



Amir receives parliament speaker, PM, chief justice



Amiri Diwan photos
His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Sunday received National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun at Seif Palace. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal, separately, received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the head of the supreme judicial council and the court of cassation, Justice Dr. Adel Bouresli.

Public order focus

Kuwait tightens security for New Year festivities

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Ministry of Interior has prepared a comprehensive plan to maintain security and discipline, and deter any attempt to violate the laws, as per the directives of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled, reports Al-Qabas daily.

Assistant Undersecretary for Public Security, Traffic, Operations, Correctional Institutions and Judgments Execution Major General Abdullah Al-Rajaib announced that the abovementioned security plan is for the New Year holiday, during which there will be heavy security presence in all locations to take the necessary precautionary measures in order to maintain public order and protect lives and properties. He said: "During the New Year holiday, there will be emphasis on all elements of the delegated security forces participating in the security plan. They have been instructed to be at their designated stations and carry out their tasks efficiently to ensure the safety of everyone." He added the total number of security patrols assigned in various governorates reached 310 with around 1,950 security personnel assigned in different parts of the country.

He stressed that like in previous years, the Public Security Affairs Sector assigned security patrols in front of churches and mobile patrols in and near these places. "We have eight churches - two in the Capital Governorate, four in Hawally and two in Ahmadi. These are the focus areas in addition to the chalets, desert, coastal strip, Abdally farms, famous commercial complexes, markets, parks, public gardens and others. We have coordinated with other entities to ensure the safety of everyone. There will be heavy presence of public security, traffic, rescue and investigation patrols in crowded places; in addition to the participation of other agencies, such as medical emergency and Kuwait Municipality that will work according to their capabilities," he explained.

On instructions for communities and churchgoers, Al-Rajaib explained that the ministry always warns and advises citizens and expatriates to respect the laws and directives of the ministry and other concerned authorities. He said: "Everyone must adhere to public values and morals. They should not deviate from public order and avoid engaging in acts punishable by law in order not to be subjected to various penalties like deportation and imprisonment."

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NewsWatch

KUWAIT CITY: The Central Bank of Kuwait has ushered in the 12th batch of freshly graduated citizens, qualified to be enrolled in the banking sector, under umbrella of "Kafaa" initiative launched in cooperation with Kuwaiti banks and supervised by Kuwait Institute of Banking Studies (KIBS).

The CBK said in a statement on Sunday that KIBS would receive enrollment applications from today until early February, noting that the program is devised to secure competent national cadres, capable of contributing to Kuwait's development.

Participants will receive practical and theoretical lessons at local and renowned international institutes for 12 months. (KUNA)

ISTANBUL: Six Turkish soldiers were killed Saturday in clashes with Kurdish militants in northern Iraq, a day after another six were also killed.

The six soldiers slain on Saturday died in a firefight when militants attempted to infiltrate a Turkish base, according to a statement by the Turkish Defense Ministry. The statement said 13 militants had been "neutralized."

In addition to the six Turkish soldiers killed on Friday, four militants were slain, authorities said. (AP)

NEW DELHI: A drone hit an Israeli-affiliated merchant vessel off the coast of India in the Arabian Sea on Saturday, a British maritime security firm said, damaging the vessel but causing no casualties.

The incident on the Liberian-flagged chemical product tanker occurred 120 miles (200-kilometers) southwest of the Indian port of Veraval, said Ambrey. It gave no further details about the vessel's Israeli links.

Ambrey said the drone attack struck the stern and caused a fire onboard that was later extinguished without any casualties among the crew. (AP)

BEIRUT: Hostilities continued between the Lebanese Resistance and the Israeli occupation army in the southern border areas of Lebanon on Saturday.

During today's clashes, two members of the Resistance were martyred, National News Agency (NNA) reported, citing a Resistance statement. (KUNA)

Opinion

Indeed, they wasted the country and people's interests

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

YOUR Highness the Amir, may Almighty Allah assist and guide you in the great task that you have been entrusted with.

For the past three years, all hopes were on you, especially since the health condition of our late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad wasn't at its best. This made the task difficult, but as Your Highness said, "Obedience to the ruler is obedience to Allah."

Therefore, great hopes have been pinned on Your Highness to shake off the dust of nearly three decades, and perhaps more, that has covered public affairs, making the state regress in all sectors and fields.

Our reliance on the state's sole income, which is oil, has increased, now constituting about 93 percent. There were no steps to diversify the sources of state revenues.

This translates to the failure of plans and programs in this regard, or in modernizing the industrial, food, and service infrastructure to attract investments, both national and foreign, to the country, similar to neighboring countries.

Most of the strategic spending is either on salaries, which represents a burden on the public finances that has reached the point where some of the concerned ministers have hinted at the lack of liquidity to meet that need, or on money given as external donations and loans, which experience have proven to be ineffective, or also on deals that Your Highness spoke about in your speech during the constitutional oath session; as all of them have harmed the interests of the state.

Your Highness, you have warmed the hearts of the people with your insight on the state of the country. You affirmed that by saying, "The two authorities - the legislative

and the executive - agreed to harm the interests of the country and its people."

This is undoubtedly the voice of all citizens who are keen about the advancement of Kuwait.

In fact, your statement represents citizens' honest expression of what happened, and how it affected all areas of life.

The harm was not only in the appointments and transfers to some jobs and positions or to the citizenship file, changing the Kuwaiti identity, and the amnesty file; rather, it reached the point of harming the supreme strategic interests of Kuwait.

In fact, the majority of the members of the two authorities were working on "hustling", which made the country live in a "looting" struggle as if it were cake or prey, and not a final homeland for them.

Also, in the last few years, rumors increased to the point that some of them were about the ruling house, its personalities, and changes that were imposed without proper authority.

It seems everyone has overlooked the fact that such kind of changes are within the jurisdiction of Your Highness, in accordance with the Constitution, which has spread some anxiety among citizens, as if we are about to fight, God forbid, or as if we were experiencing changes at the head of the state.

There is no doubt that this affects the state's reputation, both financially and economically, which is why your royal speech during the oath session was a balm.

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MPs eye AI authority

'Boost allowance'

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: MPs Dawoud Maarefi, Abdullah Fehad, Hassan Jawhar, Fahd Al-Masoud and Badr Al-Mulla have submitted a bill on the establishment of the Public Authority for Artificial Intelligence (PAAI) - a legal entity under the supervision of the minister that will be specified by the Council of Ministers.

The tasks of PAAI include dealing with issues related to the organization and development of Artificial Intelligence (AI), draft and submit the required legislation and regulations, take measures to organize the digitalization of public institutions to help the government in the provision of efficient digitalized governance, protect official data, enhance the innovation of AI, transform Kuwait into a leading State in the AI field, prepare and conduct training programs, attract global researchers take part in AI development in Kuwait, provide consultation services for public institutions, and raise public awareness about the importance of developing and investing in AI.

PAAI shall be managed by a board of directors that will be appointed by the Council of Ministers according to the nomination of the concerned minister. The Board of Directors shall consist of the representatives of the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Communications, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Higher Education. These representatives must occupy at least the assistant undersecretary position.

The board shall also include the representatives of the National Cybersecurity Center and Artificial Intelligence Community, in addition to three AI experts.

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The Holy Family Co-Cathedral in Kuwait City holds a Christmas Eve service on Sunday, drawing a significant gathering of the faithful. Photo by Rezk Tawfik

Arab Parliament to hold special session on Gaza

CAIRO, Dec 24, (Agencies): The Arab Parliament announced Sunday that it will hold a special session to discuss the latest development regarding the Israeli occupation aggression on Gaza and the latest escalations in the West Bank.

The session entitled "Supporting Palestine and Gaza" to be held in the Arab League headquarters will be attended by prominent international and Arab figures including Members of Kuwait parliament, a statement by the Arab Parliament said.

MP Mohammed Al-Huwaila, Ahmad Lary, Khaled Al-Mounes and Hamdan Al-Azmi will represent Kuwait in the session, which will tackle means of supporting the people of Palestine. The Arab parliament is scheduled to discuss plans for political support and Arab states contribution to end the Israeli war crimes in the enclave as it enters its 79th day leading to the killing of more than twenty thousands and leaving fifty-eight more wounded and missing.

Last November, the Arab parliament had announced that it was about to seek The International Criminal Court (ICC) for an immediate investigation into war crimes by Israeli aggression forces against the Palestinian people.

Elsewhere, fourteen Israeli soldiers were killed in combat in the Gaza Strip over the weekend, the Israeli military said Sunday, in some of the bloodiest days of

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Antares graces Kuwait's skies amidst intensifying cold spell

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24, (KUNA): The "Antares", a red supergiant star, is set to make an appearance once again on Monday after 40 days in hiding, signaling the start of an intensified cold weather in the upcoming period, said Al-Ojairi scientific center.

In a statement to KUNA, the center added that the Antares makes an appearance all year round except for a

few weeks before the start of winter, on November 10 of this year when the star went out of sight.

The supergiant star will appear from the East, which can be recognized by its red color, size and brightness.

The appearance of the star also signals the start of the "Murbaniya", a period where winter starts and the cold intensifies for 40 days.

Iran summons Russian envoy

Tehran enhances naval arsenal with 'advanced' cruise missiles

DUBAI, Dec 24, (AP): Iran's navy on Sunday added domestically produced sophisticated cruise missiles to its arsenal, state TV reported.

The TV said both Talaeieh and Nasir cruise missiles have arrived at a naval base near the Indian Ocean in the southern Iranian port of Konarak, some 1,400 kilometers (850 miles) southeast of the capital, Tehran.

Navy chief Adm. Shahram Irani said the Talaeieh has a range of more than 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) and called it "fully smart." Irani said the cruise missile is capable of changing targets during travel.

He said the Nasir has a range of 100 kilometers (62 miles) and can be installed on warships.

Last month, a container ship owned by an Israeli billionaire came under attack from a suspected Iranian drone in the Indian Ocean, as Israel wages war on Iran-backed Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

From time to time Iran announces the test firing, production and commissioning of new military equipment that cannot be independently verified. The country says it has a stock of various kinds of missiles with ranges up to 2,000 kilometers (1250 miles), capable of reaching its

archenemy Israel and U.S. bases in the region.

In other news, Iran summoned Russia's charge d'affaires after Moscow and Arab countries released a joint statement earlier this week challenging Iran's claim to disputed islands in the Arabian Gulf, state media reported Sunday.

Iran's official IRNA news agency said the Russian envoy was summoned on Saturday and handed a note to deliver to Moscow in which Tehran protested the statement by the 6th Arab-Russian Cooperation Forum issued in Morocco that called for a peaceful solution to resolve the conflict between Iran and the United Arab Emirates over the islands.

Earlier on Saturday, Iran's foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian told his Russian counterpart over the phone that "respecting countries' sovereignty and integrity is among basic principles in the ties between nations," IRNA said in a separate report.

This marked the second time this year that Iran has called for a Russian envoy in protest over comments on the disputed islands.

Tehran summoned the Russian ambassador in July over a similar statement.



Palestinians mourn their relatives killed in Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip in Deir al Balah, Gaza Strip, on Sunday, Dec. 24, 2023. (AP)

Prayer Timings

Fajr	05:14	Asr	14:37
Sunrise ..	06:39	Maghrib ..	16:55
Zohr	11:47	Isha	19:17

Local

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

Expected weather for the next 24 hours:

By Day: Mild and partly cloudy with light variable wind to light to moderate northwesterly wind, with speed of 06-28 km/h with a hance for scattered

Weather

light rain.

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

Station Max Exp Min Rec

Kuwait City	24	16
Kuwait Airport	24	12
Abdaly	25	11
Jahra	25	14
Salmiyah	23	17
Nuwaisib	23	14
Wafra	23	13

Minister nods controls for social, kids allowance to scholarship students

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled, officially approved the decision of the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) regarding the controls for disbursing the social allowance and the children's allowance to those sent on scholarships, whether for study or training, as well as to those sent for treatment abroad and their companions, reports Al-Qabas daily.

