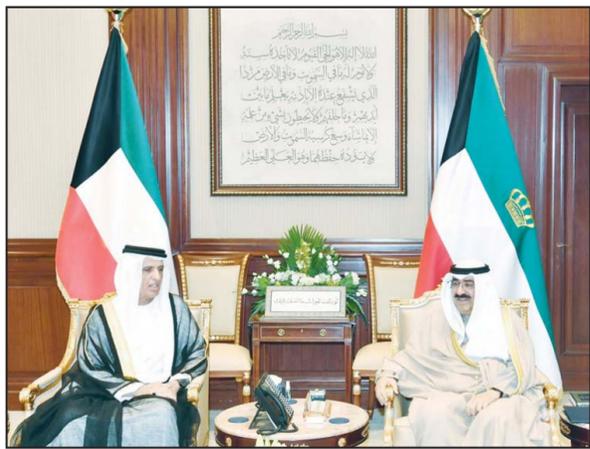




soccer
Pages 15 & 16



tennis
Page 16



Amiri Diwan photo
HH the Amir receives Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al-Qasimi.

Amir receives Ras Al-Khaimah Ruler

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Wednesday visiting Member of the UAE's Federal Supreme Council and Ruler of Ras Al-Khaimah Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al-Qasimi.

Al-Qasimi congratulated him on assuming top office and conveyed the greetings of UAE's President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, wishing His Highness good health and further progress to his country and people.

PM assumes Deputy Amir role in Amir's absence

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah assigned Wednesday His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah as Deputy Amir while His Highness the Amir was out of the country.

His Highness the Amir, in an Amiri Decree, said this measure would remain valid until a Crown Prince was named. The decree stipulates that His Highness the Prime Minister informs the National Assembly of this decree and that it takes effect once published in the official gazette.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also signed a decree Wednesday assigning Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Acting Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Yusuf Al-Sabah as Prime Minister, while His Highness the Prime Minister assumes role of Deputy Amir.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a letter on Wednesday from His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

In the letter, His Highness the Prime Minister expressed gratitude to His Highness the Amir for appointing him as Deputy Amir, promising to take on the role with integrity, thanking His Highness the Amir for the valued trust.

Kuwait government set to swear oath in special parliament session Monday

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24, (KUNA): Kuwait's new government will be taking the oath of office during a special session of parliament on Monday, while His Highness the Prime Minister will be also taking his oath as deputy Amir, chief lawmaker Ahmad Al-Sadoun said on Wednesday, citing the move as per constitutional procedures.

The measure comes at the "behest" of Kuwait's newly-formed government and as per an invitation by the country's top lawmaker, in line with constitutional

procedures, which state that a session of parliament can be held ahead of schedule when deemed necessary. Earlier on Wednesday, an Amiri decree stated that His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah would serve as Deputy Amir in the absence of His Highness the Amir until a crown prince is inevitably named.

Article 63 of the constitution states that the Amir's

Continued on Page 5

Union shocked by MoCI's decision to slash domestic labor recruitment cost

By Fares Al-Abdan
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: The Kuwait Union for Owners of Domestic Labor Recruitment Bureaus expressed its surprise by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry's decision to

change the costs for recruiting domestic workers.

In a press statement, the union described the decision as shocking and ill-considered.

It highlighted its concern for the interests of the owners of labor recruitment bureaus and for serving the Ku-

waiti people and meeting their requirements for the provision of domestic workers.

The union explained that such a decision must be taken by forming a committee whose members are representatives of all relevant ministries and

Continued on Page 5

Opinion

Field management

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

KUWAIT needs a lot of work in all facilities. Therefore, the ministerial responsibility of venturing into the field is beneficial for the official to witness first-hand the challenges the country is facing. This has been a longstanding necessity, particularly following the significant collapse in the infrastructure system that has transcended into mere scandal, illustrating how poorly someone can handle responsibility and fail. It emphasizes the importance of viewing one's position as a task requiring diligence and sincerity rather than an honor based on status.

Since liberation, there has been no realistic plan to modernize all state facilities despite the many potentials that could transform Kuwait into a developed country in all fields.

This never happened because the majority of the ministers were concerned with enjoying privileges and protocol, and ensuring they receive the exceptional retirement salary after leaving office or ensuring they would not be held accountable by the parliament for any mistake.

Therefore, many of them were subject to the will of the parliamentarians, and worked to implement their demands, even if they violated the law. What was important to them was less drama, and avoiding interpellation. For this and other reasons, the ministers closed the doors of their offices, sat inside waiting for instructions, and left matters unchecked.

All this neglect caused Kuwait to decline in global indicators. For example, Kuwait ranked 101th in education, and 71st in health globally. The roads in Kuwait are considered the worst in the Gulf due to which the country was ranked 64th globally in this aspect. When it comes to practicing business activities, we stand at 83rd globally.

Continued on Page 5

Email: ahmed@aljarallah.com

Follow me on:



ahmedaljarallah@gmail.com

Newswatch

BAGHDAD: An Iraqi army spokesman condemned on Wednesday the US airstrikes against units from the army and the Popular Mobilization Forces, in the areas of Jurf Al-Nasr and Al-Qaim, deeming such acts as "violations" threatening Iraq's sovereignty.

According to the Iraq News Agency (INA), Major General Yehia Rasool, Spokesperson for the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, stated: "In a clear determination to harm security and stability in Iraq, the United States has resumed carrying out airstrikes against the locations of Iraqi military units from the army and the Popular Mobilization Forces, in the areas of Jurf Al-Nasr and Al-Qaim." (KUNA)

CAIRO: The Yemeni issue is high on the agenda of the Arab Parliament, President Adel Al-Asoimi said Wednesday.

Stressing that Yemen's security, stability, and territorial integrity must be preserved, Al-Asoimi, after meeting with Speaker of the Yemeni House of Representatives Sheikh Sultan Al-Burkani, expressed concerns over the situation in the Red Sea region and Bab Al-Mandab Strait. (KUNA)

MPs propose 7 hours daily work cap in private sector

'Balancing act'

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: MPs Badr Nashmi, Faris Al-Otaibi, Abdul Hadi Al-Ajmi, Badr Sayyar, and Osama Al-Shaheen have submitted a proposal to amend Private Sector Labor Law No. 6/2010; such that Article 64 will be replaced with the following text: "Without prejudice to the provisions of Article 21 of this law, it is not permissible for an employee to work for more than 42 hours a week or seven hours a day except in the cases stipulated in this law. Working hours during the holy month of Ramadan are 36 hours a week; and the working hours could be reduced for work that is exhausting, harmful to health or due to harsh conditions as per the decision of the concerned minister."

The proposed amendment also replaces Clause A of Article 65 to be as follows: "A worker may not be employed for more than four consecutive hours per day without a rest period of not less than an hour. Rest periods are not counted within working hours. The banking, financial and investment sectors are excluded from this, as their working hours will be seven hours."

The explanatory memorandum for the proposal states that developed countries depend on human resources to advance and accelerate the wheel

Continued on Page 5



KUNA photo
Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Kuwait's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, addresses the UN Security Council open debate in New York on Wednesday.

1.7 mln people displaced within Gaza

Kuwait urges UNSC to uphold Palestinian rights amid crisis

NEW YORK, Jan 24, (Agencies): Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, on Wednesday, relayed Kuwait's speech to United Nations Security Council ministerial session's open debate on "the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

Ambassador Al-Sabah commenced his speech with situating this current session against the circumstances with which it is being held; he spoke of the catastrophic conditions in Gaza Strip, recounting the indescribable crimes and suffering.

He reproved the UNSC's incapability of

performing its political, legal and humanitarian duties, its double standards, its failure to take up a stance against the blatant violations of the Israeli occupation as well as its failure to adopt a resolution putting an immediate end to its crimes, in favor of geopolitical interests.

The Ambassador further asserted that they are speaking in defense of the Palestinian people and of the entirety of international law and its stipulations, as it is the protector of the rights of individuals and stability of member states.

Continued on Page 5

PAM, PAAET team up for labor skill 'boost'

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: Acting Deputy Director General for Planning and Administrative Development at the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) Eng Rabab Al-Osaimi recently met with a delegation from the Public Authority for

Continued on Page 5

Required

major press organization
is hiring

Advertising Representatives

Asian nationality

- Salary + Commission
- Fluent in Arabic and English
- Driving license and a car is a must

advt@arabtimesonline.com

Kuwait private sector's green initiatives shine

DOHA, Jan 24, (KUNA): Acting Director General of Kuwait Environment Public Authority, Sameera Al-Kandari, stressed Tuesday the importance of shedding light on the efforts of the private sector in sustainability and projects of environment.

Al-Kandari, also commissioner general of the Kuwait Pavilion at Expo 2023 Doha for Horticulture, made the statement to KUNA after a conference made by Kuwait's pavilion at the expo titled "the role of the private sector towards sustainability".

She noted that Kuwait pays special attention to sustainability, adding that welfare and development can not be achieved without exerting efforts to maintain human and environment resources, and making them sustainable.

Kuwait's pavilion shows the role of the country and its government agencies in environment projects and modern technological sustainability, referring that Kuwait's private sector has a role in this matter.

Continued on Page 5



KUNA photo
Sameera Al-Kandari, Acting Director General of Kuwait Environment Public Authority, delivers a speech at Expo 2023 Doha for Horticulture.

Prayer Timings

Fajr 05:19 Asr 14:59
 Sunrise .. 06:41 Maghrib .. 17:19
 Zohr 12:00 Isha 18:39

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Warm and partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate northeasterly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of 08-28 km/h.
By Night: Rather cold to cold

Weather

and cloudy with light to moderate southeasterly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of 08-28 km/h with a chance for scattered rain later on.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	24	19
Kuwait Airport	26	16
Abdaly	25	15
Jahra	30	18
Salmiyah	20	18
Nuwaisib	26	14
Wafra	29	15

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

Bid to ease travel, without need of visa

Kuwait, UK to launch new e-travel permit for citizens on Feb 1

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya said Kuwait is actively collaborating with Britain for the launch of a new electronic travel permit for Kuwaitis, saying the process is expected to begin on Thursday, February 1, 2024, and it will become valid for travel to the United Kingdom starting from February 22, reports Al-Qabas daily.

Al-Yahya highlighted ongoing discussions and coordination with the British authorities regarding the electronic travel permit initiative. The objective is to streamline travel procedures for Kuwaitis, providing flexibility and encouraging visits to the United Kingdom without the necessity of a visa.



Al-Yahya

Al-Yahya stated, "Joint steering committee meetings between Britain and Kuwait are scheduled for February 12 and 13 in Kuwait, with high-level Kuwaiti officials leading the Kuwaiti side, and Lord Tariq Ahmad, the United Kingdom's Secretary of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and the United Nations, heading the British side."

Underlining the strong and distinguished relations with Britain, Al-Yahya mentioned collaborative measures to advance cooperation. He referred to agreements signed during the third visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad to Britain, adding that announcements about joint agreements in various fields will be made soon.

The Foreign Minister affirmed the continuity of joint coordination between the two nations, emphasizing historical relations between Kuwait and the United Kingdom. He noted ongoing efforts to enhance cooperation across diverse fields and emphasized mutual consultation on regional and international issues for the benefit of both nations.

New co-ops policy: The Ministry of Social Affairs is implementing a new pol-

icy, giving cooperative societies a specific timeframe to address observations, objections, and reported violations by field inspection teams before taking legal action, provided the violations are not severe enough to threaten the cooperative centers or jeopardize shareholders' funds, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The ministry through its cooperatives sector seeks to reassure cooperative societies' boards of directors that its actions are aimed at guiding them toward optimal compliance with the law and the adoption of sound purchasing policies that safeguard their financial stability and protect shareholders' funds.

According to ministry sources, the inspection teams are spread across the country to assess compliance with Law No. (118/2013) on cooperative societies and its amendments, and will embark on re-inspection mission within a short period to rectify the situation.

If cooperation is lacking or the violations persist, legal measures will be taken based on the nature of the violations. The ministry emphasizes its commitment to the ultimate goal of cooperative by providing quality goods at cooperative prices, alleviating financial burdens on consumers.

The inspection teams will work concurrently with investigation committees formed by the ministry based on financial and administrative observers' reports or shareholder complaints, ensuring continuous monitoring throughout the year. The sources stress that the teams will take action even without existing problems or notes, with their continuous efforts to maintain the stability of cooperative societies.

In cases where suspicions of transgressions or intentional misuse of powers by a board of directors threaten shareholders' funds, firm measures will be taken, including the immediate formation of investigation and review committees.

The ministry reassures cooperative societies that these actions aim to guide them toward optimal law application, sound purchasing policies, and the protection of shareholders' funds.

Feb 4–Feb 29: MoE official

Transfer window opens for students

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education, Anwar Al-Hamdan, has issued a decision to open the door for transfer for an exceptional period from public schools to private (Arabic) schools and vice versa, starting from Sunday, February 4, until the end of work on Thursday, Feb 29, for kindergarten, primary and middle school students. Those enrolled in grades one to nine, subject to the same conditions and regulations.



Al-Hamdan

According to the decision, a copy of which was obtained by Al-Rai, it "allows the transfer of secondary school students enrolled in grades ten to twelfth from Arab private (private) education schools, to general education schools only on the condition that they match the free choice subjects."

The decision added, "It is prohibited to transfer secondary school students enrolled in grades ten to twelfth, from general education schools to private (private) Arab education schools," noting that "transfer shall be according to the vacancies available in the educational district, and all concerned parties must be aware and work in accordance with this." The decision is effective from February 4, 2024.

In a related context, the Acting Assistant Undersecretary for Public Edu-

Camp robbed

And it's all gone!

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: A camp owner filed a complaint at a police station in Jahra Governorate, stating that an unknown person broke into the camping site and stole a number of items, reports Al-Anba daily.

A security source disclosed that the victim told police that his camp, which is located between Arhiyah and Salmi, has been robbed. He said the thieves took two tents, three air conditioning units, two generators and a television; indicating the victim has no suspect in mind.

cation, Hessa Al-Mutawa, confirmed that the Ministry is moving to activate and open learner care centers in educational areas during the upcoming second semester.

This came after she chaired yesterday the meeting of the Council of General Directors, in the presence of the directors and principals of educational districts and the director of the Coordination Department, in the meeting room of the Ministry of Education. She said that during the meeting, a group of important educational issues were discussed, such as the timing of school hours in the upcoming month of Ramadan.

PAI, MoCI to pay KD 114m comp

Abrupt termination of contract caused major loss for company

Al-Seyassah report

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: The Court of Appeals yesterday issued the largest compensation ruling for a commercial company, requiring the government, represented by the Director of the Public Authority for Industry (PAI) and the Minister of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) in their capacities, to pay compensation worth KD 114 million after the ministry and PAI intervened to withdraw a huge commercial project from the company and caused its loss.

According to the case file, the plaintiff company had rented from the defendant authority a state-owned plot in Ardiya with an area of 150,000 square meters based on the lease contract dated May 24, 2003 for a period of 20 years, starting from the day after the completion of three years from the date of the contract.

The plaintiff company had prepared engineering plans, obtained the necessary licenses from the municipality, and completed the project, but the defendants terminated the contract. The company then filed a lawsuit against them, demanding compensation for the damages it suffered as a result of the contract termination. The Court of Cassation had issued a verdict on December 23, 2018 in the appeal No. 1604/1587/2016 Commercial/2 by obliging the Public Authority for Industry and the Minister of Commerce and Industry, in their capacity, to pay the company temporary compensation of KD 5,001.

However, the plaintiff company suffered material and moral damages as a result of this act, represented by the value of the construction and other works carried out on the site subject to the contract.

The judicial rulings were issued in favor of the project's contractors and subcontractors, other financial claims related to the project, judicial expenses, attorney's fees in those lawsuits, financial guarantees for the project, and the losses incurred as a result of the decline in the company's share price and the impact on its commercial reputation, which prompted it to file this lawsuit to calculate the value of those damages and oblige the plaintiff to pay them.

Court acquits Kuwaiti of assaulting nephew

By Jaber Al-Humoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: The Misdemeanor Court acquitted a Kuwaiti citizen who was accused of beating his sister's son in front of the family at their grandfather's house.

The defense counsel of the plaintiff Lawyer Yousef Al-Mutawa from the office of Lawyer Abdul Mohsen Al-Qattan stressed the lack of evidence to support the accusations.

He said the charges were not proven, and no crime was found.

Lawyer Al-Mutawa explained that the assumption of the innocence of the accused represents an established principle related to the criminal charge in terms of its proof and not the type of punishment prescribed for it, and it applies to the criminal case in all its stages and throughout its procedures.

The Constitution stipulates that the presumption of innocence cannot be overturned without conclusive evidence concluded by the court based on its belief.

It is necessary for this evidence to be presented to the court and for it alone to have its say in it, and for no other party to impose on it a specific concept of a particular piece of evidence, and for this matter to always be based on the facts that it concluded and obtained from its papers, and not restricted by the point of view of the prosecution.

Lawyer Al-Mutawa concluded that there is no way to refute the principle of innocence other than evidence for which the persuasive power reaches the level of certainty that leaves no reasonable room for suspicion of the absence of the accusation, provided that its evidence has established its truth.

Decision overruled: The Administrative Circle of the Court of First Instance invalidated the Public Institution for Social Security's decision to deduct KD 33,012 from a Kuwaiti citizen's replacement entitlements, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The citizen had filed a lawsuit, demanding the appointment of an expert to calculate the amounts paid over the replacement period multiplied by the installments. The expert's report stated that there were differences in the amounts, which had interest imposed on them.

The citizen had submitted a request to the Public Institution for Social Security for cancellation, but it was rejected. He then filed a grievance, which was also rejected. This prompted him to file a lawsuit based on article 77 of the Social Security law.

During the court session, Lawyer Mohammad Khalil Al-Qattan affirmed that the Public Institution for Social Security is not one of the institutions that is subject to profit and is outside the scope of the Central Bank of Kuwait's supervision.

He stressed that it is not permissible to impose interest on the amounts exchanged.

'Gifts will not be returned': The Personal Status Court rejected a Kuwaiti citizen's request to oblige his ex-wife to return some gifts he had given her during the marriage. The court affirmed that he has no right to demand their return.

The defendant's counsel Lawyer Hawraa Khala Al-Habib said in her plea that there is nothing in the law or even Sharia that require the return of gifts except for the financial debt written between the spouses, for which there is the right to demand its return.

Lawyer Al-Habib said, "We hope that the rivalry does not overshadow principles. When a person gives gifts, he gives them because the other party deserves them from his point of view. Just as a person lives bad days, he must not forget that he lived beautiful days. We must adhere to the advice of the Quran - So do not forget the goodness between yourselves".



KUNA photo
His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah receives Sheikh Saud Bin Saqr Al-Qasimi, ruler of Ras Al-Khaimah.

PM receives Ras Al-Khaimah ruler

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace on Wednesday Sheikh Saud Bin Saqr Al-Qasimi, Ras Al-Khaimah's ruler and member of the United Arab Emirates Supreme Council.

During the reception, Sheikh Al-Qasimi expressed sincere congratulations

to His Highness the Prime Minister on being appointed as Prime Minister, wishing him success and more progress and prosperity for Kuwait and its people.

Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah and Head of the Prime Minister's Office Abdulaziz Al-Dakhil were in attendance. (KUNA)



Abdulaziz Almathkour, Professor Khalid Al-Baq'a'in and other staff.

stc signs MoU with KCST to sustain education 'upgrade'

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced that it has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Kuwait College for Science and Technology (KCST). The collaboration falls under stc's educational 'upgrade' initiative and will focus on organizing a range of student activities including workshops, training courses, and specialized seminars.

The MoU between stc and KCST was made official during a signing ceremony held at stc's head office and was attended by executives from both parties including Ahmad Al Nowaibet, Manager of Public Relations and Social Media at stc and Ibrahim Al-Mutawa, Director of Public Relations and Marketing at KCST, as well as Abdulaziz Almathkour, General Manager - Rewards & Organization Effectiveness at stc, and Professor Khalid Al-Baq'a'in, President of KCST.

The MoU serves as an initial step towards fostering cooperation between the two organizations. It is a part of stc's educational "upgrade" initiative, fundamentally aimed at empowering students through diverse programs designed to enhance knowledge. The MoU outlines various collaborative efforts that will assist the college in enhancing and updating its curriculum with skills pertinent to Kuwait's private sector job market, where stc serves as prominent player.

Additionally, the college's offerings are closely aligned with the immediate and future demands of Kuwait's job market. KCST is the only university in Kuwait offering Bachelor's degrees in Electronics and Communications Engineering, and Computer Engineering, with specializations in Cyber Security and Artificial Intelligence.

The objective behind signing the MoU is to strengthen the collaboration between stc and KCST. stc will support KCST by providing practical training opportunities for the college's students and graduates. Additionally, KCST will utilize its advanced laboratories to offer training courses for stc employees to develop their professional and practical performance.

The objectives defined under the MoU strongly align with the goals that stc aims to achieve for the community under its

strategic CSR pillars. Through flagship programs such as the educational 'upgrade' initiative, stc envisions a future where its efforts ripple through the Kuwaiti economy, fostering innovation, driving growth, and most importantly, empowering the nation's future leaders to steer Kuwait towards unparalleled success and prosperity.

During the signing ceremony, Ahmad Al Nowaibet, Manager of Public Relations and Social Media at stc expressed that the Company is proud to partner with an innovative educational institution like KCST as part of stc's educational 'upgrade' initiative with the core objective of empowering the local education framework and aligns with stc's efforts towards creating a sustainable future.

Furthermore, he also shed the light on the value of this partnership as it reflects the Company's commitment to empowering the youth with essential skills to excel in their careers, while providing stc employees with additional platforms to develop their professional and practical skills.

Ibrahim Al-Mutawa, Director of Public Relations and Marketing at KCST, highlighted during the signing ceremony that this memorandum will enhance cooperation in several areas, most importantly in education and training, as the university will offer training programs through its Center of Innovation and Continuing Education and Training to stc employees, in addition to enhancing partnerships in community initiatives.

It is worth mentioning that stc has consistently invested in student and youth initiatives, recognizing them as future leaders and pillars of the Kuwaiti economy, as part of its diverse and sustainable CSR program. stc has leveraged its resources and expertise to launch or participate in initiatives that positively impact the community.

The company has implemented community programs aimed at fostering long-term development under the "Weyak" umbrella to support Kuwaiti SMEs and startups, as well as the educational "upgrade" umbrella in collaboration with various state institutions from both public and private sectors. Through these efforts, stc has established itself not just as a telecom service provider, but as a significant contributor to strengthening the social and economic fabric of Kuwait.



National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Sa'adoun received on Wednesday Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs and Acting Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Sabah. (KUNA)

diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Bankruptcy of a Kuwaiti liberal ... lies exposed at the ballot box

"IT SEEMS that many liberals in Kuwait have lost their ability to balance, psychological and intellectual balance, and have begun to flounder in presenting their ideas, visions, and interpretation of events. Since the events of the Arab Spring, and then the counter-revolutions, and their shameless support for the suppression of peoples rising up against dictatorships, they have lost balance in presenting their ideas and expressing their positions. In order not to prolong the reader's attention, we mention some examples of some of their symbols in the recent events that the country has gone through," columnist **Mubarak Fahd Al-Duwailah** wrote **Al-Qabas** daily.



Al-Duwailah

"After the formation of the new government headed by Sheikh Muhammad Al-Sabah, one of those who dedicated themselves to defending Kuwaiti liberalism wrote, criticizing the formation under the pretext of the continuation of the Islamic government alliance (!), and everyone knows that this particular government is devoid of any Islamic symbols, and is even more liberal in nature!"

"When the name of Dr. Abdullah Al-Hajri was put forward as Minister of Education, and MP Muhammad Haif and MP Hamad Al-Olayan objected to this nomination, the liberal pens revolted over this objection, and accused the Muslim Brotherhood of inciting the nomination of qualified people, and people know very well that the two distinguished MPs have no connection to the movement affiliated with the Brotherhood. And none of the Brotherhood figures objected to this nomination!"

"Some liberals are still lying and believing their lies, as they are still repeating that the backwardness of education is due to the control of the religious movement, and especially the "Brotherhood" -- as they claim -- over the Ministry of Education and the University, and if you ask them: 'Who are the ministers and agents affiliated with the Brotherhood, who took successive positions in the Ministry of Education? They would swallow their tongues, but their rule is: Lie, lie until people believe you'.

"The situation reached the point of some liberal symbols, and after they became bankrupt of people's acceptance of them, they lost balance in presenting their ideas, so they came up with the idea of supporting homosexuals in the name of freedoms, and demanding the facilitation of the path of illicit and forbidden relationships, as is the case of the one who demanded that a man be allowed to spend the night with a woman to whom he is not related to legitimately."

"This intellectual bankruptcy made people turn away from them, so it is natural for people to disperse from those around them, and a National Assembly comes devoid of their symbols, because the assembly expresses the tendencies of the people in Kuwait, most of whose people are conservative and religious."

"Today, the Brotherhood's opponents, including some liberal symbols, see that all of the country's problems are because of the Brotherhood. Some of them even said that the devastation of the roads and highways is due to some

Ministry of Public Works officials affiliated with the Brotherhood!"

"Everything we mentioned is trivial, except that the immorality in the rivalry has reached the point of some demanding the dissolution of the Islah Society, and the suppression of the Islamic movement, under the pretext of conspiring against the country's interests, and ending its existence, following the example of what is happening in some countries of the region, and yet they falsely and slanderously claim that they are protectors of freedoms and advocates of democracy."

"Kuwaiti liberalism went bankrupt, because people exposed the falsity of their ideas and the falsehood of their claims, so the election ballots threw them out. On the other hand, despite the amount of propaganda against the Islamic movement and its distortion in every detail, people know very well the sincerity of their proposal and the purity of their nature."

Also:

"Demolishing national, and even constitutional, constants is what brings together a group of lost politicians, whose understandings have combined to undermine well-established national and traditional constants," columnist **Dr. Muhammad Al-Maqatei** wrote for **Al-Jarida** daily.

"They are either strangers to them, or have moved to the stage of 'Westernization' of them. Their logic stems from short-sighted self-interested considerations, or naively motivated by false slogans that do not exist in reality."

"In both cases, we are faced with a class of 'foreigners,' who live in a state of disconnection from established national constants, and they should have aligned themselves with them, instead of rushing to a state of 'alienation.'"

