying their eyes. Far from academic, the movie's power builds through its straightforward humanity - what DuVernay calls "15 little love stories."

In between are some painful historic episodes. Yet even filming those - like the Martin shooting - the director doesn't find agonizing.

"My experience in shooting these kinds of films before has given me a set of muscles and tools where it doesn't bother me, and I actually feel empowered and bolstered because I get to be the teller of these stories," says DuVernay.

ARAB TIMES
FRIDAY-SATURDAY, JANUARY 19-20, 2024

LOS ANGELES: Thank you, next: **Ariana Grande** announced on Wednesday that her new album, titled "eternal sunshine," will be released on March 8.

Last Friday, Grande released her first single from "eternal sunshine," a house-informed pop kiss-off to the haters, "yes, and?"

News of the album first broke Dec. 27, when the two-time Grammy award winner teased the future full-length album on her Instagram page. It will be her seventh studio album and first since 2020's "Positions."

"See you next year," she wrote in the caption of the Instagram post, which included images in a studio and in front of a mixing board, and a video where someone off screen tells her it is "almost the last day of this album." Grande responds, "I'm so tired," and laughs. "But so happy and grateful. I also feel like I weigh 3,000 tons."

On her Instagram story, she shared a screenshot captured from FaceTime with the text: "The two moods of the album."

She also shared posts from fans who received packages from her in the mail containing red lipstick from her R.E.M. Beauty line and a note that also read, "See you next year."

The album announcement arrived a few weeks after news broke that Ariana Grande signed to Good World Management firm, following her split with long-term manager **Scooter Braun**.

The new album will also be her first since her marriage and subsequent separation from real estate agent **Dalton Gomez**. (AP)

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NEW YORK: **Steely Dan,** R.E.M., **Timbaland, Hillary Lindsey** and **Dean Pitchford** will be inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame, an incoming class of musicians who have scaled the heights of country, classic rock, pop, hip-hop and alt-rock.

Steely Dan - co-founded by **Donald Fagan** and the late **Walter Becker** - finally get into the hall despite being a staple of classic rock with songs like "Reelin' in the Years," "Do It Again" and "Hey Nineteen." They went into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2001.

R.E.M. - the inducted members are **Bill Berry, Peter Buck, Mike Mills** and **Michael Stipe** - are behind such alt-rock hits as "Losing My Religion," "Everybody Hurts" and "It's the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine)."

And Nashville hitmaker Lindsey helped write "Girl Crush" for Little Big Town and "Jesus, Take the Wheel" for **Carrie Underwood**.

The class of 2024 also includes Pitchford, who helped Kenny Loggins with the megahit "Footloose" and also co-wrote "Fame" and "Holding Out For a Hero," and producer-writer Timbaland, the mastermind behind **Justin Timberlake**'s "SexyBack" and Missy Elliot's "Get Yer Freak On." (AP)

Lindsey

Grande

❑ ❑ ❑

TAMPA, Fla.: Retired wrestler **Hulk Hogan** and a friend rescued a teenage girl who was trapped in an overturned vehicle after a crash in **Florida**, according to Hogan's social media posts.

Hogan said on the social media platform X that he used a ball point pen to puncture the car's airbag and free the girl after witnessing the accident Sunday night in Tampa.

His new wife, yoga instructor **Sky Daily**, took to Facebook to praise the quick action taken by her 70-year-old husband and the couple's friend **Jake Rask**.

"By all appearances, she was unscathed, just really rattled, which is an absolute miracle!" Daily wrote.

The Tampa Police Department said in an email Tuesday that there were only minor injuries from the crash. (AP)

People & Places

This combination of photos shows Jelly Roll performing during the Times Square New Year's Eve celebration in New York on Dec. 31, 2023, (left), Megan Moroney performing at the Windy City Smokeout festival in Chicago on July 15, 2023, (center), and Morgan Wallen performing at the 57th Annual CMA Awards on Wednesday, Nov. 8, 2023, at the Bridgestone Arena in Nashville, Tenn. (AP)

Fashion

Timeless elegance

Givenchy 'returns' to its storied roots

PARIS, Jan 18, (AP): In times of doubt and self-searching, fashion houses often go back to their roots - to their atelier. Givenchy, in the wake of the departure of designer Matthew M. Williams, did just that. This season, the designer-less house held on Wednesday a menswear show at its Avenue George V salons - an archetypical couture setting - to try to re-center and find its voice once more. Models walked slowly past guests, like in bygone decades, for a show whose emphasis was the clothes, rather than showmanship.

This season, there was no razzmatazz, no celebrities - just a pared-down audience, nibbling madeleines, Turkish delight, and sipping champagne around dinner tables. It was a small, sometimes nostalgic display that laid bare the finesse and power of the age-old house's famed atelier, making for a collection brimming with style, finesse, and luxury.

Givenchy

In the very atelier where the late fashion legend Hubert de Givenchy once crafted his most iconic designs, Wednesday served as a poignant reminder of the house's profound ties to couture. Givenchy's design studio showcased fine tailoring with an array of suits featuring bare arms emerging gracefully through holes inserted at the suit's underarm, while sleeves flapped elegantly on top.

This design ethos paid homage to the founder's affinity for innovative cuts. The color palette incorporated hues of blue, including Klein, pale, and navy, alongside gray and brown, honoring the founder's distinctive preferences. However, the collection also embarked on explorations of sapphire, a color so beloved by de Givenchy that he saw it as an alternative to classic black.

It resulted in a muted color scheme for a relatively understated collection. Nevertheless, the simplicity of the designs did not equate to a lack of interest. Among the thoughtful minimalist creations was a pearl loose tunic top, part-Star Trek, part-ER, paired with fur chapka headwear. The melodious strains of Leonard Cohen's "Take This Waltz" wrapped the collection in a nostalgic aura.

Couture

One particularly striking element was the reimagining of the iconic blouse blanche, capturing the essence of workwear with a couture twist. Coats and suits sported incisions reminiscent of de Givenchy's penchant for capes.

However, amidst this transitional phase for Givenchy, certain designs, while luxurious, occasionally felt somewhat disconnected, mirroring the house's ongoing journey to redefine itself. The show left fashion enthusiasts anticipating its next move - the choice of a successor to Williams, who will undoubtedly have the challenge of steering this venerable fashion house into its next chapter.

Botter, renowned for its "Caribbean couture," unveiled an eclectic mix that blurred the lines between sartorial finesse and sportswear, peppered with their signature quirks. The collection by designers Rushemy Botter and Lisi Herrebrugh was a vibrant demonstration of their knack for fusing sustainability with avant-garde fashion, a philosophy that earned them the 2022 ANDAM Grand Prize.

The show featured a brown, nipped-shouldered ensemble with minimalist lines, uniquely accessorized with a woolen beanie proudly declaring "Caribbean." This piece, more than just a headwear, was a nod to the designer's heritage.

In striking contrast, a classic black tie and white shirt were paired with urban sneakers, embodying Botter's flair for fusing formalwear with casual elements. Bursts of eye-popping yellow in a loose tunic gown brought the Caribbean's vibrancy to Paris.

A recurring theme in the co-ed show was the haphazard and voluminous layering of garments in divergent hues, creating a funky, energetic vibe on the runway. This approach, emblematic of Botter's innovative spirit, has set them apart in the fashion world, showcasing an aesthetic that marries sustainability with cultural richness.

As models sashayed down the runway in this collection, Botter's vision for an environmentally conscious and culturally diverse fashion industry was crystal clear. The collection was not just a display of garments, but rather a celebration of the brand's journey in redefining the norms of fashion with a sustainable approach.

Zainab Jiwa, (left), and Ali Plumb poses for photographers following the BAFTA Film Awards nominations announcement in London, Thursday, Jan. 18. (AP) — **Details Page 11**

Variety

NEW YORK: Someday soon, someone will be walking down the street proudly carrying a ludicrously capacious bag, bought for a ludicrously capacious price.

The voluminous Burberry tote is one of the most famous props used on "Succession," the famed HBO saga of the Roy family dynasty, and it sold at auction recently for $18,750.

But that bag, which became notorious when **Matthew Macfadyen**'s Tom Wambsgans savagely ridiculed it, wasn't even the priciest item sold from the set of the addictive drama which sweeped Monday's Emmy Awards, on the heels of its Golden Globes wins.

No, that was a set of pink index cards containing **Roman Roy**'s eulogy notes for his father's funeral - a speech he never gave. Beginning, "My father **Logan Roy** was a great man," the four cards represent the tragic failure of Roman (**Kieran Culkin**) to meet the moment. They have a new life now with someone who paid $25,000 and hopefully will frame them nicely.

The online auction on behalf of HBO at Heritage Auctions in **Dallas**, ending Saturday, brought in a total of $627,825 for 236 lots. The results showed not only that people loved the show, says Heritage spokesperson **Robert Wilonsky**, but also that meaningful objects, and not the show's high-end "stealth" fashion, clicked most with bidders.

"At the end of the day, it was key moments of the show that resonated with fans," he says.

Props often take a back seat to costumes. After all, there's no award for "best props" at awards shows, like there is for costumes, notes "Succession" prop master **Monica Jacobs**, who joined the show after the pilot episode. But prop departments go to extreme lengths to secure just the right item - even if it only appears for a few seconds. Jacobs shared the origin stories of some of the show's most iconic props. (AP)

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BEIRUT: After withstanding the pressures of time, the craft of knitting using a manual loom machine has become a significant part of Lebanese culture and heritage attract both tourists and locals who appreciate handmade and adorned Abayas (robes) that are symbolic of **Lebanon**.