The decision, which is published in the Official Gazette, Sunday, states the following:

Article (1) Scholarship to study
The employer may grant the worker study leave with pay while continuing to pay the social allowance and child allowance prescribed for workers in non-governmental agencies, provided that the following conditions are met:

1 - Approval of the employer, the employer continues to pay the scholarship student's wages, the scholarship must be to obtain a higher qualification, the qualification must be in the field of work of the scholarship student or employer, obtaining the necessary approvals from the Ministry of Higher Education and he must not have previously received a scholarship to obtain the same academic degree.

Article (2) Duration of disbursement
for the scholarship student to study -- without prejudice to the provisions of Article (1) of this decision, the social allowance and the child allowance shall be disbursed to scholarship students according to the following periods:

1 - Five years to obtain a university degree, except for students on scholarship to medical colleges, who are allowed an additional two years.

2 - Two years to obtain a master's degree.

3 - Three years to obtain a doctorate degree.

It is permissible to continue disbursing

the social allowance and the children's allowance to researchers for an additional year, provided that an application is submitted to the Authority along with the reasons and justifications for doing so, along with the necessary approvals.

Article (3) scholarship for training -- to be sent for training, the following conditions must be met:

1 - The training must be vocational, and in the field of work of the scholarship student or the employer.

2 - The training program must be part of the annual training plan presented

3 - Submit an application to the Public Authority for Manpower, accompanied by documents supporting the training, its duration, scope, and location, for examination and study by the concerned administration.

The Authority may issue a decision to form a committee to verify the availability of the conditions for scholarship for training, and decide on the submitted applications in light of what is submitted to it by the concerned administration.

Article (4) Duration of payment for the trainee -- the social allowance and children's allowance are paid for a period not exceeding six years and may be extended -- up to a maximum -- for a similar period, with the approval of Public Authority for Manpower.

Companies operating in the field of maritime or air navigation are excluded from the period referred to in order to obtain the necessary license to begin work in the competent training authorities.

Article (5) Cases of refunding what has been spent -- The scholarship student is obligated to work in the private sector for a period similar to the period of study leave, and in the event that the worker fails to do so, he is obligated to refund what was spent by the Public Authority for Manpower during the leave period in proportion to the remainder of the period to be spent in the private sector, unless he adjusts his status within one year from the expiry date of registration with the General Organization for Social Insurance, provided that work in the private sector continues for the period specified in the entity whose status was modified.

To be continued



Neda Aldaihani and Danah Al-Jasem during the signing ceremony of the memorandum of understanding.

stc signs MoU with Sabah Al-Ahmad Centre for Giftedness and Creativity

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 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) under its educational "upgrade" initiative with the Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity ('SACGC'). The collaboration with SACGC, which is part of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences ('KFAS'), will present a range of activities for children and young adults throughout 2024.

Ceremony

The signing ceremony, held at stc's head office, was attended by executives from stc and SACGC. Upon signing the MoU, stc aspires to continue showcasing its commitment to the community and its dedication to empowering the next generation of leaders specifically in science and technology. The MoU strongly aligns with some of the key objectives and pillars behind stc's CSR program, which is ultimately designed to foster an environment that nurtures education and innovation amongst the youth.

Through flagship programs like 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.

As part of this collaboration, stc and SACGC will be hosting a series of events at stc's booth in Winter Wonderland Kuwait throughout the coming period. These events will offer a blend of educational and entertainment activities aimed at children and the younger generation. The aim is to spark curiosity and a love for science and technology, nurturing the talents of Kuwait's youth. Additionally, throughout 2024, stc and SACGC plan to roll out a variety of activities, including training sessions, coding, and technology related competitions, along with other engaging activities. These initiatives are designed to provide hands-on experience and learning opportunities in the fields of science and technology, aligning with stc's commitment to social responsibility and educational development, being a pioneer in the field of digital transformation.

Danah Al-Jasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, commented, "We are proud to have signed this MoU with SACGC, and

look forward to experiencing a fruitful collaboration that aims to inspire and empower the younger generation. The initiatives that will be launched under the program are designed to equip the youth with the skills required for the digital age. We believe that by investing in these educational and developmental programs, we are not just nurturing talent but also contributing to the growth and advancement of our society. This MoU with SACGC aligns seamlessly with stc's vision of driving innovation and excellence in the field of technology and digital transformation, emphasizing our role as a catalyst for positive change in the community."

All-Jasem added, "As part of its extensive CSR program, stc has consistently invested in initiatives supporting and benefiting various community segments, some of which focus on educating the younger generation, who are our future leaders. In addition to focusing on academic learning, stc's initiatives extend to strengthening practical skills, technology training, and career readiness, ensuring that participants are well-equipped for future challenges. By fostering such educational opportunities, stc is actively contributing to the development of a knowledgeable, skilled, and dynamic workforce for the future."

"This approach reflects stc's dedication to empowering the community through education and knowledge, with strong faith to capture more of the youth by encouraging them through the groups we will be hosting in our upcoming initiatives, all while collaborating with institutions to create a wider societal impact."

Partner

Neda Aldaihani, General Manager of SACGC added, "We are delighted to partner with stc, a company that shares our vision of empowering the youth. Together, we aim to unlock the potential of Kuwait's young minds, nurturing their talents and guiding them towards a brighter future rich in opportunities and innovation. Our alliance with stc will serve as a shared journey towards igniting the ambitions of our younger generation."

"We aim to equip them with the necessary resources and opportunities to excel in their endeavors. This collaboration signifies a pivotal step in creating a supportive ecosystem where our young minds can explore, create, and lead in various sectors, thus making significant contributions to our beloved nation."

Technology used negatively wrecks homes; blackmail, defamation rife

'Kuwait must do more to confront cyber crimes'

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Participants of the Fifth Kuwait Conference on Combating Cybercrimes, which was held in Jumeirah Messilah Hotel, agreed that Kuwait is still lagging behind in confronting cyber crimes, which have increased by about three-fold in 2023 compared to last year.

They called for including information security in the curricula of students of various educational levels, starting from kindergarten.

In this regard, Head of the Kuwait Lawyers Society Sheryan Al-Sharyan said the world today faces the dangers of cybercrimes, especially considering the fact that the world has become fully linked just like a small village.

In his speech at the conference, Al-Sharyan said, "An individual who owns a smartphone now owns a Ministry of Information", indicating that there are major international institutions that have been lured and fallen victim to fraud and swindling crimes.

He said, "When advanced technology is used in a wrong way, it leads to destruction of homes, blackmail and defamation of victims."

Al-Sharyan expressed his disappointment about the fact that lagging behind in this aspect despite the active role played by the Ministry of Interior.

He stressed the need to teach the students of all educational stages about cybersecurity, adding, "One word may be more fatal than a bullet."

Meanwhile, Head of the committee assigned to organise the Fifth Conference on Combating Cybercrimes Mubarak Al-Abdulhadi said the conference comes at a very important time as the risks of cybercrime have increased significantly in recent years and have become a real threat to national and societal security in the State of Kuwait and the Gulf and Arab region.

He indicated that this situation requires everyone to cooperate and unify efforts to confront these risks and threats with science and knowledge.

Al-Abdulhadi explained that the previous four editions of this conference resulted in several recommendations, the most prominent of which is spreading awareness about the dangers of cybercrimes, educating individuals about the nature of information security and cybersecurity, its importance, and the different forms of cybercrime, and urging Kuwait University and private universities to introduce the specialization of information

security and cybersecurity within the academic curricula, especially since the labor market is in dire need of it.

He stated that the conferences contributed to encouraging all ministries to establish risk management and digital emergency centers.

Furthermore, Lieutenant Colonel Anmar Al-Saffar from the Anti-Cybercrime Department of the Ministry of Interior stressed the need to raise individuals' awareness about cybercrimes and take all methods of counter-attack.

He explained that the Anti-Cybercrime Department faced many cases of fraud in this aspect in 2023, and they were three times more than in 2022.

The department discovered a large number of crimes in recent years. The number of reported crimes in 2023 was three times more than the cyber crimes reported in 2022.

Electronic piracy is not limited to a specific category. Kuwaiti society has been exposed to it at the level of individuals and social institutions, indicating that individual

blackmail is one of these digital crimes. The Ministry of Interior formed teams, in collaboration with Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA), to fight cyber crimes. They discovered about 300 fake accounts and more than 1,000 phones that were used for committing cyber crimes.

Lieutenant Colonel Al-Saffar stressed the need to update the laws for supporting the efforts aimed at dealing with cybercrimes.

In addition, the strategic partner of the Mohammad Al-Jassem Advocates and Legal Strategies Group, Mohammed Al-Jassem stated that cybercrimes have become a serious threat for most countries around the world.

He highlighted their devastating effect on national security and individual security as well.



Part of the training program - 'Principles of Photography'.

KUNA photography training course

Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Center for Development of Media Skills started on Sunday a training program titled 'Principles of Photography' attended by a number of employees from the agency and Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha).

The program, presented by Head of the Design and Photography department Mustafa Al-Bader, aimed to identify types of cameras and lenses as well as their uses and functions.

The training program, which runs until December 28, would explain some photography theories, applications on the camera and focus systems, how to use lighting in photography and practical applications. The program also would include a field photography trip.

The center, founded in 1995, is considered to be one of the most important media training centers, providing hundreds of training programs in various media fields and aiming to develop media capabilities and personal capabilities and improve professional media work. (KUNA)

Job instability experienced

MEW bags expat debts at airport

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: As the year 2023 draws to a close, Al-Seyassah reflects on the achievements and challenges faced by the Ministry of Electricity and Water (MEW) over the past twelve months. Despite encountering numerous failures, the Ministry experienced successes amid obstacles such as job instability among long-standing leaders and supervisors.

The primary failures include the extended documentary cycle, insufficient budgets for crucial projects like the construction of new power and water stations, and delays in implementing projects planned for years. To address energy needs, the Ministry allocated 30 million dinars to purchase energy from Gulf Cooperation Council countries and sought approval to contract with an international private sector company for emergency electrical energy.

On a positive note, the Ministry established an office at the airport to collect debts from expatriates before their departure, resulting in a significant increase in debt collection. Despite challenges, the Ministry managed a successful summer without resorting to purchasing energy from external sources, considering it an accomplishment for the current year, even with potential crises anticipated in 2024 and 2025.

The Ministry faced challenges in initiating a renewable energy proj-

Birds delay flights

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24, (KUNA): Air traffic returned to normal at Kuwait International Airport after a flock of birds near a runway forced brief delay of some takeoffs and landings, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation said Saturday.

The DGCA followed the internationally-recognized safety measures and closed the runway for a short time earlier today to ensure the safety of passengers, Spokesman of the Directorate Abdullah Al-Rajehi told KUNA.

The situation was brought back to normal after taking the necessary precautions, he added.

ect, particularly the installation of photovoltaic panels on its facilities. Despite having more than 17 planned projects, none materialized, raising concerns given the smaller scale of production compared to major projects like 'Al-Shaqaya' exceeding 1,000 megawatts.

Notable failures include a widespread outage in eight regions on September 9th due to a fire at the main transfer station in Hawalli and network malfunctions throughout the year.

However, the Ministry successfully opened two consumer affairs offices in Sabah Al-Ahmad Residential City and West Abdullah Al-Mubarak, enhancing service accessibility for consumers.

Going home ... Basha calls it a day at Arab Times

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: From the city of Andhra Pradesh, India, one man's dedication and commitment have left an indelible mark on the corridors of the Arab Times newspaper. Yem Kalisha Basha, embarked on his journey with the esteemed publication as an office boy starting August, 1982. Now, after 41 years of unwavering service, he bids adieu to the company on December 28, 2023, leaving behind a legacy of hard work, loyalty, and camaraderie.