"You find them composed, based on a diaspora of personalities, orientations, and qualifications, but they have accepted or submitted to a state of 'alienation,' under the influence and dominance of 'strangers,' seeking to destroy the nation's constants, politically and socially, its values, customs, heritage, and even its behavior. It is a real and deliberate rebellion against 'national identity and its constants.'"

"Thus, a terrifying class of 'foreigners' appeared among us, including members of the ruling family, members of honorable Kuwaiti families, and those whose grandparents and perhaps fathers struggled to preserve national constants, preserve the Kuwaiti national identity, and enhance its identity, which was embodied by building walls one after another, coinciding with openness."

"Tolerance, travel, diving, education, and suffering crises and disasters, over two centuries, which almost ended the existence and heritage of Kuwait and its people, but all of that was overcome, thanks to God."

"Strangers are a group of modern politicians, whose understandings were to undermine our national constants, in response to the influences of the new social component that infiltrated the country in moments of heedlessness, complacency, or wrong selfishness, thinking that creating a new social class would be easy to control, and the new social component would be able to move to the political component, which is what allowed him the ability to infiltrate his culture, values, and behaviors that are contrary to national, and even constitutional, constants, is this the culture and goals of 'strangers' and 'the Westernized.'"

"This culture began to be revealed and worsened, which led to the emergence of a widespread spontaneous movement, popular and official, to restore the constants of the homeland and rid it of the culture of strangers, and its attempt to bring about forced change from multiple entrances. What we see today in the state of ambiguity in the general path of the state, and the encouragement of the values of the tribal culture, the sect culture, and the culture of fragmentation and fragmentation of society, is an intentional approach to weaken the social and political structure that preserved Kuwait's existence for three centuries."

"We find that the policy of expatriation sought and seeks to disrupt the basic component of society, until it penetrates. Among its ranks, which is what happened, then you try to abolish it and replace it, and this is the stage that the strangers and the astonished have reached. Work and employment are a national responsibility."

"They have been turned into a deception to receive an illegal salary. Study was science and culture and turned into papers, certificates, and even forgery. Health was a cultural medicine, so it became a hotbed for corruption and tourism treatment."

"The media was a platform for awareness and enlightenment, so it turned into platforms for sedition, intimidation, and drumming. Education and the university were a beacon of thought and advancement."

"They became a home for conflict and falsification of research. Scientists were transformed into employees, and fraud became a pattern of the culture of strangers and strangers. Patriotism, after being loyalty and affiliation, became a robe for obtaining citizenship and its benefits, and was sold at the first auction."

"Loyalties emerged that fragmented the country. The values of tolerance, honesty, communication, and sincere boldness were changed to fawning and favoritism, and violence, insults, and opportunism emerged to undermine the country's capabilities."

"The constitution and the parliamentary system are the reference for developing society and its institutions with the values of dialogue and difference, so the parliamentary seat became a source of profiteering, corruption, corruption, and the demolition of institutions, with the collapse of the emptying of democracy and the violation of the constitution."

"What do I prepare in all aspects: culture, sports, literature, civil society institutions, or cooperative work, all of which suffered from the same setback, because they were strangers to it or turned to alienation? About national constants?"

"What created strangers or foreigners was tampering with naturalization randomly or politically, or falsifying and dual nationality and making it a commodity for blackmail and bargaining, until naturalized, suspicious, forged, and dual citizens became a widespread phenomenon, and the country's security, stability, and values were lost."

"The way out is to sift through this file completely, by establishing the General Authority for Citizenship, and resolutely restoring the balance between powers as drawn up by the Constitution!"

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes



Firemen spray foam on the vehicles to extinguish the fire.

Mother, girl hurt; driver flees

A collision on the Sixth Ring Road between two vehicles -- one of them a tanker transporting hazardous material -- resulted in injuries to a mother and her daughter, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

The daily added the condition of the mother and her daughter is unstable.

The tanker driver is said to have fled the accident scene, raising speculations that the tanker may not have proper license to transport hazardous materials.

Authorities have issued instructions for the prompt arrest of the expatriate driver for further investigation.

'Most streets face long-term neglect'

No maintenance of Abdali Road since 23 years: MPW

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: The Public Authority for Roads and Land Transport (PART), in collaboration with the General Traffic Department, has announced the opening of a bridge on Al-Ghous Road, reports **Al-Jarida** daily.

This bridge intersects with Khalifa Talal Al-Jari Street (Route 210), connecting Fahd Al-Ahmad to the Seventh Ring Road.

Additionally, a traffic diversion under the bridge has been opened, leading to Al-Raqqa and the Fahaheel Expressway, inaugurated early morning on the preceding Tuesday.

Furthermore, PART has declared a temporary three-hour diversion to the Fifth Ring Road in both directions, specifically at the intersection of the Fifth and Ibn Al Qasim Street. This diversion is scheduled to take place from Wednesday morning until Thursday morning, starting from 2 am until 5 am, beginning on the first of February.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Public Works has disclosed a prolonged delay in the maintenance of numerous roads across the country, encompassing both highways and internal routes. Abdali Road, in particular, stands out as a stark example, having remained without maintenance for an extended period of approximately 23 years.

These sources have highlighted the Public Authority for Roads and Land Transport's commitment to executing essential maintenance on highways in various regions.

They revealed that, in recent times, the authority conducted a comprehensive assessment of highways urgently requiring maintenance.

'No phones'

Traffic Week starts

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: Under the slogan "Driving without a Phone," the 37th Unified Gulf Traffic Week 2024 Activities Committee held its work under the leadership of the Chairman of the Committee, Brigadier General Nawaf Al-Hayan, today, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

The committee discussed the general plan and main lines for traffic awareness and safety for Traffic Week, as well as setting all the necessary arrangements and equipment for the event.

The sources attribute the prolonged neglect of Abdali Road to procedural cycles, budget allocations within the Ministry of Works, and the prioritization of projects and maintenance initiatives by the Ministry.

The same sources mention that the Ministry is presently awaiting the completion of necessary procedures for maintenance tenders, anticipating that the direct contracting approach for road maintenance could expedite the overall process.

It is noteworthy that the "Roads" sector has multiple ongoing projects, including initiatives focused on the enhancement of Abdali Road (various sections) and others such as the development of Cairo Road.

Embezzlement, public funds theft rampant in public, private bodies

Nothing much done for recovery of looted money: Nashmi

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: MP Badr Nashmi has highlighted the recurring incidents of theft in numerous cooperative societies, attributing them to what he termed as "weak-willed residents" who manage to escape with the pilfered funds abroad, reports Al-Seyassah daily. He emphasized the urgent need to address these thefts, emphasizing their reflection on the inadequacy of supervisory and financial roles within state agencies.

Nashmi stressed the importance of preventing the squandering of public funds and safeguarding shareholders' money.

Addressing the Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs, and the acting Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, Sheikh Firas Al-Malik, Nashmi emphasized the sanctity of public money, citing its significance to the nation and its citizens.

Nashmi drew attention to the surge in embezzlement, theft, and misappropriation of public funds across various institutions, government agencies, and companies in Kuwait.

Despite the presence of multiple regulatory bodies, including consumer cooperatives, he noted a lack of effective deterrence and fair punishment for many offenders.

In his inquiry, Nashmi sought an official record of embezzlement and misappropriation crimes in consumer cooperative societies since 2014. He requested details for each cooperative society, including yearly incidents, amounts stolen, the nationality of the accused, their job descriptions, and whether they were convicted.

Additionally, Nashmi sought information on the measures taken by cooperative societies in response to embezzlement and theft incidents, including whether reports were filed with the Public Prosecution.

He inquired about the number of cases initiated by cooperative society boards against expatriates accused of theft and embezzlement of shareholders' funds.

He questioned the Ministry of Social Affairs about the mechanisms in place for fund recovery from looted cooperative societies.

Nashmi also raised concerns about individuals with financial responsibilities being allowed to travel without clearing their responsibilities and sought information on the total value of stolen funds, any recovery efforts since 2014, and the formation of investigation committees within cooperative societies.

120 more illegals held: During recent inspection campaigns organized by the General Administration of Residence Affairs Investigations led to the arrest of 120 people of various nationalities, reports **Al-Qabas** daily.

This is in addition to busting, a sham domestic workers' office housing three violators of labor law engaged in daily work activities.

Since the beginning of January, the Ministry of Interior has arrested over 390 residency violators, bringing the total number of apprehended expatriates to more than 500 within a span of three weeks. Ongoing security campaigns aim to address irregular labor issues and eliminate residency violators from the country.

Additionally, an urgent investigation has been initiated by the Ministry of Interior in response to a recent altercation at Kuwait International Airport. The incident, captured in a video circulating on social media, involves a quarrel at the airport, and appropriate disciplinary actions and measures are being taken based on the investigation's findings.

Accused 'royal' in custody

Appeal filed in Al-Za'atari murder

By **Jaber Al-Hamoud**

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: The Court of Appeals set the session of February 5 for the murder case of Kuwaiti citizen Abdulaziz Al-Za'atari, for which a member of the ruling family is currently imprisoned in the Central Prison after the Criminal Court sentenced him to death.

According to the case files, the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate witnessed a horrific crime on the evening of April 10, 2023 when a man wearing a protective helmet fired 12 gunshots at the young man, Abdulaziz Al-Za'atari, in front of his house, and then fled from the scene. Later, the Criminal Security Sector was able to seize the suspect and the weapon used in the crime. He was referred to the concerned authority for necessary legal measures.

□ □ □

Shop-keepers warned: Kuwait Municipality has intensified the surprise inspection campaigns in all governorates to ensure strict compliance with its regulations, reports **Annahar** daily.

The Public Relations Department at the Municipality confirmed that the inspection team in the Municipality branch in Hawally Governorate conducted inspection campaigns in Hawally and Salmiya.

These campaigns resulted in the issuance of 25 citations for various violations, such as using an area not mentioned in the license, expired advertising license, non-compliance with public hygiene regulations and setting up illegal barriers on State properties.

The Municipality advised the shop owners to fully abide by the relevant laws and regulations to avoid penalties that include fine and administrative closure.

SPIN & WIN

JANUARY REWARDS

FOR LOYAL GUEST



DON'T FORGET
TO SPIN THE WHEEL
WHEN YOU DINE IN AT ANY BRANCH

MUGHAL MAHAL

WWW.MUGHALMAHAL.COM

Netherlands' King extends best wishes to Kuwait's new leader

HH Amir receives congratulation from Serbia's President

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahamd Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Wednesday a cable from the President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic, congratulating him on assuming post. In the cable President, Vucic wished His Highness the Amir good health and more progress and prosperity for Kuwait and its people.

On his part, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a reply cable to President Vucic, thanking him for his kind sentiment and wishing him good health and welfare. Similarly, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Wednesday a cable from the King of Netherlands, Willem-

Alexander, congratulating him on assuming top office. In the cable, the King expressed well wishes to the Amir, desiring for him good health and further progress and prosperity to Kuwait. His Highness the Amir sent a reply cable to the King, expressing his sincere gratitude and appreciation for the heartfelt words and sentiments.

National Bank of Kuwait Hospital introduces looming cellular engineering therapy service

Stem cell transplant promises 95% success rate

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

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: Head of the Department of Hematology, Pediatric Cancer and Stem Cell Transplant at the National Bank of Kuwait Hospital Dr. Sondos Al-Shraideh revealed that cellular engineering therapy service will soon be introduced in the department, indicating that the success rate with this service may reach 95 percent.

tial element in the first stage of treatment, followed by immunosuppressants, and then cortisone in the second stage. If there is not a sufficient response, therapeutic photopheresis will be used in the third stage. Photopheresis has been used to achieve positive results in treating seven medical cases.

In a speech she delivered during the conference, Dr. Al-Shraideh affirmed that immunotherapy is one of the options that were recently provided, and is effective but not as effective as chemotherapy.

She stressed that the Ministry of Health is working to provide medicines, equipment, advanced devices and new treatments, and overcome all obstacles and challenges in a unique spirit of care.

Regarding the conference activities, Dr. Al-Shraideh indicated that it will be held over a period of two days with the participation of 18 experts and researchers in the world of stem cell transplant for children from inside and outside Kuwait, to learn about the latest diagnostic and therapeutic developments that have occurred in this vital and important field.

She also explained that the conference will include many scientific papers and lectures, such as stem cell transplant from a matched donor, others related to gene therapy for sickle cell anemia and thalassemia major, and also address cell engineering therapy, in addition to the latest developments in the treatment of conflict after stem cell transplant for children.

In a press statement issued on the sidelines of the inauguration of the 3rd Kuwait Conference for Pediatric Stem Cell Transplant and Cellular Therapy yesterday, Dr. Al-Shraideh affirmed the keenness to keep up with the latest developments in patient treatment and adopt many diverse treatment options for pediatric cancer patients.

She highlighted the introduction of the phototherapeutic apheresis service as a new step towards treating complications of stem cell transplant for patients who face a challenge with anaphylaxis disease.

Dr. Al-Shraideh revealed the adoption of internationally approved therapeutic protocols to treat the disease, where cortisone constitutes an essen-



KUNA photo
The Kuwaiti-Azerbaijani parliamentary friendship delegation meets with the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister.

Kuwait, Azerbaijan hold fresh talks

A joint friendship group comprised of lawmakers from Kuwait and Azerbaijan convened for talks on Tuesday with Baku's Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov in attendance, focusing on bilateral ties.

Some three decades after diplomatic ties between the two countries began, the group, chaired by Kuwaiti lawmaker Mohammad Al-Mutairi, agreed that there remains more room for progress in bilateral relations, citing fields that run the gamut from energy to tourism and food security.

Amid a sharp rise in the number of Kuwaiti tourists visiting the transcontinental nation, the talks also looked into a mutual visa exemption agreement that could be up and running in the near future, said the Kuwaiti lawmaker.

Current developments around the wider Middle East region was among the topics discussed, chief among them the worsening wave of violence that has gripped the Gaza Strip, while the group underlined the need to provide urgent aid to Palestinians there, he added. (KUNA)

Kuwait Amir sends condolence cable to Chinese Pres over landslide victims

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Wednesday a cable of condolences to Chinese President Xi Jinping over the landslides in Yunnan province, south-west of China, which left a number of people dead or injured.

In the cable, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah wished the injured a swift recovery.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah sent Wednesday a condolence cable to President of

China Xi Jinping over the victims of landslides in Yunnan province, south-west of China, which left a number of people dead or injured.

National Assembly speaker Ahmad Al-Sadoun sent Wednesday a cable of condolences to Chinese National People's Congress (NPC) Speaker Zhao Leji, expressing sorrow over the landslide in Yunnan province, south-west of China, which left multiple casualties and damage.

Chinese authorities announced earlier on Tuesday that the death toll of the landslide had jumped to 31.

82 buildings completed

Mutlaa City's development track outlined by committee chairman

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

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: Chairman of the Mutlaa City Committee Sabaa Al-Dousari responded to a number of questions regarding the reality and future of services in the city, after meeting with the acting Director General of the Public Authority for Housing Welfare Eng. Rashid Al-Enezi.

Al-Dousari explained that 82 buildings and service facilities were actually received by PAHW. There are projects under tender, which are 20 schools, six kindergartens, two mosques, and 26 housing for workers in religious jobs. There are also two specialized health centers, a general health center, an

ambulance center, two fire stations, 20 municipal centers, two supermarkets (cooperative societies), two community development centers, two police stations, and two citizen service centers.

The main roads have been lit, and the lighting of the internal roads of the suburbs N6, N7, N8, N9, N10 and N11 is being implemented by the contractor. The government buildings, investment and commercial sectors, and the rest of the services will be offered gradually.

Al-Dousari appealed to His Highness the Prime Minister to adopt the idea of linking Kuwait City to the northern region (Ashirj Bridge), including the city of Mutlaa, indicating that the traffic congestion on Jahra Road would be alleviated.

20 customers winning KD 1,500 each

KFH announces Al-Rabeh draw winners

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) announced the winners of the AlRabeh draw with 20 customers winning cash prizes worth KD 1,500 each for the 1st and 2nd weeks of 2024.

The winners of KD 1,500 are: Abdullah Mohammad, Mohammad Baig, Ahmad Al-Mutairi, Dalal Kartash, Mobarak Al-Mutawa, Abdulrahman Adi, Mariam Al-Enezi, Nourah Al-Harbi, Mohammad Al-Alati, Thuraya Al-Farisi, Abdunaser Al-Snan, Khaled Al-Shammari, Khaled Mowaisa, Abdullah Al-Farhan, Asia Al-Tartor, Nawal Al-Azmi, Naser Al-Jagheif, Mai Al-Mutairi, Ahmad Maqbool, Mariam Al-Harbi.

The AlRabeh campaign provides prizes and draws that offer customers several chances of winning "weekly, monthly and quarterly". The campaign crowns 536 winners throughout the year.

The draw took place under the supervision of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The campaign is part of KFH's ongoing efforts to offer exceptional products and services that meet customers' aspirations, enhance the Bank's leadership in the local and global markets, as well as reflect its excellence in offering innovative banking solutions as per the highest quality standards.

The Al-Rabeh account is a salary account available to customers wishing to transfer their salaries and manage their personal accounts. Customers can open Al-Rabeh account in any of KFH branches in Kuwait, or through the Bank's online channels. The account can be opened in the Kuwaiti Dinar and is targeted for customers wishing to transfer their salaries and manage their personal accounts. Salary transfer is a prerequisite for customers to enter the draw



The campaign visual

provided that the transfer of salary to Al-Rabeh account is constant.

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

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

Customer base expanding day by day

Kuwait banking sector continues to experience remarkable growth

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: The Kuwaiti banking sector continues to achieve significant growth with its customer base expanding day after day, attracting new customers through its diverse and innovative list of products to meet their banking needs, reports Al-Anba daily.

The sector enjoys high rates of financial inclusion, which allows individuals to obtain financial services that meet their needs easily, while providing better opportunities for money management.

Official data that the daily accessed through the financial services revealed that 349 out of every 1,000 citizens and expatriates have more than one deposit in local banks; while the number of depositors in commercial banks for every 1,000 adults reached about 1,349 people by the end of 2022.

These figures indicate a continued change in the culture of saving among citizens and expatriates; as the number of people who have more than one bank deposit increased by about 25 percent in just one year, compared to 280 people in 2021 when the number of depositors in commercial banks for every 1,000 adults reached 1,279.

This comes in midst of innovative solutions and savings vessels provided by local banks according to various segments of interest rates, not to mention the con-

tinued attractiveness of the Kuwaiti dinar as a receptacle for savings while maintaining its strength despite the challenges the world is witnessing, which increases the confidence of citizens and expatriates in maintaining Kuwaiti Dinar deposits.

The date also showed that about a quarter of citizens and expatriates borrowed from banks, as 22.5 percent of every 1,000 citizens and expatriates have loans. Data from the Central Bank of Kuwait revealed that the number of borrowers from commercial banks per 1,000 adults reached 224 by the end of 2022.

Annually, the number of borrowers from banks increased, as their percentage in 2021 reached about 21.6 percent; increasing the number of borrowers from commercial banks per 1,000 people to 216. Kuwaiti banks offer multiple financing options that cover various goals like purchasing consumer goods, building or renovating a house or investment purposes.

Banks in Kuwait are racing to offer various segments of loans to their customers, even offering good loans without interest on some types of financing, which motivate citizens and expatriates to borrow.

Banks operating in Kuwait increased the coverage rate of serving the public through the ATM machines, as the number of ATM machines per 100,000 adults reached 68.52 by the end of 2022.

albander hotel & resort

January

Room Promotion

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

Promo period from 1st - 31st January 2024

Terms & conditions apply*

LOCAL

Field management

Continued from Page 1

It fell behind in all aspects, not only in the Gulf, but globally. This consequently affected all sectors, especially after the successive Cabinets failed to pay attention to improving the production environment in either the public sector or the private sector.

All of this is the responsibility of the executive authority. It must work on development, which is its first task, instead of reaching deals and settlements with parliamentarians whose only concern is to increase their financial and electoral gains even if it is at the expense of institutions and public funds.

This is why we saw such a level of paralysis, while the absurd political noise rose above everything else. There is no doubt that this initiative requires follow-up and continuous field work. Therefore, the decision of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem to hold the Cabinet meeting every Monday at 6:00 pm "so that the ministers can devote themselves to following up the work of their ministries" is a good step.

However, there is a fear that this dedication might transform into desk-bound work, involving meetings with MPs, cronies, and influential individuals, and potentially causing ministers to neglect their fundamental responsibility, which should primarily involve fieldwork.

Hence, the ministers, particularly His Highness the Prime Minister, must realize that talking about a new Kuwait in light of the decline at all levels has become a ridiculous joke, not only among citizens, but in the Gulf in general.

We have become the subject of ridicule because of the failure that has been accumulating over decades. Therefore, a mere glimmer of hope intensifies enthusiasm.

To achieve this, let the ministers and their chief render their management office to be on the field, and perhaps they will be able to correct what has been ruined by the age of disappointments.

MPs propose

Continued from Page 1

of their economy, so countries must pay attention to the human element and ensure the provision of comfort in order to provide the appropriate climate to have achievements at work and attain the required productivity in a way that provides workers with comfort and the appropriate time to accomplish the tasks and affairs of their daily lives. In view of the reality about the inadequacy of some provisions of Law No. 6/2010 regarding work in the private sector, the amendment was considered in some of its provisions as necessary to achieve its purpose. Article 64 of the aforementioned law stipulates that it is not permissible for an employee to work for more than 48 hours a week or eight hours a day. To achieve these goals, the amendment to this article reduces the number of working hours by one hour to become seven hours a day or 42 hours a week.

This amendment came about because working hours in the government sector differ from those in the private sector, where employees usually have flexible and irregular working hours. This is due to the nature of the work, which includes employees caring for their families like the children, elderly, people who need special care and other cases. The amendment retained the working hours in Ramadan as 36 hours per week and it is not permissible for an employee to work for more than seven hours per day, except what is stated in the provisions of the aforementioned law regarding the employer's desire to extend working hours with the additional wage stipulated in the articles of the law and in accordance with the employee's circumstances.

The amendment aims to make employees more active, reduce the burden of employees in the private sector, and provide sufficient time to fulfill their daily needs; which enhances their sense of satisfaction, improves their psychological and emotional state, and encourages them to exert more effort at work that benefits the employer and helps improve the business environment in the private sector, especially since the State of Kuwait is a financial and commercial center that attracts foreign investments.

Meanwhile, MP Saud Al-Asfour commented about the Amiri Decree on the appointment of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah as Deputy Amir. He called for a special parliamentary for Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Al-Salem to take the constitutional oath as per Article 63 of the Constitution.

Article 60: Before assuming his powers, the Amir takes the following oath at a special sitting of the National Assembly: "I swear by Almighty God to respect the Constitution and the laws of the State, to defend the liberties, interests and properties of the people, and to safeguard the independence and territorial integrity of the Country."

Article 63: Before assuming his powers, the Deputy Amir, at a special sitting of the National Assembly, takes the oath mentioned in Article 60 with the following phrase added thereto: "and be loyal to the Amir." In case the National Assembly is not in session, the Oath shall be taken before the Amir.

In a relevant development, constitutional expert Professor Ibrahim Al-Homoud explained that Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Al-Salem will neither preside over the Council of Ministers meetings nor attend parliamentary sessions in his capacity as Prime Minister whenever HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is outside the country. He said that under such circumstances, the First Deputy Prime Minister will carry out the aforementioned tasks.

He also affirmed that Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Al-Salem will take the constitutional oath in a special session of the Assembly as stated in Articles 60 and 63 of the Constitution.

It should be pointed out here that Article Two of the Amiri Decree on the Deputy Amir's appointment states: "HH the Prime Minister shall serve as

Deputy Amir whenever HH the Amir is outside Kuwait until the appointment of the Crown Prince."

On the other hand, MPs Fares Al-Otaibi, Badr Nashmi, Muhammad Al-Hewaila and Mubarak Al-Hajraf have submitted a proposal to increase the allowance for patients undergoing overseas treatment from KD75 to KD100 per month and that of their companions from KD25 to KD50 per month.

In addition, Chairman of the parliamentary fact-finding committee tasked to investigate the violations in the distribution of agricultural, industrial and vocational plots MP Abdullah Al-Mudhaf affirmed that the committee has submitted its report to the Assembly.

He added they sent a letter to the Parliamentary Priorities Committee requesting discussion of the report, including findings and recommendations, in a public session in the coming period.

He affirmed the committee spared no effort in completing the report to the fullest extent, as it remains committed to the oversight role assigned to the nation's representatives. He said the committee held a number of meetings and listened to the views of 97 concerned officials in order to finalize the report and present recommendations.

He thanked the rapporteur and members of the committee for exerting tremendous efforts and commitment to attend meetings to prepare a comprehensive technical report on the investigation. He also lauded the Technical Office of the committee for its positive role in ensuring the successful completion of the task.

In another development, the delegation of the Kuwaiti-Azerbaijani Parliamentary Friendship Group, headed by MP Muhammad Al-Mutairi, met with Azerbaijani Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeyhun Bayramov on Tuesday.

Members of the group MPs Adel Al-Damkhi and Falah Al-Hajri, in addition to Kuwaiti Ambassador to Azerbaijan Abdullah Al-Mawad, attended the meeting.

Al-Mutairi disclosed that they discussed the bilateral relations between the two friendly countries with the aim of strengthening ties in all fields; especially oil, gas, food security, green energy and transportation.

He said this year marks the 30th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between Kuwait and Azerbaijan, which gives rise to more opportunities to fortify cooperation between the two countries.

He confirmed the commitment of the group to hold the joint governmental committee meeting to be hosted by Kuwait this year, as well as organizing forums for businesspersons and investors.

He also disclosed that they discussed the visa exemption for the citizens of both countries; considering almost 30,000 Kuwaitis visited Azerbaijan in the past year according to official statistics.

On the current regional conditions, he said both sides stressed the need for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, securing the delivery of humanitarian aid, and forcing Israel to comply with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The delegation also met with Chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Parliamentary Relations Committee at the Azerbaijani National Assembly Sevinj Fataliyeva and Chairman of the Democratic Reform Party Dr. Asim Mollazade. They tackled a number of issues of mutual concern, including the regional developments.

Moreover, Assembly Speaker Ahmed Al-Saadoun had a meeting with Minister of Social, Family and Childhood Affairs and acting Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Sabah.

He also sent a cable to Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in China Zhao Leji to express condolences over the victims of the recent landslide that resulted in a number of deaths and injuries.

Kuwait government

Continued from Page 1

Deputy shall, at a special sitting of the National Assembly, take the oath mentioned in Article 60 of the constitution with the following phrase added thereto: "and be loyal to the Amir."