Though it faced a major decline in most cities, the Lebanese Abaya knitting craft endured for its deep cultural roots. The craft uses threads made of wool, silk, cotton, and linen with gold and silver embroideries to knit the Lebanese abaa'a, scarves, and Arabian seat coverings.

This distinct looming craft requires much patience and passion. It would take two months for a silk Abaya with gold embroideries to come to fruition, to organically dye the cloth, and to precisely weigh silk threads used. (KUNA)

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TOKYO: Uniqlo Co. has sued rival retailer Shein over a small shoulder bag the Japanese retailer said was an inferior and unlawful copy of its hit product touted as the "Mary Poppins bag."

The lawsuit demanded Shein stop selling its product that Uniqlo said looks too much like its Round Mini Shoulder Bag.

The Uniqlo bag is praised on TikTok and other social media as roomy but also light and compact. The **Mary Poppins** nickname refers to the 1964 musical starring **Julie Andrews** in which a nanny pulls just about anything from her magical carpet bag, including a hat stand.

Macfadyen

Culkin

Shein, founded in **China** but now based in **Singapore**, did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The lawsuit was filed in Tokyo District Court on Dec. 28 by Tokyo-based Fast Retailing Co., which operates Uniqlo stores.

Uniqlo said Thursday it's demanding damages of about 160 million yen ($1.1 million) in its lawsuit targeting the three companies that operate Shein, Roadget Business Pte, Fashion Choice Pte and Shein Japan Co. (AP)

Music

'Not rock 'n' roll's little sister'

Country music's new golden era

LOS ANGELES, Jan 18, (AP): It was an unexpected musical success story last year, one that has only continued to snowball: Country music, with its loyal listenership on the margins of pop's mainstream, had a crossover moment.

Some of the biggest albums and songs of the year are credited to country musicians like Morgan Wallen, Zach Bryan and Luke Combs, whose hits went beyond country radio stations and onto pop rotations.

But when the 2024 Grammy nominations were announced in November, something seemed amiss. Country was not represented in the main categories - except for Jelly Roll and The War and Treaty, who are up for best new artist. It seemed like a notable absence for a genre that topped the charts all year. The lack of nominations surprised Recording Academy CEO and President Harvey Mason jr.

"We need to do more work with our country voters and continue to invite more country voters to the process," he told The Associated Press at the time.

Innovative

That hasn't always been the case: In 2019, Kacey Musgraves won album of the year at the Grammys for her "Golden Hour," a release celebrated for its innovative take on the country genre that combined elements of pop and disco. It's the kind of innovation often celebrated by the Recording Academy.

Still, country music has broken new ground. In July, country acts held the top three spots on the Billboard Hot 100 for the first time in the chart's 65-year history: Controversy hoisted Jason Aldean's "Try That In a Small Town" to No. 1 for a short week, followed by Wallen's "Last Night" and Combs' cover of Tracy Chapman's "Fast Car." The latter also won song of the year at the 2023 Country Music Awards, despite the fact that the original was written in 1988.

Oliver Anthony's viral hit "Rich Men North of Richmond" also made it to No. 1, making him the first artist without any prior chart history.

Wallen is in a league of his own. His latest album, with its inventive exploration of trap beats over heartbreaking country, titled "One Thing at a Time," spent 16 weeks at the top of the Billboard 200 in 2023 - which meant he held the top spot for 30% of the year ... and his record was released in March. It also means that Wallen's album spent the more time at No. 1 than any other album since Adele's "21" dominated over a decade ago. Unsurprisingly, "One Thing at a Time" was the most-consumed album in the US last year.

Across iHeartRadio stations, Wallen accounted for 2.1 billion total audience spins.

Beyond Wallen and those other chart-toppers, newer country talent has begun experiencing some crossover success, like the hip-hop head Jelly Roll (with "Need a Favor"), Lainey Wilson's Deana Carter-referencing "Watermelon Moonshine," and Bailey Zimmerman's hard rock rasp on "Rock and A Hard Place." (Wilson is the only woman on the list, but additional attention can and should be given to other newcomers, like Gabby Barrett, Carly Pearce, Ingrid Andress, among others.)

If pop has begun embracing a "genreless" approach to music, it seems like that unconventionality is opening doors for country as well - and it is accounting for the music's popularity. At least, that's what Dan Smyers of the three-time Grammy award winning duo Dan + Shay believes. "There's so many different sounds in country happening right now," he says, which has inspired "crossover" moments over the last few years - like his group's song "10,000 Hours," which featured Justin Bieber and got Top 40 radio play.

Getting in those all-genre spaces allows for discovery. "Somebody who might have been listening to the top 40 station in their town goes like, 'Oh, that's cool. I dig that song. I've never really listened to country,'" Smyers says. "And then they start digging into the catalog and listening to our back catalog, or to other country acts, and they fall in love with it. And now it's like this perfect storm with streaming."

"Since I've been in the game, I can confidently say country is bigger than ever. I think we're in a really strong spot," says award-winning, "Small Town Boy" singer Dustin Lynch. Particularly in that country acts can now play with different sounds. "I've been able to do very traditional country leaning (music) and had success with that, and a straight up rock song as well."

He says country music is now in a position where people who "maybe never gave us a chance" are listening to country music with an open-mindedness.

Streaming

And there's something to that: According to Luminate, country music experienced its biggest streaming week ever in 2023, a whopping 2.26 billion, the data and analytics platform's Midyear Music Report found. In the first 26 weeks of 2023, the data and analytics platform found that country music consumption in the United States was up 20.3% year-over-year, a number Wallen is particularly responsible for: He accounted for 40% of the growth in country consumption last year.

The genre has historically been enjoyed by English-speaking Americans, but Luminate's reporting also shows growth in the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Brazil, Mexico, Germany and Vietnam. That's something Darius Rucker has noticed firsthand. "I've seen what country is doing, especially in Europe. It's crazy. I tour Europe and you know, we do well. And it's just great to see what America has known forever," he says, "And people just didn't want to embrace, and so many people are embracing now."

"It just shows that country music is not rock and roll's little sister anymore," he adds.

Smyers has his own theories to why country music is experiencing this explosive period. "Western culture is having a moment," he theorizes, referencing the success of the popular television show "Yellowstone." "It was a big movement for that kind of rootsy Americana country sound," he says, which served as another platform for viewers to potentially become country music fans.

But ultimately, he believes "people are starved for authenticity in just everything in life, in TV and movies, especially in music," he says. "And I feel like country music kind of does the authenticity thing better than any other genre."

Up-and-comer Megan Moroney agrees. "I think people are just like really drawn more towards authenticity nowadays," she says, highlighting country music's "real life lyrics."

Thanks to social media, where there's "so much fake stuff," she believes there's a hunger for truth-telling. It's why she describes her single "I'm Not Pretty," not as a "country song," but as a "cultural song," one with lyrics that tackle universal concerns like doom scrolling and insecurity.

Champion

Veterans of the genre, too, have taken note of country's big year. Reba McEntire, who joined "The Voice" as a coach for the first time in 2023, taking over from Blake Shelton, views her role there as an opportunity to champion this era of country music performers.

"I just kind of stay in my lane and do the best I can with supporting country music," she told AP. Next month, Dan + Shay will join her, John Legend and Chance the Rapper as season 25's coaches - marking the first-time half of the four spots will have been occupied by country musicians.

Garth Brooks, too, has watched as country music enjoys a new kind of crossover moment - and he's meeting it in a big way. In May of last year, Brooks announced he was launching his own radio station with the streaming platform TuneIn called The Big 615, with a focus on traditional country music unbeholden to major labels, which dominate terrestrial radio. He's hoping to use it to promote more women on the airwaves as well as have a positive influence on country music's growing global footprint.

"If you're in country music," he says, "They're going to try and fix your music if they take it outside of the United States - which usually means steel (guitars) and fiddles get taken off. Now, that doesn't work for us," Brooks told AP, referring to archaic radio structures.

"So, what I love, it's fresh(ly) baked out of Nashville and it's a global station. So, you're hearing it the moment it hits the streets. Very proud of it."

And if his career can be used as evidence of country music's enduring appeal, this new class of performers only have more exciting things ahead.

Schools shut, nationwide vaccination program launched

Zambia reels from cholera outbreak with over 400 dead

LUSAKA, Zambia, Jan 18, (AP): Zambia is reeling from a major cholera outbreak that has killed more than 400 people and infected more than 10,000, leading authorities to order schools across the country to remain shut after the end-of-year holidays.

A large soccer stadium in the capital city has been converted into a treatment facility.

The Zambian government is embarking on a mass vaccination program and says it's providing clean water - 2.4 million liters a day - to communities that are affected across the southern African nation.

The national disaster management agency has been mobilized.

Cholera is an acute diarrhea infection caused by a bacteria that is typically spread via contaminated food or water. The disease is strongly linked to poverty and inadequate access to clean water.

Emergencies

The outbreak in Zambia began in October and 412 people have died and 10,413 cases have been recorded, according to the latest count on Wednesday from the Zambia Public Health Institute, the government body that deals with health emergencies.

The Health Ministry says cholera has been detected in nearly half of the country's districts and nine out of 10 provinces, and the nation of about 20 million people has been recording more than 400 cases a day.

"This outbreak continues to pose a threat to the health security of the nation," Health Minister Sylvia Masebo said, outlining it was a nationwide problem.

The United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, called the fatality rate of around 4% in the three-month outbreak "a devastatingly high number." When treated, cholera typically has a death rate of less than 1%.

There have been recent cholera outbreaks in other southern African nations including Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. More than 200,000 cases and over 3,000 deaths have been reported in southern Africa since the start of 2023, UNICEF said.