Yem Kalisha Basha's story is not just one of professional milestones; it is a testament to the power of resilience, adaptability, and a relentless pursuit of excellence. From the humble role of an office boy, Yem Kalisha Basha grew to become an integral part of the Arab Times family, witnessing and contributing to the evolution of the newspaper over four decades.

His journey reflects the changing landscape

of the media industry, and Yem Kalisha Basha has been a steadfast witness to its challenges and triumphs. Through his years of service, he has not only shouldered responsibilities with grace but has also been a source of inspiration for his colleagues, earning their respect and admiration.

Yem Kalisha Basha's departure marks the end of an era. His contributions, both big and small, have woven into the fabric of the newspaper's history. The relationships he cultivated, the memories he leaves behind, and the lessons he imparts are invaluable.

The Arab Times family extends its deepest gratitude to Yem Kalisha Basha for his unwavering dedication and wishes him a well-deserved retirement. May the next chapter of his life be as fulfilling and rewarding as his illustrious career at the Arab Times.



Yem Kalisha Basha

6 contractors face penalties for violating MEW set rules

2 MEW officials under corruption probe

Other Voices

Iran, Al-Rubaie and history

By Ahmad alsarraf

Iran has played a destabilizing role in the Arab region, which resulted in its almost complete control over the decisions of four Arab capitals, and its mullahs did not hesitate to praise this from the podium.

But on the other hand, some believe that the dispute with it turned, over time, into unjustified hostility, took a sharp sectarian turn, and increased the hostility of the two parties to each other and their ignorance of each other.

This is attested to by the fact that the curricula of the schools of both parties and their media are devoid of almost anything about the other. If we compare the percentage of Arabs who visit Iran annually, for reasons other than religious matters, we would find them in the thousands, compared, for example, to the tens of millions who visit Turkey, and the reasons for this are many!

In a serious study carried out by the Iraqi researcher Fadel Al-Rubaie, and our colleague Abdul-Ghani Salama had previously touched upon it almost 10 years ago, as almost nothing has changed since that day, Al-Rubaie presented in his study an image that even those sympathetic to Iran may not know, contrary to what the Arab media has tended to portray, introducing it, especially recently.

Al-Rubaie first asks about the secret of the hysterical verbal hostility towards Iran, stressing that criticizing Iranian politics is a legitimate right, but it has turned over time to defaming Iranian history, values and culture, demonizing them and using racist descriptions such as Magians, Safavids, Shiites, Jews and temporary marriage ... etc.

"It is often met with the same obscene words from the other side, pointing out that the criticism directed is not subject to any ethical or scientific standard, as both sides do not have research centers specialized in Iranian or Arab studies, and all those who attack Iran are horribly ignorant of its history and geographical and demographic composition, but are merely heresy and wrong judgments, and even if we consider Iran an enemy, it is sad to fight "enemies" about whom we know nothing.

"There is no country in the world that has formed its identity independent of the influence of its neighbors, even if they were invaders. In this context, Iraq contributed, to a vital degree, to the formation of Iranian identity, and not the other way around, as the Iranian identity was formed linguistically, under the influence of its Iraqi neighbor, since the ancient Persian language replaced its "Indo-European" alphabet with the "Iraqi cuneiform" alphabet, and then adopted its current language in its letters and the rules of writing it in Arabic, abandoning its ancient language, and also part of its history, to attribute its

roots to Islamic history, and dealt with it as a part of it.

Iran has also been influenced by Iraqi worship since ancient times. Ishtar was a common deity for the two peoples. Just as the ancient Iraqis mourned the death of the god Tammuz, the ancient Iranians led processions of tears and weeping for him. Today, the two peoples cry over their religious symbols. In this context, Al-Rubaie believed that ancient Iran was a great civilization, but without a great religion, and this deficiency formed in it a complex that prompted it to search for a religious message, so they learned the Qur'an in the Arabic language, abandoning their ancient religions.

Al-Rubaie confirmed that describing the Iranians as Magi includes a major fallacy, as the word is a derogatory description given by the Persian pagans to the monotheists who preach one God (Zoroastrianism around 1500 BC), which means that the Persians are something different from the Magi, but Safavidism is something else, as it is not a religion.

It is not a religious sect, nor does it indicate contemporary Shiites, but rather a political Sufi movement that used the heritage of Islam to confront the Ottomans, and belongs ethnically to the Seljuk Turks, who waged a struggle against the Ottomans against the backdrop of an ethnic conflict, and after their takeover of Iran they approved the Twelver Shiite sect as an official doctrine of the state, and it has ended. Safavidism with Iran's conversion to Shiism. Also, saying that Iran was the one that imposed Shiism on the Iraqis is a falsification of history, as the opposite is true.

Persians make up 49% of the population, while Turks and Azeris make up about 20%, and Arabs make up about 7%, as do Kurds. Iran's senior religious leaders are not Persians, and the majority of them are fluent in Arabic.

Regarding the nature of the danger posed by Iran, Al-Rubaie believes that it has never had expansionist ambitions, even though it fought with its Turkish and Iraqi neighbors for long periods, as it was a traditional struggle over interests and areas of influence, in which the two sects (Sunni and Shiite) played the role of ideological cover to cover it up on his self-interested nature.

One of the common mistakes is linking Shiites with Persian nationalism. Iran knew the Shiite doctrine approximately 500 years ago, but Persianism is a national component that preceded Shiism by thousands of years. They are originally two conflicting components within the Iranian identity itself, and this is what is difficult to notice, and this conflict intensified in the interest of Persian nationalism, in the days of Pahlavi in 1925, then returned to the interests of Shiism with the Khomeini Revolution in 1979.

Note: We congratulate all our beloved Christians, inside and outside Kuwait, on Christmas and the Hijri New Year, wishing peace and love for all.

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Cars, buses burn in parking

1,967 traffic accidents in week

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The General Traffic Department announced that 1,967 traffic accidents occurred during the period from 16 to 22 of this month. Among these accidents, 868 were minor accidents and 254 were serious accidents, reports Al-Rai daily.

The Traffic Department stated, in a statement issued by it, that the traffic campaigns resulted in the referral of 20 violators to precautionary detention on the grounds of serious violations, and 19 juveniles to the Juvenile Prosecution for driving vehicles without a driving license, and the arrest of 19 wanted persons and 6 violators of the residency law.

The rescue personnel were able to arrest 172 people wanted by several authorities, 110 residency violators, 31 people in abnormal condition, 102 wanted vehicles, and seize 159 people without proof. They were referred to the competent authorities, to take legal measures against them.

Cars burn in parking: Acting on information from the Al-Samoud Center rushed to Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and put out fire to buses and private cars which were parked in a parking lot in an open area, reports Al-Jarida daily.

No injuries have been reported.

Food safety, cleanliness sought

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Inspection Supervisor in the Capital Governorate Unit at the Public Authority Food and Nutrition Abdullah Al-Siddiqi revealed that several inspection rounds were carried out recently, which resulted in the issuance of 36 violation reports and 12 closures, reports Al-Anba daily.

In a statement to the daily recently, Al-Siddiqi revealed that the inspection sector made a number of rounds and was divided into two groups to work 24 hours a day in shifts; indicating that the primary goal was to ensure the safety of food supplies and cleanliness. He said the uncovered violations include the swarm of insects in the central markets, affirming a violation report was filed for the destruction of food items in which cockroaches were found and the market was closed.

He pointed out that the tours included Shuwaikh Industrial Area, in which 36 violation reports were issued, including the closure of 10 commercial stores due to the presence of foodstuffs in unhygienic conditions and in places unsuitable for storage.

"We destroyed the foodstuffs, and the total number of closures at the level of the Capital Governorate reached 12 food establishments," he added.

He also confirmed that the companies' food supplies were destroyed in the warehouses as they were found to be unfit for human consumption, and a violations report was drawn up, in addition to other violations committed by workers without health certificates, where a violation was issued to the worker and the company owner, stressing that the fine for employing a worker without a health certificate amounts to a thousand Kuwaiti dinars.

He revealed that a tour of the Ministry of Education's school canteens was conducted to check the places where food is prepared and the methods of transporting and storing them. Some companies had previously been warned about the need for cars to meet the conditions, for workers to obtain health certificates, and for places that sell food to meet the conditions in terms of cleanliness, air conditioning and other requirements.

By Mohammad Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times
Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: According to reliable sources, the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy will report six contractors to the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) to impose penalties on them because they violated the terms included in the relevant contracts.

The sources explained that CAPT is authorized to impose the penalties as per article 85 of Law No. 49/2016.

The penalties expected to be imposed could vary between removing the contractors from the CAPT register, suspending their participation in public tenders for certain time periods, and excluding them from bidding for tenders.

Meanwhile, Head of the judicial arrest team at the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Ahmad Al-Shammari affirmed that campaigns are ongoing in all governorates to control infringements on the electricity and water network, as many violations have been monitored that may negatively affect the network.

He revealed that more than 30 violations have been recorded since the beginning of December such as tampering with fuses, direct connections without meters, changing the sizes of breakers, and so on.

Al-Shammari said the team has received a number of complaints from tenants about owners cutting power supply. He said the team dealt with these complaints with complete impartiality and in accordance with the relevant regulations.

He said, "Campaigns against violators were held in the past days in Farwaniya, Capital, and Hawally governorates. The team also implemented a joint campaign from several government agencies to control violations and violators."

Officials under probe: Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and Acting Minister of Public Works, Jassem Al-Ostad referred two officials from the ministry to the public authority for anti-corruption (Nazaha) on suspicions of corruption.

The ministry told (KUNA) in a statement that the investigative committee, established by Al-Ostad, immediately after these violations came to light, proved that "it caused damage to many civilians and other parties"

An investigation proved that the two deliberately disrupted tenders having to do with electricity and damaging electricity connected to civilian homes and other public projects.

According to the statement, "the deliberate disruption of tenders forced people to buy their own cables, and further making them sign a pledges to never demand compensation from the ministry" negatively affecting the ministry's reputation with claims of incompetence.

In the previous months, Al-Ostad referred a number of officials in government bodies under his supervision to the public prosecution and Nazaha for suspicions of corruption and infringement of public money.

1 dead in mishap: One person died and another was injured in a road accident on the Doha Link Road, reports Al-Anba daily.

The cause of the accident is not known.

300 deported: During a security crackdown on violators of residence and labor laws, outlaws and people wanted by law, the security authorities during a campaign in Farwaniya, Khaitan, Al-Qurain Markets, Salhiya and the Shuwaikh Industrial Area have arrested 300 people and handed them over to the deportation center, reports Al-Anba daily.

The campaigns were organized in cooperation with Public Authority for Manpower and the Kuwait Municipality.

diwaniya



A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Bu Hassam, a philanthropist who worked for God's reward, blessing

"In the area of philanthropy, we turn our attention to an individual, and we implore God for success in our endeavor," columnist Dr Abdul Mohsen Al-Jarallah Al-Kharafi, wrote for Al-Qabas daily.

"The tales of virtue and benevolence among the honorable people of Kuwait in its bygone era are truly captivating. Yet, what surpasses all is when this noble spirit is intertwined with a reluctance to seek public recognition.

"It is in these moments that the authentic feats and lessons of Kuwait's virtuous citizens emerge. Such is the case with the benevolent Fawzi Muhammad Abdul Mohsen Al-Kharafi, may God have mercy on his soul. These accounts were personally shared with me by his esteemed nephew, Engineer Hosam Fawzi Al-Kharafi.

"Engineer Hosam recounts, "My father, Fawzi Al-Kharafi, may God have mercy on him, eschewed media visibility. He avoided having his name associated with charitable endeavors, preferring only the title 'philanthropist' or his nickname 'Buhusam.' This was a testament to his earnest commitment to serving God."

"The philanthropist Fawzi Al-Kharafi, also known as Bu Hassam, may God have mercy on him, contributed to acts of righteousness and charity that extend beyond the scope of these humble lines. His altruistic efforts reached various corners of the world, collaborating with numerous charitable and humanitarian organizations.