The oath in Article 60 reads the following: "I swear by Almighty Allah to respect the constitution and the laws of the State, to defend the liberties, interests and properties of the people and to safeguard the independence and territorial integrity of the country."

In case the National Assembly is not in session, the oath shall be taken before the Amir.

Kuwait private

Continued from Page 1

"Through this conference, we review environment policies and different efforts of the private sector for partaking in sustainability and social responsibility," she elaborated.

Kuwait's pavilion held several effective activities and lectures relating to environment and sustainability with different bodies, she made clear.

PAM, PAAET

Continued from Page 1

Applied Education and Training (PAAET), headed by Deputy Director General for Training Eng Sayed Al-Tabtabai, to discuss the mechanism for activating the joint cooperation protocol with the aim of starting the implementation of professional tests for workers to raise the skill level of the Kuwaiti labor market, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

These tests are considered one of the mechanisms of PAM to empower national workers and create job opportunities; thus, modifying the demographic composition of the State of Kuwait.

During the meeting, an agreement was reached to form a higher committee between the two bodies to supervise the implementation of the project. The committee's tasks include supervising

four joint specialized teams between the two bodies to develop the executive work mechanisms for the project.

In addition, the Labor Market Standards Department in the Planning and Administrative Development Sector of PAM was assigned to coordinate the implementation of professional tests for the construction sector in the labor market, which includes approximately 400,000 expatriate workers.

At the end of the meeting, Al-Osaimi thanked the PAAET delegation and the representatives of PAM.

Kuwait urges

Continued from Page 1

He took the time to reiterate Kuwait's unwavering stance in support of Palestinian people in face of a conflict caused primarily by the existence of an expanding occupation.

Sustainable peace and security could only be achieved through adherence to agreed upon stipulations, UNSC resolutions, and 2002 Arab Peace Initiative ensuring the political rights of Palestinian people, commented Ambassador Al-Sabah.

Once again, Kuwait vehemently rejected and condemned the occupation's ongoing aggression, called for immediate end to the destruction and for the unimpeded delivery of aid.

The Ambassador expressed Kuwait's regard to the nation of South Africa for the unprecedented step of filing a lawsuit against the occupation at the International Court of Justice.

Concluding his statement, Ambassador Al-Sabah urged the UNSC to undertake its responsibility and protect the Palestinian people.

He called on the international community to support the resilience of Palestinian people on their own land and warned against attempts of forced eviction.

Meanwhile, Israeli forces battled Palestinian militants on Wednesday near the main hospital in Gaza's second-largest city where medics said hundreds of patients and thousands of displaced people were trapped by the fighting.

Israel has ordered residents to leave a swath of downtown Khan Younis that includes Nasser Hospital and two smaller medical facilities as it pushes ahead with its 3-month-old offensive against Hamas. The United Nations humanitarian office said the area was home to 88,000 Palestinians and was hosting another 425,000 displaced by fighting elsewhere.

But the aid group Doctors Without Borders said fleeing was not an option for many. It said its staff was trapped inside Nasser with some 850 patients and thousands of displaced people because the surrounding roads were inaccessible or too dangerous. The hospital is one of only two in southern Gaza that can still treat critically ill patients, the group said. Gaza's Health Ministry also said the facility had been isolated.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to press ahead with the offensive until "complete victory" against Hamas, which started the war with its assault across the border on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people in Israel and abducting another 250.

The Israeli military said its forces were battling militants inside the city after encircling it the day before. It said aircraft were striking targets as part of the operations there and had also targeted suspected militants in central and northern Gaza.

Thousands of people fled south from Khan Younis on Tuesday toward the town of Rafah. The U.N. says some 1.5 million people - around two-thirds of Gaza's population - are crowded into shelters and tent camps in and around Rafah, which is on the border with Egypt.

Even there, Palestinians have found little safety, with Israel regularly carrying out strikes in and around the town. Palestinian witnesses said that in recent days Israeli soldiers and tanks had pushed into parts of Muwasi, a sandy area along the coast that Israel had declared a safe zone, where tens of thousands of people were living in tents without basic services.

Union shocked

Continued from Page 1

the Public Authority for Manpower, in addition to representatives of the Kuwait Union of Owners of Domestic Workers Recruitment Bureaus.

These procedures guarantee the issuance of a decision in line with the research of specialists in this field, and in line with the requirements of the local and global markets in the field of recruitment, so that the decision is fair and just for the Kuwaiti society and bureau owners.

The union stressed that the Board of Directors has sufficient experience to study such decisions and the mechanism for implementing them, and determining how it suits the economic and social conditions for the Kuwaiti citizen and the recruitment bureaus in line with the similar social and economic conditions of the countries exporting that labor force.

It stated that recruitment does not take place through the union, but rather through coordination and cooperation between the union and the labor-exporting countries, which are governed by binding laws and procedures that must be followed and not violated.

The union revealed that the State of Kuwait is considered one of the cheapest in the region in terms of recruitment of domestic workers, adding, "If it is compared with the Arabian Gulf countries, for example, there is a big difference between the prices. Their prices are very high compared to the prices in Kuwait."

It said, "The prices set by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry are prices that have not been studied through a serious and realistic study. They are not economically feasible for those who engage in the activity of recruiting domestic workers, and do not meet the requirements and specifications of the desired workers that Kuwaiti society requires. We cannot help but wonder who will bear the price difference."

PADA committee deliberates on Decree No. 229 during meeting

Amendments to disability law face rejection

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: MP Saud Al-Asfour, Chairman of the Committee on People with Disabilities Affairs, announced that during its ninth meeting, the committee deliberated on Decree No. 229 of 2023, which rejected the proposed amendment to certain provisions of Law No. 8 of 2010 concerning the rights of individuals with disabilities, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The session, attended by Finance Minister Anwar Al-Mudhaf, representatives from the Public Authority for Disabled Affairs, the Fatwa and Legislation Department, and the General Organization for Social Insurance, addressed the reasons for the rejection.

In a press statement, Al-Asfour explained that the meeting involved a thorough examination of the decree, exploring the committee's and government agencies' perspectives.

Amendments

Notably, some articles, initially part of a government draft law, garnered surprise from the committee. The Ministry of Finance shared its views on the financial aspect, the Social Insurance Corporation presented comments on the proposed amendments, and the General Authority for Disabled Affairs conveyed its opinions.

Al-Asfour said it was unanimously decided for the Ministry of Finance and the Public Authority for Disabled Affairs to collaborate on a comprehensive official response within two weeks. Subsequently, the committee members will evaluate the response, leading to a decision that will be presented to the National Assembly.



Kuwait University female student participants.

10 universities qualified

Kuwait University female students shine in international competition

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: Kuwait University female students have accomplished a significant feat, securing qualification for the final rounds of the competition among 36 participating universities from Saudi Arabia, the Gulf, and the Arab re-

gion, reports Al-Qabas daily.

Additionally, 10 other universities have also qualified. This accomplishment underscores the outstanding academic prowess of Kuwait University students on the international stage.

He emphasized the committee's dedicated efforts to finalize the amendments, incorporating the observations outlined in the rejection decree.

The goal is to establish a new consensus with the government. Al-As-

four disclosed that, at a later stage, the committee intends to prepare a new report for submission to the National Assembly for a vote in the upcoming phase. The public will be informed of developments in a timely manner.

ABK announces Ghada Abdullah AlBassam as winner of Alfouz KD 10,000 Weekly Draw Prize

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced Ghada Abdullah AlBassam as the KD 10,000 Alfouz weekly draw winner on Monday, 22 January 2024, whereby the draw was held under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Since its launch, the Alfouz account continues to offer an impressive weekly draw of KD 10,000. The Bank has recently expanded its offering by adding a new alluring monthly draw of KD 20,000, and an exceptional quarterly draw of KD 100,000.

The account also retains its hallmark mega annual draw of a KD 5,000 monthly salary for ten years. Furthermore, the Bank now offers customers an increased opportunity to win for every KD 10 as opposed to KD 100 previously.

ABK encourages everyone to open an Alfouz draw account and/or increase their balances to have more chances in winning in the upcoming draw winner announcement, which



Ghada Abdullah AlBassam – winner of Alfouz KD 10,000 Weekly Draw Prize.

will take place on Monday, 29 January 2024. The higher the deposits, the higher the chances to win.

For more information about ABK,

please follow the Bank's Instagram account @abk_kuwait, visit eahli.com, contact AhlanAhli 1 899 899 or visit one of the Bank's branches across Kuwait.

State Municipality bolster efforts to tackle violations

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: The Public Relations Department at Kuwait Municipality has confirmed that the field teams in the sanitation departments in the governorates continue to intensify their campaigns to monitor and uncover violations of sanitation and road occupancy regulations throughout the country, reports Al-Anba daily.

The department said the teams carried out several inspection campaigns to maintain cleanliness, and remove everything that obstructs the road and distorts the general view like the abandoned cars and boats, and scrap materials.

Director of the Public Sanitation and Road Occupancy Department at the Municipality branch in the Capital Governorate Saad Al-Kharing clarified that the objective of the intensive campaigns is to monitor violations and take legal measures against those proven to have committed violations. He affirmed that his supervisory team focuses on maintaining cleanliness and the aesthetic view in areas under its responsibility.

He revealed the recent campaigns in Shuwaikh Industrial Area resulted in the impounding of 14 abandoned cars; issuance of 13 citations for different violations such as the illegal use of public property, failure to abide by the sanitation regulations and selling on the streets; in addition to five violations uncovered at Watiya Beach.

World News Roundup

Europe

74 people killed

Russia accuses Ukraine of shooting down plane

MOSCOW, Jan 24, (AP): Russia's Defense Ministry on Wednesday accused Ukrainian forces of shooting down a military transport plane, killing all 74 people aboard, including 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war being swapped.

Ukrainian officials did not comment on the crash in Russia's Belgorod border region, and The Associated Press could not confirm who was aboard or other details on what brought the plane down. Officials in Kyiv cautioned against sharing unverified information.

In addition to the 65 POWs, the Il-76 transport carried a crew of six and three other passengers, the Russian military said. According to the statement, Russian radar registered the launch of two Ukrainian missiles from Ukraine's Kharkiv region bordering Belgorod. The ministry called the attack "a terrorist act."



Gladkov

Firefighters, ambulances and police rushed to the site in the Korochansky district of Belgorod, state news agency Tass reported, citing a local emergency services official.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the POWs were being transported to the region for a prisoner exchange when the plane was downed at 11:15 am local time (0815 GMT, 3:15 am EST).

Shortly before the crash, Belgorod Gov Vyacheslav Gladkov said on his Telegram channel that a "missile alert" had been triggered in the region and warned residents to take shelter.

UK gives Northern Ireland new deadline: The UK government on Tuesday gave Northern Ireland politicians until Feb 8 to restore the collapsed regional government in Belfast, after a deadline this month passed without an end to the deadlock.

The extension comes amid signs Northern Ireland's largest British unionist party is close to deciding whether to end a boycott that has kept the power-sharing administration on ice for almost two years.

The British government is legally obliged to call new Northern Ireland elections now that a previous deadline of Jan 18 has passed. Northern Ireland Secretary Chris Heaton-Harris said he would bring a bill to Parliament on Wednesday to set a new date of Feb. 8.

Moldova foreign minister resigns: Moldova's foreign minister Nicu Popescu announced on Wednesday that he's resigning from his post, saying that he "needs a break" after what he described as a difficult period for the country but also one of "remarkable achievements" punctuated by progress toward one day joining the European Union.

Popescu, who has led the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration since August 2021, will step down on Jan. 29. He will also leave his position as deputy prime minister on the same date.

Throughout his mandate, Popescu helped steer Moldova through a series of crises including the coronavirus pandemic, the war in neighboring Ukraine, and what Moldovan officials have routinely said were Russian attempts to destabilize Moldova, a country of about 2.5 million people.

Poland's prez pardons 2 politicians: Poland's president said Tuesday he was once again pardoning two politicians who were arrested earlier this month amid a bitter standoff between the new centrist government and the previous conservative administration.

President Andrzej Duda made the announcement shortly after the new justice minister refused Duda's motion for a pardon procedure to be applied to two senior opposition members who served in the previous right-wing government until December. Duda is closely aligned with the Law and Justice party that ruled then.

Duda made an appeal to Justice Minister Adam Bodnar, who is also the prosecutor general, to release the two from prison immediately. Both were released a few hours later and were met outside by their wives and cheering gatherings.

'Far-right party ineligible for funding': Germany's highest court ruled Tuesday that a small far-right party will not get any state funding for the next six years because its values and goals are unconstitutional and aimed at destroying the country's democracy.

The Federal Constitutional Court said the Die Heimat party, which used to be known as the National Democratic Party of Germany, or NPD, "continues to disregard the free democratic basic order and, according to its goals and the behavior of its members and supporters, is geared towards its elimination."

Presiding judge Doris Koenig, the court's vice president, explained the unanimous decision by saying the party's political concept was incompatible with the guarantee of human dignity as defined by Germany's constitution, the Basic Law.

1 dead, 19 hurt in train-truck collision: A fast train collided with a truck in eastern Czech Republic on Wednesday, killing one person and injuring at least 19 people, officials said.

The Czech Railways said the driver of the train was killed and that the injured have been transported to nearby hospitals with no life threatening injuries.

Police said there were 60 people onboard the train at the time of the crash. The accident occurred early in the morning when a fast train heading for Prague, the country's capital, hit a truck at a crossing near the town of Bohumin.

Scores of people arrested in Belarus: Belarusian authorities on Tuesday arrested several dozen people in raids marking the latest in a relentless crackdown on dissent, a local human rights center said.

The Viasna center said that at least 64 people were detained across Belarus on charges of "involvement in extremist groups" and "financing extremist activities," accusations that are routinely used to target dissenters.

Viasna said that some political prisoners who had been released after serving their sentences were among those arrested.

It said that some of those detained had cooperated with a humanitarian project providing food for political prisoners and others who have found themselves in a desperate situation amid official reprisals. On Tuesday, the authorities branded the project, INeedHelpBY, as extremist, a designation that could trigger seven-year prison sentences for those who cooperate with it.



US Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump speaks at a primary election night party in Nashua, NH, on Jan 23. Watching from left are Vivek Ramaswamy, Sen Tim Scott, R-S.C., and Eric Trump. (AP)

Politics

'Rematch with Biden appears increasingly likely'

Trump wins New Hampshire primary

MANCHESTER, NH, Jan 24, (AP): Former US president Donald Trump easily won New Hampshire's primary on Tuesday, seizing command of the race for the Republican nomination and making a November rematch against President Joe Biden feel all the more inevitable.

The result was a setback for former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley, who finished second despite investing significant time and financial resources in a state famous for its independent streak. She's the last major challenger after Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis ended his presidential bid over the weekend, allowing her to campaign as the sole alternative to Trump.

Trump's allies ramped up pressure on Haley to leave the race before the polls had closed, but Haley vowed after the results were announced to continue her campaign. Speaking to supporters, she intensified her criticism of the former president, questioning his mental acuity and pitching herself as a unifying candidate who would usher in generational change.

"This race is far from over. There are dozens of states left to go," Haley said, while some in the crowd cried, "It's not over!"

Boast

Trump, meanwhile, can now boast of being the first Republican presidential candidate to win open races in Iowa and New Hampshire since both states began leading the election calendar in 1976, a striking sign of how rapidly Republicans have rallied around him to make him their nominee for the third consecutive time.

At his victory party Tuesday night, Trump repeatedly insulted Haley and gave a far angrier speech than after his Iowa victory, when his message was one of Republican unity.

"Let's not have someone take a victory when she had a very bad night," Trump said. He added, "Just a little note to Nikki: She's not going to win."

With easy wins in both early states, Trump is demonstrating an ability to unite the GOP's factions firmly behind him. He's garnered support from the evangelical conservatives who are

influential in Iowa and New Hampshire's more moderate voters, strength he hopes to replicate during the general election.

Trump posted especially strong results in the state's most conservative areas, while Haley won more liberal parts. The only areas in which Haley was leading Trump were in Democratic-leaning cities and towns such as Concord, Keene and Portsmouth.

Pat Sheridan, a 63-year-old engineer from Hampton, voted for Trump "because he did a really good job the first time."

"We need a businessman, not bureaucrats," Sheridan said.

About half of GOP primary voters said they are very or somewhat concerned that Trump is too extreme to win the general election, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of the state's electorate. Only about one-third say the same about Haley.

Favoring

Still, Haley's path to becoming the GOP standard-bearer is narrowing quickly. She won't compete in a contest that awards delegates until South Carolina's Feb. 24 primary, bypassing the Feb. 8 Nevada caucuses that are widely seen as favoring Trump.

As South Carolina's former governor, Haley is hoping a strong showing there could propel her into the March 5 Super Tuesday contests. But in a deeply conservative state where Trump is exceedingly popular, those ambitions may be tough to realize and a home-state loss could prove politically devastating.

"This is just the beginning; we've got the rest of the nation," said Sandy Adams, 66, an independent from Bow who supported Haley. "I think we've got a strong candidate, and the first time we have just two candidates, and that's a great thing."

On the Democratic side, Biden won his party's primary but had to do so via a write-in effort. The Democratic National Committee voted to start its primary next month in South Carolina, but New Hampshire pushed ahead with its own contest. Biden didn't campaign or appear on the ballot but

topped a series of little-known challengers.

Trump's early sweep through the Republican primary is remarkable considering he faces 91 criminal charges related to everything from seeking to overturn the 2020 presidential election to mishandling classified documents and arranging payoffs to a porn actress. He left the White House in 2021 in the grim aftermath of an insurrection at the U.S. Capitol led by his supporters who sought to stop the certification of Biden's win. And Trump was the first president to be impeached twice.

Challenge

Beyond the political vulnerabilities associated with the criminal cases, Trump faces a logistical challenge in balancing trials and campaigning. He has frequently appeared voluntarily at a New York courtroom where a jury is considering whether he should pay additional damages to a columnist who last year won a \$5 million jury award against Trump for sex abuse and defamation. He has turned these appearances into campaign events, holding televised news conferences that give him an opportunity to spread his message to a large audience.

But Trump has turned those vulnerabilities into an advantage among GOP voters. He has argued that the criminal prosecutions reflect a politicized Justice Department, though there's no evidence that officials there were pressured by Biden or anyone else in the White House to file charges.

Trump has also repeatedly told his supporters that he's being prosecuted on their behalf, an argument that appears to have further strengthened his bond with the GOP base.

As Trump begins to pivot his attention to Biden and a general election campaign, the question is whether the former president's framing of the legal cases will persuade voters beyond the GOP base. Trump lost the popular vote in the 2016 and 2020 elections and has faced particular struggles in suburban communities from Georgia to Pennsylvania to Arizona that could prove decisive in the fall campaign.



Firefighters work at the fire at the National Art Gallery in Abkhazia, in Sukhumi the capital of the separatist Georgian region, on Jan 21. Thousands of artworks have been destroyed in a fire that swept through the main art gallery in Abkhazia in a severe blow to the cultural heritage of the separatist Georgian region. The cause of the fire has not been determined. (AP)



Monahan



Donofrio

America

Jury awards \$85m to 9 victims: An Oregon jury awarded \$85 million Tuesday to nine victims of wildfires that ravaged the state in 2020, the latest verdict in a series of legal proceedings that are expected to put the utility PacifiCorp on the hook for billions of dollars over its liability for the deadly blazes.

"We are so proud of the strength and resilience of our clients, and thankful to the jury for holding PacifiCorp accountable for what happened on Labor Day 2020 - something it will never do itself," Nick Rosinia, one of the plaintiffs' attorneys, said in a statement.

PacifiCorp expects post-verdict rulings and insurance payments to bring its share of the verdict to just under \$80 million, the company said in a statement.

"The 2020 wildfires were undeniably tragic," it said. "PacifiCorp has settled and will continue to settle all reasonable claims for actual damages under Oregon law. (AP)

911 calls show residents fears: A concerned college student asked police if they'd seen his fraternity brother early one Saturday morning after he'd sent the 20-year-old home from a sports bar in an Uber. He hadn't heard from his friend in the hours since, but the rideshare driver had let him know that the young man passed out on a front porch. The caller did not say exactly where or when that happened - he only knew that his friend's roommates had not seen him.

About 75 minutes earlier, a panicked woman had told dispatchers about an intruder who'd been shot by her boyfriend after banging on the front door and breaking a glass panel at her house near the University of South Carolina's campus in Columbia.

The two callers were describing the same person.

The recently released 911 audio, obtained by The Associated Press through the Freedom of Information Act, reflects the confusion that followed Nicholas Donofrio's fatal shooting on Aug 26, 2023. The clips reveal the fear of the residents who lived at the house that authorities say Donofrio mistook for his own home and the alarm

of schoolmates who'd been unable to track Donofrio down. (AP)

Man convicted of murder: A man was convicted of second-degree murder Tuesday for fatally shooting a young woman



Britain's Queen Camilla meets with the public during her visit to Deacon & Son Jewellers in Swindon, western England on Jan 22, 2024, as the company celebrates 175 years of trading. (AP)

when the SUV she was riding in mistakenly drove up his rural driveway in upstate New York.

A jury found Kevin Monahan, 66, guilty of second-degree murder for shooting 20-year-old Kaylin Gillis on a Saturday night last April after she and her friends

pulled into his long, curving driveway near the Vermont border while they were trying to find another house.

The group's caravan of two cars and a motorcycle began leaving once they realized their mistake. Authorities said Monahan came out to his porch and fired twice from his shotgun, with the second shot hitting Gillis in the neck as she sat in the front passenger seat of an SUV driven by her boyfriend. (AP)

Grand jury indicts farmworker: A farmworker charged with killing seven people last year in back-to-back shootings at two Northern California mushroom farms was indicted by a grand jury in an effort by prosecutors to move the case along, authorities said.

Chunli Zhao was in court Tuesday to be arraigned on seven counts of first-degree murder and one count of attempted first-degree murder, but his arraignment was continued until Feb. 29, San Mateo County District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe said in an email.

Zhao was charged last year in the Jan. 23, 2023, killings of seven people in Half Moon Bay. He pleaded not guilty last February. But the case has dragged on with a preliminary hearing not set until March, and that has now been vacated, Wagstaffe said.

The grand jury indictment supersedes the criminal complaint and bypasses the need for a preliminary hearing, skipping one step in the legal process and advancing the case, he said. (AP)

Lat/Am

Ex-vice consul killed

Political factions rally in Venezuela's capital

CARACAS, Venezuela, Jan 24, (AP): Dueling political factions took to the streets of Venezuela's capital on Tuesday for the first competing rallies of the presidential election year, showcasing their ability to draw people en masse, as voters grapple with political disappointments and uncertainty over the candidate who ultimately will challenge President Nicolás Maduro.

Supporters of Maduro's ruling party and opposition leader María Corina Machado demonstrated in Caracas a day after Venezuela's top prosecutor announced the detention of more than 30 people and arrest warrants for a dozen others who allegedly plotted efforts to destabilize the South American country's government.

But if either camp had hoped to scare the other in numbers, neither gathered the tens of thousands each were capable of last decade.

Maduro supporters - overwhelmingly a mix of state workers, ruling-party community leaders and loyalists of the late President Hugo Chávez - walked across the city, with dozens of them also concentrating in the same plaza where Machado, the winner of an October presidential primary election, was expected to address her own followers.

More than an hour after Machado was supposed to show up, her supporters left the plaza and stopped traffic, allowing her to address them from a makeshift stage as they waved Venezuelan flags.

"They talk about elections, but they are terrified of elections," Machado said, referring to Maduro and his allies. "But because they know that they do not have votes, they hide... behind threats, persecution, lies, a fabricated sentence, to try to end us. Let them know clearly, no one takes us out of this electoral route."

Maduro and the opposition faction behind the primary agreed last year to hold a presidential election in the second half of 2024. The agreement, which also calls on both sides to work on free and fair electoral conditions, earned Maduro's government some relief from US economic sanctions and resulted in the release of several political prisoners.

Maduro will seek to add six more years to his decade-long, crisis-ridden presidency. His challenger's participation in the election remains in doubt even though she won the primary with more than 90% of support.

Puerto Rico debates bill: Legislators in racially diverse Puerto Rico have opened a public debate on a bill to explicitly prohibit discrimination against hairstyles such as cornrows and Afros, sparking a heated debate.

Local government officials argue the legislation is unnecessary because federal and local laws already ban such discrimination. But Puerto Rican activists said at a hearing Tuesday that the island's Afro Caribbean community still faces discrimination and needs explicit protection when it comes to public services, work, education and housing.

"I'm 23 years old, and I'm tired of this problem," said Julia Llanos Bultrón, a teacher who wears cornrows. "I'm very disappointed with a system that pushes us to change the hair with which we're born."

'Train sinks pilings into limestone caves': Activists in Mexico have published photos of steel and cement pilings from a government project that were driven directly through the roofs of sensitive limestone caves on the Yucatan peninsula.

The network of caves, sinkhole lakes and underground rivers along Mexico's Caribbean coast are both environmentally sensitive and have been found to hold some of the oldest human remains in North America.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador had promised that part of his controversial \$20 billion tourist train project, known as the Maya Train, would run on an elevated causeway supported by pilings to avoid crushing or disturbing the caves and sinkhole lakes known as cenotes.

Gangs extort money from taxi drivers: Criminal gangs are trying to extort 'protection' payments from taxi drivers in Mexico's Caribbean coast resort of Cancun, prosecutors said Monday.

It is a problem that has long beset the Pacific coast resort of Acapulco, where the killing of drivers and the torching of taxis has become commonplace, but it was long believed that Cancun would not face such levels of violence and extortion.

On Monday, prosecutors detained five men who had been demanding about \$12 per week from 200 unionized taxi drivers to allow them to work. In the past, such demands have usually been accompanied by threats to shoot drivers and burn taxis that fail to pay.

Former Haitian vice-consul killed: A former Haitian vice-consul to the Dominican Republic was gunned down near an airport in northern Haiti, a police official told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

Claude Joazard, a doctor and former senatorial candidate, was killed Sunday near the sole international airport in the northern coastal city of Cap-Haitien, said police spokesman Inspector Arold Jean.

Joazard was a former diplomat to the Dominican Republic town of Dajabon, located near the border that the countries share on the island of Hispaniola.

'File manslaughter charges': A government inquiry into the deaths of four divers in Trinidad who became trapped in a pipe while doing maintenance for a state-owned fuel supplier recommends that prosecutors consider filing corporate manslaughter charges against the company, saying it made "little or no attempt to rescue" them.