Malawi had its worst cholera outbreak in decades in 2023. Last year, the World Health Organization reported that about 30 countries globally, also including Nigeria and Uganda in Africa, suffered serious outbreaks in the last few years.

Cholera barely affects countries in the developed world and can be easily treated but can be quickly fatal if not treated.

More than half - 229 - of the victims in the Zambian outbreak died before being admitted to a health facility, the public health institute said.

Zambia has had several major cholera outbreaks since the 1970s but this one is the worst for 20 years in terms of the caseload, according to Dr. Mazyanga Mazaba, the director of public health policy and communication at the public health institute.

The cholera bacteria can also survive longer in warmer weather and unusually heavy rains and storms in southern Africa have contributed to recent outbreaks, experts say.

WHO said last year that while poverty and conflict remain the main drivers for cholera, climate change has contributed to the disease's upsurge in many places across the globe since 2021 by making storms wetter and more frequent. A cyclone sparked a spiraling cholera outbreak in Mozambique last year.

Heavy rains and flash flooding in Zambia have converted some neighborhoods into soggy or waterlogged areas.

The Zambian government announced in early January that schools - which were meant to open for the year on Jan. 8 - will only open on Jan. 29. Parents and children were urged to make use of education programs on public TV and radio, a situation that had echoes of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The education minister ordered schools to be cleaned and inspected.

Treatment

Zambia's Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit was mobilized and it was delivering large water tanks and trucking in clean water to some neighborhoods daily. Granulated chlorine to treat water was also being provided, it said.

The majority of cases are in the capital, Lusaka, where a 60,000-seat national soccer stadium has been converted into a treatment center and is dealing with around 500 patients at any one time, the health minister said.

She said Zambia had received around 1.4 million doses of the oral cholera vaccine from the WHO and expected more than 200,000 more to arrive soon. Zambian government officials, including Masebo, took a vaccine publicly to encourage others to also do so.

Health experts have previously warned that the numerous cholera outbreaks globally have strained the supply of vaccines, which are mostly distributed to poor countries through an international body run by the UN and partners. Vaccines alliance Gavi predicted that the vaccine shortage could last until 2025.

The Conversation

Unlock the dietary secrets with a nutrition expert

What's best diet for healthy sleep?

By Erica Jansen

University of Michigan

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

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You probably already know that how you eat before bed affects your sleep. Maybe you've found yourself still lying awake at 2 a.m. after enjoying a cup of coffee with dessert. But did you know that your eating choices throughout the day may also affect your sleep at night?

In fact, more and more evidence shows that overall dietary patterns can affect sleep quality and contribute to insomnia.

I am a nutritional epidemiologist, and I'm trained to look at diets at the population level and how they affect health.

In the US, a large percentage of the population suffers from poor sleep quality and sleep disorders like insomnia and obstructive sleep apnea, a condition in which the upper airway becomes blocked and breathing stops during sleep. At the same time, most Americans eat far too much fatty and processed food, too little fiber and too few fruits and vegetables.

Although it is difficult to determine whether these two trends are causally linked to one another, more and more research points to linkages between sleep and diet and offers hints at the biological underpinnings of these relationships.

My colleagues and I wanted to get a deeper understanding of the possible link between sleep and diet in Americans who are 18 and older. So we analyzed whether people who follow the government's Dietary Guidelines for Americans get more hours of sleep.

Using a nationally representative dataset of surveys collected from 2011 to 2016, we found that people who did not adhere to dietary recommendations such as consuming enough servings of fruits, vegetables, legumes and whole grains had shorter sleep duration.

In a separate study, we followed more than 1,000 young adults ages 21 to 30 who were enrolled in a web-based dietary intervention study designed to help them increase their daily servings of fruits and vegetables.

We found that those who increased their fruit and vegetable consumption over a three-month period reported better sleep quality and reductions in insomnia symptoms.

Research conducted outside the US by my group and others also shows that healthier overall dietary patterns are associated with better sleep quality and fewer insomnia symptoms. These include the Mediterranean diet - a diet rich in plant foods, olive oil and seafood, and low in red meat and added sugar - and anti-inflammatory diets. These are similar to the Mediterranean diet but include additional emphasis on certain components in the diet like flavonoids, a group of compounds found in plants, which are shown to lower inflammatory biomakers in the blood.

Within overall healthy diet patterns, there are numerous individual foods and nutrients that may be linked to quality of sleep, with varying degrees of evidence.

For example, studies have linked consumption of fatty fish, dairy, kiwi fruit, tart cherries and other berries such as strawberries and blueberries with better sleep. One of the common pathways through which these foods may affect sleep is by providing melatonin, an important modulator of sleep and wake cycles in the brain.

Fiber-rich foods like beans and oatmeal and certain protein sources - especially those that are high in the amino acid tryptophan, such as poultry - are also associated with higher-quality sleep. Individual nutrients that may be beneficial include magnesium, vitamin D, iron, omega-3 fatty acids and manganese. Some foods like salmon are sources of multiple nutrients.

Habits

One important caveat with a lot of the research on individual foods, as well as diet patterns, is that most studies cannot easily disentangle the direction of the relationships.

In other words, it's hard to know whether the association is a result of diet affecting sleep, or sleep affecting diet. The reality is that it is likely a cyclical relationship, where a healthy diet promotes good sleep quality, which in turn helps to reinforce good dietary habits.

With observational studies, there are also possible confounding factors, such as age and economic status, that may have important correlations with both sleep and diet.

Aiming for higher intake of sleep-promoting foods isn't necessarily enough to get better sleep. It's also important to avoid certain foods that could be bad for sleep. Here are some of the main culprits:

■ Saturated fats, such as that in burgers and fries and processed foods, could lead to less slow-wave sleep, which is considered the most restorative sleep.

■ Refined carbohydrates, such as those in white bread and pasta, are metabolized quickly. If you eat these foods for dinner, they can result in waking up from hunger.

■ Alcohol disrupts sleep quality. Although the sedative effects of alcohol can initially make it easier to fall asleep, it disrupts sleep patterns by shortening the amount of REM, or rapid eye movement, sleep in the first part of the night and leads to more night awakenings.

■ Caffeine consumed even six hours before bed can make it difficult to fall asleep because it blocks the hormone adenosine, which promotes sleepiness.

■ The consistent overconsumption of calories can lead to weight gain, one of the strongest predictors of obstructive sleep apnea. Having excess weight is a factor because it can put additional pressure on the diaphragm and lungs, and can also lead to a narrower airway if fat accumulates around the neck and throat.

Interestingly, our group has recently shown that toxicants in food or food packaging, like pesticides, mercury and phthalates - chemicals used to manufacture plastics - can affect sleep. Since toxicants can be found in both healthy and unhealthy foods, this research suggests that some foods can contain a mix of components that are both beneficial and harmful for sleep.

The timing and consistency of eating, known as "chrononutrition" in the sleep research field, also very likely help to explain associations between healthy diets and good sleep.

In the US, eating at conventional meal times as opposed to random snacking has been associated with better sleep. In addition, late-night eating is typically associated with unhealthier food intake - such as processed snacks - and could cause more fragmented sleep.

A final and very interesting piece of this puzzle is that associations between diet and sleep often differ by gender. For example, it appears that the associations between healthy diet patterns and insomnia symptoms could be stronger among women. One reason for this could be gender differences in sleep. In particular, women are more likely than men to suffer from insomnia.

Overall, there is not one magic food or drink that will improve your sleep. It's better to focus on overall healthy dietary patterns throughout the day, with a higher proportion of calories consumed earlier in the day.

And, in addition to avoiding caffeine, alcohol and heavy meals in the two to three hours before bed, the last few hours of the day should include other good sleep hygiene practices.

These include disengaging from technology, reducing light exposure and creating a comfortable and relaxing environment for sleep. Moreover, allowing enough time to sleep and maintaining a consistent bedtime and wake time is essential. (AP)

Experts warn against carbon monoxide, hypothermia risks

Expert tips to navigate cold weather dangers

HOUSTON, Jan 18, (AP): The arctic blast of winter weather that is gripping much of the US this week is also bringing with it various hazards that people have to contend with to keep warm and safe.

These dangers can include carbon monoxide poisoning, hypothermia and frozen pipes that can burst and make homes unlivable.

Public safety officials and experts say there are multiple ways people can prepare themselves to avoid these winter weather hazards and keep themselves safe.

Officials say that during a winter storm, people should stay indoors. But home heating systems running for hours can increase the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning as the deadly fumes can be produced by furnaces, stoves and heaters, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Carbon monoxide can also be created when people use portable generators or run cars in their garages to stay warm or charge their phones.

Dr. Alex Harding, assistant professor of emergency medicine at the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, said because carbon monoxide is odorless and colorless, people won't necessarily be aware of it.

"The symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning can be really insidious. They can sneak up on patients and can range from just developing a headache or maybe a little bit of nausea to all the way to losing consciousness and seizures," he said.

Exposure

Houston Fire Chief Samuel Peña said residents should not operate generators inside their homes or even in their garages.

"We all don't want you to sacrifice safety for warmth," Peña said.

Prolonged exposure to frigid temperatures can put people at risk to hypothermia, a condition that happens when one's body loses heat faster than it can produce it.

"Hypothermia is definitely one of the bigger concerns, especially if we do have any kind of certainty in like power grids or electricity failing," Harding said.

The danger of hypothermia is greater for someone who is outside, exposed to wind gusts and isn't wearing appropriate clothing or has clothing that gets wet.