"In Kuwait, the list of projects is too vast to enumerate fully, ranging from establishing comprehensive Islamic centers, constructing and renovating mosques, providing homes for orphans, supporting educational institutions, sponsoring students of knowledge, and other benevolent endeavors. We beseech Almighty God to accept these deeds sincerely for His honorable countenance.

"In addition to his charitable initiatives, Bu Hassam demonstrated unwavering loyalty to his family. He dedicated numerous charitable projects in memory of his father, mother, grandmother, and grandfather, may God have mercy on them all, including Islamic complexes in Indonesia and Bangladesh.

"These brief lines aim to shed light on Bu Hassam's exemplary stances, may God have mercy on him. On one occasion, during the blessed month of Ramadan, Kuwaiti television aired a renowned program titled "The Bridge of Goodness."

"Influenced by the humanitarian cases presented, Bu Hassam instructed his son Hosam to support over twelve cases out of the thirty daily humanitarian cases. His involvement included treatment abroad, immediate financial aid, such as checks sent to beneficiaries, and assistance for disabled individuals, including purchasing cars and funding complex surgeries. When invited for a television interview,

"Bu Hassam declined, emphasizing that his actions were solely for the sake of God, refusing any acknowledgment or gratitude. Even when offered a phone interview during the program, he declined, appointing his office manager to discuss the mechanisms of aiding the adopted cases.

"One unforgettable act of kindness involved the delay of salaries for workers in a company under Bu Hassam's management due to a technical issue. Upon learning of the delay, he proactively used his personal funds, around nine hundred thousand Kuwaiti dinars, to pay all the salaries, considering it non-refundable. The joy and gratitude expressed by the employees left a lasting impression on him, as they continually prayed for his well-being.

"May God have mercy on you, Bu Hassam, for your concealed acts of goodness, undertaken solely for the sake of God's reward and approval."

Also:

"The Minister of Defense of the Zionist entity, Yoav Galant, confirmed that the army "is fighting against evil, and we must win," stressing that the war will be long, and that they are paying difficult prices in exchange for achieving their goals," columnist **Suad Fahd Al-Mojil** wrote for Al-Qabas daily.

"Thus, then, the Zionist entity sees its war and its future motives behind this war, while on the other hand, some Arab intellectuals come out to us in a party of theorizing about the merits of the Al-Aqsa Flood operation, the danger of the state of inequality between the two parties in it, and the possibility of its regional expansion, which may portend alliances that may pose a threat to countries of the region, while warning from time to time about Hamas' lack of accurate calculations based on advanced knowledge, information, and military, intelligence, and material capabilities.

"The war of the Vietnamese people against America at that time was not equal, and although Soviet support was heaped on the North Vietnamese army, while the United States supported the southern army, the Vietnamese called that war the war of resistance against America, and in the period between November 1955 and the fall of Saigon in April 1975, all the Vietnamese fought on their land, in their tunnels, and in their jungles, and leaders emerged from their ranks, such as the military and political General Giap, who is considered one of the most important figures in the Vietnam War, and he was the author of the Dien Bien Phu battle plan, which defeated France in 1954, and later contributing to the defeat of American forces.

"The Vietnamese at that time used all available

capabilities, from transport vehicles to animals, to deliver materials and weapons to the resistance. They were only preoccupied at the time with the course of the battle and achieving their goals of struggle, so that after the dust of war had settled, they were able to organize their ranks politically, so that Vietnam today became one of the leading countries industrially and economically.

"The Vietnamese scene returns today in Gaza. Everyone who fights on its territory today is a hero, and everyone who dies is a martyr, regardless of his party, intellectual or ideological affiliation. The crimes of the Zionist entity have united the goals and refined the differences, and there is no longer any difference between a Hamas fighter or a fighter. From the Popular Front, from the Jihad Movement, or from any other faction, the goal today has become common, in which there is no place except for resistance, and there is no voice in it except for the bullets emerging from the certainty and conscience of every free resistor.

"There are certainly mazes in wars, and the longer the war lasts, the more speculation and possibilities increase about its course changing, alliances changing, and other parties entering into it. But today, for more than two months, we have been dealing with one scene, which sums up in its details the feelings of victory that we have long missed as Arab peoples, after a series of frustrating defeats, which made the Arab soul wither, break, and shroud in disappointment due to the absence of the slightest degree of dignity and chivalry.

"The scene of Gaza today does not accept division or theorization. It is a scene that did not come about as a result of the October 7 attack, but rather as a result of a long series of massacres, wars, pain, abuse, and psychological and moral defeats. It is a scene that is difficult for us as Arabs to comprehend after we have been able to witness scenes of weakness and intermarriage deals with the entity.

"Zionism, which killed every sign of hope in the proud Arab soul, despite the fact that we are the people who repeat most of the poems and sayings that favor the act of resistance and struggle, from "and for red freedom there is a door with every striking hand it knocks," to "what was taken by force can only be recovered by force," and others, a lot.

"Over more than seventy-five years, the Palestinians have tried all methods, from Arab wars, to Arab peace, and to consultations for a two-state solution. They have waited a long time in their shelters and camps, embracing their pain without Arab hope, and today they are the ones imposing solutions, after all the agreements and false peace treaties fell. And the mined normalization truces, the Palestinians became convinced that resistance is the only weapon.

"Indeed, it is the weapon that inflicted on the Zionist entity losses that the Arab armies, with their many wars, could not cost the entity half of.

"Therefore, the theorizing of some Arab intellectuals today and their warning of the intentions of "Hamas" is completely outside the scene, the scene that is driven by the Palestinian resistance with all its factions and all its affiliations. This is the only reality today on the ground, as the resistance is the official spokesman, and it is the one who has the political and military decision, at least in the current pivotal stage."

□ □ □

"His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah protect and preserve him, is the 17th ruler of the State of Kuwait. He is the seventh son of HH the late Amir Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah have mercy on him," columnist **Mohammad Ali Al-Naqib** wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"His Highness, may Allah protect him, studied at Al-Mubarakiya School, and then at the Hendon Police College in the United Kingdom. After graduation, he joined the Ministry of Interior until he was appointed head of the General Investigations Department, which became the State Security Service during his tenure.

"In 2004, an Amiri decree was issued appointing His Highness as Deputy Chief of the National Guard with the rank of Minister. His Highness held the position until he assumed the Crown Prince post in 2020. His Highness, may Allah protect him, had clear imprints in the development of the State Security Service and the National Guard that witnessed distinct stages of development in terms of performing duties and tasks in the Homeland Defense System. During his tenure as Deputy Chief of the National Guard, the President of the French Republic awarded him the Order of Commander of the Legion of Honour.

"On Dec 16, 2023, when HH the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah passed away, may Allah bless him and grant him a good resting place next to his Lord. His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah -- may Allah protect and preserve him -- was declared as Amir of the State of Kuwait.

"On this blessed occasion, we are honored to extend to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah protect and preserve him, our warmest congratulations and best wishes for taking the reins of government and for obtaining the support of the beloved State of Kuwait. We implore Allah Almighty to guide his steps. May Allah grant him success and support, and may the State of Kuwait and its people be blessed with progress, prosperity, security, safety and stability under his wise and rational leadership."

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes

Two die, 2 hurt in ATV mishaps

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Jahra security men have impounded 90 All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) and handed them over to the Kuwait Municipality and arrested 10 expatriates for renting them without a license, reports Al-Rai daily.

This happened during a security campaign in the Subbiya desert which was organized upon instructions from the Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior for the Public Security Sector, Major General Abdullah Al-Rujaib.

Security sources explained to Al-Rai that due to the illegal rental of these ATV, four accidents happened within 24 hours, resulting in the death of two people and the injury of two others, including a 25-year-old girl who was transferred to intensive care in Jahra Hospital.

Regulations issued on allocation of service, craft, commercial lots

PAI to put plots up for bidding in public auction

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Minister of Commerce and Industry and State Minister for Youth Affairs Muhammad Al-Aiban issued a ministerial decision specifying the rules and regulations on the allocation of service, craft and commercial lots under the supervision of the Public Authority for Industry (PAI) in order to limit speculation on these plots, and give the developers and serious investors a chance to use these plots for their enterprises, reports Al-Qabas daily quoting reliable sources.



Al-Aiban

Sources revealed the decision specifies a mechanism for allocating the above-mentioned plots by putting them up for bidding in a public auction. Sources confirmed that most categories can participate in the auction provided they meet conditions.

Sources stressed that the decision will prevent the exploitation of these plots as it requires the assignment or sale of the usufruct right within a period of not less than three years from the date of signing the usufruct contract with the authority and provided the plot is fully built and utilized in order to limit speculation on it.

Important

Following are the most important provisions of Ministerial Resolution No. 32 of 2023 applicable to service, craft and commercial plots under the supervision of PAI, regardless of their location:

- The authority shall put these plots up for bidding in a public auction, such that the plots are awarded to the highest bidders.
- The plots allocated before this resolution took effect are subject to the provisions of Council of Ministers Resolution No. 141 of 2023 regard-

ing the allocation of industrial, craft, service and commercial plots, as well as the service wages and fees imposed by PAI; or any subsequent decisions issued in this regard.

- The auction committee is formed as per the minister's decision and it shall consist of three members from PAI, one member from the Legal Advice and Legislation Department, and one from the Ministry of Finance.

- A contract shall be concluded with the winning bidder to benefit from the plot for a period of five years, renewable for a similar period or another period as per the request submitted by the beneficiary or his legal representative, and after the authority's approval of the renewal.

- The beneficiary is obligated to use the plot only for permitted activities, in accordance with the license issued. It is not permissible to engage in other activities except after obtaining the approval of PAI and other concerned authorities.

- The beneficiary is obligated to pay the corresponding fees to PAI annually and a 10 percent penalty is applied in case of delayed payment.

- The beneficiary is allowed to sublease the plot as per the relevant regulations, while it is not permissible to sublease service plots in industrial areas except after obtaining approval from PAI. The subtenant can engage in the same activities stipulated for the beneficiary in the terms and conditions.

- If the beneficiary wishes to renew the contract, he is obligated to express his desire to renew three months before the end of the contract period. During this period, he is obligated to fulfill all the requirements for renewal and fine will be imposed in case of delay.

- Employees assigned by the minister have the right to enter the plots to monitor the implementation of the provisions of this decision, and all related decisions and regulations. They have the right to inspect premises, uncover violations, and submit reports in this regard to the concerned authorities.

- The beneficiary cannot assign the plot without obtaining approval from PAI and it should be done in accordance with Article 13 of the relevant law.

On adding or changing activities:

- The beneficiary or his legal representative should submit the request for changing or adding activities using the forms prepared by the authority.

- Pay the prescribed fees for change or addition.
- There are no violations or unpaid dues.

- Obtain approval from the competent authorities for the activities required to be added or changed.

Waiver

Regarding the waiver of service, craft, and commercial plots:

- The beneficiary or his legal representative should submit the waiver request using the forms prepared by the authority.

- The assignee must meet the condition for allocating the plot -- three years have passed from the date of concluding the usufruct contract.

- The plot must be fully built and utilized for its intended purpose in accordance with the schedule approved by the competent authority.

- Pay the dues in full.

- Pay the prescribed fees for the waiver.

- There are no violations on the plot.

- There are no judicial rulings regarding non-assignment or disposal of the plot.

- Obtain approval from the concerned government agencies.

The decision states that in valid contracts, the beneficiary of the fully built plot is given a period of six months from the date of issuance of this decision to utilize it in accordance with the licensed activities, while the beneficiary of the plot that is still vacant is granted a period of one year to obtain building permits from the competent authorities and use the plot in accordance with the approved activities, and it is permissible to extend the period if the reasons are valid.

In the event that the contract period expires without renewing it or if the plot is withdrawn, the beneficiary is obligated to deliver the plot to the authority free of problems and physical or legal impediments that prevents it from being reallocated. Otherwise, the authority may vacate it administratively and at its expense, and the fate of the buildings and machinery erected on the plot will be in accordance with the terms and conditions of the contract.