The commission of inquiry report criticizes Paria Fuel Trading Company's response to the deaths in February 2022, which angered many in the eastern Caribbean island nation of Trinidad and Tobago. A fifth diver who survived recounted the ordeal to the commission.

The report accuses the company of preventing a contractor from sending commercial divers to rescue those stuck and of spending several hours searching open waters despite knowing the divers could be inside the 30-inch (76-centimeter) pipe. It says Paria delayed in seeking cameras as part of the operation and did not consult with commercial divers on site.



Maduro



South Korean army soldiers pass by their armored vehicles during a military exercise in Paju, South Korea, near the border with North Korea on Jan. 24. Inset: A TV screen shows a report of North Korea's cruise missiles with file footage during a news program at the Seoul Railway Station in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday. (AP)



This image provided by Mongolia National Emergency Management Agency and posted on Facebook, shows the scene of an explosion in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia on Jan. 24. A truck carrying 60 tons of liquefied natural gas and a car collided at an intersection in the Mongolian capital early Wednesday, causing a series of explosions that killed three firefighters and injured 11 people, officials said. (AP)



Blinken



Mweemba

Africa

'US better security partner': US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday pitched the United States as a better security partner for Africa in place of Russia's Wagner mercenary group, which he accused of exploiting coup-hit and conflict-hit nations in the continent's Sahel region.

Blinken, who is visiting Nigeria as part of an Africa tour to strengthen bilateral relations, said the U.S. will continue to support Nigeria and other regional partners in their efforts to help stabilize the Sahel, the vast region south of the Sahara Desert that Islamic extremist groups have turned into a global terror hot spot as it struggles with a recent spate of coups.

"We hope it can make a difference in restoring the constitutional order and restoring a critical partner in trying to find security in the region," Blinken told reporters in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, speaking in particular about Niger, where a coup has threatened years of support by Western and European nations.

Until Niger's elected President Mohamed Bazoum was deposed by his elite soldiers in July, the country had played a critical role in U.S. counterterrorism activity in the Sahel and was seen as one of the last democratic nations in the region to partner with counter-jihad violence linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group.

But as Niger faced sanctions from neighbors, the West and Europe, its new junta severed military ties with European nations and turned to Russia for security partnership. Neighboring Burkina Faso and Mali, which have also had two coups each since 2020, have also taken similar steps. (AP)

Authorities in Zambia pump mud: Authorities in Zambia said Tuesday they were frantically pumping water and mud from a Chinese-owned copper mine where seven miners were trapped underground.

The two Chinese workers and five Zambian ones were caught on Monday when water and mud entered the shaft where they worked at the Macrolink mine in Ndola, about 400 kilometers (248 miles) from the capital, Lusaka. Another miner escaped.

Copperbelt Province police commanding officer Peacewell Mweemba told The Associated Press that authorities were mobilizing equipment from various mining companies for what they hoped was still a rescue mission.

"For now, we are still hopeful that they are still alive," he said.

Asia

Pita didn't violate law: Thai court

'NKorea fires cruise missiles into sea'

SEOUL, South Korea, Jan 24, (AP): South Korea's military said Wednesday that North Korea fired several cruise missiles into waters off its western coast, as an analysis of commercial satellite images suggested that the North has torn down a huge arch in its capital that symbolized reconciliation with war-divided rival South Korea.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un last week described the Pyongyang monument as an "eyesore" and called for its removal while declaring that the North was abandoning long-standing goals of a peaceful unification with South Korea and ordered a rewriting of the North's constitution to define the South as its most hostile foreign adversary.

Reflected

The launches marked North Korea's second known launch event of the year, following a Jan. 14 test-firing of the country's first solid-fuel intermediate range ballistic missile, which reflected its efforts to advance its lineup of weapons targeting US military bases in Japan and Guam.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said Wednesday that the US and South Korean militaries were analyzing the latest launches. It did not immediately confirm the exact number of missiles fired or their specific flight details.

"Our military has increased surveillance and vigilance and is closely coordinating with the United States while monitoring for further signs and activity from North Korea," the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula have increased in recent months as Kim continues to accelerate his weapons development and issue provocative threats of nuclear conflict with the United States and its Asian allies.

Meanwhile, North Korea appears to have torn down a huge arch in its capital that symbolized reconciliation with South Korea, a week after leader Kim Jong Un dismissed decades of hopes for peaceful reunification with the war-divided peninsula's south, according to satellite photos analyzed by The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Kim last week described the Pyongyang monument as an "eyesore" and called for its removal while declaring that the North was abandoning long-standing goals of a peaceful unification with South Korea and ordered a rewriting of the North's constitution to define the South as its most hostile foreign adversary.

Local media reported that the miners were working at around 235 meters (257 yards) underground.

Local media reported that the miner who escaped, Penjeni Kaumba, said he noticed water coming from a tunnel and immediately informed colleagues, but it was too late.

Zambia is one of the world's largest copper producers, and Chinese firms have invested billions of dollars in mining there. Another mine accident in Zambia in November killed at least 11 people, with others missing. Zambia's President is Hakama Hichilema. (AP)



Supporters of opposition coalition presidential hopeful María Corina Machado attend her campaign event in Caracas, Venezuela on Jan. 23. An election date has not been set yet, when the opposition's one candidate, Machado, will run against current President Nicolás Maduro. (AP)

China restores diplomatic relations with Pacific Island nation of Nauru

BEIJING, Jan 24, (AP): China and Nauru formally restored diplomatic relations Wednesday after the tiny Pacific island nation cut its ties with Taiwan earlier this month, in a further move by Beijing to isolate Taipei's democratic government.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Nauru's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Lionel Aingimea at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing, and Wang said the resumption of ties "once again demonstrates to the world that adherence to the one-China principle is an irresistible historical trend."

Aingimea said Nauru recognized that Taiwan is part of China, despite the fact that the People's Republic of China has never governed the island and that Taiwan's 23 million people overwhelmingly reject Beijing's claims to sovereignty over them.

"We look forward to the practical cooperation that's going to happen between Nauru and China. The prospect is bright," Aingimea said. Nauru's announcement on Jan. 15 came just two days after Taiwan elected a new president and left the self-governing republic with only 12 remaining diplomatic allies, although it enjoys strong unofficial

relations with the US, Japan and most other major nations.

American officials expressed disappointment with the decision. The United States has diplomatic relations with China but also maintains extensive unofficial ties with Taiwan, including selling it fighter jets and other weaponry for its defense.

Nauru first established diplomatic ties with Taiwan in 1980, then switched to Beijing in 2002, then back to Taiwan in 2005, amid allegations that both sides were pushing off or otherwise pressuring Nauruan officials.

Also:

TAIPEI, Taiwan: The co-chairs of the US Congressional Taiwan Caucus on Wednesday opened the first trip by US lawmakers to the island where the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party won a third straight term in presidential elections this month.

US Reps **Ami Bera**, a Democrat from California, and Florida Republican **Mario Diaz-Balart** plan to "engage with senior officials and business leaders," Bera's office said in a statement, without naming those with whom they would meet.

Wednesday and will bring flooding into Queensland state into the weekend.

Tropical Cyclone Kirrily was moving west at 5 mph and forecast to make landfall overnight Thursday.

"After the cyclone crosses the coast, it's likely to weaken to a tropical low but have very high levels of rainfall associated with it," Queensland Premier **Steven Miles** said at a news conference in Brisbane. "And so depending on its path, that rainfall is likely to cause flooding in parts of the state."

BEIJING: At least 39 people died after a fire broke out in China's southeastern Jiangxi province, the local government said on Wednesday.

Officials for the Yushui district of Jiangxi province said a fire broke out in the basement of a shopping area at 15:24 on Wednesday. They said 120 rescue, firefighters, police and local government officials were deployed to the scene.

Also:

BANGKOK: Thailand's Constitutional Court ruled Wednesday that popular progressive politician **Pita Limjaroenrat**, who was blocked from becoming prime minister even though his party placed first in last year's election, did not violate the election law and can retain his seat in Parliament.

Pita had been suspended from the legislature pending the court ruling on whether he violated the law by owning shares in a media company. He was the executor of his father's estate which included stock in ITV, a company that is the inactive operator of a defunct independent television station.

The court agreed with Pita's contention that ITV was not an operator of a media business.

BRISBANE, Australia: A tropical low slowly moving toward northeast Australia reached cyclone strength on

Wednesday and will bring flooding into Queensland state into the weekend.

Tropical Cyclone Kirrily was moving west at 5 mph and forecast to make landfall overnight Thursday.

"After the cyclone crosses the coast, it's likely to weaken to a tropical low but have very high levels of rainfall associated with it," Queensland Premier **Steven Miles** said at a news conference in Brisbane. "And so depending on its path, that rainfall is likely to cause flooding in parts of the state."

BEIJING: At least 39 people died after a fire broke out in China's southeastern Jiangxi province, the local government said on Wednesday.

Officials for the Yushui district of Jiangxi province said a fire broke out in the basement of a shopping area at 15:24 on Wednesday. They said 120 rescue, firefighters, police and local government officials were deployed to the scene.

He testified that he was a drug user and was told to kill the man by a Tanzanian drug dealer who lived in the building.

Hours later, police said they had arrested the man after his testimony. He is also facing 120 counts of attempted murder and a charge of arson, police said in a statement. He would appear in court in Johannesburg soon, police said, without giving a date. (AP)

Kutayba Alghanim with Ahmad Marafie and Hashim Behbehani.



Alghanim Industries renews 'Kuwait Codes' partnership

Alghanim Industries (Kutayba Alghanim Group), one of the largest privately-owned companies in the region, has announced the continuation of its strategic partnership with CODED Academy for the third consecutive year, supporting the "Kuwait Codes" initiative. This initiative focuses on teaching high school students in Kuwait the fundamentals of coding, a vital skill for shaping the future. "Kuwait Codes" offers students in Kuwait a unique opportunity to choose from four specialized educational paths: web development, game creation, versatile Python programming,

and smartphone app development. This diversity in educational programs aims to equip students with practical skills in their chosen field, preparing them to be creative and effective contributors in the advanced world of technology. To date, the initiative has benefited over 2500 students, primarily from the public education sector. Previous winners of the "Kuwait Codes" initiative, which began four years ago, have exhibited a wide range of innovative projects. These include the development of websites and applications with specially designed tools

to support mental health, along with applications focused on environmental protection and interactive educational platforms for students. This variety in projects highlights the students' endeavor to provide innovative solutions that meet the needs and challenges of the local community. In a recent meeting at Alghanim Industries' headquarters in Al Hamra Business Tower in Kuwait City, Kutayba Yusuf Alghanim, Executive Chairman of Alghanim Industries, met with Ahmad Marafie and Hashim Behbehani, founders of CODED Academy.

Market Movements 24-01-2024

Country	Index	Change	Closing pts
UAE	- DFM	+1.80	4,181.47
PAKISTAN	- KSE 100	+0.50	64,748.84
PHILIPPINES	- PSEi	+0.88	6,679.96
SAUDI	- Tadawul	+0.57	12,174.18
EGYPT	- EGX 30	+0.29	27,666.18

Country	Index	Change	Closing pts
JAPAN	- Nikkei	-0.80	36,226.48

Business

Projects awards reach highest ever yearly mark in '23 at \$209.7b

Kuwait leads region in total value of contracts awarded

By Kamco Invest

Projects awards reach highest ever yearly mark in 2023 at USD 209.8 Bn...

GCC project awards almost doubled during 2023 to reach USD 209.7 Bn as compared to USD 109.7 Bn during 2022, underlining the progress made by governments in the region. This was the highest ever aggregate value of in terms of yearly projects awarded in the GCC region which underlines among other things the culmination and significant trajectory of Saudi Arabia's diversification plans and underscores the determination of the countries in the region to continue to execute their modernizing and economic diversification plans. In terms of the wider Middle East and North Africa region, total value of contracts awarded during the year surpassed the previous high of USD 240 Bn in 2014 to reach USD 254 Bn in 2023.

Growth in GCC contract awards was broad-based during 2023 as all the countries in the GCC witnessed at least double-digit y-o-y growth in their aggregate value of contracts awarded during the year. Kuwait witnessed the highest percentage growth in the region recording nearly 300% y-o-y growth in total value of contracts awarded to reach USD 8.2 Bn up from USD 2.1 Bn in 2022.

Bahrain remained the smallest project market in the region despite witnessing a 19% gain in its total value of contracts awarded during the year that reached USD 1.2 Bn while Saudi Arabia maintained its top position as the largest projects market in the GCC during 2023. Total annual contracts awarded in Saudi Arabia reached their highest ever level after the Kingdom's total value of projects awarded jumped 58.6% to reach USD 94.9 Bn against USD 59.8 Bn in 2022. Saudi Arabia's y-o-y growth in contract awards was propelled by the country's Vision 2030 Plan. Similarly, total contracts awarded in the UAE witnessed a strong surge during the year recording an increase of 167.9% y-o-y to reach 79.5 Bn during the year.

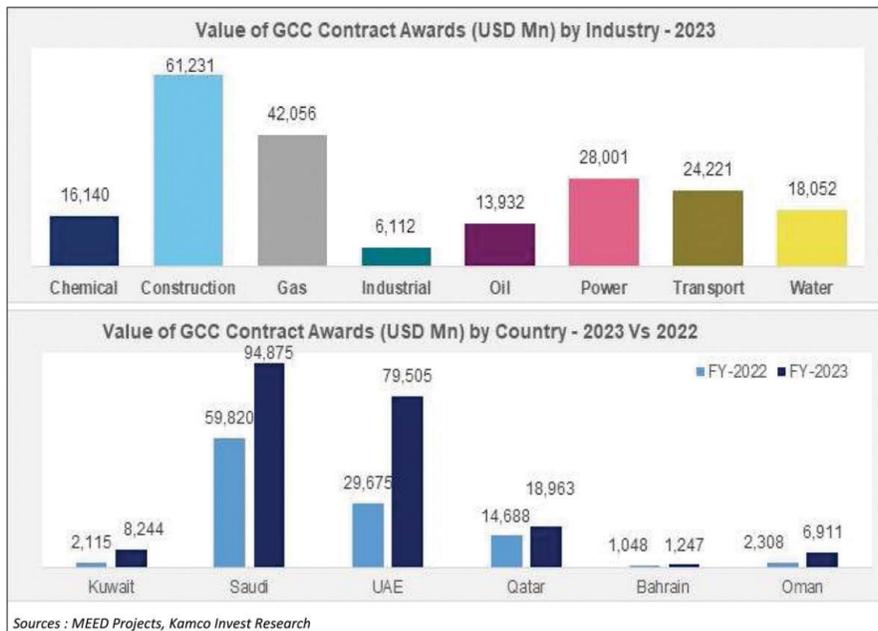
Saudi Arabia comprised 45.2% of the contracts awarded in the GCC region during 2023, while Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar combined represented 92.2%. The surge in GCC project awards during the year was mainly driven by a jump in the value of projects awarded in the Gas and Construction sectors. The GCC Gas Sector contracts awarded quadrupled during 2023 to reach USD 42.1 Bn as compared to USD 9.7 Bn during 2022. On the other hand, the total value of contracts awarded in the GCC Construction Sector increased by 33% to reach USD 61.2 Bn during the year, making the sector the biggest in the region comprising 29.2% of total projects awarded in the region during 2023.

Saudi Arabia

Total yearly contracts awarded in Saudi Arabia reached their highest ever mark at USD 94.9 Bn during 2023 as compared to USD 59.8 in 2022. The Kingdom represented over 45.2% of total GCC projects awarded during 2023. The Kingdom achieved this feat despite recording a y-o-y dip in aggregate projects awarded in the Construction and Industrial Sectors. The growth was mainly attributed to the movement of high value contracts from the design phase into construction phase. Moreover, the uptick in tendering activity of the Kingdom's giga projects also contributed to the overall growth of contract awards in the country. So far Saudi Arabia's five official giga projects awarded an aggregate of USD 60.0 Bn worth of contracts since their inception in 2017 till December-2023, according to MEED Projects. In 2023 alone, Saudi Arabia awarded nearly 30% out of the total value of giga projects awarded during the last five years.

In terms of sectors, the Construction sector remained the largest sector in the Kingdom after registering USD 23.3 Bn of value of projects awarded during the year or a quarter of total projects awarded in the Kingdom during the year followed by the Power Sector which recorded the biggest growth in absolute value of contracts awarded in 2023; total projects awarded in the Power Sector increased from USD 5.2 Bn in 2022 to USD 20.4 Bn in 2023. Furthermore, y-o-y growth in total value of projects awarded in the Transport and Water sectors also witness robust gains during the year reaching USD 15.8 Bn and USD 10.9 Bn, respectively. In terms of monthly contracts awarded during the year, September-2023 has been the best month for projects awarded in Saudi Arabia with total value of contracts awarded reaching USD 14.5 Bn. Some of the major and notable projects awarded in Saudi Arabia during 2023 is the USD 547 Mn project to provide tram system as part of the USD 15 Bn to regenerate Al-Ula tourism project of which approximately USD 3.2 Bn has been allocated so far.

The tram line would have 17 stations and stretch



about 22.4 kilometers. The line would pass through and provide access to Al-Ula's five historical districts. The Al-Ula project is a long-term project to establish a living museum of cultural heritage in the Kingdom. Another major contract awarded during the year has been the USD 8.4 Bn project to construct the world's biggest ammonia storage facility/tanks in Neom. The ammonia project includes the installation of two tanks to store green ammonia with the overall goal of producing electricity through hydrogen.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia won the right to host Expo 2030 in which it plans to invest USD 7.8 Bn in building and upgrading facilities, according to figures gathered by MEED Projects. The Kingdom already announced its plans for the site of the Expo 2030 to be established near the King Salman International Airport and would be linked by Riyadh's upcoming metro network. Saudi Arabia forecasts that the Expo 2030 site would be visited by 40 Mn people.

UAE

Total value of projects awarded in the UAE jumped 2.7 times y-o-y during 2023 to reach the highest ever mark at USD 79.5 Bn as compared to USD 29.7 Bn in 2022. The Emirates' projects market maintained its spot as the second biggest projects market in the GCC during 2023 managing to increase its share of total GCC projects awarded from 27.1% in 2022 to 37.9% in 2023. In context, the UAE recorded USD 49.8 Bn in absolute growth of contract awards from 2022 to 2023, the largest in the GCC during the year. The Emirates, which hosted the Cop28 global climate change conference during the year, witnessed growth in diverse areas of contracts awarded during the year cementing the country's growing economy as well as its economic diversification push. The UAE showcased its successful focus and track record of diversifying its economy from oil with a significant number of projects awarded in the non-oil sector.

In terms of sectors, the Construction Sector once again comprised the biggest pie of new project awards in the UAE representing 44.0% of total projects in the UAE during 2023 which reached USD 35.0 Bn as compared to USD 19.1 Bn awarded in 2022 breaching the USD 30 Bn level for the first time since the 2008 global financial crisis. There has been over USD 17.5 Bn of construction projects awarded across real estate asset classes such as residential, commercial, hospitality and retail sub-sector during the year.

One of the prominent construction projects awarded in the UAE during the year was the USD 1.2 Bn Saadiyat Lagoons project awarded by Aldar Properties. The Saadiyat Lagoons project, which encompasses 6.2 square kilometers, would include the development of 1,102 villas as part of packages of 2 and 4 of the development.

The Gas Sector followed as the second largest sector in terms of total contracts awarded during the year after it recorded USD 19.6 Bn worth of contracts during 2023

while the Water Sector fell into a distant third at USD 5.6 Bn in contract awards during the year. Some of the notable contracts in the UAE Gas Sector during the year was the USD 1.3 Bn project for two key contracts for its sales gas pipeline network across the Emirates during the year awarded by Adnoc Gas.

There have been several sizable and eye-catching projects awarded in the UAE or by UAE multinational companies during 2023 such as the USD 5.1 Bn contract to provide satellite capacity and services for 17 years to the UAE government won by Al-Yah Satellite Communications Company (Yahsat). From its foundation Yahsat has been providing the UAE government services and under this contract the company is expected to provide operations, maintenance, and technology management services.

Kuwait

Total yearly projects awarded in Kuwait during 2023 reached their highest level in five years to reach USD 8.2 Bn vs. USD 2.1 Bn in 2022. Kuwait witnessed nearly 300% y-o-y gain in the value of contracts awarded during 2023, the biggest y-o-y percentage growth in aggregate contracts awarded among the GCC countries during the year. Growth in Kuwait's contract awards was mainly driven by infrastructure investment which are one of the key pillars in Kuwait's Vision 2035 plan led by the Transport and Power Sectors. As a high-income country and one of the Middle East and GCC's most credit worthy economies Kuwait's project market is expected to grow steadily over the coming years.

Aggregate value of projects awarded in the Power Sector jumped over 12 times to reach USD 3.0 Bn in 2023 against USD 246 Mn in 2022 underpinning Kuwait's robust growth of overall contracts awarded during the year. The Transport Sector followed as a close second with aggregate value of projects awarded in 2023 at USD 2.7 Bn as compared to USD 754 Mn in 2022. In context, the total sum of projects awarded in the Power and Transportation Sectors represented 68.8% of the total value of projects awarded in Kuwait during the year. There have been 20 projects awards in the Power Sector of Kuwait during 2023. The largest Power Sector project awarded in Kuwait during the year was the USD 1.1 Bn 900 MW Subiya Power and Desalination Plant Gas Turbines Phase 4 project which has been awarded during the early period of Q2-2023 by Kuwait's Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy (MEW). The project includes the installation of gas turbines, generators, steam turbine, fuel gas conditioning systems and the laying transmission lines at north of Kuwait City. The second biggest project in the Power Sector during the year was the USD 442 Mn Rehabilitation of Az-Zour South Power and Water Distillation project and similarly awarded by MEW of Kuwait. In the Transportation Sector, the South Saad Al-Abdullah Residential City: Infrastructure Works project estimated at a value of USD 1.1 Bn awarded by Kuwait's Public Author-

ity for Housing Welfare (PAHW). The project is intended to among other things construct access roads, rainwater drainage systems, sewerage systems and streetlights as well as install streetlights.

Qatar

Total value of contracts awarded in Qatar increased by 29.1% y-o-y to reach USD 19.0 Bn during 2023 as compared to USD 14.7 Bn in 2022 according to data gathered by MEED Projects. The growth in contract awards was primarily due to the jump in value of projects awarded in Qatar's Gas Sector during 2023 which represented 61.1% of the total contracts awarded in the country during the year.

Total value of Gas Sector projects awarded jumped from USD 6.5 Bn in 2022 to USD 11.6 Bn during 2023. The growth of the Gas Sector's total value of contracts awarded during the year was mainly due to the USD 10 Bn engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) contract for the North Field South project. The project aims to construct two mega LNG trains which has a total capacity of 16 million tons of LNG per annum.

Total value of contracts awarded in Qatar's Oil Sector witnessed 19.2 times jump to reach USD 2.9 Bn in 2023 as compared to USD 152 Mn in 2022. Comparatively, Qatar's Construction Sector witnessed a 42.5% decline in total value of projects awarded during the year which reached USD 580 Mn as compared to a total value of USD 1.0 Bn Mn in the corresponding year. In the third quarter of the year, North Oil Company, the Qatari oil producer, has selected contractors for four main EPC packages of the third phase of expansion of Al-Shaheen offshore field production which has currently a production capacity of 300,000 bpd. The overall Al-Shaheen oil field is Qatar's largest oil field and has been producing oil for over 28 years. The third phase expansion contract to expand the fields oil production is valued at USD 6 Bn, according to MEED Projects.

GCC Projects Market Outlook

We expect the 2024 GCC project market to be at par with 2023 levels, given the strong pipeline as well as the reforms being formulated by the governments in the region to move the economy away from the dependence on oil revenues. The efforts are also evident in the real GDP growth expectations for 2024. The GCC countries are expected to witness stronger economic growth in 2024 after sluggish performance in 2023 that was affected by OPEC+ oil production cuts. In its latest Regional Economic Outlook report, the IMF has penciled the GCC real GDP to expand 3.7% in 2024 as compared to 1.5% in 2023. This very closely matches with the forecasts published by the World Bank recently, which highlighted sustained private consumption, strategic fixed investments and accommodative fiscal policy as the main driver of growth in the region in the medium term. Other broad drivers include participation of the private sector by way of PPP projects as well as transition to a more ESG-compatible projects model with each country in the GCC making concerted efforts to be compliant with the most recent green initiative guidelines.

According to MEED Projects, the total value of projects in the Middle East and North Africa region that are in the bidding phase or due for an award in 2024 is expected to surpass USD 270 Bn. In terms of outlook for contract awards in 2024, according to MEED Projects, Saudi Arabia leads in the GCC with USD 107.2 Bn in expected contract awards, followed by UAE and Kuwait with expected awards at USD 51.5 Bn and USD 19.8 Bn, respectively. GCC countries comprise 80% or USD 216 Bn of the MENA region's aggregate value of contracts that are in a bidding phase or due for an award in 2024. According to MEED Projects, there is more than USD 105 Bn worth of contracts in the bid evaluation phase in the GCC and a further more than USD 130 Bn of contracts in the tender or pre-qualification stage.

The biggest project that is in both the bidding and in the bid evaluation phase in the GCC is the USD 7 Bn UZ1000 expansion project by Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (Adnoc Offshore) for the construction of surface facilities at the Upper Zakum oil field. The second largest contract that is currently in both the bidding and evaluation phases simultaneously is the USD 6 Bn Duwaihen project to develop two 2,800 MW nuclear reactors in Saudi Arabia. In Kuwait, the USD 4 Bn Al-Zhour North independent water and power project (phases one to three) tops the list as the largest contracts in the bid phase or due for an award during the year in the country. In terms of contract awards by sector in 2024, the GCC Power Sector is expected to be the strongest sector with the value of projects in bid and due for award phases at USD 59.7 Bn followed by the Transport sector at USD 53.1 Bn.

Accounts & deposits of local banks at CBK surged in 2023

Surge translates into 5% increase

By Ahmad Fathi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: In 2023, the accounts and deposits of local banks at the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) witnessed a significant surge, recording a 5% increase of 254.3 million dinars. The total rose from 5 billion dinars in December 2022 to 5.3 billion

dinars by the end of December 2023. On a monthly basis, these accounts and deposits experienced notable growth, increasing by 3.8%, approximately 196.9 million dinars, compared to the end of November 2023, where the total stood at 5.128 billion dinars.