"If they have a safe place that's warm, where they can hunker down, where they have water and food and all those kind of necessities … then that's going to limit their exposure to those risks," Hardin said.

But vulnerable populations like people with disabilities or homeless individuals can have problems with finding a warm and safe place to stay. In Houston, officials have worked in recent years to improve their services for disabled individuals and homeless people during winter weather and other situations, like natural disasters, said Julian Ochoa, who is the Houston Office of Emergency Management's emergency preparedness manager for vulnerable populations.

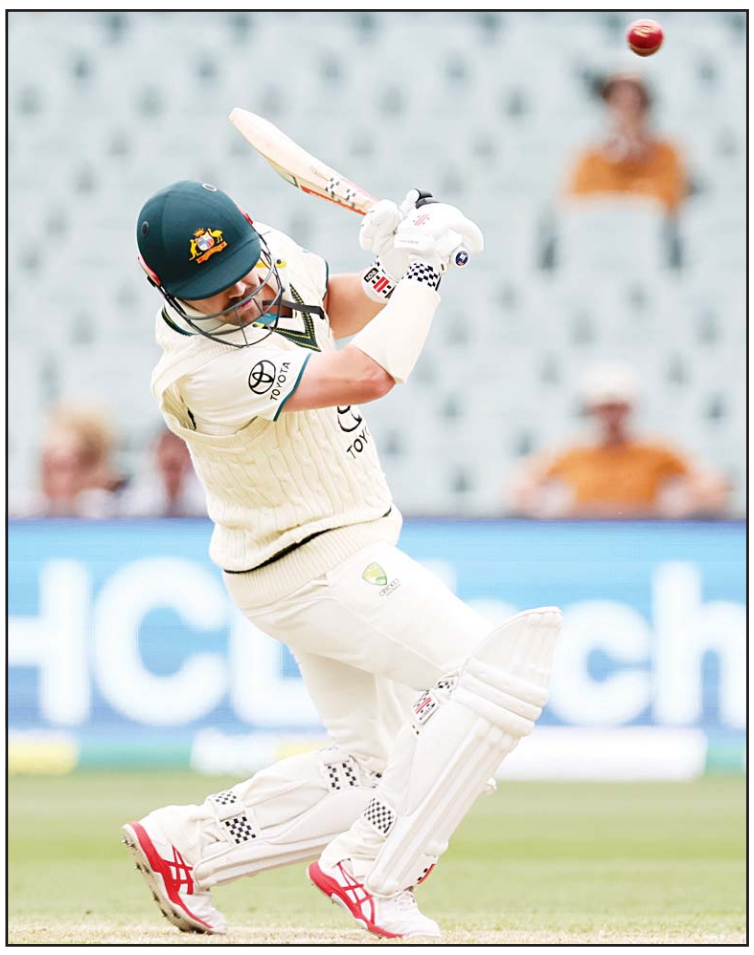
Frozen pipes in a home during severe winter weather is a particular problem in parts of the South, including in Houston, as such equipment is often located outside of structures. But other parts of the country also have to deal with this problem.

Jose Parra, a master plumber with Abacus Plumbing, Air Conditioning & Electrical in Houston, advises people to insulate any pipes that are exposed to the outside, turn off and drain sprinkler systems and let faucets inside a home drip during freezing temperatures so water can run through the pipes and protect them.

"A lot of what we're fixing, I would say 80% to 90%, could have been prevented with just a little bit of work ahead of time," Parra said.

Head scores 119 from 134 balls

Australia set to win 1st test against Windies



Australia's Travis Head avoids a delivery from the West Indies on the second day of their cricket Test match in Adelaide, Australia, Thursday, Jan. 18, 2024. (AP)

ADELAIDE, Australia, Jan 18, (AP): Australia was set to force an early end to the first cricket test against West Indies after taking six second-innings wickets late on the second day at the Adelaide Oval on Thursday.

The Caribbean side was 73-6 in its second innings and still trails Australia by 22 runs going into Day 3 on Friday.

Travis Head earlier scored 119 from 134 balls to help put Australia in a strong position with 283 runs and a first-innings lead of 95 runs.

CRICKET

Head mixed some edgy near-misses with audacious stroke-play, smacking a dozen fours and three sixes.

"It was pretty rough going, but that reflects the wicket," Head said. "But I am really happy with the way that I was able to fight through that ... I felt like I took my chances when I could."

Shamar Joseph took his third wicket on his debut for West Indies and Australia went to lunch Thursday at 144-5 and trailed the Caribbean side by 44 runs.

The 24-year-old Joseph took the prized wicket of new Australian opener Steve Smith with his first ball in test cricket on the opening day Wednesday at the Adelaide Oval.

Joseph added the wicket of Marnus Labuschagne before stumps Wednesday, when Australia was 59-2. On Thursday, Joseph had new No. 4 batter Cameron Green out for 14.

Pace bowler Joseph, who made 36 batting at No. 11 - the second-highest score in the visitor's innings - had eventual figures of 5-94.

Australia captain Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood took four wickets each as Australia restricted West Indies to 188 and made good use of the Adelaide Oval pitch after winning the toss and bowling first.

West Indies, which hasn't won a test match Down Under since February 1997, has brought only five players who appeared in the two tests against Australia in 2022-23 and added seven uncapped players to the touring squad.

West Indies coach Andre Coley said things might not improve anytime soon for his Caribbean side.

Former captain Jason Holder is among a senior core of players who chose to play in cash-rich global Twenty20 leagues rather than tour Australia.

"Our situation is that financially we aren't secure enough to be able to offer substantial central contracts," Coley said. "And that is always going to be a challenge for us.

1st US woman to achieve feat

Price celebrates Dakar Rally stage win

RIYADH, Jan 18, (AP): Sara Price slid out of her off-road vehicle at the Dakar Rally, after a rigorous ride through the diabolical dust and dunes in Saudi Arabia, and checked for certain she made history in the endurance event.

"I don't think an American female's ever won a stage, right," she asked.

RALLYING

Price was right, the 31-year-old Californian this week became the first female American driver and third woman ever to win a Dakar stage.

Not bad for a Dakar rookie.

Price has forged a career out of remote adventures around the globe. She's a former X Games medalist, drove in an electric racing series for Daytona 500 and Indianapolis 500 team owner Chip Ganassi, was a national dirt bike champion, and even went Hollywood for a spell. Look it up on IMDB, she boasts credits as a stunt driver, including in "Jumanji: The Next Level."

But racing in Dakar?

The off-road race that stretches for thousands of miles, this year held up to 15 days throughout the jagged rocks and canyons in Saudi territory, had been just a dream for Price since 2015.

"This year, I finally just said, you know what, I'm going," Price said in an interview with The Associated Press. "If that takes spending every ounce of dollars I have in my savings account, I'm going to make it happen. I don't want to wait anymore. I was trying to get sponsors and funding to make it happen, I'd say heavily the last five years, and it just wasn't happening. It's a very expensive race to do."

Murray's jumper at buzzer propels Hawks past Magic

Brooklyn Nets forward Cameron Johnson, front, is fouled by Portland Trail Blazers guard Malcolm Brogdon during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Portland, Ore., Wednesday, Jan. 17, 2024. (AP)

Lakers drown Mavericks

ATLANTA, Jan 18, (AP): Dejounte Murray hit a 17-foot jumper as time expired to give the Atlanta Hawks a 106-104 victory over the Orlando Magic on Wednesday night.

Murray finished with 26 points, and Trae Young scored 18 points on 5-for-14 shooting for Atlanta. Onyeka Okongwu had 15 points, and Bogdan Bogdanovic and Clint Capela each added 12. The Hawks shot 51.3% but had a season-high 23 turnovers

Paolo Banchero scored 26 points to lead the Magic. Wendell Carter Jr. had 18 and Jalen Suggs added 16.

After Banchero made a 3-pointer from a couple of feet beyond the arc to tie it at 104 with 8.4 seconds left, Murray dribbled down the left wing with Markelle Fultz, pulled up and swished the jumper for the win.

Lakers 127, Mavericks 110

In Los Angeles, Anthony Davis finished an assist shy of a triple-double, D'Angelo Russell scored 29 points and Los Angeles overcame Luka Doncic's triple-double to beat Dallas.

Davis had 28 points on 12-of-17 shooting and added 12 rebounds and nine assists in 33 minutes. LeBron James added 25 points, eight rebounds and eight assists to help the Lakers win for the fourth time in six games.

Los Angeles, which evened its record at 21-21, shot 53.8% from the field (49 for 91) and had 12 3-pointers. It also had a 32-7 advantage in fastbreak points.

Returning after missing three games because of a sprained right ankle, Doncic had 33 points, 13 rebounds and 10 assists in 33 minutes for his seventh triple-double of the season and 63rd overall. Dereck Lively II added 16 points and 11 rebounds for the Mavericks, who dropped to 5-4 in January.

Trail Blazers 105, Nets 103

In Portland, Ore. Anfernee Simons hit the winning layup with 0.2 seconds left and Portland snapped a four-game losing streak.

Simons finished with 20 points. Jerami Grant led the Blazers with 30 points and eight rebounds.

Mikal Bridges scored 21 for the Nets but had to leave the game for a time in the second half after a collision. Spencer Dinwiddie added 19 points for Brooklyn, which lost its fourth straight.

Portland trailed by 11 but pulled in front 88-87 midway through fourth quarter on Grant's 3-pointer. It was close the rest of the way. Dinwiddie made two foul shots with 1:48 left that gave the Nets a 101-97 lead. But then Simons hit a floater that tied it at 101 before Grant's tip-in with 9.1 seconds to go gave Portland a 103-101 edge.