The beneficiary's heirs shall replace him with the same conditions agreed upon in the contract during the remaining period of the contract, provided that an application is submitted to the authority on the form prepared by the authority for this purpose within six months from the date of the beneficiary's death. Within a period of one year from the date of taking the place of the deceased, the heirs must transfer the benefit right to a natural or legal person.

Working from home in India?

Insights from CA Gandhi: key rules for NRIs on money, gold & taxation

CA Surin Gandhi is a Senior Investment Analyst employed with Astrolabe Holding Company. He serves as a Committee member of The Kuwait Chapter of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (KCICAI).



Surin Gandhi

Arab Times (AT): What are the stipulated limits for the amount of money and gold an NRI can carry when visiting India?

Gandhi: For cash, an NRI can carry up to USD 10,000 or its equivalent in foreign currency without customs declaration.

For gold, a male passenger is allowed to carry a maximum of 20 gms, which doesn't cost more than Rs. 50,000 and a female passenger can carry a maximum of 40 gms that should not cost more than Rs. 1 lakh as a duty-free allowance.

AT: Is the salary transferred to an NRI account taxable if you are working from home in India?

Gandhi: If an NRI is working from home in India, the tax implications would depend on various factors, including the duration of stay in India and the residential status. If the person is working remotely for a foreign employer, his/her salary earned outside India is generally not taxable in India. However, if he/she is physically present in India for more than 182 days in a financial year while working remotely, full salary is taxable in India.

AT: What must NRIs do after returning to India for good? (Bank notification)

Gandhi: Upon returning to India for good, an NRI must notify his/her bank within 30 days about the change in residential status. They need to convert their NRI accounts to resident accounts or open new resident accounts. Provide necessary documents to the bank as per RBI guidelines.

AT: What is the process for NRIs to file tax returns, and are there specific guidelines or requirements that need clarification in this regard?

Gandhi: NRIs with taxable income in India if such income exceeds the basic exemption limit, need to file income tax returns before July 31st of the following year. The process involves obtaining a Permanent Account Number (PAN), filing the return online on the portal, and fulfilling other compliance requirements as necessary.

AT: What emerging investment opportunities are available for NRIs beyond traditional choices like real estate and gold?

Gandhi: India's financial landscape is evolving, and there are diverse investment options beyond traditional choices. For NRIs looking to invest outside real estate and gold, they can consider:

- Equity markets and Mutual Funds
- Startups and SMEs: Invest in high-growth Indian businesses through angel investing or venture capital funds.
- Infrastructure Bonds: Offer attractive returns with government backing and contribute to India's development.
- Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs): Provide access to diverse assets like private equity, debt, and real estate with

higher potential returns.

AT: What are the challenges and issues that NRIs can face while investing in real estate in India?

Gandhi: NRIs may face challenges such as legal complexities, delays in property transactions, lack of physical presence to manage property, currency fluctuations, and lack of transparency in real estate transactions. It is crucial to conduct thorough due diligence and seek legal advice before investing.

AT: What recommendations are advised for NRIs facing a limited time-frame stay in India due to delays in government processes?

Gandhi:

- Appoint a trustworthy power of attorney to manage your affairs in your absence.

- Plan investments carefully, consider short-term liquid investment options such as mutual funds or bonds that are easy to encash. Be aware of the regulatory and procedural delays.

- Consider renting instead of buying property unless you have a long-term commitment.

- Seek professional advice of registered wealth advisors

AT: How can NRIs avoid double taxation, and where exactly do Indians end up paying taxes twice?

Gandhi: NRIs can avoid double taxation by utilizing Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements (DTAA), claiming foreign tax credits, and understanding the residential status. It is advisable to seek advice from a tax consultant to ensure compliance with applicable tax treaties and take advantage of available DTAA exemptions.

AT: What are the restrictions for NRIs in India in terms of investments in India?

Gandhi: While NRIs have various investment options, there may be restrictions on certain sectors as regulated by FEMA guidelines. Some of these include:

- NRIs cannot invest in agricultural land or purchase agricultural properties directly.
- Certain restrictions apply to investments in sensitive sectors like defense and atomic energy.

See Also Page 9



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Bahain

December

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 57.173/-net	BHD 128.000/-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 19th - 31st December 2023

Terms & conditions apply*



From right: Dawwas, Al-Haddad, and Professor Zabalawi.

AU attains Investors in People Silver Accreditation

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Australian University (AU) is proud to announce its receipt of the Silver Accreditation from Investors in People, recognizing the university's continuous dedication to international standards in human resources practices and development.

Investors in People sets the global standard for effective people management, defining what its essential elements to lead, support, and manage people effectively to achieve sustainable results. Underpinning the standard is the Investors in People framework, reflecting the latest workplace trends, essential skills and effective structures required to outperform in any industry. Investors in People enables organizations to benchmark against the best in the business on an international scale.

AU received the accreditation due to its commitment towards providing a career nourishing experience for its staff members where career paths are clearly defined, staff recognition and engagement initiatives are utmost and professional development opportunities are identified and implemented. AU works to attain excellence in its HR operations which will in turn aid in producing knowledgeable, competent, and well-rounded graduates for Kuwait's expanding economy.

Commenting on the accreditation, Mr. Paul Devoy, CEO of Investors in People, said: "We'd like to congratulate Australian University, Kuwait on receiving the silver accreditation. Invest in people is a remarkable effort for any organization, and places Australian University in fine company with a host of organizations that understand the value of people."

Ms. Dalal Dawwas, Senior Manager of Employee Relations at AU, also stated: "We are celebrating a major milestone: earning "We Invest in People" Silver Accreditation! We are incredibly proud of our commitment to employee development, and we are grateful for the acknowledgment from Investors in People."

Furthermore, Ms. Sondos Al-Haddad, Senior Manager of Human Resources at AU, commented: "We would like to thank our team who contributed to this excellent result which demonstrates commitment to provide the best service for our staff members."

AU President Professor Isam Zabalawi acknowledged the achievement, stating: "This is an excellent benchmark for the Australian University (AU) to achieve higher standards in people management practices". AU remains committed to fostering an environment that values and invests in its people.

Ministry to construct buildings with high technical, engineering technology

MPW-CITRA coordinate for designing authorities new headquarters

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Ministry of Public Works has been coordinating with the Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) for the issuance of a public tender to design a new head-

quarters of CITRA.

According to sources from the ministry, the construction of the building was assigned to the ministry in accordance with the Cabinet's Resolution No. 519. The ministry, in turn, will obtain approvals and complete the design and implementation procedures based on the decision of the General Secre-

tariat of the Council of Ministers, as well as obtain the necessary licenses for the project and the approvals of the relevant authorities.

The ministry's Construction Projects Sector, has been implementing the buildings of government agencies and ministries within its jurisdiction, in order to provide the rental value

that these agencies pay annually to the private sector and incur huge sums of money to the state. Another tender will be floated later for the constructions and execution of the headquarters.

The sources revealed that the tender was referred to Ministry of Public Works according to the decision of the Council of Ministers No. 419. CITRA has fin-

ished the requirements of the tender including the design of the headquarters as well as the other buildings.

They said CITRA has received the plot allocated for the project located in Sharq, and it will continue to obtain the rest of approvals according to the decision issued by Secretariat General at the Council of Ministers.

The sources said the ministry is constructing these buildings with high technical and engineering technology that keeps pace with the requirements and needs of ministries and government agencies, and also keeps pace with modern changes in construction and building. It also aims to save the money paid to private sector.

Indeed, they

Continued from Page 1

It is "cauterizing" for anyone who wants to fish in troubled waters, irrespective of whether they have local agendas whose goals are known, or are lurking in Kuwait from abroad.

During the opening session of the current term of the National Assembly a few months ago, Your Highness had warned the National Assembly and the Council of Ministers of the consequences of continuing with the approach of achieving interests, but they did not heed the sound advice.

Therefore, your speech during the oath-taking session about what happened expressed what the Kuwaitis sensed, that the deals amounted to conspiracy.

In fact, the scene seemed as though there were 51 Amirs in Kuwait - one in the Palace of Government, and 50 in the National Assembly - while the ministers appeared as if they were employees, and not people with major responsibilities who had to work for the country's highest interests.

Your Highness, may Almighty Allah honor you. With your sublime speech, you have made the citizens feel like they are under your highest attention and follow-up, and that you follow up every big and small thing, and you are keen on reform, no matter how painful it is. This is especially after the practices prevalent over the past three decades that have spread tribalism, sectarianism, and factions.

Therefore, the country today needs an experienced captain who is aware of the risks, works to confront changes locally, regionally and internationally in a way that benefits Kuwait, and is strong in his resolve, which does not deviate from the decision. You are the best captain of the Kuwait ship at this sensitive stage.

Your Highness, Kuwait needs a decision-making government in which the hands of its ministers do not tremble. There should be no quota-based governments, but a government that knows what Kuwait wants, and whose main concern is a better future for the people and the country. It should be a government that preserves its sovereignty and puts higher interests ahead of every personal interest. It should be a government that realizes the importance of attracting foreign investments and encouraging local ones, especially after Kuwait has described as an investment-repelling environment since 2009, and after some international credit rating centers announced its decline but the successive governments did not work to address this sensitive and important matter.

It goes without saying that the pressure on citizens' livelihoods is increasing. Their purchasing power is declining, especially in light of the high cost of craft labor, due to attempts to "dilute" it with laws and decisions that have affected all productive sectors such as the laws and decisions related to expatriates over 60 years of age, and others who have resided here for many years. All of these have turned into added value in neighboring countries, which opened their doors for them.

Your Highness, what the country needs, after 30 years and maybe more of failed experiments or ill-considered decisions, is to work quickly but without haste, to revive light and heavy industries, and to truly pay attention to food security, as well as opening the country, as is customary in all countries of the world, because all of this contributes to an active economic movement and stimulates the financial cycle.

Likewise, it is certain that Kuwait's role has declined regionally and internationally in the past years, as if it had abandoned its policy, which had created a strong presence for it in the world.

Let us be busy boasting about a democracy in which, to say the least, it is "one-eyed" that only sees with one eye, which is chatter and not production, as is the case in countries similar to ours in a democratic system of government.

Let's refrain from boasting about a democracy that, to say the least, is one eyed, in the sense that it focuses only on chatter rather than tangible productivity. This echoes the situation in countries akin to ours under a democratic governance system.

Your Highness, you are the beacon of hope and wisdom. You are firm in your decisions, and strict in your accountability. That is why all Kuwaitis today have begun to see the features of a new era.

The coming days must bring good news for them. We also pray for your good health and long life, so that our dreams with you may materialize.

Kuwait tightens

Continued from Page 1

He added security officers will be stationed in different areas like the chalets, beaches, Subiya, end of Jaber Bridge and desert to prevent the violation of public morals. He said Sabah Al-Ahmad Marine Police Station and Wafra Police Station will also carry out their duties in maintaining security and public order; stressing all the participating security services will conduct inspections to monitor violations or manifestations of violation of public morals. He warned that all those proven to have committed violations will be dealt with as per the law.

About the reckless activities along highways such as Wafra and Salmi, he asserted there will be a strict mechanism to prevent such activities as all the concerned patrols have been instructed to prevent the gatherings of vehicles and individuals who engage in reckless acts that endanger their lives and that of other people. "If any of these reckless people are caught, they will be referred to the concerned authorities, along with their vehicles," he stressed.

MPs eye

Continued from Page 1

The board shall be granted all the powers to lay down the State's AI strategy, follow up the execution of this, lay down plans and programs for AI development, lay down governance strategies, and issue licenses for individuals and entities to manage AI establishments according to the criteria and conditions in this regard.

The board should hold regular meetings - at least six meetings per year.