This surge in demand for increasing deposits and accounts

with the Central Bank is driven by the substantial financial liquidity held by local banks. Seeking viable investment channels to utilize this liquidity, banks find the Central Bank of Kuwait to be an attractive option due to the confidence it commands in global, regional, and local financial spheres.

Banks are strategically directing a portion of their liquidity towards acquiring Central Bank bonds, influenced by the rising interest rates and limited investment opportunities. This trend is evident in the Central

Bank's increased issuance of bond issues and corresponding securitization, growing by 2.4% and totaling 210 million dinars in 2023 compared to the previous year. The Central Bank launched 41 issues with a combined value of 8.94 billion dinars, attracting coverage by banks at 11.9 times, amounting to 106.5 billion dinars.

This marks an increase from the 38 issues in 2022, with a total value of 8.73 billion dinars, covered by banks at 11.3%, totaling 98.5 billion dinars.

EMR Foundation issues report

Global real estate poised for 'substantial' growth in 2024

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: Global real estate is poised for substantial growth in 2024, driven by government initiatives focusing on infrastructure development and increased consumer spending. The tourism sector's expansion also plays a pivotal role in propelling real estate growth, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The EMR Foundation, specializing in market research, issued a report anticipating a 5% compound annual growth rate in the global real estate market between 2024 and 2032. Factors contributing to this growth include a rising population, improved infrastructure, a growing trend of property ownership, and the diversification of various industries.

According to projections from Statista, the global real estate market's value is expected to reach \$637.80 trillion in the current year. The sector is anticipated to grow at a compound annual rate of 3.41% between 2024 and

2028, resulting in a projected market size of \$724.40 trillion by 2028, as reported by the Emirates News Agency.

The year 2024 is predicted to witness a qualitative shift in residential real estate due to increased demand across various sectors. Statista forecasts the size of the residential real estate market to reach approximately \$518.90 trillion this year.

Qualitative factors are influencing the real estate sector's indicators. Studies highlight that widespread promotion of investment opportunities could double real estate purchasing rates and lead to the initiation of more projects. Developed countries, benefiting from an active business environment, are contributing to the momentum in the real estate market.

On a global scale, China is expected to attain the highest value in the real estate market, reaching an impressive \$135.70 trillion.

BUSINESS

French farmers protest

French farmers staged protests Wednesday across the country and in Brussels against low wages and what they consider to be excessive regulation, mounting costs and other problems. Roadblocks were spreading in many French regions, one day after a farmer and her daughter died due to a traffic collision at a protest barricade. Farmers have also been

turning road signs upside down to protest what they argue are nonsensical agricultural policies.

Some were planning to protest in Brussels, home to EU headquarters, where French farmers' union Rural Coordination called for a demonstration against the "ever-increasing constraints of European regulations and ever-lower incomes." (AP)

TikTok laying off workers

TikTok is laying off dozens of workers in its advertising and sales unit, becoming the latest tech company to trim jobs in the new year.

A spokesperson for the company confirmed Tuesday that the social media platform is cutting 60 jobs. The company did not provide a reason for the layoffs. It said impacted workers can apply to other open positions at TikTok, which cur-

rently has more than 120 similar job listings.

TikTok is owned by Beijing-based ByteDance and has more than 150 million users in the U.S. The social media platform is known for short-form video content popular among Gen Z and younger users. In September, it also launched an e-commerce arm and marketplace that allows merchants to sell products on its platform. (AP)



The TikTok app logo is displayed on a screen, Sept. 28, 2020, in Tokyo. A spokesperson for TikTok confirmed Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2024, that the social media platform is laying off dozens of workers in its advertising and sales unit, becoming the latest tech company to trim roles in the new year. (AP)

Outlook changed to negative from stable

Moody's affirms GIG Insurance - Egypt's rating at B1

LIMASSOL, Jan 24: Moody's Investors Service ("Moody's") has today affirmed at B1 the insurance financial strength rating (IFSR) of GIG Insurance - Egypt (S.A.E.) ("GIG Egypt") and changed the outlook to negative from stable. Based in Cairo, Egypt, GIG Egypt is the property and casualty (P&C) Egyptian subsidiary of Gulf Insurance Group K.S.C.P. ("GIG Group"; A2 stable) based in Kuwait. All the other ratings of the GIG Group are unaffected by this rating action.

The rating action was prompted by Moody's recent decision to change the outlook to negative from stable for the Government of Egypt. For further information on the sovereign rating action, please refer to Moody's press release dated 18 January 2024 ("Moody's changes outlook on Egypt to negative, affirms Caa1 ratings").

Ratings rationale

The affirmation of GIG Egypt's IFSR at B1 reflects the company's stand-alone credit profile and Moody's view of the implicit parental support coming from the GIG Group, enabling the positioning of GIG Egypt's rating three notches above the Egyptian sovereign rating (Caa1 Negative) and at the local currency country ceiling (B1). Moody's expects GIG Group to continue to provide technical expertise and reinsurance support to GIG Egypt, reflecting the group's continued commitment to the region, including Egypt. The rating agency notes that despite GIG Egypt's relatively healthy financial position, including strong profitability and capital, its standalone credit profile is constrained by the Caa1 sovereign rating in view of its meaningful direct exposure to Egypt's credit risk.

GIG Egypt's standalone credit profile reflects its top three position in the Egyptian P&C insurance market combined with a well-established brand, good product diver-

sification and very good operating profitability. GIG Egypt's gross premiums written (GPW) increased by 31% during the fiscal year ended 30 June 2023 (FYE 2023). The company continued to report strong profits as reflected by a return on average capital of around 34% and the combined ratio of approximately 84% for FYE 2023. In addition, the rating agency expects GIG Egypt to benefit from the new insurance law that should contribute to strengthening its market position and profitability as the new capital requirements could challenge many smaller competitors in the market.

Implicit support from the parent, GIG Group, is demonstrated through common use of the GIG brand, the company's contribution to GIG Group's revenues, a strong track-record of sharing of technical expertise and coordination of reinsurance purchasing across the group. In addition, GIG Group has been increasing its stake in GIG Egypt over time, reflecting the Group's continued commitment to Egypt, which has the highest population in the region and good growth potential for insurance business. GIG Group's recent acquisition of American International Group, Inc.'s (AIG) operations in Egypt with plans to merge them with GIG Egypt and the EGP40 million capital increase effected in November 2022, are also testament of the importance that GIG Group lays on its Egyptian subsidiary, aiming to further strengthen its local franchise.

Outlook change to negative from stable

Moody's said that the change in outlook to negative from stable reflects the change in outlook for the Egyptian sovereign. Negative macro-economic developments in the country would likely to place pressure on GIG Egypt's credit profile because of its strong linkage to the sovereign through its whole operations/busi-

ness and the vast majority of its assets being domiciled in Egypt.

Despite GIG Egypt's relatively healthy financial position and solid fundamentals and capital, its stand-alone credit profile is constrained by the sovereign rating in view of its meaningful direct exposure to Egypt's credit risk in terms of investment portfolio (treasury bills and bonds comprising around 168% of shareholders' equity at the end of June 2023) and the operating risks inherent in the increasingly competitive Egyptian insurance market. In addition, GIG Egypt's other key credit fundamentals, specifically asset quality, capitalisation and financial flexibility, are correlated with and thus linked to - the economic and market conditions in Egypt.

Factors that could lead to an upgrade or downgrade of the rating

Given the negative outlook combined with the constraints of the Egyptian sovereign rating and local currency ceiling, there is limited upward pressure on GIG Egypt's rating at present, absent additional explicit support from its parent. However, any future upgrade of the sovereign rating will likely have a positive impact on the company's IFSR as well.

Conversely, GIG Egypt's IFSR may be downgraded in case: 1) the Caa1 government bond rating for Egypt is downgraded, or the B1 local currency ceiling for Egypt is lowered; 2) GIG Egypt's franchise weakens by losing market share and new business; 3) there is deterioration in its profitability with a combined ratio (COR) consistently above 100% or average return on capital (ROC) below 5%; and 4) there is any evidence of reducing willingness and capacity by GIG Group to support its subsidiary in Egypt, including any indication of the Egyptian insurance market becoming less important to the Group's overall strategy.

How to navigate IRS collection process

Tackle overdue taxes this year

For some, the new tax season might serve as a stressful reminder of past taxes that have yet to be filed and paid. Taxpayers owed over \$120 billion in back taxes, penalties and interest in 2022, according to the IRS. And there soon may be more concrete reminders coming: The IRS resumed sending automated collection notices for unpaid taxes in 2024 after pausing them "due to the unprecedented effects of the COVID-19 pandemic" in February 2022.

If you're one of the many taxpayers who owe tax debt this season, addressing the issue sooner rather than later can save you from penalties, interest and other more serious consequences. And you can get started even if you can't afford to pay in full. Here's what you can do to get back on track.

If You Get A Notice, Read It

The longer you delay reading and responding to unpaid tax notices, the more serious your tax situation could become.

"People come into our office, and they have all these unopened letters," says Kenneth Portera, an enrolled agent and owner of Kenneth Portera and Associates in New Jersey who works with clients who owe back taxes. He wishes people would open these notices when they arrive, he notes. "If you do get a letter, open it up and find out what's going on."

If you continue to ignore notices, the IRS may resort to severe measures, including tax liens, wage garnishment, asset seizure and passport restrictions. And if you owe state taxes, you could face additional collections and garnishments.

However, the IRS and state tax agencies will always try to contact you before escalating to more extreme measures. If you show the agency that you're willing to pay - even if it's not the full amount - you can avoid the worst outcomes.

Set Up A Payment Plan

Most taxpayers can set up short- or long-term payment plans, including installment agreements, through the IRS website. To apply for one online, you must owe less than \$50,000 in combined tax, penalties and interest for a long-term plan or less than \$100,000 for a short-term plan. The agency waives setup fees for low-income taxpayers and has options for businesses, too.

Once you contact the IRS and set up a plan, the government will stop sending notices about your tax debt because collection has already been accomplished, Portera says.

If you have an existing payment plan, you can update it to account for this year's taxes.

Contact A Pro

Not everyone with overdue taxes needs a tax attorney. But if you're dealing with tax authorities, owe large amounts of money or have a tax situation that you feel unable to handle on your own, Portera recommends enlisting the help of a licensed tax professional, such as a certified public accountant, enrolled agent or tax attorney.

When you don't file your return, the IRS puts together a substitute return for you with a proposed assessment of what you owe. This tax return the IRS files for you is "almost always going to

be not in your favor," says Robert Perschitte, a CPA at Delagify Financial in Colorado who has experience working with clients in urgent tax situations.

According to Perschitte, some tax preparers will look at your substitute return for free and tell you if it needs to be amended. Sometimes, a licensed tax professional can negotiate with the IRS to reduce the amount you owe. In serious cases, they may help you apply for an offer in compromise, an agreement with the IRS that settles your tax liability at a lower amount.

Remember, though, that tax relief isn't usually a quick fix - and promises of a dramatic cut to your tax debt may be a scam.

"If it sounds too good to be true, guess what? It usually is," Portera says. The process of negotiating a reduced tax bill is complicated, he notes. If a tax relief company can't deliver and fumbles communications, he adds, it could result in more interest and penalties for you, and no resolution.

For low-cost options, contact the Taxpayer Advocate Service or your local Low Income Taxpayer Clinic, which provides free or low-cost assistance for low-income taxpayers.

Don't Forget About Current Tax Returns

When taking care of overdue taxes, don't forget to file taxes for 2023.

Even if you have overdue penalties - or don't have the funds to pay this year's fees in full - stay compliant with the IRS by filing your returns annually. The agency is much more likely to waive your penalties or even agree to reduce your tax debt if you have a history of compliance. (AP)

Sunny economic outlook shaping America's future



A customer checks prices while shopping at a grocery store in Wheeling, Ill., on Jan. 19, 2024. A typical basket of groceries now costs 20% more than in February 2021, just before inflation began to take off. (AP)

Inflation slows and wages outpace prices

WASHINGTON, Jan 24, (AP): After an extended period of gloom, Americans are starting to feel better about inflation and the economy - a trend that could sustain consumer spending, fuel economic growth and potentially affect President Joe Biden's political fortunes.

A measure of consumer sentiment by the University of Michigan has jumped in the past two months by the most since 1991. A survey by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York found that Americans' inflation expectations have reached their lowest point in nearly three years. And the same survey, released last week, found that the proportion who expect their own finances to improve a year from now is at its highest level since June 2021.

Economists say consumers appear to be responding to steadily slower inflation, higher incomes, lower gas prices and a rising stock market. Inflation has tumbled from a peak of around 9% in June 2022 to 3.4%. According to the Federal Reserve's preferred price gauge, inflation has reached the Fed's annual 2% target when measured over the past six months.

What's more, paychecks have outpaced inflation over the past year, thereby easing Americans' adjustment to a higher cost of living. Weekly earnings for the typical worker - half-way between the highest and lowest earners - rose 2.2% last year after adjusting for inflation, the government reported last week. By that measure, inflation-adjusted pay is 2.5% higher than before the pandemic.

Falling inflation

"While falling inflation took some time to feed through to consumer sentiment, it appears the good news is finally getting through," said Grace Zwemmer, an analyst at Oxford Economics.

Even with the steady slowdown in inflation, prices are still nearly 17% higher than they were three years ago, a source of discontent for many Americans. Though some individual goods are becoming less expensive, overall prices will likely remain well above their pre-pandemic levels.

That dichotomy - a rapid fall in inflation with a still-elevated cost of living - will likely set up a key question in the minds of voters, many of whom are still feeling the lingering financial and psychological effects of the worst bout of inflation in four decades. Which will carry more weight in the presidential election: The dramatic decline in inflation or the fact that most prices are much higher than they were three years ago?

Consider the price of food, one of the items people encounter most frequently. Grocery inflation has plummeted from a year-over-year peak of 13.5% in August 2022 to just 1.3%. Yet a typical basket of groceries still costs 20% more than it did in February 2021, just before inflation began to accelerate. On average, chicken prices are up 25%. So, too, is bread. Milk is 18% more expensive than it was before the pandemic.

The cost to rent an apartment has also soared and is still rising faster than before the pandemic. Rental costs are up 6.5% from a year earlier, nearly twice the pre-pandemic pace. At their peak in early 2023, rents were rising nearly 9% annually.

Sharply higher costs for such necessities as food and rent

LA Times to lay off 20% newsroom employees

LOS ANGELES, Jan 24, (AP): The Los Angeles Times said it planned to lay off at least 115 employees - more than 20% of the newsroom - starting Tuesday, one of the largest staff cuts in the newspaper's 143-year history.

The announcement came after the LA Times Guild walked off the job last Friday to protest the imminent layoffs, the institution's first ever newsroom union work stoppage.

Matt Pearce, president of the Media Guild of the West, which encompasses the Times' union, called Tuesday a "dark day." He said at least 94 union members would be let go.

"Many departments and clusters across the newsroom will be heavily hit," Pearce said in a statement. "This total, while devastating, is nonetheless far lower than the number of layoffs the Bargaining Committee was expecting last week."

He said some of those selected for layoffs by management may be eligible for buyouts under the union contract.

Senior editors, photographers and members of the video unit were also part of the purge, the Times said.

The cuts were necessary because the Times could no longer lose up to \$40 million a year without boosting advertising and subscription revenue, the paper's owner, Dr. Patrick Soon-Shiong, said Tuesday.

"Today's decision is painful for all, but it is imperative that we act urgently and take steps to build a sustainable and thriving paper for the next generation. We are committed to doing so," Soon-Shiong said.

Layoffs and buyouts have hit a wide swath of the news industry over the past year. The Washington Post, NPR, CNN and Vox Media are among the many companies hit.

still represent a heavy burden for people like Romane Marshall, a 30-year-old software engineer who lives on the outskirts of Atlanta.

In late 2020, Marshall took computer coding classes to try to move beyond the warehouse and customer service jobs he had previously held. When he was hired by a professional services consulting firm in April 2021, he was "ecstatic." After he completed an apprenticeship program the next year, his pay jumped from \$50,000 to \$60,000.

Yet his expenses kept rising, too. When he moved to a new apartment to be closer to work as his company shifted from full-time remote work to a hybrid schedule, his rent doubled to \$1,475 a month, from the \$700 he'd paid for a room in a friend's house.

Marshall says his typical grocery bill is now about \$120 to \$130, up from just \$70 to \$80 three years ago. To keep his electricity costs down, he only occasionally turns on the heat in his apartment.

"There have been some positive changes, it's just that things got expensive," he said. "The only thing I notice is that the price of food is still high."

Some Americans do have a cheerier outlook now. Hiring has remained solid, with the unemployment rate remaining below 4% for nearly two years, the longest such stretch since the 1960s.

Bold move with \$10 billion WWE deal

Netflix gains 13M new global 4Q subscribers as it unwraps its best-ever holiday season results

SAN FRANCISCO, Jan 24, (AP): Netflix registered its third-consecutive quarter of accelerating subscriber growth in the final three months of 2023, closing out a comeback year that included a crackdown on viewers freeloading on the video-streaming service and a smattering of price hikes.

The fourth-quarter results announced Tuesday provided further evidence that Netflix was able to come up with a formula that produced a spike in subscribers even as it became more expensive to watch its lineup of TV shows and movies.

Netflix signaled it will try to justify the higher subscription prices - and perhaps reel in more advertisers to a low-cost plan that includes commercials - with a \$10 billion deal announced Tuesday that will bring the popular wrestling program, WWE's "Raw," to its service.

That weekly show, set to move to Netflix next year, will supplement a smorgasbord of TV shows that include the likes of the Emmy-award winning black comedy "Beef" and the Oscar-nominated film, "Maestro."

Drawing cards like that helped the Los Gatos, California, company add 13.1 million worldwide subscribers during the October-December period, well above analyst projections, according to FactSet Research. The holiday season gains - the biggest Netflix has ever posted in the fourth quarter - exceeded the 8.8 million additional subscribers that Netflix posted in the July-September period, which in turn jumped above the numbers recorded in the quarter starting the year.

The rising tide of customers left Netflix with more than 260 million global subscribers at the end of 2023 - an annual increase of nearly 30 million subscribers. Last year's performance was a stark contrast to 2022's increase of 8.9 million subscribers - a lackluster showing that raised questions whether the video-streaming pioneer was losing steam amid stiffening competition for viewers.

But Netflix managed to bounce back, primarily through



The Netflix logo is shown in this photo from the company's website, in New York, Feb. 2, 2023. Netflix reports earnings on Tuesday, January 23, 2024. (AP)

the rollout of a low-priced streaming plan that injected commercials into its service for the first time, combined with an effort to block viewers who had been accessing the service for free by using the passwords of paying customers.

At the same time, Netflix tightened its programming budget while also increasing the price of its top-tier streaming plan by 10% to help appease investors seeking higher profits. That paid off in the latest quarter, which saw Netflix earn \$937.8 million, or \$2.11 per share, up from net income of \$55.3 million, or 12 cents per share, the same time in the previous year. Revenue climbed 13% from the prior year to \$8.83 billion.

The revenue exceeded analysts' forecasts, while earnings per share missed analyst targets, partly because of a \$239 million charge tied to its foreign debt.

Online retailer eBay cutting 1,000 jobs

LONDON, Jan 24, (AP): Online retailer eBay Inc. will cut about 1,000 jobs, or an estimated 9% of its full-time workforce, saying its number of employees and costs have exceeded how much the business is growing in a slowing economy. It marks the latest layoffs in the tech industry.

CEO Jamie Iannone said in a message to employees on Tuesday that the company also will reduce how many "contracts we have within our alternate workforce over the coming months."

Those who are being laid off will be told through Zoom

calls with their bosses, Iannone said, requesting that people work from home Wednesday to allow privacy for those conversations.

"We need to better organize our teams for speed - allowing us to be more nimble, bring like-work together, and help us make decisions more quickly," he said in the note, which was posted online.

"These changes are difficult, but I'm confident that by working together we will become stronger than ever," Iannone added.

BUSINESS

An Amazon company logo is seen on the facade of a company's building in Schoenefeld near Berlin, March 18, 2022. France's privacy watchdog has slapped Amazon's French warehouse arm with a 32 million euro fine for using an 'excessively intrusive system' to monitor worker performance and activity. (AP)



Amazon fined \$35 mln for 'excessively intrusive' monitoring of warehouse staff

France's privacy watchdog said Tuesday that it slapped Amazon's French warehouse business with a 32 million euro fine (\$35 million) for using an "excessively intrusive system" to monitor worker performance and activity.

The French Data Protection Authority, also known by its acronym CNIL, said the system allowed managers at Amazon France Logistique to track employees so closely that it resulted in multiple breaches of the European Union's stringent privacy rules, called the General Data Protection Regulation.

"We strongly disagree with the CNIL's conclusions, which are factually incorrect, and we reserve the right to file an appeal," Amazon said. "Warehouse management systems are industry standard and are necessary for ensuring the safety, quality and efficiency of operations and to track the storage of inventory and processing of packages on time and in line with customer expectations."

The watchdog's investigation focused on Amazon employees' use of handheld barcode scanners to track packages at various points as they move through the warehouse,

such as putting them in crates or packing them for delivery.

Seattle-based Amazon uses the system to manage its business and meet performance targets, but the regulator said it's different from traditional methods for monitoring worker activity and puts them under "close surveillance" and "continuous pressure."

The watchdog said the scanner, known as a "stow machine gun," allows the company to monitor employees to the "nearest second" because they signal an error if items are scanned too quickly - in less than 1.25 seconds. (AP)

Deposit reserve requirement would be cut by 0.5 % points as of Feb 5

China slashes reserves ratio to revitalize slowing economy

BANGKOK, Jan 24, (AP): China's central bank said Wednesday it will cut the ratio of reserves banks must hold as part of a slew of measures to support the slowing economy.

The announcement by the People's Bank of China prompted a surge in share prices, with Hong Kong's benchmark jumping 3.6%.

Chinese stock markets have languished in recent months as investors pulled money out, discouraged by a faltering recovery from the shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A sell-off earlier in the week was followed by unconfirmed reports that the government planned to get state-owned investment companies to funnel offshore funds into the markets to help staunch the losses. The central bank's moves appear to be part of a concerted effort to stabilize the markets and instill greater confidence in the outlook for the world's second-largest economy.

Central bank Gov. Pan Gongsheng said the deposit reserve requirement would be cut by 0.5 percentage points as of Feb. 5. Pan said that would inject about 1 trillion yuan (\$141 billion) into the economy. As of December, the reserve requirement ratio was 7.4%.

Pan told reporters in Beijing that the central bank also plans to issue a policy soon on lending to property developers to help support the industry.

China's economy is recovering, he said, allowing ample room for policy maneuvers.

"At present, our country's financial risks are generally controllable, the overall operations of financial institutions are sound, and financial markets are operating smoothly," the government website China.com cited Pan as saying.

The economy expanded at a 5.2% annual pace in the October-December quarter, enabling the government to attain its target of about 5% annual growth for 2023. But



Pedestrians wearing face masks walk past the People's Bank of China in Beijing on March 3, 2023. China's central bank said Wednesday, Jan. 24, 2024, it will cut the ratio of reserves banks must hold to help boost the slowing economy. (AP)

the recovery remains uneven, and most forecasts say the economy will grow more slowly in 2024.

The slow pace of the recovery after China dropped stringent anti-virus precautions in late 2022 has added to gloom over a crisis in the once-booming property market as dozens of developers defaulted on loans after the government cracked down on excessive borrowing a few years ago.

That has left many Chinese families who had invested their life savings in unbuilt homes in limbo, unsure if the

developers would deliver those apartments.

There have been some signs of improvement: Last week, the government resumed its reporting on the rate of unemployment among young people, which stood at a record 21.3% in June. According to a revised methodology, the latest youth unemployment rate was 15%. Overall unemployment stood at 5.1%.

Many youths also were left without work after the government cracked down on technology companies, which tended to hire younger workers. More recently, moves to

impose more controls on online gaming spurred massive sell-offs of game company shares, leading the authorities to apparently backpedal on that plan.

The Federal Reserve and other major central banks have been raising interest rates and finding other ways to raise the cost of borrowing to help stem inflation, which peaked at 9.1% in mid-2022 in the United States. Central banks are now easing their monetary policies as price pressures abate.

In China, regulators are grappling with the opposite problem, a risk that weak demand will cause prices to spiral lower, discouraging investment and hobbling growth. The moves by the central bank this week will ease credit and pump money into the economy to try to spur businesses and consumers to start spending more.

The central bank cut the reserve requirement twice in 2023, by 0.25 percentage points each time. A key policy tool for controlling the amount of money circulating in the economy, it peaked at more than 20% in 2011 and is at its lowest level since the early 2000s.

"The authorities will likely launch more measures to stabilize market sentiment, such as mobilizing state resources to support the stock market," Raymond Yeung of ANZ said in a report. "The authorities are clearly concerned about market sentiment."

He noted that the central bank is also acting to avoid a weakening in the Chinese currency, the yuan. Pan told reporters in Beijing that the PBOC would ensure the yuan's value remains stable.

Like many other analysts, Yeung said the latest moves might not be enough to fully reassure investors and that more needs to be done to foster wider reforms.

"This requires some structural measures to boost private sector confidence and the long-term outlook of the real estate sector," he said. "The measures announced so far do not seem sufficient."

Japan exports surge 10 % in Dec on strong demand for autos revived trade with China

Imports fall 7%

BANGKOK, Jan 24, (AP): Japan's exports surged almost 10% in December from a year earlier, helped by a revival in trade with China and strong demand for vehicles, machinery and computer chips.

Imports fell almost 7%, leaving a trade surplus of 62 billion yen (\$410 million), according to preliminary customs data released Wednesday.

A weak Japanese yen has helped export manufacturers like Toyota, Honda and Sony, though it increases costs of imports of key commodities like oil and gas needed to fuel the world's third-largest economy.

A decline in oil prices helped reduce the burden of energy imports in December, which fell by 18% from a year earlier.

A recovery in demand in China contributed to a 10% increase in exports, while imports from China were flat.

Another boost came from a surge in tourist arrivals, which are counted as exports in trade statistics.