Cam Johnson's layup tied the game again, and the Blazers called a timeout with 5.2 seconds left before Simons' game-winning basket.

Knicks 109, Rockets 94

In New York, Julius Randle scored 31 points, Jalen Brunson added 30 in his return from a two-game absence and New York beat Houston.

Brunson missed two games because

BASKETBALL

of bruised left calf and Randle struggled without his point guard in a loss to Orlando on Monday, shooting 5 for 18 for 15 points. But the offense was flowing nicely again in the second half as the Knicks pulled away after leading by two at halftime.

OG Anunoby had 15 points for the Knicks, who reached the halfway point of their schedule at 24-17. Josh Hart finished with 10 points and 13 rebounds.

Fred VanVleet had 24 points and 12 assists for the Rockets, who finished 1-5 on a six-game trip. Alperen Sengun added 18 points and 10 rebounds in Houston's eighth straight loss to New York.

Timberwolves 124, Pistons 117

In Detroit, Anthony Edwards had 27 points and eight assists to lead Minnesota.

The Pistons, who beat the Wizards on Monday, are 2-35 after winning two of their first three games, including a 28-game losing streak that matched the NBA record.

Karl-Anthony Towns scored 27 points for Minnesota, which has won three straight. Jaden McDaniels had 23 points and Rudy Gobert added 19 points and 16 assists.

Jaden Ivey scored 32 points for the Pistons, who were starting a six-game homestand without Cade Cunningham (knee). Bojan Bogdanovic had 20 points and Jalen Duren added 16 points and 11 rebounds.

Celtics 117, Surs 98

In Boston Jayson Tatum scored 24 points and Jaylen Brown returned from a one-game absence to score 21 as Boston beat San Antonio in Spurs phenom Victor Wembanyama's first game on the Celtics' famous parquet floor.

The 7-foot-3 French rookie, the No. 1 overall pick in the draft, scored 10 points in the first quarter, when San Antonio kept it close. He finished with 27 points and five rebounds in 27 minutes as the Spurs (7-33), who have the worst record in the Western Conference, lost their third straight.

Jrue Holiday scored 22 points and Luke Kornet matched his season high with nine rebounds for the Celtics, won their third game in a row and improved to 20-0 at home, extending their franchise record.

Raptors 121, Heat 97

In Toronto, Gary Trent Jr. scored a season-high 28 points, RJ Barrett had 26 and Toronto never trailed in a win over Miami.

Toronto led by 37 at one point despite playing without forward Pascal Siakam. The two-time All-NBA selection and two-time All-Star is being traded to the Indiana Pacers, according to a person with knowledge of the agreement.

Scottie Barnes scored 20 points and Immanuel Quickley had 17 points, nine assists and eight rebounds for the Raptors.

Jimmy Butler scored 16 points for Miami, whose 35-point halftime deficit was the biggest in team history. Tyler Herro and Bam Adebayo also had 16 points each while Duncan Robinson added 14.

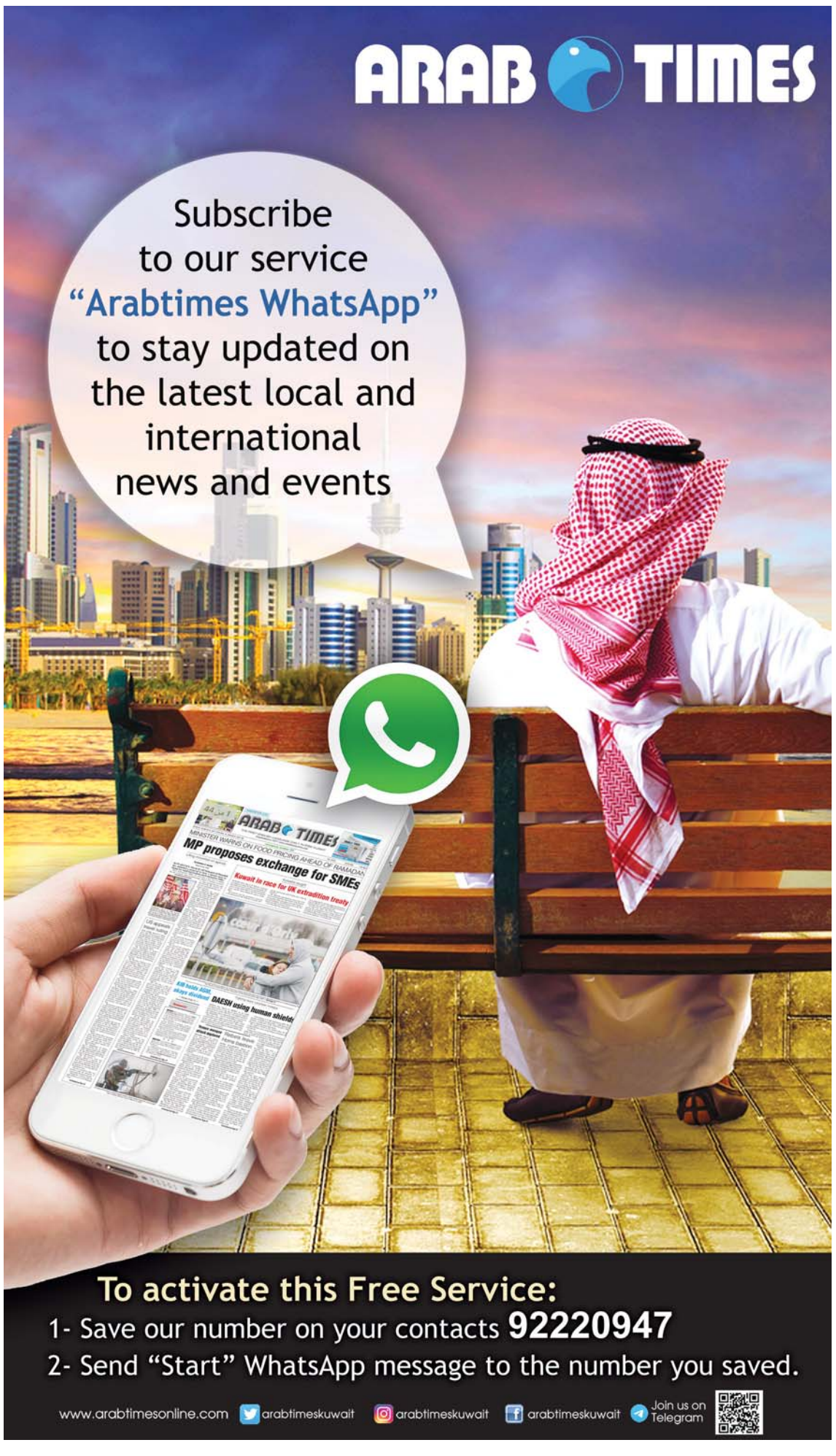
Pelicans 132, Hornets 112

In New Orleans, Brandon Ingram highlighted a 28-point performance with a career-best seven 3-pointers to go with 10 rebounds and 10 assists, and New Orleans set a franchise record for 3s with 25.

It was the third career triple-double for Ingram, who received a standing ovation as he checked out of the game for good in the final minutes.

CJ McCollum scored 22 points and hit four times from deep. Rookie guard Jordan Hawkins made six 3s and finished with 21 points for New Orleans, while Trey Murphy III hit five 3s and scored 18.

LaMelo Ball had 29 points and Terry Rozier added 25 for Charlotte, which trailed most of the game and by 24 in the second half. Nick Richards added 10 points and 12 rebounds for the struggling Hornets, who have lost six straight and 17 of 18.



Arizona beats USC 82-67 for latest bounce-back victory

TUCSON, Ariz., Jan 18, (AP): Kevin Durant sat in the front row. Bijan Robinson also was in the crowd, along with several current and former Arizona athletes.

The star-studded crowd filled McKale Center to get a glimpse of Bronny James and the Wildcats wanted to put on a show of their own.

Arizona won, but it was more gritty than graceful.

Caleb Love scored 20 points, Pelle Larsson added 13 and No. 12 Arizona beat Southern California 82-67 on Wednesday night for another bounce-back victory under coach Tommy Lloyd.

"Arizona basketball is a show," Lloyd said. "I wish we would have played better for everybody tonight, but at the end of the day we got the result we wanted. It didn't feel great, but we did."

Coming off a three-point loss at Washington State, the Wildcats (13-4, 4-2 Pac-12) overcame a nearly seven-minute stretch without a field goal to lead by 10 at halftime and stretched it to 19 midway through the second half.

Arizona had a second straight subpar shooting night, hitting 40% from the field after 35% against the Cougars, allowing short-handed USC to hang around. The Wildcats made up for it by scoring scored 22 second-chance points off 21 offensive rebounds to beat the Trojans for the 13th time in the last 14 games at McKale Center.

Arizona is 15-0 coming off a loss under Lloyd.

'Offensively, we've got to go hard whether we're making shots or not," said Arizona's Keshad Johnson, who had 10 points and 13 rebounds.

The Trojans (8-10, 2-5) arrived in the desert on a two-game losing streak and missing their top two scorers. Boogie Ellis was out for the second straight game with a hand injury and freshman guard Isaiah Collier had hand surgery last week.