PAAI should have an independent budget that starts at the beginning of the fiscal year. Its revenues shall be handed over to the public treasury except the amount specified to be kept in its custody as per the request of the concerned minister. This amount must not exceed 10 percent of the total revenues and it should be used as the reserve fund of PAAI. Once the reserve fund amount equals the capital of PAAI, all its revenues must be handed over to the public treasury.

The chief executive officer (CEO) of PAAI must be appointed with the undersecretary job degree according to the decision of the Council of Ministers. PAAI must submit a report to the Council of Ministers in the first three months of every fiscal year.

The concerned minister should issue the executive regulations for this bill within one year of its ratification.

MPs Muhammad Al-Sayer, Abdullah Al-Mudhaf, Abdulaziz Al-Saqaab, Hassan Jawhar and Mubarak Al-Tasha have submitted a proposal to amend the Judiciary Law in order to organize the litigation works related to judges or public prosecutors.

According to the bill, the convicted individuals have the right to complain against the judge or public prosecutor

in case the latter commits a mistake or cheats during trial. The complaint must be submitted within 60 days after the issuance of the verdict or once the concerned convict discovers the error. The complaint should be submitted to the concerned court, which then decides to hear or dismiss the case. If the complaint is proven correct, the erring judge or public prosecutor is referred to the concerned institution for disciplinary action. The State shall pay the compensation for the complainant, and then take the amount from the erring judge or public prosecutor. The maximum compensation is KD3,000. If the complaint is dismissed, the amount that the complainant paid to proceed with the hearing is non-refundable. The final verdict issued by the Court of Cassation is not subject to the aforementioned regulations.

The bill also stipulates the establishment of minor courts in the governorates as per the decision of the First Instance Court chairperson. A minor court is chaired by one judge and such court is established based on the needs of the governorates. The General Assembly of the First Instance Court shall specify one or more courts at the Capital Governorate to handle the lawsuits of government or public institutions.

The bill states that judges and public prosecutors are prohibited from doing the following: engage in commercial activities while doing their judicial jobs, give political opinions, get involved with political blocs, run for elections as long as they are working in the judiciary, and participate in political meetings or gatherings. Judges in the same court must not be related until the fourth degree and the public prosecutor must not handle any case involving relatives up to the fourth degree.

The bill states that a judge or public prosecutor cannot be arrested or investigated unless he is caught red-handed or as per the decision of the Supreme Judiciary Council based on the request of the Public Prosecution. In case a judge or public prosecutor is arrested red-handed, the prosecutor in charge of investigations must inform the Supreme Judiciary Council within 24 hours of the arrest. Only the Supreme Judiciary Council has the authority to issue a decision to detain, extend the detention or release the erring judge or public prosecutor as per the Procedures and Trials Law.

On the other hand, Chairman of the parliamentary Financial and Economic Affairs Committee MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri has confirmed the committee's approval of the bills on increasing the cost of living allowance of citizens and granting zero interest loans to retirees. He added these bills were included in the agenda of the session slated for Dec 19, but the session was cancelled in view of the death of HH the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

He said these bills might be included in the agenda of the upcoming session, clarifying the committee does not mind if the cost of living allowance is increased and zero interest loans are granted to retirees as per the legislation or executive decision in this regard. He stressed that the main goal is to fulfill the demands of citizens.

Rapporteur of the committee MP Dawoud Maarefi revealed certain details about the proposed amendment of Article 112bis of the Public Institution for Social Security (PIFSS) Law number 61/1976. He disclosed that the bills include increasing the maximum amount of the zero interest loans for retirees to be 15 times the pension, instead of seven times. He said the proposed installments for such loans are 10, 15 or 20 percent of the pension; indicating this will be the choice of the borrower. He added that once the borrower pays the loan in full, he has the right to apply for a new loan but the installment will be 25 percent of his pension.

He added the other bills are aimed on increasing the cost of living allowance of citizens working in the public and private sectors, as well as those covered by the Fifth Chapter of PIFSS Law from KD130 to KD 250 per month. He affirmed that the committee has referred its reports on these bills to the Assembly.

Moreover, Al-Muwaizri revealed that he obtained the signatures of MPs Abdullah Fehad, Dawoud Maarefi and Khalid Al-Otaibi on the proposal he submitted to hold a session on Jan 7, 2024 to discuss the speech of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah after taking the constitutional oath, especially his statement about those who conspired to harm the interests of the nation and its people.

In a press conference, Al-Muwaizri presented copies of the front pages of some daily newspapers that allegedly attacked the National Assembly when the Amiri speech was released. He claimed the owners of these daily newspapers do not want the Assembly to continue, since it goes against their personal interests. He stressed that he deals with everyone as per the Constitution, which regulates all issues concerning the State.

Arab Parliament

Continued from Page 1

battle since the start of the ground offensive and a sign that Hamas is still putting up a fight despite weeks of brutal war.

The mounting death toll among Israeli troops is likely to play an important factor in Israeli public support for the war, which was sparked when Hamas-led militants stormed communities in southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 and taking 240 hostage. The war has devastated parts of the Gaza Strip, killed roughly 20,400 Palestinians and displaced nearly 85% of Gaza's 2.3 million people.

The Health Ministry in Hamas-controlled Gaza said 166 people were killed in the coastal enclave over the past day.

Israelis still stand firmly behind the country's stated goals of crushing Hamas' governing and military capabilities and releasing the remaining 129 captives. That support has stayed mostly steady despite rising international pressure against Israel's offensive and the soaring death toll and unprecedented suffering among Palestinians.

But the growing number of dead soldiers could undermine that support. Soldiers' deaths are a sensitive and emotional topic in Israel, a country with compulsory military service for most Jews.

The names of fallen soldiers are announced at the top of hourly newscasts, and in a small country of about 9 million people, virtually every family knows a relative, friend or co-worker who has lost a family member in war.

The 14 Israeli soldiers killed on Friday and Saturday died in battles in central and southern Gaza, an indication of how Hamas is still putting up tough resistance against advancing Israeli troops, even as Israel claims to have dealt a serious blow to the militant group.

According to Israeli Army Radio, four soldiers were killed when their vehicle was struck by an anti-tank missile. The others were killed in separate, sporadic fighting.

Another soldier was killed in northern Israel by fire from the Lebanese Shiite militant group Hezbollah, which has kept up low-level fighting with Israel since the war with Hamas erupted, raising fears of a wider regional conflict.

Their deaths bring the number of Israeli soldiers killed since the ground offensive began to 153.

"The war exacts a very heavy price from us but we have no choice but to continue fighting," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told a meeting of his Cabinet Sunday. "We are continuing with all the force, until the end, until victory, until we reach all our goals."

Even if Israelis have been supportive of the war effort, there has been widespread anger against Netanyahu's government, which many criticize for failing to protect civilians on Oct. 7 and promoting policies that allowed Hamas to gain strength over the years.

On Saturday night, thousands of people demonstrated in pouring rain in Tel Aviv, chanting "Bibi, Bibi, we don't want you anymore," referring to Netanyahu by his nickname.

Netanyahu has avoided accepting responsibility for the military and policy failures leading up to Oct. 7, saying he

KOC workers union to discuss amendments to some articles

MC seeks responses of top body to members queries

By Najeh Bilal and Inass Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Workers Union of the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) has set tomorrow for holding its special general assembly to discuss amendments to some articles of the union's bylaws, amid widespread rejection of some amendments.

The union explained that the meeting will be held based on the decision of the union's board of directors, which met on December 21.

A number of workers of KOC objected to the proposed amendments, which include increasing the number of members of the Board of Directors from 15 to 19, increasing the annual subscription fee from KD 1 to KD 3, as well as amending the item related to resignation.

If a member is absent three times in a row or ten random meetings in a year without an acceptable excuse, he will be considered as resigned.

The proposed amendments also include adding new committees to organize the union's affairs in addition to the Cultural and Social committees, Fellowship Fund Committee, Media Committee, Complaints Committee, Negotiations Committee, Investment Committee and Follow-up of Retirement Affairs Committee.

Increasing

The union indicated that all proposals are open to discussion, with the exception of the one related to increasing the number of members of the Board of Directors, as this is unacceptable to a large segment of the KOC workers.

Meanwhile, on Monday, the Municipal Council will discuss, during its 11th regular session of the second term headed by Abdullah Al-Mahri, a number of items on its agenda, the most prominent of which are the responses of the executive body to the members' questions such as the one submitted by member Sharifa Al-Shalfan regarding the names and locations of the municipality's parks, and the standards of safety in public places and play areas, as well as the question submitted by member Dr. Hassan Kamal regarding the allocation and licensing of storage sites.

The Municipal Council will also be discussing the response to the question submitted by member Abdullah Al-Enezi regarding future and vital projects, including the Sulabikhat Bay development project, the Jahra Front, and the Al-Khuwaissat tourist area, as well as discussing the final account of the Kuwait Municipality for the fiscal year of 2021/2022.

It will also deliberate on the draft ministerial decision regarding a regulation on the cultivation of state-owned squares adjacent to private residential homes, the request to allocate a site for the construction of a secondary transformer plant in Jabriya, and a request from the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs to allocate a mosque site within the premises of the General Authority for the Quran, Sunnah and its Sciences in the government area in South Surra. It will also discuss the complaint filed by a Kuwaiti citizen against another regarding violations in a residential property in Shamiya, as well as the United Real Estate Company's objection to the council's decision to reorganize part of the Blocks 4 and 7 in Qibla.

would answer tough questions once the fighting is over.

On Saturday, Israeli military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said forces were expanding their offensive in northern and southern Gaza and troops were fighting in "complex areas" in Khan Younis, Gaza's second-largest city, where Israel believes Hamas leaders are hiding.

Israel's offensive has been one of the most devastating military campaigns in recent history and has claimed a staggering toll on Palestinian civilians. More than two-thirds of the 20,000 killed were women and children, according to the Health Ministry in Gaza, which does not differentiate between civilians and combatants.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said Sunday morning that a 13-year-old boy was shot and killed by an Israeli drone attack while inside the building of al-Amal Hospital in Khan Younis. It provided no further details.

An Israeli strike overnight hit a house in a refugee camp west of the city of Rafah, on Gaza's borders with Egypt. At least two men were killed and their bodies taken to the Abu Yousef al-Najjar hospital, according to Associated Press journalists in the hospital.

Palestinians reported heavy Israeli bombardment and gunfire Sunday morning in the town of Jabaliya, an area north of Gaza City that Israel had previously claimed to control. Sounds of explosions and gunfire echoed across the town with Israeli warplanes flying over the area, they said. Hamas' military arm said its fighters shelled Israeli troops in Jabaliya and Jabaliya refugee camp.

"There are bombings and fierce battles during the night," said Assad Radwan, a Palestinian fisherman from Jabaliya. "Sounds of explosions and gunfire never stopped."

Greetings to HH the Amir



Shavkat Mirziyoyev



Carlos Mendiolá

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Sunday received a congratulatory cable from President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev on assuming the top office.

His Highness the Amir sent a reply enclosed with the utmost appreciation for the heartfelt sentiments expressed by the president.

Peru
The Ambassador of Peru to the State of Kuwait HE Carlos Velasco Mendiolá has sent deepest respect and warm regards to HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of assumption of the highest office.

The message read, "On behalf of the Embassy of Peru, may I extend to His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sa-

bah the warmest and heartfelt congratulations on the constitutional swearing-in as the Amir of the State of Kuwait. This momentous occasion marks a new chapter in the history of Kuwait's esteemed nation, and I am confident that under His Highness's wise leadership, Kuwait will continue to prosper and flourish.

"Peru and Kuwait share a long history of friendly relations, built on mutual respect and understanding. Over the years, our two nations have collaborated on various fronts, including cultural exchange, economic and financial cooperation, as well as global partnerships. I am confident that these ties will be strengthened in the years to come, guided by His Highness's visionary leadership and unwavering commitment to building a brighter future for Kuwait."