Improvement

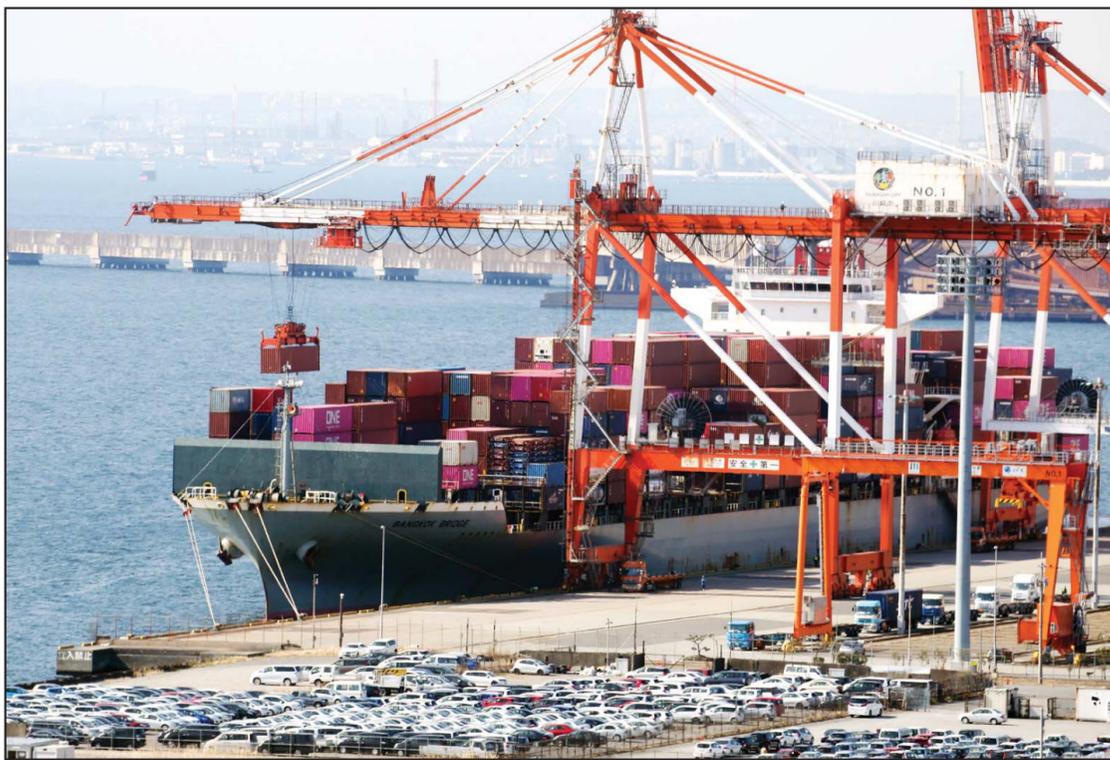
The improvement late in the year "means that overall net exports should have made a significant contribution to GDP growth in the fourth quarter," Gabriel Ng of Capital Economics said in a report. But he added that "Looking ahead, we expect export growth will be sluggish this year."

Data from a preliminary survey of factory managers also released Wednesday likewise showed weakness in the export manufacturing sector, with "new export orders" falling to 46.0 from 46.4 on a scale up to 100 where 50 marks the cut-off between expansion and contraction.

Exports to the U.S., Japan's single largest export market, jumped 20% in December from the year before, while imports of U.S. goods fell 7%.

Shipments of cars rose 16% in unit terms, to 1.47 million vehicles, and more than 35% in dollar value. Power generation equipment, construction machines and semiconductors also showed strong growth.

For the full year, Japan's exports grew 3%, to 100.9 trillion yen (\$680 billion) and imports fell 7% to 110.2 trillion yen (\$740 billion). The trade deficit was 9.2 trillion yen (\$62 billion), down sharply from a deficit of 20.3 trillion yen in 2022.



A container ship is loaded and unloaded at a container terminal at a port of Kawasaki near Tokyo on March 9, 2022. Japan's exports surged almost 10% in December from a year earlier, helped by a revival in trade with China and strong demand for vehicles, machinery and computer chips, according to preliminary customs data released Wednesday, Jan. 24, 2024. (AP)

Leaders continue to seek membership in bloc

Western Balkan countries pledge support for new EU growth plan

US, Australia, UK impose 'sanction' on Russian cyber actor for Medibank hack

WASHINGTON, Jan 24, (KUNA): The US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), in coordination with Australia and the United Kingdom, designated Alexander Ermakov (Ermakov), a cyber-actor who played a pivotal role in the 2022 ransomware attack against Medibank Private Limited, an Australian healthcare insurer.

"Russian cyber actors continue to wage disruptive ransomware attacks against the United States and allied countries, targeting our businesses, including critical infrastructure, to steal sensitive data," said Under Secretary of the Treasury Brian E. Nelson.

"Today's trilateral action with Australia and the United Kingdom, the first such coordinated action, underscores our collective resolve to hold these criminals to account," Nelson added.

Yesterday, Australia sanctioned Ermakov for utilizing ransomware to attack the Medibank network and for the exfiltration of sensitive data of 9.7 million users of Medibank services.

Today, the United States and the United

Kingdom, in solidarity with Australia, are taking action against the same individual because of the similar risk presented by this actor to the United States and the UK.

This action demonstrates that the United States stands with our partners to disrupt ransomware actors who victimize the backbone of our economies and critical infrastructure.

Ransomware attacks against healthcare firms, which are frequent targets of ransomware attacks in the United States, present risks to patient care, safety, and sensitive personally identifiable data.

Russia continues to provide a safe haven to ransomware actors like Ermakov, enabling cyber actors to freely perpetrate ransomware attacks and other malicious cyber activities from Russia.

In addition, Russia has also enabled ransomware attacks by cultivating and co-opting criminal hackers.

The US Treasury has previously stressed that Russia must take concrete steps to prevent cyber criminals from freely operating in its jurisdiction.

SKOPIJE, North Macedonia, Jan 24, (AP): The leaders of Western Balkan countries pledged Monday to make full use of the European Union's financial support plan of six billion euros (about \$6.5 billion) as they continue to seek membership in the bloc.

Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Albania are at different stages of the accession process. Their leaders gathered in North Macedonia's capital, Skopje, and said in a joint statement they were committed "to the development of their countries to follow European standards."

In November, the European Commission presented a Growth Plan for the Western Balkans to enhance economic integration with the EU's single market, boost regional economic integration, accelerate fundamental reforms, and increase financial assistance.

The plan includes a proposed six billion euro reform and growth scheme to be given out over three years, 2024-2027, contingent on agreed reforms. Its main aim is to help double the Western Balkans' economy throughout the next decade. The funding hopes to address frustration among residents of candidate countries with the slow pace of the membership process, as well as maintain the countries' alignment with the West as Russia's war against Ukraine continues.

Present at Monday's meeting were Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, Albanian

4.7% drop across '23

Inflation slows in NZ to lowest rate since 2021

WELLINGTON, New Zealand, Jan 24, (AP): Inflation in New Zealand has slowed to its lowest rate in two and a half years, the country's official statistics agency announced on Wednesday.

Stats NZ revealed the latest consumer price index (CPI) data had slowed to 4.7% across 2023, a significant drop from the 5.6% result in the year to September 2023.

The agency said falling food and transport prices were the main drivers of the slowdown in the inflation rate which had peaked at 7.3 per cent in 2022.

While the CPI is still above the Reserve Bank of New Zealand's target band of 1-3%, the better than expected slowdown all but ends any speculation of a further hike of the official cash rate - which currently sits at 5.5% - when the Reserve Bank next meets in on Feb. 28.

The fall to 4.7% was in line with market expectations, but lower than the Reserve Bank's prediction of 5%.

Key goal

New Zealand Finance Minister Nicola Willis said a key goal of the government was to lower inflation.

"Our immediate focus is getting inflation back into the target range under three per cent," she said.

The result means annual inflation rate is now at its lowest since June 2021, while quarterly inflation was tracked at 0.5 per cent, the smallest rise since December 2020.



Willis



North Macedonia's Prime Minister Dimitar Kovacevski (left), stands by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs James O'Brien, at the end of their joint news conference after the Western Balkans meets EU, Growth plan for WB - Leaders meeting, in Skopje, North Macedonia, on Jan. 22, 2024. (AP)

prime minister, Edi Rama, Kosovo's Albin Kurti, Montenegro's Milojk Spajic and the North Macedonian premier, Dimitar Kovachevski

The U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, James O'Brien, and the Director General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations at the European Commission, Gert Jan Kopmann, were also present.

Oscars music nominees reflect diversity and talent

Music

LOS ANGELES, Jan 24, (AP) — The often-nominated Diane Warren and past winners Mark Ronson, Andrew Wyatt, Billie Eilish and Finneas O'Connell are among the nominees for music awards at the 2024 Oscars. The hyper-competitive original song and original score categories include nominees from the films "Barbie" to "Oppenheimer" and beyond.

Warren is vying for original song with "The Fire Inside" from "Flamin' Hot." She is joined in the category by Ronson and Wyatt for "I'm Just Ken" from "Barbie," Jon Batiste and Dan Wilson for "It Never Went Away" from "American Symphony," and Scott George for "Wahzhazhe (A Song For My People)" from "Killers of the Flower Moon." Rounding out the category is "What Was I Made For?" from "Barbie" by Eilish and O'Connell.

There's a lot that is noteworthy here: Two of the five songs come from the stellar "Barbie" soundtrack, both from previous winners in the category. Siblings Eilish and O'Connell won best original song at the 2022 Academy Awards for their James Bond theme "No Time to Die." Mark Ronson and Andrew Wyatt won the prize in 2019 for "Shallow" from "A Star Is Born" alongside Lady Gaga and Anthony Rossomando. "The Fire Inside" marks Warren's 15th Oscar nomination. Could it be her first win?

The nominees for original score are: "American Fiction," Laura Karpman; "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny," John Williams; "Killers of the Flower Moon," Robbie Robertson; "Oppenheimer," Ludwig Göransson; and "Poor Things" by Jerskin Fendrix.

At 64, Karpman has the first nomination of her career. It's also a first nomination for Fendrix - for the first film he's ever scored. Robertson's

nomination for "Killers of the Flower Moon" is posthumous. The lead guitarist and songwriter of The Band died in August.

A look at some of the nominees and their reactions.

Warren describes the song as bringing "a little reggaeton to the Oscars."

"I'm thrilled. Beyond. And now the number of Oscars I've been nominated for has caught up to my emotional age, which is (15). I'm just kidding. Kind of.

I was in front of the TV with about 20 of my friends, a bunch of them stay up all night with me as we do. It's called a sleepless sleepover.

It's still exciting. I've yet to win an Oscar, you know, with my 14 other nominations which may continue, you know. But you win when you get nominated. There's only five songs down that that are chosen by the best of the best in film music on the planet. It's the best composers, songwriters, music editors, I don't take it lightly when they choose a song of mine."

Original

Ronson wrote "I'm Just Ken" with Andrew Wyatt. This is the second nomination for both collaborators; the first won them original song for "Shallow" in 2019.

"It's a huge honor. I was actually on the plane when I found out, the flight had taken off and the wi-fi wouldn't work. I couldn't watch the livestream. Then I got a barrage of texts but also my 1-year-old daughter was sleeping next to me on the plane, so I was dead quiet, kind of sitting on my hands. It was exciting, and I kept it to myself.

"It's different than 'Shallow,' because 'Ken' is almost this left-field

- in the film, it is this 11-minute prog rock dream ballet, shred fest that (director) Greta (Gerwig) and Ryan (Gosling) made people fall in love with with all these beautiful touches ... We wanted to write a song that made the listener feel something that wasn't necessarily silly, but of course Ken is silly - so it had to have that."

This is Batiste's second nomination - he won best original score in 2020 for his work on the animated film "Soul." Batiste provided a statement, thanking the Academy.

"Making music is an act of survival. There was a stretch of time during which my wife, Suleika, was in the hospital and we weren't sure she'd make it. This song began as a lullaby, so she could have a restful aura in the hospital room.

Congratulations to my co-writer, Dan Wilson. We are grateful to be surrounded by love."

This is Billie Eilish and Finneas O'Connell's second nomination. They previously won best original song at the 2022 Academy Awards for their James Bond theme "No Time to Die." The duo issued a statement saying they are "truly honored."

"We are so incredibly honored to receive a nomination for "What Was I Made For?" As lifelong fans of film, music in film and the Academy Awards, this means everything to us. We are so grateful to the Academy, its members, and to be recognized alongside so many songwriters that we respect and admire. We are truly honored. Thank you."

This is Göransson's third nomination. In 2018, he won the Oscar for his "Black Panther" score.

"It was an exciting morning... The way that Chris Nolan uses music in his storytelling is so unique and special and inspiring."

Variety



This image released by Universal Pictures shows actor Emily Blunt (left), with writer-director-producer Christopher Nolan, center, and actor Cillian Murphy on the set of 'Oppenheimer.' (AP)

Film

Filmmaker dishes on 'Oppenheimer' Oscar success

Sometimes you catch a wave: Nolan

NEW YORK, Jan 24, (AP) — Christopher Nolan was still sleeping when his film, "Oppenheimer," landed a leading 13 Academy Awards nominations Tuesday. Emma Thomas, Nolan's wife and producing partner, roused him after a flurry of congratulatory messages came through on her phone.

"Don't take it as being blasé," Nolan told The Associated Press, laughing. "We just didn't want to jinx anything. Watching the nominations was more than our nerves could take so we just had a restless night and slept through."

Nolan and Thomas didn't have much reason to be anxious. "Oppenheimer," Nolan's sprawling American saga of J. Walter Oppenheimer and the creation of the atomic bomb, has more or less been the Oscar frontrunner since it made its acclaimed debut in late July. On Tuesday, it earned nominations for its achievement, including acting nods for Cillian Murphy, Robert Downey Jr. and Emily Blunt.

"Oppenheimer" was nominated for Nolan's direction and adapted screenplay; for Hoyte van Hoytema's cinematography; Jennifer Lame's editing; Ellen Mirojnick's costume design; Ruth De Jong and Claire Kaufman's production design; Luisa Abel's makeup and hairstyling; best sound; and Ludwig Göransson's score. It came one nomination shy of tying the record for best Oscar nominations ever.

"It's flabbergasting," said Thomas who spoke with her husband in an interview a few hours after nominations were announced. "Then we got on with the routine of getting a 16-year-old out of bed, but with a spring in our step."

Though Nolan is regarded as the big-canvas auteur of his era, he's never won an Academy Award - nor have any of his films won best picture. He was nominated for best director once before, for "Dunkirk." But Nolan's absence from the movie's biggest stage has often been more notable than the honors his films have collected. After his "The Dark Knight" was overlooked for best picture in

2009, the academy expanded the category beyond five films.

But this year's Oscars may be leading toward a coronation for the 53-year-old Nolan and a three-hour opus that broke records - and Hollywood conventional reasoning - in grossing nearly \$1 billion worldwide. On Tuesday, he and Thomas reflected on the movie's Oscar success.

AP: Do you see the success of "Oppenheimer" as a statement to the industry - which usually funnels big budgets only to sequels and remakes - about what's possible for an original film made with scale?

Nolan: I grew up loving Hollywood movies and believing studio filmmaking can take on anything. Seeing audiences respond to that this summer was incredibly thrilling and getting this kind of recognition from the academy, I don't know what to say, really. It certainly confirms our faith in what studio filmmaking can be.

AP: Have you reflected on why "Oppenheimer" has resonated so much?

Nolan: It's always a tricky thing to try to analyze the zeitgeist or analyze success. We were really interested and excited, in particular, to see young people responding to a piece of history. I keep coming back to the unique nature of the story. I think it is one of the great American stories. It encompasses so much that's important and dramatic about our history. That gives audiences a lot to hang to, when you get a great group of actors and incredible cast like we have, you can make this feel real and emotionally accessible. That's as far as I can analyze its success. Beyond that, sometimes you catch a wave and it's a wonderful and unique thing.

Thomas: Oftentimes you think of history as being the ancient past, and it's not terribly relevant to today. But I think the unique thing about the Oppenheimer story is that everything the movie deals with has direct relevance to this moment in time

as well. And so I think that's something that really touched audiences.

Nolan: Yeah, that's a good point. When I first started on the project, one of my kids said to me about nuclear weapons, people my age don't really worry about that so much. This was a couple of years ago. With everything that's going on in the world since, that's very much changed. We came along right at a time when people were beginning to worry about that again, and worry about the fate of the world. Oppenheimer's story is so relevant to that - not just the threat of nuclear weapons but also the burgeoning threat of AI and what it can do to our world.

AP: Though your films have often been celebrated by the academy, neither of you have won an Oscar. Does this year feel different?

Nolan: I think the breadth of recognition that we woke up to this morning is something we haven't experienced before, and it's really thrilling for us. It's a very unique feeling to see in academy recognizing all different aspects of the film, from the performances to the technical achievement of the film. I mean, I grew up watching the Academy Awards. It's the pinnacle of sort of the recognition of your peers.

Thomas: It definitely feels like a film that was made with all the things we've learned together over the years. It all came together on this film. But I'm hoping it's not the culmination. I'm hoping that we'll get to make another one. (Laughs) We're at the midway point!

Nolan: We're just getting started! With every film, you try to build on what you've learned previous films.

Thomas: Well, we'll probably be having dinner with our kids. We've got one who's going back to college. We'll have a family celebration, which feels entirely appropriate given the nature of our movie and the way we work.

NEW YORK: Ai Weiwei, the Chinese artist and dissident who believes it his job to be "incorrect," was hard at work Tuesday night during an appearance at The Town Hall in Manhattan.

"I really like to make trouble," Ai said during a 50-minute conversation-sparring match with author-interviewer Mira Jacob, during which he was as likely to question the question as he was to answer it. The event was presented by PEN America, part of the literary and free expression organization's PEN Out Loud series.

Ai was in New York to discuss his new book, the graphic memoir "Zodiac," structured around the animals of the Chinese zodiac, with additional references to cats. The zodiac has wide appeal with the public, he said, and it also serves as a useful substitute for asking someone their age; you instead ask for one's sign.

"No one would be offended by that," he said.

Ai began the night in a thoughtful, self-deprecating mood, joking about when he adopted 40 cats, a luxury forbidden during his childhood, and wondered if one especially attentive cat wasn't an agent for "the Chinese secret police." Cats impress him because they barge into rooms without shutting the door behind them, a quality shared by his son, he noted.

"Zodiac" was published this week by Ten Speed Press and features illustrations by Gianluca Costantini. The book was not initiated by him, Ai said, and he was to let others do most of the work. (AP)

NASHVILLE, Tenn.: Country singer Chris Young was arrested at a Nashville bar after an alleged altercation with Alcoholic Beverage Commission agents who were doing compliance checks, according to court documents.

Young, who was described as having having bloodshot, watery eyes and slurred speech, was arrested Monday night and charged with assaulting an officer, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest, news outlets reported, citing arrest affidavits.

The agents were checking the Tin Roof when they first encountered Young sitting at a bar and checked his identification, the arrest affidavit said. After that, Young began ques-

tioning and videoing agents and then he and others followed them into the Dawg House next door, the affidavit said. As the agents were leaving that bar, Young put his hands out to stop the agents and struck one on the shoulder, who then pushed the singer to create distance between them, the affidavit said. (AP)



Ai



Osgood

NEW YORK: Charles Osgood, a five-time Emmy Award-winning journalist who anchored "CBS Sunday Morning" for more than two decades, hosted the long-running radio program "The Osgood File" and was referred to as CBS News' poet-in-residence, has died. He was 91.

CBS reported that Osgood died Tuesday at his home in Saddle

River, New Jersey, and that the cause was dementia, according to his family.

Osgood was an erudite, warm broadcaster with a flair for music who could write essays and light verse as well as report hard news. He worked radio and television with equal facility, and signed off by telling listeners: "I'll see you

on the radio."

"To say there's no one like Charles Osgood is an understatement," Rand Morrison, executive producer of "Sunday Morning," said in a statement. "He embodied the heart and soul of 'Sunday Morning.' ... At the piano, Charlie put our lives to music. Truly, he was one of a kind - in every sense." (AP)

Features

ARABIC TIMES

THURSDAY, JANUARY 25, 2024

People & Places



A model wears a creation for Franck Sorbier as part of the Haute Couture Spring-Summer 2024 collection presented in Paris, Wednesday, Jan. 24. (AP)

Fashion

Giorgio Armani redefines excess

Chanel 'displays' button-inspired ballet

PARIS, Jan 24, (AP): An air of surrealism enveloped Chanel's Spring Couture show Tuesday as celebrity guests including Naomi Campbell and Kendrick Lamar faced a navigational challenge: walking past a towering pair of open metal scissors. That symbolic gateway set the stage for a theater-in-the-round showcase in Paris.

The show's spotlight was on a lowly yet groundbreaking fashion element: the button. The motif featured in a short film with Naomi Campbell and as a giant sculpture descending from the ceiling, a feat of fashion theatrics provoking gasps of delight from camera-wielding guests - and a nod of approval from the equally spectacular movie director Baz Luhrmann.

Here are some highlights of Tuesday's spring couture shows:

The button is a humble icon, but it was not always so. Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel was credited with revolutionizing fashion with the women's suit, and the button on its front was vital, so the house says, to help women "rid themselves of everything that had prevented them from moving freely."

In Tuesday's frothy and sparkling couture display, showcased beneath the lofty ceilings of the Grand Palais Ephemere, creative director Virginie Viard used the button as a jewel. It infused a collection that celebrated the freedom of movement in the world of ballet and dance.

Viard used the button-jewels as a spice for the drama of the ballet stage, scattering them across contrasting and often segmented silhouettes. A striking tulle ruff neck adornment opened the show, paving the way for pieces like an A-line black mini dress that captured the essence of a ballerina silhouette. The collection's layering over ballet leotards and tights elegantly glided down the runway.

The house was keenly aware of its history: 2024 marks a century since Coco Chanel first ventured into ballet design. This collection's pink and white aquarelle palette evoked the vibrant style of the Ballets Russes as envisioned by Léon Bakst and Sergei Diaghilev.

"Dance, it's an essential theme at Chanel. We are closely linked with its institutions, choreographers and dancers, and we often create costumes for the ballet," Viard said.

The gowns echoed the tight bodices and billowing tulle skirts characteristic of the Ballets Russes. The collection also featured

transparent short straight skirts, long dresses and jumpsuits, all with intricate embroideries depicting draperies, little bows, illusion tulle pockets and lace belts, further weaving the ballet theme into the fabric of each garment.

Still, Viard's collections continue to lack the sense of cohesion - the dominance of one overarching aesthetic in each season - that was closely associated with her predecessor Karl Lagerfeld, who died in 2019.

In a dazzling prelude, a fashion film starring Margaret Qualley, the actress and daughter of Andie MacDowell, illuminated the runway's curtained walls with a whimsical narrative directed by Dave Free. The plot, at times reminiscent of Barbra Streisand's iconic turn in "Funny Girl," recounts a tragicomic tale of a beautiful young woman on a desperate quest for a missing button - a journey that leads her to Paris.

Naomi Campbell appears as a serendipitous savior, providing Qualley with a ticket to the fashion capital. The climax unfolds on the famed Rue Cambon, where Qualley meets a modern-day Coco Chanel portrayed by the enigmatic Anna Mouglalis. Mouglalis, with her instantly recognizable baritone, is no stranger to the role, having previously brought the legendary designer to life on screen.

Spectacle

The cinematic adventure set the stage for the real spectacle. As the film concluded, Qualley seamlessly transitioned from screen to stage, opening the couture show.

"Fashion is undoubtedly a serious matter for Giorgio Armani but can also represent play... especially with haute couture, a space in which the designer can indulge in unexpected bursts of creativity," so said the house.

Indulge, Giorgio Armani did - for a couture show in the Palais de Tokyo that turned a faux marble runway into a night that redefined excess. Amidst the sweltering heat and relentless paparazzi, a galaxy of stars aligned in the front row - a demure Gwyneth Paltrow mingled with Glenn Close in a jewel-encrusted Armani tuxedo. While, Juliette Binoche's sultry leather and glove ensemble commanded the spotlight.

Fashionably late, the show began with a flourish of floral motifs on jackets with softly rounded shoulders, cascading effortlessly into loose pleated pants. A dance of sheer lace

across jackets and blouses brought a breezy, ethereal quality, whispering of spring's gentle touch while jacquard added textures.

But then, in true Armani fashion, the spectacle turned to sparkle. Diamond-encrusted ponytails shone like constellations above a parade of shimmering jeweled bodices, leading into a blinding array of night gowns. The seemingly never-ending display deployed a kaleidoscope of aqueous tones - pale pinks, jade green, soft blues, gold flashes, midnight and royal blues, in celebration of Armani's unapologetic love for exuberance.

Moments of Arabian nights and fantasy princesses intermingled, creating a theatrical universe that bordered on the fantastical. Yet, amidst this whirlwind of imagination, Armani's signature tailoring stood out. Long, meticulously crafted suits paid homage to his roots in tailoring, a nod to the precision and elegance that underpin his design philosophy.

Armani, the 89-year-old fashion maestro, embraced his mantra of "more is more" with open arms - waving warmly at his audience as he came out for the finale.

In a blaze of pearl, gold and obsidian, Alexis Mabille transported guests to the realm of old-school couture in the halls of Christie's auction house. This extravagant spring display featured the satin sheens reminiscent of Asiatic fashion codes, showcasing Mabille's roving eye.

The giant white bows that cascaded from the chest were a hallmark of his design aesthetic. These bows then mingled effortlessly with Eastern-inspired fabric sashes, gracefully swooshing around the models and accentuating the sumptuous textures of silk fabrics that invigorated the display.

Mabille's focus on archetypical couture was showcased in his highly crafted garments. The attention to detail was clear, from the scalloped bustier, reminiscent of seashell waves, to the ruffles of fabric around the bust, which evoked imagery of a cloud and the intricate beauty of coral.

In a world that often seeks the innovative, Mabille reminds us of the enduring allure of classic couture.

This season, Stephane Rolland forwent the razzmatazz that once saw Kim Kardashian a staple at his shows, for a different kind of display.

Film

Oscars snubs and surprises

DuVernay and Gerwig's absence stuns film fans

LOS ANGELES, Jan 24, (AP): Cue all the "did 'Barbie' direct itself" snark. But **Greta Gerwig** not being among the five best director nominees for this year's Oscars is one of the biggest shocks in recent memory. Here are some other major "snubs" and "surprises" from Oscar nomination morning.

If we knew anything going into Oscar nominations morning, it was that Gerwig was obviously going to be nominated for directing "Barbie." It was that rarest of things, a critically praised original blockbuster (about a woman to boot) that became the highest earner of the year by a wide margin and Gerwig was previously nominated for best director for "Lady Bird," and missing out for "Little Women" was even a snub. Unfortunately many will likely point to Justine Triet ("Anatomy of a Fall") for taking Gerwig's spot, but let's not pit two great female directors against one another. If it's any consolation to Gerwig, last year's blockbuster directors were also shut out of this category - neither James Cameron ("Avatar: The Way of Water") nor Joseph Kosinski ("Top Gun: Maverick") made it in.