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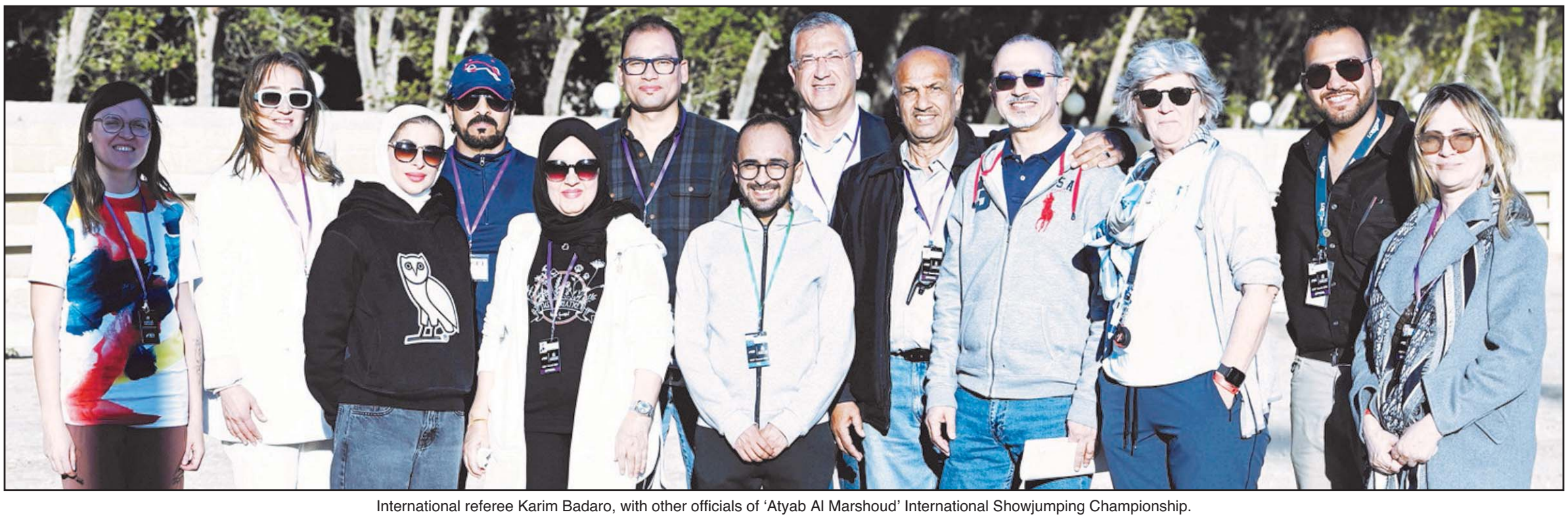


International referee Karim Badaro, with other officials of 'Atyab Al Marshoud' International Showjumping Championship.

Lebanese referee Badaro applauds Kuwait's equestrian 'development'

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: The tenth edition of the "Atyab Al-Marshoud" International Two-Star Show Jumping Championship, an annual event organized by Walid Al-Marshoud at the Kuwait Equestrian Center in the Subhan area, will feature ongoing competitions today starting at two o'clock in the afternoon. The competitive events are scheduled to continue until tomorrow.

EQUESTRIAN

Heading the Kuwaiti International Referees Committee is Nadar Al-Mustafa, with referees Abdulaziz Al-Mashouti, Nada Al-Awadhi, and Walid Al-Jassem as committee members. Sharon Al-Qaoud leads the Kuwaiti International Arena referees, including Bahraini referees Muhammad Dadullah, Dr. Yahya Al-Hadban, and Ibtisam Al-Arouri, Italian Andrea Colombo, the tournament's course designer, and Lebanese international referee Karim Badaro, the representative of the International Equestrian Federation.

Karim Badaro, the Lebanese international referee and representative of the International Equestrian Federation, highlighted Kuwait's role as the host for three international tournaments in the two- and three-star categories. These tournaments include qualifying rounds for the World Championship.

Expressing his admiration for the development of Kuwaiti equestrianism, Badaro stated, "I have been closely following Kuwaiti equestrianism for years, and it has seen significant growth, hosting three international tournaments per season. The organizational standards have been improving from season to season, aiming to elevate the technical level of equestrianism, which has indeed materialized. Kuwaiti riders are making a mark internationally, and there is a noticeable enhancement in the performance of both local and international horses due to the participation of riders and horses from outside Kuwait in the championships."

Badaro emphasized that Kuwait's accomplishments in equestrianism are a result of the vision and planning by those in charge of Kuwaiti equestrianism in recent years. He disclosed that Kuwait will host two 3-star national championships in February, with qualifying points for the World Cup scheduled in Riyadh in April.

He also outlined the structure of the Arab League, dividing it into North African countries and Arab Gulf countries. A total of five cards are distributed, with two knights from North Africa and three from the Gulf region qualifying. Additionally, two invitation cards are extended to the host country, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Kuwait Club sail to another victory

By Hassan Musa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: Kuwait Club sailed smoothly to another victory in the basketball league, securing a triumphant 108-67 win over Al-Arabi in its recent encounter during the second round of the league's second division. Simultaneously, Al-Sulaibikhat celebrated a significant triumph over Al-Qurain with a final score of 80-60.

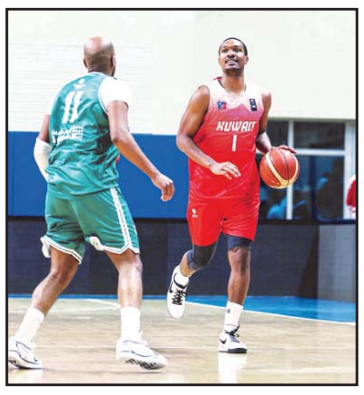
With this latest win, Kuwait Club elevated its score to 18 points, while Al-Arabi reached 14 points. Likewise, Sulaibikhat's victory propelled its score to 16 points, with Al-Qurain trailing closely at 14 points.

As per the tournament system, the top four teams from the preliminary round will advance to the semi-finals. In this phase, the first-ranked team will face the fourth, and the second will meet the third in a semi-final featuring a "play-off" system consisting of three matches, with the team winning two matches progressing to the final.

The defending champion, Kuwait Club, encountered little resistance in asserting dominance over the match from the outset. It concluded the first quarter with a commanding lead of 33-14.

Maintaining their superiority, Kuwait, led by Haitian professional Cady LaLanne's impressive 29-point contribution, concluded the second quarter with a 50-30 advantage.

Despite the efforts of Arab-American professional Dax, who scored 31 points, Al-Abyad continued to control the game in the third quarter, extending its lead to 79-43.



Players inn action during the Kuwait basketball league match between Al -Kuwait and Al-Arabi.

BASKETBALL

In the final quarter, Kuwait's coach introduced substitutes who seamlessly continued the team's advantage, concluding the match with a convincing 108-67 victory.

In the second matchup, Sulaibikhat secured a crucial win over Al-Qurain in their pursuit of a spot in the semi-finals. Sulaibikhat dominated each quarter, finishing 18-14, 38-31, and 63-42 before ultimately sealing the victory at 80-60.

Al-Mashaan 'disputes' reasons for Al-Qadisiya's heavy defeat

By Hassan Musa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: Dr. Muhammad Al-Mishaan, the coach of Al-Qadisiyah team, shared insights into his preference for challenging friendly matches during the team's camp in Bahrain. The team faced Al-Ahly of Bahrain, currently holding the second position in the league, followed by a match against Al-Khalidiya, the reigning champion of the Bahraini league last season.

Sula intensifies training.

Expressing discontent with the team's 6-1 friendly defeat against Al-Ahly, Al-Mishaan highlighted the team's commendable performance in the first half. He emphasized the positive aspects, citing the application of technical ideas, numerous opportunities, and possession control, despite the early stage of the camp.

Al-Mishaan acknowledged providing an opportunity for players who had not participated since the beginning of the season, aiming to assess their levels and readiness. This assessment will influence decisions regarding the team's composition during the winter period. He underscored the importance of building a robust second-row of substitute players, crucial for the team's competitiveness in various local tournaments.

SOCCER

Highlighting the upcoming challenging matches, Al-Mishaan urged Al-Qadisiyah fans to support all players. He assured that the team would showcase a different and improved performance in official matches. Commending the players' dedication, perseverance, and technical discipline in training sessions, the Yellow coach expressed satisfaction with the team's overall commitment since the start of the camp in Bahrain.