'Registration for Hajj caravans still open'

5th Hajj and Umrah Exhibition ends

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Fifth Hajj and Umrah Exhibition, organized by the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs in cooperation with Kuwaiti Hajj caravans, concluded Sunday, reports Al-Anba daily.

The exhibition opened on Dec 14 and it was supposed to close on Dec 20, but it was extended until Dec 24 since it was closed for four days to mourn the death of HH the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah have mercy on him.

Speaking to the daily, Assistant Undersecretary for Media and Foreign Relations Muhammad Nasser Al-Alem confirmed that the exhibition witnessed the attendance of several people wishing to learn about the services provided by Kuwaiti Hajj caravans; while the ministry exerted tremendous efforts to respond to all inquiries. He disclosed the number of pilgrims who registered this year reached 45,000 citizens and Bedouins; while the quota for Kuwait is 8,000 pilgrims and 63 Hajj caravans. "We have submitted a request to increase the number of Kuwaiti pilgrims and we are waiting for the response of the concerned authorities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. All the Kuwaiti

Hajj companies and caravans gathered in one place to offer their services to the pilgrims," he revealed.

Meanwhile, Director of the Hajj and Umrah Department at the ministry Sattam Al-Muzain clarified that the registration for the Hajj caravans is still open and it continues for five days. He confirmed that changing the Hajj regulations and subsequent central registration system succeeded for the second year in a row in terms of reducing prices that start from KD 1,590.

Regarding the registration dates, Al-Muzain confirmed: "We are committed to the brothers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that specified the dates. We started early to align with them and implement the decisions regulating the Hajj, which also made it easier for the owners of caravans to make early preparations for the Kuwaiti pilgrims."

Head of Kuwaiti Hajj Caravans Union Ahmed Al-Duwaihi added: "This year is characterized by early registration for Hajj. The exhibition was prepared well in advance and the largest number of caravans participated this year compared to previous years. The caravans compete to provide the best services for the pilgrims."

In the meantime, a member of the Municipal Council Abdullah Al-Enezi sent queries to Kuwait Municipality regarding the old scrapyards in Amghara.

He wanted to know if the area was being used for some benefit purposes following the issuance of the evacua-

tion decision in April 2014.

Al-Enezi stressed that the site is located in a prominent location between Blocks 9, 10 and 11 of Saad Al-Abdullah City, due to which this location needs to be used for the interest of citizens.

Nutrition consultant at Mujezat Al-Shifa: Ginseng is a stimulant that is not prohibited for athletes

The Nutrition Consultant at Mujezat Al-Shifa Honey Company said: The ginseng herb increases muscle recruitment, reduces exerted effort, and accelerates the recovery of muscle strength after strenuous exercise in athletes, noting that most athletes resort to taking ginseng, as it has been permitted by the Intergovernmental Committee to Monitor Olympic Games.



The latest studies in 2022 in Brazil, conducted by Professor Cristina Souza at the Federal University of Prana, cited a study on the effect of ginseng on muscle strength and muscle excitement during strenuous exercise, in addition to resistance to subsequent muscle damage and subsequent muscle pain.

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World News Roundup

Europe

Blow to Tusk's agenda

Polish president plans to 'veto' spending bill

WARSAW, Poland, Dec 24, (AP) - Poland's president said Saturday that he intends to veto a spending bill which includes money for public media and raises for teachers, dealing a blow to the new pro-European Union government of Prime Minister Donald Tusk.

President **Andrzej Duda** said he would veto the bill that includes 3 billion zlotys (\$762 million) for public media and would propose a bill of his own instead.

It comes after Tusk's government this week fired the directors of state television, radio and the government-run news agency, a step it said was necessary to reestablish independent media in Poland.

Public media in Poland is funded by taxpayers and is legally required to be free of political bias. However, Law and Justice, the populist right-wing ruling party that held power for eight years until this month, used media as a propaganda mouthpiece that spread disinformation and xenophobic and homophobic content.

Tusk won power on promises to restore democratic norms, including through the reform of public media. But Poles have been debating whether his government was setting new negative examples in the way it took control over public media. The culture minister replaced the heads of state media and TVP Info, a 24-hour news network, which went off air on Wednesday and is not yet broadcasting again.

The Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights in Warsaw said Friday that it had doubts about whether a member of the government should be making decisions about changes in leadership positions in public media.

"We realize that political and legal conditions make such reforms very difficult," the human rights group wrote. "However, we cannot help but notice that the manner of initiating changes in public media raises serious legal doubts."

Some others defended the Tusk government's move, saying it had to act to stop media that were producing propaganda, and that the government should ultimately be judged on whether it manages to establish objective media outlets free from political bias.

Duda, who is politically aligned with Law and Justice, harshly condemned the government's takeover of public media, warning that he won't accept moves that he believes to be against the law.

The president has the right to veto legislation and can propose legislation of his own. Duda remains in office for another year and a half, and his veto is an early sign of difficulties Tusk is likely to face in putting forward his agenda.



Austria, Germany on high alert: Sightseeing visits were barred at Germany's landmark cathedral in Cologne and Christmas Eve worshippers faced security checks to get into midnight Mass there Sunday as police responded to indications of a potential attack.

However a top security official urged people not to shy away from holiday celebrations out of fear.

Churchgoers attended multiple services at the cathedral despite the ban on visits purely for sightseeing, a day after police descended on the cathedral and searched it with sniffer dogs. With several dozen officers on duty outside, Auxiliary Bishop Rolf Steinhilber greeted those attending what he said was "probably the most secure church service in all of Germany."

In Austria, police said they also were stepping up security around Vienna's churches and Christmas markets, apparently responding to the same intelligence about a potential threat. They did not give further information, but the dpa news agency reported without citing a source that the threat was from an Islamic extremist group.

Police in Cologne said they were taking precautions over Christmas even though the information they had was for an attack on New Year's Eve. (AP)



300 Indians await fate: Judges will decide Sunday whether about 300 Indian citizens, suspected of being victims of human trafficking, should continue to be sequestered in a small French airport.

En route to Central America, the passengers have been held at Vetry airport - in Champagne country - since Thursday after a dramatic police operation prompted by a tip about a possible human trafficking scheme, authorities said.

The passengers will appear before judges throughout the day, who will decide whether to extend their detention in the airport, according to the administration for the Marne region. If they can't be held any longer, they will be free to leave the country.

"I don't know if this has ever been done before in France," Francois Procureur, lawyer and head of the Châlons-en-Champagne Bar Association, told BFM TV on Saturday. The situation is urgent because "we cannot keep foreigners in a waiting area for more than 96 hours. Beyond that, it is the liberty and custody judge who must rule on their fate," he said.

This period can be extended to eight days if a judge approves, then another eight days in exceptional circumstances. (AP)



Banksy art thief apprehended: A man suspected of stealing an artwork by Banksy of a stop sign adorned with three military drones, was arrested Saturday, London police said.

A man in his 20s was in custody on suspicion of theft and criminal damage, the Metropolitan police said.

The sign was taken less than an hour after the elusive street artist posted a photo of the work on his Instagram page Friday.

Video showed a man with bolt cutters climbing up on a bicycle to remove the work from a sign post on a street corner in the Peckham area of south London while another man steadied the bike. The man who cut the sign free then ran off with it in his hand.

A voice on a video of the incident could be heard saying, "it makes me so annoyed," as the man ran away.

A witness who only wanted to be called Alex told the PA news agency that the small crowd of people that had shown up to view the work stood around watching in awe as the scene unfolded. (AP)



Former President Donald Trump greets supporters as he arrives at a caucus rally, Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2023, in Waterloo, Iowa. (AP)

Trump's lawyers press immunity claims before lower court

Donald Trump was acting within his role as president when he pressed claims about "alleged fraud and irregularity" in the 2020 election, his lawyers told a federal appeals court in arguing that he is immune from prosecution.

The attorneys also asserted in a filing late Saturday night that the "historical fallout is tremendous" from the four-count indictment charging Trump with plotting to overturn the election he lost to Democrat

Joe Biden.

No other former president has ever been indicted; Trump has been indicted four times, in both state and federal court, as he campaigns to reclaim the White House.

"The indictment of President Trump threatens to launch cycles of recrimination and politically motivated prosecution that will plague our Nation for many decades to come and stands likely to shatter

the very bedrock of our Republic - the confidence of American citizens in an independent judicial system," the attorneys wrote in a brief filed with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit.

At issue before the court, which has set arguments for Jan. 9, is whether Trump is immune from prosecution for what defense lawyers say are official acts that fell within the outer perimeter of a president's duties and responsibilities. (AP)

Policy

Biden vows improved consultation on sacred site

Nevada tribe opts for coalitions, not lawsuits

RENO, Nevada, Dec 24, (AP) - The room was packed with Native American leaders from across the United States, all invited to Washington to hear from federal officials about President Joe Biden's accomplishments and new policy directives aimed at improving relationships and protecting sacred sites.

Arlan Melendez was not among them.

The longtime chairman of the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony convened his own meeting 2,500 miles (4,023 kilometers) away. He wanted to show his community would find another way to fight the U.S. government's approval of a massive lithium mine at the site where more than two dozen of their Paiute and Shoshone ancestors were massacred in 1865.

Opposed by government lawyers at every legal turn, Melendez said another arduous appeal would not save sacred sites from being desecrated.

"We're not giving up the fight, but we are changing our strategy," Melendez said.

That shift for the Nevada tribe comes as Biden and other top federal officials double down on their vows to do a better job of working with Native American leaders on everything from making federal funding more accessible to incorporating tribal voices into land preservation efforts and resource management planning.

The administration also has touted more spending on infrastructure and health care across Indian Country.

Many tribes have benefited, including those who led campaigns to establish new national monuments in Utah and Arizona. In New Mexico, pueblos have succeeded in getting the Interior Department to ban new oil and natural gas development on hundreds of square miles of federal land for 20 years to protect

culturally significant areas.

But the colony in Reno and others like the Tohono O'odham Nation in Arizona say promises of more cooperation ring hollow when it comes to high-stakes battles over multibillion-dollar "green energy" projects. Some tribal leaders have said consultation resulted in little more than listening sessions, with federal officials not incorporating tribal comments into the decision making.

Rather than pursue its claims in court that the federal government failed to engage in meaningful consultation regarding the lithium mine at Thacker Pass, the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony will focus on organizing a broad coalition to build public support for sacred places.

Clean energy

Tribal members are concerned other culturally significant areas will end up in the path of a modern day Gold Rush that has companies scouting for lithium and other materials needed to meet Biden's clean energy agenda.

Melendez was among those thrilled when Biden appointed Deb Haaland to lead the Interior Department. A member of Laguna Pueblo, Haaland is the first Native American to serve as a cabinet secretary.

Melendez, a former member of the U.S. Human Rights Commission who has led his colony for 32 years, said he understands the difficulty of navigating the electoral landscape in a western swing state where the mining industry's political clout is second only to the power wielded by casinos.

Still, he was disappointed Haaland declined an invitation to visit the massacre site.

"The largest lithium project in the United States and they don't even have

the time to come out here and meet with the tribal nations in the state of Nevada," he said.

The tribe's lawyer, Will Falk, urged other tribes to resist "tricking ourselves into believing that just because the first Native American secretary of Interior is in office that she actually cares about protecting sacred sites."

Interior Department spokeswoman Melissa Schwartz didn't respond directly to that criticism but said in an email to The Associated Press that there has been "significant communications and partnership with tribes in Nevada."

The federal government in early December published new guidance for dealing with sacred sites. While Falk and others are skeptical, they acknowledged the document speaks to concerns tribes have raised for decades.

Among other things, the guidance says federal agencies should involve tribes as early as possible when planning projects to identify potential impacts to sacred sites and to determine whether mitigation measures can allay concerns. Agencies also should consult with tribes that attach significance to the project area, regardless of where they are located.

It also suggests Indigenous knowledge should be on equal footing with other sciences and incorporated into the federal decision-making process. That knowledge can consist of practices, cultural beliefs and oral and written histories that tribes have developed over many generations.