Gerwig

tor. Margot Robbie was not among the lead actress nominees Tuesday morning but her co-star America Ferrera, of that now-famous monologue, made it into supporting. Robbie did snag one nomination for the film, as producer in the best picture category.

It's not the Oscars without a Diane Warren nomination. The songwriter got her 15th nomination, this time for "The Fire Inside" from "Flamin' Hot." Though she has now received an honorary Oscar, Warren has not yet won a competitive statuette. This is not likely to be her year either, up against two "Barbie" juggernauts: "I'm Just Ken" and "What Was I Made For." Oscar rules state that only two original songs from a single film can be nominated, meaning Dua Lipa's "Dance the Night Away" was the unlucky "Barbie" exclusion.

Competitive

The international feature category always has some heartbreakers but this year stung a little more: Aki Kaurismäki's acclaimed deadpan romantic comedy "Fallen Leaves" looked like it could have been a shoo-in for the Oscars, but it got zero nominations Tuesday. It's in good company with France's selection "The Taste of Things," which was also shut out. Many thought it wild that France selected that film over "Anatomy of a Fall," which was rewarded with four nominations in other categories including director and picture.

In one version of nominations morning, "Past Lives" could have been among the top six nominees but Celine Song's graceful romance came out with only two, for screenplay and best picture. Besides Song missing out for her direction, the biggest snub is for Greta Lee's gorgeous, soulful lead performance.

Oh no, Mario! "The Super Mario Bros." movie, the second highest-grossing film of the year was completely shut out from nominations including animation. We knew going into the morning that Bowser's ballad to Princess Peach had not made the shortlist for original song, but it is pretty surprising that it wasn't at least among the best animated movies. Perhaps the unexpected element of chaos here was Neon's "Robot Dreams," a Cannes acquisition that has not yet been released in the US.

The Almodóvar/Anderson duel in the short film category just became a draw. Pedro Almodóvar was not nominated for his Pedro Pascal and Ethan Hawke led film "Strange Way of Life," making the category a little less starry. Wes Anderson, who has never won an Oscar, did make it in however for his Roald Dahl short "The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar." This makes eight nominations for Anderson over the years.

Overlooked

Even with her years of service to the academy, Ava DuVernay could see the writing on the wall: "Origin" was completely overlooked by her fellow members, most upsettingly for Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor's leading performance as Isabel Wilkerson. It's not a secret that the Oscars have a bad track record with Black female directors - remember last year how Gina Prince-Bythewood's "The Woman King" was also shut out? DuVernay's "Selma" remains the only best picture nominee directed by a Black woman. And Halle Berry will for another year continue to be the only Black woman to ever win best actress, as "The Color Purple" s' Fantasia Barrino also missed out on a nomination.

Someone tell Charles Melton's mom to get a comforting batch of her kimchi going ASAP. "May December" actor was not nominated for his heart-breaking performance as the unknowing victim of an older woman's grooming. The surprise inclusion in this category was Sterling K. Brown for "American Fiction." "May December" did not do well at all, getting only one nomination for screenwriter Samy Burch.

"Barbie's" chaos didn't stop with Gerwig's exclusion from best direc-

MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY



RECALL VEHICLES



TOYOTA HIGHLANDER (MY 2023 & 2022)

VIN: 5TDLA3AH4LS000052 TO 5TDLB3CH5P593243

RECALL REASON

When the lower bumper cover of these cars is subjected to a slight impact from the front, this may result in the clips of these parts becoming disconnected, which may lead to the separation of one or more pieces from the car during normal use of the car. Which may increase the risk of collision or injury to road users.

REMEDY

ALSAYER will contact the involved vehicles customers to inform them about bringing their vehicles to the Service Centers, for inspection and doing the needful. All the repairs will be free of charge, both Parts and Labor.

CONTACT

MOHAMED NASER AL-SAYER & SONS EST. CO. W.L.L.
HOTLINE: 1803803
WWW.TOYOTA.COM.KW
Please book an appointment to serve you better

This Recall is run pursuant to articles (42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, and 48) of no. (27/2015) issuing the executive bylaws of law no. (39/2014) on Consumer Protection

Variety

ATLANTA: Rapper **YFN Lucci** pleaded guilty Tuesday to a gang-related charge after reaching a deal with prosecutors nearly three years after he was indicted on murder, gang and racketeering charges in Atlanta.

The rapper, whose given name is **Rayshawn Bennett**, was one of a dozen people charged in a wide-ranging indictment targeting alleged members of the Bloods gang in April 2021. He was charged with murder in January of that year after police said he was the driver in a gang-related drive-by shooting that killed a man.

As part of the plea deal, prosecutors dropped 12 of 13 counts against Bennett and he pleaded guilty to a single count of violating the Street Gang Terrorism and Prevention Act, his lawyers said.

"After three years of pretrial litigation, more than two weeks of jury selection and three years of incarceration waiting for his jury trial, today, the prosecution finally relented and dismissed the murder and RICO charges against Rayshawn Bennett," defense attorneys **Drew Findling**, **Gabe Banks** and **Marissa Goldberg** said in an emailed statement. "As he has maintained for three years now, Mr. Bennett will NOT cooperate in any other case."

The plea deal will allow the rapper to be eligible for parole as soon as four months from now, and prosecutors agreed that he should be released early

on parole, which "will allow him to get back to his children, family and career," his lawyers said. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: It is a name that has become almost synonymous with professional wrestling but its bearer, **Dwayne Johnson**, has never legally owned "The Rock."

That will change under a new agreement with the WWE under which Johnson will also join the board of TKO Group, the sports and entertainment company that houses WWE and UFC.

"The Rock" is a name derived from Johnson's father, WWE Hall of Famer **Rocky Johnson**, who was the first Black champion in WWE history (alongside partner **Tony Atlas**), according to



Johnson



Bennett

WWE.

Johnson, in an interview on CNBC, would not discuss the financial value of the deal with WWE, but said that the name "The Rock" means a lot to him personally.

"I owe that name everything," Johnson said. "Without that name there'd be no wrestling career. There'd be no Hollywood career."

Johnson, a movie and wrestling star, has a business portfolio that includes his production company Seven Bucks Productions, tequila brand Teremana Tequila, energy drink company ZOA Energy, Project Rock apparel brand and the United Football League.

Johnson said on CNBC that this will be his first time serving on the board of a publicly traded company.

"I'm very motivated to help continue to globally expand our TKO, WWE, and UFC businesses as the worldwide leaders in sports and entertainment - while proudly representing so many phenomenal athletes and performers who show up every day putting in the hard work with their own two hands to make their dreams come true and deliver for our audiences," Johnson said in a prepared statement. "I've been there, I'm still there and this is for them."

TKO Group Holdings Inc. says Johnson's board appointment, effective Tuesday, reflects its "commitment to delivering long-term value and strong performance for shareholders through strategic growth initiatives across both UFC and WWE." (AP)

The Conversation

A psychiatrist explains what disorder really is and how to seek help

A TikTok 'expert' says you have PTSD – but do you?

By Arash Javanbakht

Wayne State University

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

□ □ □

Among the many emerging trends on social media, one recent concerning fad is a casual and often inaccurate portrayal of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD - along with an array of questionable interventions suggested for its cure.

But what really is PTSD, who suffers from it, and what are the available treatments?

As a psychiatrist specializing in trauma, I've worked with hundreds of people with PTSD. Some are refugees, first responders and survivors of torture and human trafficking. Others have survived childhood trauma, shootings, assault, rape or robbery.

As part of my outreach, I post educational material about trauma and PTSD on social media, so my news feeds often contain misleading material along these lines:

"Procrastination is not laziness. It is childhood trauma."

"Trauma test: What image did you see first? A shark. A leg?"

"People who say sorry for no reason have PTSD."

Mental health advocacy work has led to great progress in making the public aware of trauma and overcoming its stigma. But misuse of terms such as "trauma," "childhood trauma" and "PTSD" has filled the social media sphere with misinformation. It is often spread by people with a financial or emotional incentive, such as those seeking followers, selling tests, therapies, interventions, coaching and more.

Such posts treat trauma and PTSD as something that's trendy, at times even romanticizing trauma. In turn, this trivializes the suffering of those who really have endured traumatic experiences. It can also create confusion for those with a real need for help and prevent them from receiving the right support.

Culture

In popular culture and in the everyday vernacular, the word trauma is often used too loosely. As a result, on social media a difficult breakup or an argument with a family member might be portrayed as traumatic. While these experiences could be highly stressful, they are not considered trauma in the clinical world.

The field of psychiatry defines trauma as direct exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence. That includes experiences such as war, assault, sexual abuse and rape, robbery, being shot at, severe car accidents and natural disasters. Trauma exposure is common among, though certainly not limited to, urban populations.

Trauma exposure does not necessarily have to be direct; it can also happen by witnessing or being near the event or by exposure to its aftermath. This is what often happens to first responders, those in the vicinity of or exposed to the aftermath of mass shootings, and refugees, all of whom see the worst of what humans do to each other.

The immediate response to trauma can include shock, severe anxiety or panic, confusion, helplessness, constant recall of the event, feeling on edge, difficulty sleeping, anger, guilt or physical discomfort. Trauma can have numerous long-term effects, including anxiety, difficulty with trust, depression and substance use.

Not everyone who experiences trauma has PTSD. For the majority of people exposed to trauma, symptoms subside over time. But some people remain in a constant state of "fight or flight," a physiological response in which the brain stays fully alert to ensure escape or to neutralize a real or

perceived danger.

When the severity of symptoms passes a specific threshold, mental health clinicians consider a PTSD diagnosis. To be diagnosed with the disorder, the person must have one or two symptoms from all of the following categories:

■ "Intrusion" symptoms, such as recurring, unwanted memories of the traumatic event, or frequent nightmares or flashbacks as if the event is happening again. This includes seeing the scenes, hearing the sounds or experiencing the smells of the event.

■ Intense avoidance of anything that is a reminder of the trauma, including thoughts and memories of the event, people who could resemble the perpetrator, and places or times of day that are associated with where, when or how the trauma happened.

■ Persistent negative emotions and thoughts, such as anxiety, sadness, guilt, a negative perception of self - that is, a feeling that you're permanently damaged - or a mistrust of the world. This might include an inability to experience positive emotions.

■ Hyperarousal - meaning constantly being on the lookout for danger - and being easily startled or angered and being unable to sleep.

Symptoms

Like any other medical condition, a diagnosis of PTSD must be made by a mental health professional, preferably one skilled in trauma and PTSD. Some people endure certain symptoms without meeting all criteria for PTSD. If this causes significant social, academic or occupational dysfunction and distress, the person will still need help.

If you have endured traumatic experiences, first understand that PTSD is not your identity. It is a disease that can be and should be treated. Getting an evaluation from your primary care doctor is the first step. They may refer you to a mental health professional. Or you can reach out directly to a psychiatrist, a clinical psychologist or a licensed social worker for an evaluation.

Your insurance provider can help you find a therapist or psychiatrist, preferably specialized in trauma. You can also find a list of providers through the Anxiety and Depression Association of America. If you don't have insurance, you can get help at a local community mental health clinic or a federally qualified health center.

If a diagnosis is confirmed, know that you do not have to suffer for years to come. There are effective and safe psychotherapy treatments that can help process the traumatic memories, overcome the related negative thoughts or feelings of guilt and shame and help overcome avoidance of normal life situations because of the trauma.

In my newly published book, I discuss new, cutting-edge treatments as well as stories from those who overcame their illness.

For instance, our team has created AI-enhanced mixed reality technologies to produce immersive and interactive diverse situations of encounters with digital humans. This will allow the patients to, for example, experience the sensation of being in a crowded grocery store, with their therapist alongside to help them navigate and overcome their fears.

Medications can also help. Often labeled as antidepressants, these medications are safe and nonaddictive, and they can lower the intensity of anxiety to a level that allows the patients to deal with their fears.

Lifestyle changes like diet, mindfulness and exercise can also help a lot.

I have seen many traumatized people get back on their feet and resume their normal lives after the right intervention and lifestyle adjustments. Those who continue to have some symptoms often manage to build life around them without letting the trauma take away the joy and prosperity of their lives. (AP)

Decoding the anatomy of fear

If anxiety is in my brain, why is my heart pounding? Expert explains

By Arash Javanbakht

Wayne State University

Heart in your throat. Butterflies in your stomach. Bad gut feeling. These are all phrases many people use to describe fear and anxiety. You have likely felt anxiety inside your chest or stomach, and your brain usually doesn't hurt when you're scared. Many cultures tie cowardice and brav-

ery more to the heart or the guts than to the brain.

But science has traditionally seen the brain as the birthplace and processing site of fear and anxiety. Then why and how do you feel these emotions in other parts of your body?

I am a psychiatrist and neuroscientist who researches and treats fear and anxiety. In my book "Afraid," I explain how fear works in the brain and

the body and what too much anxiety does to the body. Research confirms that while emotions do originate in your brain, it's your body that carries out the orders.

While your brain evolved to save you from a falling rock or speeding predator, the anxieties of modern life are often a lot more abstract. Fifty-thousand years ago, being rejected by your tribe could mean death, but not doing a great job on a public speech at school or at work doesn't have the same consequences. Your brain, however, might not know the difference.

There are a few key areas of the brain that are heavily involved in processing fear.

When you perceive something as dangerous, whether it's a gun pointed at you or a group of people looking unhappily at you, these sensory inputs are first relayed to the amygdala. This small, almond-shaped area of the brain located near your ears detects salience, or the emotional relevance of a situation and how to react to it. When you see something, it determines whether you should eat it, attack it, run away from it or have sex with it.

Detection

Threat detection is a vital part of this process, and it has to be fast. Early humans did not have much time to think when a lion was lunging toward them. They had to act quickly. For this reason, the amygdala evolved to bypass brain areas involved in logical thinking and can directly engage physical responses. For example, seeing an angry face on a computer screen can immediately trigger a detectable response from the amygdala without the viewer even being aware of this reaction.

The hippocampus is near and tightly connected to the amygdala. It's involved in memorizing what is safe and what is dangerous, especially in relation to the environment - it puts fear in context. For example, seeing an angry lion in the zoo and in the Sahara both trigger a fear response in the amygdala. But the hippocampus steps in and blocks this response when you're at the zoo because you aren't in danger.

The prefrontal cortex, located above your eyes, is mostly involved in the cognitive and social aspects of fear processing. For example, you might be scared of a snake until you read a sign that the snake is nonpoisonous or the owner tells you it's their friendly pet.

Although the prefrontal cortex is usually seen as the part of the brain that regulates emotions, it can also teach you fear based on your social environment. For example, you might feel neutral about a meeting with your boss but immediately feel nervous when a colleague tells you about rumors of layoffs. Many prejudices like racism are rooted in learning fear through tribalism.

If your brain decides that a fear response is justified in a particular situation, it activates a cascade of neuronal and hormonal pathways to prepare you for immediate action. Some of the fight-or-flight response - like heightened attention and threat detection - takes place in the brain. But the body is where most of the action happens.

Several pathways prepare different body systems for intense physical action. The motor cortex of the brain sends rapid signals to your muscles to prepare them for quick and forceful movements. These include muscles in the chest and stomach that help protect vital organs in those areas. That might contribute to a feeling of tightness in your chest and stomach in stressful conditions.

The sympathetic nervous system is the gas pedal that speeds up the systems involved in fight or flight. Sympathetic neurons are spread throughout the body and are especially dense in places like the heart, lungs and intestines. These neurons trigger the adrenal gland to release hormones like adrenaline that travel through the blood to reach those organs and increase the rate at which they undergo the fear response.

To assure sufficient blood supply to your muscles when they're in high demand, signals from the sympathetic nervous system increase the rate your heart beats and the force with which it contracts. You feel both increased heart rate and contraction force in your chest, which is why you may connect the feeling of intense emotions to your heart.

In your lungs, signals from the sympathetic nervous system dilate airways and often increase your breathing rate and depth. Sometimes this results in a feeling of shortness of breath.

As digestion is the last priority during a fight-or-flight situation, sympathetic activation slows down your gut and reduces blood flow to your stomach to save oxygen and nutrients for more vital organs like the heart and the brain. These changes to your gastrointestinal system can be perceived as the discomfort linked to fear and anxiety.

Sensation

All bodily sensations, including those visceral feelings from your chest and stomach, are relayed back to the brain through the pathways via the spinal cord. Your already anxious and highly alert brain then processes these signals at both conscious and unconscious levels.

The insula is a part of the brain specifically involved in conscious awareness of your emotions, pain and bodily sensations. The prefrontal cortex also engages in self-awareness, especially by labeling and naming these physical sensations, like feeling tightness or pain in your stomach, and attributing cognitive value to them, like "this is fine and will go away" or "this is terrible and I am dying." These physical sensations can sometimes create a loop of increasing anxiety as they make the brain feel more scared of the situation because of the turmoil it senses in the body.

Although the feelings of fear and anxiety start in your brain, you also feel them in your body because your brain alters your bodily functions. Emotions take place in both your body and your brain, but you become aware of their existence with your brain. As the rapper Eminem recounted in his song "Lose Yourself," the reason his palms were sweaty, his knees weak and his arms heavy was because his brain was nervous. (AP)



A mother holds her baby receiving a new malaria vaccine as part of a trial at the Walter Reed Project Research Center in Kombewa in Western Kenya on Oct. 30, 2009. Cameroon is beginning the world's first routine immunization program against malaria for children. (AP)

Aims to vaccinate 250K

Cameroon starts first malaria vaccine program for children

CAMEROON, Jan 24, (AP) - Cameroon will be the first country to routinely give children a new malaria vaccine as the shots are rolled out in Africa.

The campaign was due to start Monday was described by officials as a milestone in the decades-long effort to curb the mosquito-spread disease on the continent, which accounts for 95% of the world's malaria deaths.

"The vaccination will save lives. It will provide major relief to families and the country's health system," said Aurelia Nguyen, chief program officer at the Gavi vaccines alliance, which is helping Cameroon secure the shots.

The Central Africa nation hopes to vaccinate about 250,000 children this year and next year. Gavi said it is working with 20 other African countries to help them get the vaccine and that those countries will hopefully immunize more than 6 million children through 2025.

In Africa, there are about 250 million cases of the parasitic disease each year, including 600,000 deaths, mostly in young children.

Cameroon will use the first of two recently approved malaria vaccines, known as Mosquirix. The World Health Organization endorsed the vaccine two years ago, acknowledging that that even though it is imperfect, its use would still dramatically reduce

severe infections and hospitalizations.

The GlaxoSmithKline-produced shot is only about 30% effective, requires four doses and protection begins to fade after several months. The vaccine was tested in Africa and used in pilot programs in three countries.

GSK has said it can only produce about 15 million doses of Mosquirix a year and some experts believe a second malaria vaccine developed by Oxford University and approved by WHO in October might be a more practical solution. That vaccine is cheaper, requires three doses and India's Serum Institute said they could make up to 200 million doses a year.

Also:

LOS ANGELES: Health officials have linked numerous cases of gastrointestinal illness in Southern California to the consumption of raw oysters imported from Mexico.

The California Department of Public Health this week warned consumers that raw oysters harvested from several locations on the Baja California peninsula and the mainland state of Sonora may be contaminated with norovirus.

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health reported Wednesday that there were more than 150 suspected local cases of gastrointestinal illness linked to raw oysters.

MEDICAL CLASSIFIEDS

Take care of your health



To advertise in this page please call: (+965) 24813566 Ext.: 513 or E-mail: advt@arabtimesonline.com

For your ads on this page

Call: **24813805** E-mail: **advt@arabtimesonline.com**

www.arabtimesonline.com

مرکز شفاء الجزيرة الطبي
SHIFA AL JAZEERA MEDICAL CENTRE
الفروانية FARAWANIYA

DENTAL & COSMETIC DEPARTMENT

- SCALING & GUM TREATMENT
- COSMETIC SMILE RECONSTRUCTION
- GUM & ORAL SURGERY
- BAD BREATH TREATMENT
- SURGICAL TREATMENT
- ROOT CANAL TREATMENT
- COSMETIC FILLING
- FIXED & REMOVABLE DENTURES
- CROWN TREATMENT
- SIMPLE & SURGICAL EXTRACTION

Dr. Shajahan V.M
BDS, MDS
Dental Surgeon

Dr. Ayham Askar
BDS
Dental Surgeon

Dr. Raina Fernandes
BDS
Dental Surgeon

Working Time: From 9am to 1pm & 5pm to 9pm
Ph: 24 734 000

Behind Maghateer Commercial Complex & Opp. Police station - Farwaniya
www.shifaaljazeera.com.kw

BazBall vs. Turning Ball

India, Poms start 5-match test 'series' in Hyderabad

HYDERABAD, India, Jan 24, (AP): Red-ball cricket and the quality of pitches will be the major talking points when India takes on England in a five-test series starting Thursday.

This is India's only long-format international engagement at home in the 2023-24 season, after it previously hosted the 50-over Cricket World Cup last year in October and November.

Over the past few seasons, test cricket in India has come under scrutiny due to the nature of the spin-friendly pitches.

A year ago, world test champion Australia played in Nagpur, Delhi and Indore. All three tests finished within three days - India won with relative ease in both Nagpur and Delhi before Australia won in Indore.

Spinners accounted for 95 out of 113 wickets to fall in that four-match series, with no Australian pace bowler taking more than three wickets.

It will likely be more of the same in this series.

The nature of wickets in India became a trend from 2019, when South Africa visited, and then continued with England's last tour here in 2021. In that series, the third test in Ahmedabad - played

eter Brendon McCullum and captained by Ben Stokes, England has attempted to redefine test cricket. It was seen in the past couple of seasons against Pakistan, New Zealand and at home against Australia.

With "BazBall," England has played a more attacking brand, often pushing some matches into a shorter time frame. The cricket-loving masses in India are also excited to watch a style that has brought test cricket more in sync with the modern-day Twenty20 format.

Even so, England has only found relative success under Stokes and McCullum. It has won 13 out of 18 tests, losing four matches and drawing only one game. It has beaten New Zealand and South Africa at home, while blanking Pakistan 3-0 away.

But England only drew in New Zealand, and then failed to beat Australia at home in 2023. It was 2-0 down in the Ashes, before pulling back to draw level at 2-2 but unable to regain the urn.

England was the last team to win a test series in India - back in 2012 under Alastair Cook. Since then, India is unbeaten at home - losing only three of 44 tests on home soil in the last 11 years.

CRICKET

Ahead of the test, attacking middle-order batter Harry Brook has flown home for personal reasons and won't be returning. Young spinner Shoab Bashir is yet to arrive in India due to visa issues and flew home on Tuesday from Abu Dhabi to sort out his travel arrangements.

Batter Dan Lawrence has been called up to replace Brook.

England's bowling, especially in the spin area, appears lightweight. Along with Bashir, it has brought 19-year-old wrist spinner Rehan Ahmed - who has played one test - and left-arm spinner Tom Hartley, who is yet to make his test debut.

Both Ahmed and Hartley were selected Wednesday in a starting XI containing three spinners, with Jack Leach the most experienced of the trio. Joe Root is another spin option for Stokes.

Wood is the only pace bowler in the lineup as Stokes is not bowling this series after recently undergoing knee surgery.

Lineups:

India: To be announced.
England: Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Jonny Bairstow, Ben Stokes (captain), Ben Foakes, Rehan Ahmed, Tom Hartley, Mark Wood, Jack Leach.

Pelicans set franchise record for points in victory over Jazz



Los Angeles Clippers forward Paul George (13) shoots against Los Angeles Lakers forward Christian Wood (35) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Los Angeles. (AP)

UConn rips 'Marquette'

MILWAUKEE, Jan 24, (AP): UConn coach Geno Auriemma initially feared the worst possible scenario when Paige Bueckers clutched her surgically repaired left knee early in Tuesday's game.

Bueckers knew there wasn't much reason to worry.

After leaving early in the first quarter to get her knee checked, Bueckers scored 28 points and beat the halftime buzzer with a 3-point shot from about 40 feet away as No. 8 UConn topped Marquette 85-59 for its 13th consecutive victory.

Clippers top LeBron-less Lakers

NEW ORLEANS, Jan 24, (AP): CJ McCollum hit nine 3-pointers and matched a career-high with 33 points, Zion Williamson added 17 points and a career-best 11 assists and the New Orleans Pelicans set a franchise record for points in a 153-124 victory over the Utah Jazz on Tuesday night.

The Pelicans' previous scoring high was 149 points in a victory over the Sacramento Kings in October 2018.

Herb Jones scored 22 points, Brandon Ingram had 18 and Jonas Valanciunas 17 for the Pelicans, who finished with 41 assists on 60 made field goals.

McCollum shot 11 of 17 from the floor, including 9 for 13 from long distance, and the Pelicans shot 57.1% from the field (60 of 105).

Collin Sexton had 22 points and seven assists, and Simone Fontecchio added 18 points for the Jazz, who lost their third straight game.

Clippers 127, Lakers 116

In Los Angeles, Kawhi Leonard had a triple-double, James Harden had 23 points and 10 assists and the Clippers beat the Lakers for their third straight victory and 11th win in 13 games.

Leonard had 25 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists, including three key ones in the fourth when the Clippers were clinging to a narrow lead.

D'Angelo Russell led the Lakers with 27 points and 10 assists and Anthony Davis had 26 points and 12 rebounds with LeBron James watching from the bench.

BASKETBALL

James is day-to-day with left ankle pain. The Clippers didn't have big man Ivica Zubac, who is out for at least a month with a right calf strain.

The fourth straight road loss dropped the Lakers under .500 at 22-23.

Nuggets 114, Pacers 109

In Indianapolis, Nikola Jokic scored 31 points as part of his 13th triple-double of the season to help Denver sent Indiana to its third straight loss.

Jokic's final basket - a 3-pointer with 4.7 seconds left - sealed the win. The All-Star forward also had 13 rebounds and 10 assists as the Nuggets won their third straight overall and beat the Pacers for the eighth consecutive time.

Jamal Murray also scored 31 points.

Myles Turner had 22 points to lead the Pacers and Pascal Siakam added 16 points and 10 rebounds in his first home game since being traded to Indiana last week.

All-Star guard Tyrese Haliburton again sat out with a strained left hamstring and already has been ruled out of Indiana's next two games.