Blinkova upsets Rybakina in wild, record-long tiebreaker

Alcaraz rallies past Sonego

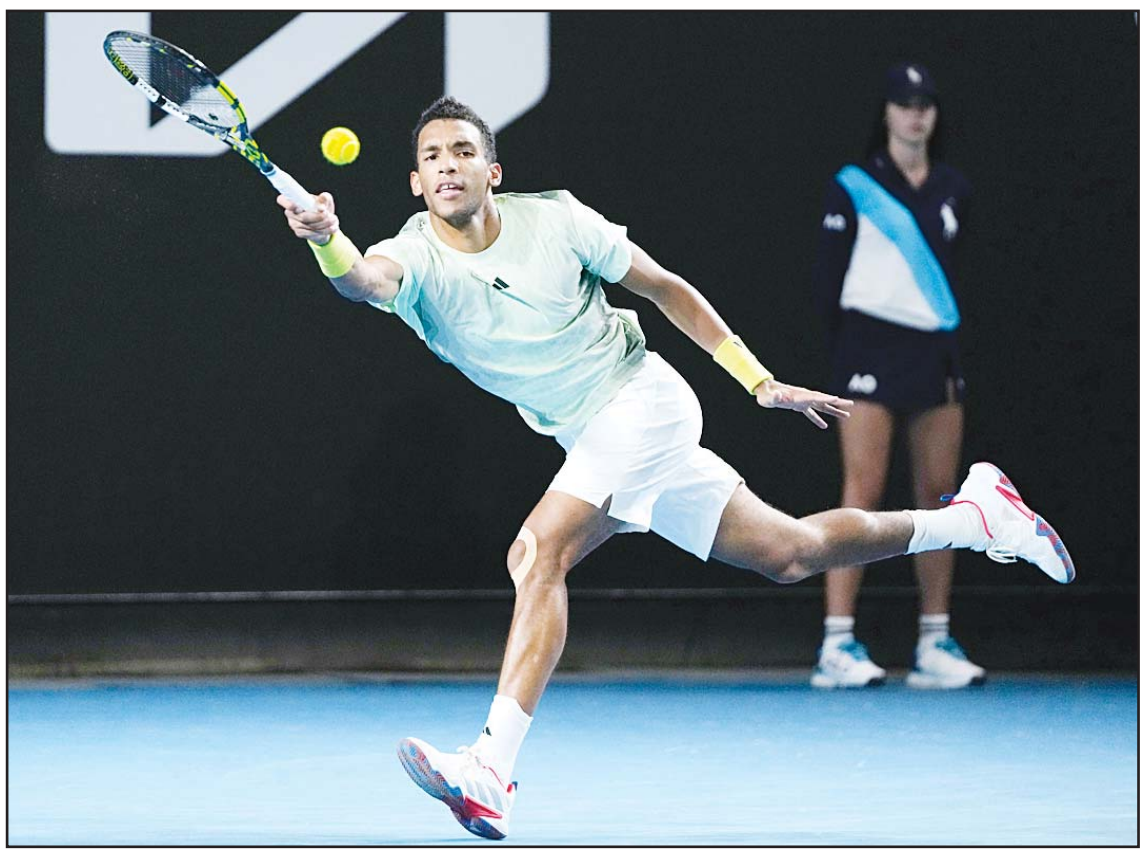
MELBOURNE, Australia, Jan 18, (AP): Her hand and her legs were shaking, she'd missed nine match points but also saved six, and Anna Blinkova was 41 points into a wild tiebreaker that was the longest ever in a women's Grand Slam event.

Elena Rybakina, last year's Australian Open runner-up, was just as anxious on the other side of the net.

When Blinkova lunged to retrieve a backhand, aiming just to keep the rally alive, and Rybakina's next backhand sailed wide, it finished off a 6-4, 4-6, 7-6 (20) second-round victory Thursday that she'll never, ever forget.

"It took me courage," she said. "It took me some certain calmness to stay in the present moment and to play point by point no matter what happens."

Rybakina, the 2022 Wimbledon champion who was runner-up here last year to Aryna Sabalenka, saved two match points in a third set that contained six service breaks.



Felix Auger-Aliassime of Canada plays a forehand return to Hugo Grenier of France during their second round match at the Australian Open tennis championships at Melbourne Park, Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

Blinkova twice served for the match but couldn't finish off, and a double-fault in the 12th game sent it to a 10-point tiebreaker. Once there, 13 minutes after her first match points, Blinkova had two more points at 9-7 but again Rybakina saved them, and so it went on.

Blinkova, smiling, later described it as the "endless tiebreaker." It went on for 32 minutes until Rybakina's backhand error ended it.

In terms of points - 42 - it was the longest tiebreaker ever in a women's major.

"It was super tough. I had so many match points," said Blinkova, who is ranked 57th and had 13 first-round exits in her previous 20 majors. "I tried to be aggressive but my hand was shaking. And my legs, too!

"I tried to be calm, as much as I could."

It was one that Rybakina will dwell on, too. She knew she wasted chances.

But "I'm really proud that I could fight till the end," Rybakina said. "I mean, you can't always play perfect. And of course I could have lost it even earlier."

Unlike Rybakina, top-ranked Iga Swiatek had a narrow escape in the opening match on Rod Laver Arena when she rallied from 4-1 down in the third set to beat 2022 runner-up Danielle Collins 6-4, 3-6, 6-4.

Swiatek was down two service breaks in the deciding set before she went on a five-game winning roll to finish off a match that featured wild momentum shifts and a 25-minute rain delay in 3 hours, 14 minutes.

"You can actually relax a little bit more because you know that, 'OK, probably I'm going to lose, so I don't care anymore,'" Swiatek said. "Then it's easier."

In her on-court interview, she joked: "Honestly, I was on the airport already."

TENNIS

"But I wanted to fight to the end, she said. "I'm really proud of myself."

Collins announced soon after that 2024 would be her last season on tour.

"Yeah, I lost 6-4 in the third to one of the best players in the world," Collins said. "And she played some great tennis. (I) left it all on the court."

Swiatek, a four-time major winner, next faces No. 50-ranked Linda Noskova, who beat U.S. qualifier McCartney Kessler 6-3, 1-6, 6-4.

Fifth-ranked Jessica Pegula's run of three consecutive quarterfinals in Australia was ended in a 6-4, 6-2 loss to Clara Burel. Her fellow American, 2017 U.S. Open winner Sloane Stephens, took out No. 14 seed Daria Kasatkina 4-6, 6-3, 6-3 and advanced along with No. 11 Jelena Ostapenko, No. 12 Zheng Qinwen, No. 19 Elina Svitolina and No. 27 Emma Navarro.

The 2021 U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu's comeback major ended in a 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 loss to Wang Yafan.

Wimbledon champion Carlos Alcaraz dropped a set for the first time in the tournament before recovering to beat Lorenzo Sonego 6-4, 6-7 (3), 6-3, 7-6 (3).

With a strong breeze to contend with, Alcaraz was tested by Lorenzo Sonego before coming through in four sets and will next face 18-year-old Chinese wildcard entry Shang Juncheng, who ousted India's Sumit Nagal 2-6, 6-3, 7-5, 6-4.

It'll be the first time on tour Alcaraz has faced a younger player.

"He beat some big guys," Alcaraz said of Shang's run to the semifinals in Hong Kong earlier this month. "So I know he has the level. He's already there."

Arthur Cazaux upset No. 8 Holger Rune 7-6 (4), 6-4, 4-6, 6-3 but No. 13 Grigor Dimitrov, No. 14 Tommy Paul, No. 19 Cameron Norrie, No. 21 Ugo Humbert and No. 27 Felix Auger-Aliassime all advanced.

Al-Jarallah's Al-Ittihad list faces hurdles

Jahra Club crisis deepens with election registration challenges

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: The Jahra Club crisis has taken center stage on social media platforms in recent days, following the Al-Ittihad list's decision to register a case at the police station due to their inability to participate in the club elections scheduled for February 17.

Khaled Al-Jarallah, the head of the list and the club's board of directors before the last elections were canceled, expressed frustration through his official account on the "X" platform. He revealed that despite attempting to register the list for the upcoming elections, they faced obstacles, citing a lack of specialists for registration. Al-Jarallah alleged that this hindrance aimed to prevent their candidacy and registration, leading them to submit proof of the case through the Ministry of Interior.

The club's electoral committee, led by Abdullah Al-Enezi, announced on the last day of registration that the "Everyone" list, headed by Khalaf Al-Sahu, was the only one to submit nominations. This list is recommended to lead the club in the period 2024-2028, according to the committee's statement expressing gratitude to the General Sports Authority and the Kuwaiti Olympic Committee.

The crisis originated after the January 12, 2023 club elections, won by the Al-Ittihad list with a score of 11-0. The losing "Jahra List" contested the results, leading to the Kuwaiti Sports Arbitration Authority ruling the elections invalid in September due to a violation of Article 20 of the statute.

The Kuwaiti police maintain their presence during the crisis.

A new electoral committee, armed with a court ruling, asserted its right to manage the club's affairs. However, this move conflicted with the club's bylaws and sports law, prompting the Sports Authority to challenge the ruling.

An extraordinary general meeting was announced, forming a transitional committee to manage the club's affairs. However, committee member Ali Al-Shammari resigned, signaling further discord.

Former club board member Tawari Madloul revealed notification of professionals and coaches facing eviction if apartment rents were unpaid. He held those responsible for the club's crisis accountable and emphasized the expiry of residencies with escalating late fines.

The crisis, now seemingly in an endless tunnel, risks the club's collapse and a decline in team performance. The General Sports Authority and the Kuwaiti Olympic Committee must address the issue collaboratively to restore the club's former glory and revive sports for the "Red Palace" community.

Fans left frustrated amid ticket issues at Africa Cup

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast, Jan 18, (AP): Fans hoping to attend games at the Africa Cup of Nations have been frustrated in their efforts to get tickets, and yet matches have been played in half-empty stadiums.

Organizers of the tournament on Wednesday acknowledged ticketing issues for the opening game, but failed to address any potential problems preventing fans from attending other matches so far.

"Although there were some printing issues on the first day of the AFCON due to last-minute group purchases of physical tickets, the ticketing system has since been adapted to deal with such requests," the African soccer confederation (CAF) said in a statement.

SOCCER

CAF said the system was "functioning well" with more than 60% of tickets sold through its online platform internationally.

The 2023 Africa Cup organizing committee (COCAN) said the reason there were empty seats for host nation Ivory Coast's match against Guinea-Bissau in the tournament opener at the 60,000-capacity Alassane Ouattara Stadium on Saturday was because of so-called "dead seats," which include places with reduced visibility or security seats.

Excluding these places would leave the stadium with a useable capacity of 50,786.

Yet the stadium announcer gave an attendance of 36,858 people for the tournament's opening match. It had been billed as a sell-out.

There were fewer than 10,000 fans at the match between Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea in the same stadium the next day.

Australia's Harry Souttar tackles Syria's Omar Khrbin during the Asian Cup Group B soccer match between Australia and Syria at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha, Qatar. (AP)

Sports

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Qatar, Australia advance to knockout stage

Irvine delivers again

DOHA, Qatar, Jan 18, (AP): Jackson Irvine delivered again as Australia booked its place in the knockout stage of the Asian Cup on Thursday by beating Syria 1-0.

The midfielder scored for the second straight game to maintain the Socceroos' 100% start in Group B.

Australia, the 2015 champions, tops the group on six points and and cannot finish lower than second.

SOCCER

Irvine struck the winner with a flicked shot from inside the box in the 59th minute at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium. He had scored the opening goal in his team's 2-0 win against India on Saturday.

The closest Syria came to scoring was when Pablo Sabbag hit the post early on.

India played Uzbekistan later Thursday and a draw in that game would guarantee Australia advances as group winner.

Australia plays Uzbekistan in its final Group B game on Tuesday.

Dumped out of its own World Cup at the earliest possible stage in 2022, Qatar looks intent on sticking around at the Asian Cup.

The host and defending champion became the first team to advance to the knockout stage of the tournament on Wednesday after a 1-0 win against Tajikistan.

Akram Afif scored his third goal in two games to secure victory at Al Bayt Stadium and ensure Qatar goes through as Group A winner.

It is all a far cry from the World Cup when, as host, Qatar exited the competition at the group stage after three straight losses.

Now maximum points from its opening two games have given Bartolome Lopez's team the perfect start to its defense of the Asian Cup.

Qatar's Almoez Ali (right), and Tajikistan's Vahdat Hanonov jump for the ball during the Asian Cup Group A soccer match between Tajikistan and Qatar at Al Bayt stadium, in Al Khor, Qatar. (AP)

And it has one of the most impressive players of the tournament in Afif, who lifted a shot over Tajikstan goalkeeper Rustam Yatimov in the 17th minute for the only goal of the game.

The forward had spoken of his desire to return to Europe after spells in Spain and Belgium earlier in his career, and he is likely to have earned admirers for his performances so far for Qatar as the tournament's leading scorer.

Tajikistan ended the game with 10 men after Amadoni Kamolov was sent off in the 81st.

Equatorial Guinea top Guinea-Bissau

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast, Jan 18, (AP): Emilio Nsue scored a hat trick and Equatorial Guinea took a giant step toward the knockout stage of the Africa Cup with a 4-2 win over Guinea-Bissau on Thursday.

Equatorial Guinea moved into first place in Group A with four points from two games before home nation Ivory Coast played Nigeria later.

Nsue capitalized on a defensive mistake to put the "National Thunder" ahead in the 21st minute, only for an own goal from Esteban Orozco to draw Guinea-Bissau level again in the 37th.

Orozco was trying to cut out a cross for Franculino Djú - who was offside - when he turned the ball into his own net.

But José Miranda struck from outside the box after the break and Nsue grabbed his second to effectively seal the result five minutes later. He completed his hat trick by scoring from a difficult angle in the 61st, though he had to endure a VAR review before celebrating.

Al-Daghishim clinches gold: Kuwait's fencing glory continues

Kuwaiti fencers display their medals as an official looks on.

MANAMA, Jan 18: The Kuwaiti national fencing team added to its impressive medal count at the Arab Fencing Championship for cubs and buds in Bahrain, bringing the total to 10 with the acquisition of four new medals.

Badriya Al-Daghishim secured the gold medal in the fluoro weapon category for females under 13 years old, while Khaled Al-Houli claimed the silver medal in the epee weapon category for males under 15 years old.

FENCING

Additionally, Laura Al-Roumi and Abdulaziz Al-Duaij contributed to the team's success by each earning a bronze medal in their respective categories. Laura excelled in the saber weapon category for females under 15, while Abdulaziz demonstrated prowess in the saber weapon category for males under 15.

The Kuwaiti fencing team commenced its campaign on Tuesday, initially securing six diverse medals in the competition.

Al-Hajeri 'takes' helm as IWBF Asia Oceania chief

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18, (KUNA): Shafi Al-Hajeri from Kuwait has been selected as the head of IWBF Asia Oceania for a four-year tenure, as announced by the continental federation following its general assembly meeting in Bangkok, Thailand, on Thursday. Al-Hajeri, uncontested in his candidacy, confirmed that the elections took place alongside the final qualifiers for the upcoming Olympic Games in Paris next summer.

India play Oman at Asian Handball Championship

Kuwait face tough task against South Korea

By Khaled El Anzi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

MANAMA, Jan 18: Kuwait is set to play its second match in the second group of the 21st edition of the Asian Handball Championship, currently taking place in Manama, Bahrain at 3:00 pm. The championship concludes on the 25th of this month, and our team will face the Korean national team at the Khalifa Sports Hall.

In today's matches, Bahrain will also meet Iraq in the same role and group, while in the first group, Qatar will play against Iran, and Japan will face the Emirates.

In the consolation rounds, Kazakhstan will compete against China, Hong Kong will face New Zealand, India will play against Oman, and Saudi Arabia will meet China's Taipei.

Kuwait secured a second-place finish in the preliminary round's first group, earning a spot alongside Qatar in the main round. They continue their journey in the competition for the championship title.

HANDBALL

As per the tournament system, the top two teams from each main round group will qualify for the semi-finals. These teams will also secure their spots in the 2025 World Cup finals, to be held in three countries: Croatia, Denmark, and Norway.

Kuwait youth volleyball team technical staff.

A Kuwaiti player prepares to shoot.

Kuwait volleyball team heads to Cairo for a 12-day training camp

Khaled El Anzi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 18: This evening, the delegation of our national youth volleyball team, born in 2005, embarks on a journey to the Egyptian capital, Cairo, for a 12-day training camp. This camp is a crucial part of their preparations for the upcoming first Gulf Youth Games, set to take place in Dubai from April 16 to May 2.

Heading the selected delegation is the President of the Federation, Dr. Jaber Al-Marri. The delegation includes Nayef Al-Khamili, a member of the Federation's Board of Directors, Talal Al-Jassem, the national team director, and the technical staff led by national coach Jassim Al-Tarrawah, assisted by Egypt's Osama Madk-

VOLLEYBALL

our. Dr. Moataz Ezz Al-Din serves as the national team's doctor, and the team comprises 20 players: Fawad Al-Mishaal, Ali Dashti, Barak Al-Nasser, Abbas Hussein, Abdul Rahman Walid, Hamoud Kanaan, Badr Al-Attar, Muhammad Al-Banna, Hassan Al-Qattan, Muhammad Al-Dokhi, Hammoud Al-Masoud, Bandar Al-Ahmad, Khaled Bararaki, Abdulaziz Al-Anazi, Abdulaziz Muhammad Kamel, Ahmed Al-Sarhid, Nasser Al-Sanea, Rashid Al-Awadi, Ahmed Al-Mutairi, and Abdullah Al-Ali.

Director of the national team, Talal Al-Jassem, emphasized that the team's technical staff has crafted a comprehensive training program for the external camp. The program aims to prepare and refine players in technical, physical, and tactical aspects. The camp also includes a trial match against strong opponents, offering valuable exposure. Al-Jassem urged the players to give their utmost effort during this period to fully benefit from the prescribed training regimen.

Coach likely to make changes

Kuwait look to bounce back against Uganda

CAIRO, Jan 18: The Kuwait is set to engage in its second friendly match at seven o'clock this evening, taking on the Ugandan national team at Cairo In-

SOCCER

ternational Stadium as the concluding event of its training camp in Egypt.

This match marks the team's second appearance in Cairo, following their previous encounter where they experienced a 1-3 loss to the Libya last Friday.

With tonight's confrontation on the horizon, it's anticipated that the technical staff of the Kuwait national team, under the guidance of Portuguese coach Rui Pinto, may introduce make that participated in the first match. This presents an opportunity to assess the performance of new additions to the roster.

Kuwait is currently gearing up for upcoming challenges, particularly the back-to-back matches against Qatar scheduled for March. These matches are integral components of the joint Asian qualifiers for both the 2026 World Cup finals in the United States, Mexico, and Canada, as well as the 2027 Asian Cup set to take place in Saudi Arabia.

Kuwaiti players enjoying their training session on the eve of the friendly match against Uganda.

Toney returns from ban

LONDON, Jan 18, (AP): First there was anger, then there was self-pity, then came a period of introspection.

Soon enough, Ivan Toney was gripped by a desire to make amends and become the best striker in England.

Toney went through a range of emotions while serving an eight-month ban for breaching betting rules that, as he prepares to return to the field with Brentford in the Premier League on Saturday, has given him a new outlook on life and his soccer career.

He realizes just how lucky he is to be playing the sport he loves, how much he missed the locker-room jokes and the banter with his teammates in training.

"FREE!" was the message on a GIF he posted on X, formerly Twitter, on Wednesday as the 27-year-old Toney celebrated the first day back from his ban, handed to him after being charged with 232 counts of breaching English soccer's betting rules. An independent commission said in its report that the suspension could have been longer if not for the diagnosis of a gambling addiction.

"I feel like we lost connection," Toney said in an interview with British broadcaster Sky Sports. "The Wi-Fi went and now we're back, fully loaded."

He'll make his return to action in Brentford's home match against Nottingham Forest.

"I'm sure I'll be knackered after 20-30 minutes," Toney said. "But I'm sure the excitement will be there and that will get me through the 90 minutes."

SOCCER

Brentford will likely need him to complete the match.

Without its star striker, the club from west London has plunged into trouble and finds itself in 16th place - three points and two spots above the relegation zone - after seven losses in its last eight league matches.

"We are in a relegation battle," Toney said, "but everyone knows we are capable of getting back to where we should be."

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