Thunder 111, Trail Blazers 109

In Oklahoma City, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 33 points and Jalen Williams added 19 points, including the game-winner with two seconds left, to help Oklahoma City beat Portland.

Gilgeous-Alexander intercepted a lob intended for Deandre Ayton right before the buzzer sounded, sealing Oklahoma City's seventh straight win over Portland. The Trail Blazers had lost to the Thunder by 62 points in the team's last game.

Scott Henderson scored 19 points and Anfernee Simons added 17 for Portland, including a 3-pointer with 29 seconds left in the game, to give the Trail Blazers a 109-106 lead.

A Williams make pulled Oklahoma City within 109-108 with 15.6 seconds remaining, but Portland turned it over on a double-dribble by guard Malcolm Brogdon.

The call infuriated Trail Blazers coach Chauncey Billups, who picked up two technical fouls and was ejected.

Gilgeous-Alexander made one of two free throws to tie the score before Williams connected on a mid-range jumper in traffic to win for the Thunder.

Oklahoma City got 13 points off the bench from Aaron Wiggins and eight points and 10 rebounds from Chet Holmgren.

Knicks 108, Nets 103

In New York, Jalen Brunson scored 30 points, Julius Randle added 30 points, nine rebounds and seven assists and New York extended its winning streak to four games with a win over Brooklyn.

New York trailed by nine points at the start of the fourth quarter and outscored the Nets 10-3 over the final two minutes to seal the win.

Donte DiVincenzo scored 11 points and OG Anunoby added 10 for the Knicks.

Mikal Bridges hit a career-high seven 3-pointers and scored 36 points for Brooklyn, which blew a 10-point lead in the third quarter. Cameron Johnson scored 19 points and Cam Thomas added 14 off the bench for the Nets, who had lost the last three meetings against the Knicks.



India's Shubman Gill attends a practice session ahead of their first cricket test match against England in Hyderabad, India. (AP)

under lights with a pink ball - finished in two days.

"You get different conditions in India, and the home team is really good (in these conditions). I don't think we will be defensive. We will still look to take the game on and take the positive option," England pace bowler Mark Wood said.

Coached by former New Zealand crick-



New Orleans Pelicans guard CJ McCollum (3) steals the ball from Utah Jazz forward Lauri Markkanen (23) in the first half of an NBA basketball game in New Orleans. (AP)

Khawar takes over as interim PCB chairman

ISLAMABAD, Jan 24, (AP): An advocate of Pakistan's Supreme Court was appointed Wednesday as interim chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board.

Shah Khawar, who is also election commissioner of the PCB, is expected to hold elections for the permanent position next month.

"My primary responsibility will be to hold the election in a free and transparent manner," Khawar said in a statement.

Caretaker chief minister of Punjab province, Mohsin Naqvi, has emerged as favorite to be elected as the new chairman for a three-year term.

Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul-Haq-Kakar, who is also patron of the national cricket board, appointed Naqvi to the board of governors after Zaka Ashraf quit last week due to personal reasons.

The PCB has been without an elected chairman since Ramiz Raja quit in December of 2022. Najam Sethi was appointed as chairman of the board's management committee before he quit and was replaced by Ashraf last July.

The government gave Ashraf until Feb. 4 to form a board of governors and organize an election for the chair of the cricket board, but he didn't achieve that before resigning.

The Pakistan men's team endured below-par performances during Ashraf's tenure. The team didn't get out of the group stage at the Cricket World Cup in India, and didn't pass the Super Four stage of the Asia Cup in Sri Lanka.

Babar Azam quit as the captain in all formats after the World Cup, and Ashraf asked team director Mickey Arthur and coach Grant Bradburn to report to the National Cricket Academy in Lahore before they both quit as well.

Under new test captain Shan Masood, Pakistan was routed by Australia 3-0 and Twenty20 captain Shaheen Shah Afridi lost the five-match series in New Zealand 4-1.

FOR RENT

PARTIALLY FURNISHED PRIVATE 6 BDRM 6 BATH LUXURY VILLA IN SABAH ALAHMED

(Great commute for expats working in Mina Abdullah, Arifjan or Wafra) IN-HOUSE GARDEN AND PATIO, FULL GYM, 2 EQUIP. KITCHEN, POOL TABLE, PRIVATE GARAGE (electronic gate) PLUS OUTDOOR COVERED PARKING, SEC. CAMS, KD 1,250/month. Minimum 1 year lease.

For more info pls contact Mobile or WhatsApp for Pics

50999320

ARAB TIMES

Subscribe to our service "Arabtimes WhatsApp" to stay updated on the latest local and international news and events



To activate this Free Service:

- 1- Save our number on your contacts 92220947
- 2- Send "Start" WhatsApp message to the number you saved.

www.arabtimesonline.com arabtimeskuwait arabtimeskuwait arabtimeskuwait Join us on Telegram



Ghana, Gambia and Algeria eliminated

Cameroon reach Africa Cup last 16

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast, Jan 24, (AP): Christopher Wooh was the last player to score in an extraordinary finale as Cameroon defeated Gambia 3-2 to save its Africa Cup of Nations campaign on Tuesday, when Ghana and Algeria were both eliminated.

Cameroon, which had been in danger of an early exit, clinched its place in the knockout stage as runner-up in Group C as it scored more goals than Guinea, which lost 2-0 to group winner Senegal.

Gambia defender Muhammed Sanneh stunned the Cameroon players in stoppage time when he scored what would have been the fourth goal in eight minutes for 3-3, but a VAR check showed he used his hand. A draw would have eliminated both teams.

"There are a lot of surprises this year, but we had confidence in ourselves," said Georges-Kévin Nkoudou, who struck the crossbar in the first half for Cameroon. "You know that things can happen very quickly and that's what happened. I've no more words, I don't know what to say. It's incredible."

Gambia had put itself in contention for the last 16 by coming from behind to take a 2-1 lead when Ebrima Colley scored with just five minutes of normal time remaining.

Then an own goal two minutes later from James Gomez, who was trying to cut out a cross, drew Cameroon level,

and Wooh scored what proved to be winner with a header from a corner in the first minute of stoppage time.

"We just won a final, a great match against a very, very good team who gave everything, who gave their all. Bravo to them, and congratulations to my teammates who believed in this victory despite everything," Cameroon captain André-Frank Zambo Anguissa said.

Defending champion Senegal finished

SOCCER

ished with a perfect nine points from three games, followed by Cameroon and Guinea on four, with Gambia finishing bottom of the group with none despite all the excitement the Scorpions had brought to the tournament.

Gambia coach Tom Saintfiet resigned after the game.

Cameroon counterpart Rigobert Song dropped Manchester United goalkeeper André Onana to the bench in favor of Onana's cousin, Fabrice Ondoa. Onana missed Cameroon's first game after playing for United the day before, then produced a shaky performance in its second.

Goals from Abdoulaye Seck and Iliman Ndiaye were enough for Senegal to maintain its perfect start to its title defense with another commanding performance in Yamoussoukro.

Cameroon's win also eliminated Ghana, which had been hoping to still somehow finish as one of the four best third-place finishers. That's no longer possible for the Black Stars with just two points.

The Ghana Football Association later fired Chris Hughton as coach. His team missed its chance to progress Monday when it conceded two goals in stoppage time to draw with Mozambique 2-2.

Mauritania eliminated two-time champion Algeria by winning its first-ever Africa Cup game to reach the last 16.

Mohamed Dellahi Yali's first-half strike helped Mauritania win 1-0 and left the Desert Foxes contemplating their second straight group-stage exit.

Substitute Pape Ibnou Ba missed a great chance to seal it late when he struck the crossbar with goal at his mercy, but the Lions of Chinguetti survived 11 minutes of stoppage time to see out their first win in their third participation in the tournament.

"We suffered. We knew that this team had great individual quality (but) we were solid. We scored from one situation and we fought, we showed great desire, and I'm very proud, very proud of what we did," Mauritania coach Amir Abdou said.

His team's win was enough to finish among the four best third-place finishers.

Rampant Chelsea surge into final of League Cup



Middlesbrough's Morgan Rogers (right), watches as Chelsea's Levi Colwill (left), challenges Middlesbrough's Matt Crooks during the English League Cup semifinal second leg soccer match between Chelsea and Middlesbrough at the Stamford Bridge Stadium in London. (AP)

Exciting showdown

Al-Tadamon, Yarmouk clash in league

By Khaled El Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: Today, a riveting match is set to take place in the General Volleyball League, featuring a showdown between Al-Tadamon and Yarmouk at 5:15 pm at Al-Ittihad Hall in the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex.

In a remarkable performance, Al-Arabi secured victory against Al-Sulaibikhat, sweeping three games with scores of "25-20, 25-15, 25-20."

The league standings are as follows: Al-Kuwait, Al-Qadisiya, and Burgan each boast 31 points, while Al-Arabi and Kazma follow closely with 28 points. Al-Shabab holds 18 points, Yarmouk has 16, Al-Tadamon sits at 12, and Sulaibikhat at 3 points. Meanwhile, Al-Sahel remains at the bottom of the standings without a score.

It's important to note that the matches of Al-Kuwait and Al-Qadisiya have been postponed due to their participation in the Second West Asian Club Championship in

Oman, hosted by Sohar Club from February 1 to 12. Both teams are presently engaged in external camps, with the "White" training in Turkey and the "Yellow" in Dubai.

Shifting focus to the Kuwaiti youth volleyball team, Director Talal Jassim affirmed that the team's training during the ongoing external camp in Cairo is progressing well. The training adheres to the plan devised by the

VOLLEYBALL

technical staff, led by national coach Jassim Al-Tararwa, in preparation for the first Gulf Games for youth, scheduled in Dubai from April 16 to May 2. Jassim highlighted the players' commitment to the staff's instructions, emphasizing their concerted effort to maximize the benefits of the current training period. Despite losing the first two trial matches to the Aviation Club team and the Petrojet team, Jassim noted a noticeable development in the players' performance.



A file photo of players in action.

Sociedad return to Copa del Rey semis

MADRID, Jan 24, (AP): Real Sociedad defeated Celta Vigo 2-1 to reach the Copa del Rey semifinals for the first time since winning the competi-

SOCCER

tion four seasons ago.

Mikel Oyarzabal and Sheraldo Becker scored for the visitors in a re-

match of the teams' Spanish league game on Saturday, when Sociedad won 1-0 in Vigo.

"We've played against a great team and a great coach, so what we've achieved in these two matches has a lot of value," Sociedad coach Imanol Alguacil said.

Luca de la Torre scored for the hosts with a low shot from inside the box in the 92nd minute.

Celta, coached by Rafa Benítez, was looking to return to the semifinals for the first time since 2017.

Sociedad, which beat Basque Country rival Athletic Bilbao in the 2019-20 final, had made it to the last eight the last two seasons but failed to advance.

Oyarzabal opened the scoring with a header from close range two minutes into the match at the Balaídos Stadium.

Becker added to the lead in a fast breakthrough in the 66th, making a run from behind the midfield line and finding the net from outside the area as Celta goalkeeper Iván Villar charged from the net.

Sociedad sits in sixth place in the Spanish league, six points from fourth-place Atletico Madrid in the final Champions League place, Celta is 16th, two points from the relegation zone.

Sociedad's win against Celta on Saturday ended the team's four-game winless streak in the league.

Kazma's new signing Teddy arrives

By Hassan Musa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: Kazma's new Nigerian professional, Benjamin Teddy, arrived in the country and received a warm welcome from the first team's manager, Hussein Kalender, and public relations official, Awad Al-Shammari.

SOCCER

Teddy has inked a contract with Kazma Club, valid until the conclusion of the current season. He steps in to fill the void left by Brazilian Douglas Vale, whose performance fell short of the club's ambitions.

Born in 1994, Teddy brings professional experience from Georgia, where

he achieved league title victories twice with Dinamo Batumi.

As it stands, Kazma's roster features Guinean professional Tony Silva, Jordanian Ahmed Arsan, and Palestinian Michel Milad. The club has made the decision to part ways with Algerian defender Imad Eddine Ezzi.

Ongoing negotiations are in progress between Kazma and Al-Qadisiya for the potential inclusion of defender Abdul Rahman Al-Daihani. This move is at the request of "Orange" coach Muhammad Dehelis, aiming to compensate for the departure of Ezzi.

Coach Dehelis is determined to prepare his team adequately ahead of the upcoming activities, with Kazma scheduled to face Burgan in the preliminary round of the Amir Cup competition next Sunday.

Owners given chance at first trophy

LONDON, Jan 24, (AP): After a chaotic and underwhelming 20 months in charge, Chelsea's big-spending American ownership has a date at Wembley Stadium as the London club seeks a first trophy of the new regime.

Chelsea routed second-tier Middlesbrough 6-1 in the English League Cup semifinals to overturn a 1-0 first-leg deficit to an opponent that was looking to become the first team from outside the Premier League to reach the competition's title match since 2013.

A 15th-minute own-goal tied the score on aggregate before Chelsea added more goals in the first half through Enzo Fernandez, Axel Disasi and Cole Palmer.

Strikes after the break from Palmer and Noni Madueke piled on the misery for Middlesbrough as Chelsea sealed a 6-2 aggregate victory.

A Todd Boehly-fronted consortium and Clearlake Capital have owned Chelsea since buying the club off Roman Abramovich in May 2022. Their spending on players has been unprecedented - more than \$1 billion in the first three full transfer windows - but hit-and-miss, while the regime is onto its third permanent manager in Mauricio Pochettino. The team is languishing in ninth place in the Premier League, having finished a dismal 12th last season.

SOCCER

It has taken a while but things might finally be falling into place, even if Chelsea still appears far off the top teams in England.

"When you see the team, we are young and we need to grow," Pochettino said. "This type of game is good experience for our young players. Step by step, we are building a good team."

"We have the talent, but we need time to put it all in place. It's a new project."

Even after its surprising loss at Riverside Stadium two weeks ago, Chelsea was still favored to advance to the final and the flurry of early goals - four in the first 42 minutes - virtually ended Middlesbrough's hopes.

The visiting team coached by former Manchester United and England midfielder Michael Carrick was its own worst enemy at times, like when Jonny Howson diverted the ball into his own net for the opening goal as he tried to tackle Armando Broja in the area.

Fernandez swept in a close-range finish for 2-0 after Broja helped on a cross from Disasi, who then scored himself by converting a cross from Raheem Sterling in the 36th.

Palmer, a revelation since joining from Manchester City in August, stroked in his first goal of the game in the 42nd after dispossessing Boro defender Daniel Barlaser on edge of the visitors' area.

He made it 5-0 in the 77th before substitute Madueke wrapped up the win four minutes later.

Morgan Rogers grabbed an 88th-minute consolation for Middlesbrough. The domestic cups offer the best - likely the only - chance of silverware this season for Chelsea.

Pochettino's team is still in the FA Cup though faces a tough fourth-round match against Aston Villa on Friday.



Al-Qadisiya player shoots a free throw.

Al-Qadisiya, Kazma fight for supremacy

By Hassan Musa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 24: The front-runner of the Basketball League Al-Qadisiya is gearing up for a formidable challenge as it faces Kazma in the fourth round of the second division tonight at 7:30 pm. Simultaneously, another intense showdown awaits in the same hall at 5:00 pm, where Al-Arabi and Al-Qurain will lock horns.

The top four teams from the preliminary round will secure a spot in the semi-finals. The semi-final matchups will follow a "play-off" system consisting of three matches, with the winners of two matches advancing to the final.

BASKETBALL

Entering the match at the summit of the standings with 21 points, Al-Qadisiya aims to extend its winning streak and widen the gap at the top. Kazma II, with 19 points, is determined to deliver a strong performance and surpass Al-Qadisiya, showcasing its potential to contend seriously for the league title.

Under the guidance of American coach Stebbing, Al-Qadisiya has showcased outstanding performances, with key players including Mohsen Mortada, Abdullah Tawfiq, Muhammad Ashkanani, Saad Al-Rifai, and American Emino. Meanwhile, Slovenian coach Bojan Lazic leads the Orange, relying on the efforts of players like Ahmed Al Balushi, Abdulaziz Al Hamidi, and Americans Chapman and Leslie.

In the second match, Al-Arabi, currently in fifth place with 15 points, aims for victory to enter the competition for the fourth qualifying spot in the golden square. Al-Qurain VI, with 14 points, faces challenges after the decision of the Board of Directors to abandon its professionals, creating an opportunity for Al-Arabi to seize the advantage in the league standings.



Media coordinator Mishaal Al-Abakal receiving Ayman.



Kazma's new Nigerian signing Benjamin Teddy received by officials.



Alexander Zverev of Germany celebrates after defeating Carlos Alcaraz of Spain in their quarterfinal match at the Australian Open tennis championships at Melbourne Park, Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

Sports

Latest sports scores at — <http://sports.arabtimesonline.com>

Zheng into maiden semifinal

Zverev ousts Alcaraz to move into Australian Open semis against Medvedev

MELBOURNE, Australia, Jan 24, (AP) — Alexander Zverev made no mistake with his second chance to close out a win over No. 2-ranked Carlos Alcaraz on Wednesday night and moved into an Australian Open semifinal against two-time finalist Daniil Medvedev.

The sixth-seeded Zverev was up a break in the third set at 5-3 and missed a chance to serve it out but the Olympic champion didn't blink when he got another chance in the fourth, finishing off a 6-1, 6-3, 6-7 (2), 6-4 victory.

Alcaraz won Wimbledon last year and was the only player to beat 10-time Australian Open winner Novak Djokovic in a Grand Slam match in 2023. The 20-year-old Spaniard won't get the chance in Australia this time.

It was Zverev's first win over a top-5 player at a Grand Slam, and the reward was a spot in the semis for the seventh time at a major.

"Look, I'm playing one of the best players in the world, especially over the last two years," Zverev said. "He's been No. 1, No. 2 constantly. He's won two Grand Slams. And when you're up 6-1, 6-3, 5-2, you start thinking. I mean, we're all human."

"Then when you start winning, obviously your brain starts going. It's not always helpful but I'm happy I got it at the end. I fought back quite well in the end, didn't let go."

Medvedev, a two-time finalist in Australia, outlasted ninth-seeded Hubert Hurkacz 7-6 (4), 2-6, 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 to make it to the semifinals at Melbourne Park for the third time in four years.

Djokovic will play Jannik Sinner in the other semifinal.

Zverev said he'd been taking some beatings from Medvedev recently but "maybe this will be it. Maybe this will be the place."

No. 12-seeded Zheng Qinwen and Ukrainian qualifier Dayana Yastremska won women's quarterfinals on Day 11 and will play their first Grand Slam semi when they meet after a night sleep.

The sixth-seeded Zverev was on top of Alcaraz early, getting 16 of his 18 first serves into play in the first set and winning the point on all but two.

He raced through the first set in 29 minutes and two service breaks in the second gave him a 2-0 lead.

TENNIS

Just after midnight, Zverev was serving for a straight set win when Alcaraz broke for the first time. Alcaraz got back to 5-5 when he chased a shot into the doubles alley and knocked a backhand down the line, beaming a big smile and shaking his racket in a gesture that suggested: "Hello, still here."

He won the last seven points of the tiebreaker to make it 2-1, flashing a big smile after earning four set points when he chased a ball wide and hit a forehand passing shot.

After an exchange of service breaks to open the fourth and some energy-sapping rallies that had both players sprinting side-to-side to make incredible shots, Zverev got another chance to close out after breaking in the ninth game.

He clinched the victory about 1:20 a.m. local time, letting out a scream of relief and shaking both arms in celebration.

Medvedev's celebration was more like a sigh of relief. He led 4-2 in the fourth set but No. 9 Hurkacz rallied to force a fifth and took it to a grueling four hours.

"I'm so destroyed right now," Medvedev, the 2021 U.S. Open winner, said in his on-court interview as he stood with his hands clasped behind his head.

The No. 3-ranked Medvedev has had a tough run in Melbourne, including a nearly 4 1/2-hour, five-set second-round win that finished at 3:39 a.m.

The women's semifinal lineup was completed when Zheng won 10 of the last 11 games to fend off Anna Kalinskaya 6-7 (4), 6-3, 6-1 and Yastremska beat Linda Noskova 6-3, 6-4. Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka and U.S. Open winner Coco Gauff will meet in the other semifinal.

The 19-year-old Gauff beat Sabalenka in the U.S. Open final and is on a 12-match streak in majors. Sabalenka is on a 12-match winning run at Melbourne Park.

Zheng, a U.S. Open quarterfinalist last year, regained control midway through the second set after Kalinskaya won six of the last seven points to take the first set in a tiebreaker.

"Really excited. First time for me," in the semifinals, Zheng said. "Of course I'm proud of myself. But this is just the beginning - I still need to play tomorrow."

Japan advance

DOHA, Qatar, Jan 24, (AP) — Japan got its Asian Cup campaign back on track by advancing to the knockout stage after a 3-1 win against Indonesia on Wednesday. The Palestinian soccer team advanced to the knockout stage of the Asian Cup for the first time.

Both secured their place in the round of 16 as two of the best third-placed teams from the group stage.

Oday Dabbagh scored twice for the Palestinian team in a 3-0 win over Hong Kong in Group C and Omar Khrbin struck the only goal in Syria's 1-0 win against India in Group B.

SOCCER

The Palestinian team had failed to advance from the first round in its prior two attempts.

The pre-tournament favorite Japan surprisingly lost to Iraq in its second Group D match last week to leave its hopes of winning a record-extending fifth Asian Cup title in jeopardy.

But any concerns that it could face an early exit were swept away at Al Thumama Stadium after two goals from Ayase Ueda put the four-time champion on course for victory.

Justin Hubner scored a late own goal and Sandy Walsh pulled one back for Indonesia in added time.

Iraq advanced as group winner ahead of second-placed Japan with a perfect record. Substitute Aymen Hussein scored from the penalty spot in the 12th minute of stoppage time to beat 10-man Vietnam 3-2 at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium.

It took Ueda just six minutes to settle any nerves Japan's players and fans might have been feeling going into their final group game.

The Feyenoord striker had won the spot kick after being fouled by Jordi Amat and fired his shot into the right hand corner beyond Indonesia goalkeeper Ernando Ari Sutaryadi to open the scoring.

He doubled Japan's lead in the 52nd - and when Hubner diverted another effort from Ueda into his own goal in the 88th the win looked beyond doubt.

Walsh scored a consolation in added time and Indonesia, on three points, will have to wait to see if it advances as one of the best third-placed teams.

Having already missed one penalty after coming on as a halftime substitute, Hussein converted from the spot deep into stoppage time to maintain Iraq's perfect record in Group D.

Hussein is the tournament's leading scorer with five goals and that record might have been even better had he not struck the post with his earlier penalty against Vietnam.

He still managed to have a key impact on the match with two goals as the 2007 champion came from behind to make it three wins out of three.

Vietnam had taken the lead through Bui Hoang Viet Anh in the 42nd - but Khuat Van Khang was sent off in first-half stoppage time for a second yellow card.

It took only two minutes of the second half for Rebin Solaka to even the score for Iraq and Hussein headed his team in front in the 73rd.

Hussein failed to score from the spot 10 minutes later when firing against the post and that miss looked to be costly when substitute Nguyen Quang Hai leveled the game in the 91st.

That was until Hussein was given the chance to make amends for his earlier penalty and he made no mistake from the spot on this occasion.



Palestine's Zeid Qunbar (front), fights for the ball with Hong Kong's Sue Jesse Joy Yin during the Asian Cup Group C soccer match between Hong Kong and Palestine at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium in Doha, Qatar. (AP)

Qatar play Japan for gold

Kuwait, Bahrain battle for Asian Handball Championship bronze

By Khaled El Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

MANAMA, Jan 24: Kuwait is set to play its final match in the 21st Asian Handball Championship, which also serves the "2025 World Cup Qualifiers," when it plays Bahrain for the bronze medal at 4:00 pm. Subsequently, the Asian title final between Qatar and Japan will take place at 6:30 pm.

The four teams have already secured qualification for the upcoming World Cup, slated to take place from January 14 to February 2, 2025, in Croatia, Denmark, and Norway.

HANDBALL

In the semi-finals, Kuwait suffered a second defeat against Qatar, setting the stage for today's bronze medal match.

Leading up to the Asian Championship, Kuwait underwent preparation through an external camp held in Slovenia and Croatia, featuring a series of official matches.

This marks the ninth time that Kuwait has qualified for the World Championship in its history, ending a 15-year absence. The team's previous qualifications were in 1982, 1995, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007, and the most recent in 2009.

In a recent announcement, the Minister of State for Youth Affairs revealed a set of rewards for teams achieving international success. The handball team is set to receive 2,000 dinars for securing the bronze medal at the Asian Games held last September in China, along with an additional 5,000 dinars for qualifying for the World Cup.

Should Kuwait clinch the bronze medal, each player will be awarded 2,000 dinars. Following their World Cup qualification, the Handball Federation declared a financial reward of 1,000 dinars for each player, as well as the technical and administrative staff.

Breaking barriers

Kuwait's Al-Hendal makes history as referee in U-18 Women's World Cup



Shouq Al-Hendal officiating in one of the games.



Players battle for the ball during Kuwait and Qatar match.

SOFIA, Jan 24: Kuwaiti international ice hockey referee Shouq Al-Hendal celebrated her historic role in officiating matches at the Women's World Cup (under 18 years), held in Bulgaria. She proudly stands as the first Kuwaiti referee to lead matches in this prestigious global event, describing it as a truly unique experience.

Al-Hendal expressed her pride in being selected by the International Ice Hockey Federation as one of the 11 international female referees entrusted with overseeing matches at this significant tournament. This recognition serves as a source of pride not only for her but also for the entire Kuwaiti ice hockey community, marking the pinnacle of her sporting career, which spans several years.

She shared her journey, recounting her initial involvement as a player in the club's women's teams for several years before transitioning to the field of arbitration in 2019. It took her three years to obtain the international badge from the International Federation of the Game, following her nomination by the club and the successful completion of training courses in the field of arbitration.

ICE HOCKEY

Reflecting on her experience managing World Championship matches, Al-Hendal noted that she successfully officiated four matches, attributing her success to diligent technical and physical preparation. She expressed gratitude to the international referees committee in the tournament for their tremendous support during her inaugural experience at this high level.

Looking ahead, Al-Hendal affirmed her commitment to continuous hard work and personal development in this challenging field. Recognizing that ice hockey is one of the fastest games, she emphasized the significant fitness and high concentration required for a referee to excel in this dynamic sport.