Justin C. Ahastee, executive director of the Navajo Nation Washington (D.C.) Office, said the new guidance appears to have incorporated some of the recommendations made by tribal leaders but that it could have gone further.



Yekaterina Duntsova speaks to journalists after submitting her documents as a presidential candidate for the upcoming presidential election to Russia's Central Election Committee, in Moscow, Russia, Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2023. Duntsova is a journalist-turned-grassroots campaigner and local legislator. She secured a nomination from a group of more than 500 supporters as required by Russian electoral law from those not running on a party ticket. Delegates from Russia's ruling party unanimously backed President Vladimir Putin's bid for reelection at a party conference in Moscow on Sunday. (AP)



Reynolds



Knox

America

Iowa opts out of food program: Iowa will not participate this summer in a federal program that gives \$40 per month to each child in a low-income family to help with food costs while school is out, state officials have announced.

The state has notified the U.S. Department of Agriculture that it will not participate in the 2024 Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children - or Summer EBT - program, the state's Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Education said in a Friday news release.

"Federal COVID-era cash benefit programs are not sustainable and don't provide long-term solutions for the issues impacting children and families. An EBT card does nothing to promote nutrition at a time when childhood obesity has become an epidemic," Iowa Republican Gov. **Kim Reynolds** said in the news release.

She added, "If the Biden Administration and Congress want to make a real commitment to family well-being, they should invest in already existing programs and infrastructure at the state level and give us the flexibility to tailor them to our state's needs."

States that participate in the federal program are required to cover half of the administrative costs, which would cost an estimated \$2.2 million in Iowa, the news release says.

Some state lawmakers, including Democratic Sen. **Izaiah Knox** of Des Moines, quickly voiced their opposition to the decision. (AP)



Man killed at Florida mall shooting: A man died in a shooting at a shopping mall

in central Florida two days before Christmas in which the victim was "targeted" for the attack, police said.

Ocala Police Chief Mike Balken told re-

porters Saturday evening that the man was killed after he was shot multiple times in a common area at Paddock Mall in Ocala, located about 79 miles (127 kilometers) north-

west of Orlando.

A woman also was shot in the leg. She was treated at a local hospital and expected to recover, Balken said. (AP)



Inmate dies at West Virginia jail: An inmate at a West Virginia jail scrutinized in lawsuits citing inmate deaths and alleging poor living conditions was pronounced dead Friday morning, officials said.

Correctional officers at Southern Regional Jail found the 24-year-old man unresponsive in his cell and attempted life-saving measures, according to a Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation statement. He was then taken to a local hospital where he was pronounced dead, WCHS reported.

Authorities did not immediately provide further details or reveal the deceased inmate's identity. The state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Criminal Investigation Division and the West Virginia State Police have opened an investigation into the death.

Several former correctional officers with Southern Regional Jail were indicted last month by a federal grand jury in connection with the 2022 death of an incarcerated man who was beaten while handcuffed and restrained in an interview room and later a jail cell.

They were also charged with trying to cover up their actions, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. (AP)



Gov. Kathy Hochul reads 'Snowflakes Fall' to day care children at the Department of Labor on Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2023, in Albany, N.Y. Gov. Hochul visited the day care facility to make an announcement on new state child care measures. The plan includes a \$50 million tax credit for employers who build new child care facilities and \$50 million in business tax credits for workplace-based child care expansion. (AP)

Asia

Housing units set up

Economic toll from China quake soars into millions

BEIJING, Dec 24, (AP) — The strong earthquake that hit northwest China this week, killing at least 148 people, caused economic losses estimated to be worth tens of millions in the agricultural and fisheries industries, state media said.

Officials in Gansu conducted preliminary assessments that showed the province's agricultural and fisheries industries have lost 532 million yuan (about \$74.6 million), state broadcaster CCTV reported.

Authorities were considering the best use of the relief fund, set up days before, for the agricultural sector to resume production as soon as possible, the report said.

The magnitude 6.2 quake struck in a mountainous region Monday night between Gansu and Qinghai provinces and about 1,300 kilometers (800 miles) southwest of Beijing, the Chinese capital. CCTV said 117 people were killed in Gansu and 31 others died in neighboring Qinghai, while three people remained missing. Nearly 1,000 were injured and more than 14,000 homes were destroyed.



Qiang

During a visit Saturday to several villages in Gansu and a county in Qinghai, Chinese Premier Li Qiang urged authorities to improve living conditions for the survivors of the quake by every available method, the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

Li said the top priority of relief efforts was to make sure people stay warm and safe in winter, the report added.

CGTN, the Chinese state broadcaster's international arm, said the first batch of 500 temporary housing units had been built for residents in Meipo, a village in Gansu, on Friday night.

Many had spent the night in shelters set up in the area as temperatures plunged well below freezing. Funerals were held, some following the Muslim traditions of much of the population in the affected area.

Meanwhile, hundreds of temporary one-room housing units were set up Thursday in northwest China for survivors of an earthquake that destroyed more than 14,000 homes and killed at least 144 people, according to state media reports.

The death toll rose by nine as search teams dug through heavy mudslides that had inundated two villages, a city official in Qinghai province said Friday morning. Three people remained missing in the mudslides.

State broadcaster CCTV showed footage of cranes lifting white, box-like housing units and lining them up in an open field in Meipo, a village in Gansu province. About 260 had been erected, and the total in the village was expected to reach 500 across nine sites by Friday morning.

The arrival of the prefabricated units was a sign that many of the more than 87,000 people resettled after the Monday night earthquake may be homeless for some time. Many have been enduring temperatures well below freezing in flimsier tent-like units with blue plastic sheeting on the outside and a quilted cotton lining inside.

An assessment of the houses in a village visited by the AP on Wednesday found that 90% weren't safe to live in, experts told CCTV in an online report. Some of the homes in Yangwa village appear OK, but they have structural damage that make them unsafe, the experts said. For those that can be repaired, the work may have to wait until next year, because the soil is frozen.

The death toll included 113 people in Gansu and another 31 people in neighboring Qinghai. Nearly 1,000 were reported injured. The magnitude 6.2 quake struck in a mountainous region on the Gansu side of the boundary between the two provinces and about 1,300 kilometers (800 miles) southwest of Beijing, the Chinese capital.



Furnace blast in Indonesia kills 13: A smelting furnace exploded Sunday at a Chinese-owned nickel plant on Indonesia's Sulawesi island, killing at least 13 workers and injuring dozens of others, police and a company official said.

It was the latest of a series of deadly accidents at nickel smelting plants in Indonesia that are part of China's ambitious transnational development program known as the Belt and Road Initiative.

Nickel is a key component in global battery production for electric vehicles.

At least five Chinese and eight Indonesian workers died when the furnace suddenly exploded while they were repairing it, said Central Sulawesi police chief Agus Nugroho.

The blast was so powerful it demolished the furnace and damaged parts of the side walls of the building, said Nugroho, adding that about 38 workers were hospitalized, some in critical condition.

Authorities are working to determine whether negligence by the company led to the deaths, Nugroho said.

The accident occurred at PT Indonesia Tsingshan Stainless Steel, a subsidiary of PT Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park, known as PT IMIP, in the Bahodopi neighborhood of Morowali regency.

"We sincerely apologize for this incident and we are working closely with authorities to investigate what caused the accident," said company spokesperson Dedy Kurniawan.

Rescuers extinguished the fire and evacuated workers after a nearly four-hour operation, he added. (AP)



Sect leader gets jail time: A South Korean religious sect leader whose crimes were featured in the popular Netflix series "In the Name of God: A Holy Betrayal" earlier this year was sentenced to 23 years in prison on Friday, court officials said.

The Daejeon District Court in central South Korea said that it handed the prison term to Jeong Myeong-seok after convicting him of sexual violence against three of his female followers from 2018-2021.

Jeong, 78, is leader of the Christian Gospel Mission in South Korea, which is also known as Jesus Morning Star, or JMS.

A court statement said that Jeong's convicted crimes include "quasi-rape" and "quasi-imitative rape," which court officials said meant illicit sexual intercourse with a person who was unconscious or unable to resist. The court refused to provide details of Jeong's convicted sexual crimes.

Dozens of Jeong's supporters gathered near the court, shouted slogans and raised placards that say Jeong isn't guilty.

Jeong committed the crimes after he was released earlier in 2018 after spending 10 years in prison over sexual violence against other female followers. (AP)



People take pictures with a Christmas tree decorated outside the Wangfujing Church, a Catholic church, on Christmas Eve in Beijing, Sunday, Dec. 24, 2023. Like other western festivals, Christmas is not traditionally celebrated in China, but it has been a common thing among young Chinese in big cities across China. (AP)

Mexico

Obrador calls for US talks with Cuba

Mexico extends support amid migrant surge

MEXICO CITY, Dec 24, (AP) — Mexico's president has said that he is willing to help out with a surge of migrants that led to the closure of border crossings with the United States, but he wants the U.S. government to open talks with Cuba and send more development aid to migrants' home countries.

The comments by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador came a day after the U.S. announced that a delegation of top U.S. officials would visit Mexico for talks on how to enforce immigration rules at the two countries' shared border.

López Obrador confirmed that U.S. officials want Mexico to do more to block migrants at its southern border with Guatemala, or make it more difficult to move across Mexico by train or in trucks or buses, a policy known as "contention."

But the president said that in exchange he wanted the United States to send more development aid to migrants' home countries, and to reduce or eliminate sanctions against Cuba and Venezuela.

"We are going to help, as we always do," López Obrador said. "Mexico is helping reach agreements with other countries, in this case Venezuela."

"We also want something done about the (U.S.) differences with Cuba," López Obrador said. "We have already proposed to President (Joe) Biden that a U.S.-Cuba bilateral dialogue be opened."

"That is what we are going to discuss, it is not just contention," he said at his daily morning press briefing.

Mexico is apparently offering to negotiate with Venezuela, whose people make up a large part of the surge of migrants at the U.S. southwestern border. That surge has led U.S. officials to pull immigration officers away from two Texas border rail crossings that are vital to Mexico's economy.

López Obrador has long opposed U.S. sanctions on Cuba, whose migrants are also streaming to the U.S. border. And the Mexican president has long pressed the United States to contribute to a tree-planting program and to youth scholarship and apprentice programs that he has been pushing for Central America.

López Obrador said the development aid will help stem residents' need to migrate.

The Mexico-U.S. meetings come as Republican and Democratic lawmakers are debating border policy changes as part of a larger conversation over U.S. assistance for Ukraine and Israel, which are top foreign policy priorities for the White House.

Pressure mounted on Mexico following the closure of two rail-road crossings in Texas earlier this week. U.S. officials said personnel assigned to the locations needed to be redeployed to help with large numbers of migrants illegally crossing the border. Mexican businesses warned the closures were hampering trade.

López Obrador spoke by telephone with Biden on Thursday and agreed that additional border enforcement was needed so the crossings can be reopened, White House national security spokesman John Kirby said.

Kirby said Biden asked Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and White House Homeland Security Advisor Liz Sherwood-Randall to travel to Mexico for talks with López Obrador and his team.

A U.S. official said the trip would likely happen the Wednesday after Christmas.

"Their visit will really be about getting at the migratory flows and talking to President López Obrador and his team about what more we can do together," Kirby said at a White House briefing.

Border

Mexican companies are so eager for the border points to reopen that the leader of the Industrial Chamber of Commerce wrote on his social media accounts late Wednesday that a deal had been brokered to get them reopened. A U.S. Embassy spokesperson quickly denied that, saying they remained closed.

The Mexican Employers' Association described the closure of railroad crossings into Eagle Pass and El Paso, Texas, as a "failure of migration policy." The organization said the situation was causing losses of \$100 million per day in delayed shipments.

Mexico receives much of the corn and soy products it needs to feed livestock on trains from the United States. Auto parts and automobiles also frequently are shipped by rail in Mexico.

"We energetically but respectfully call on the governments of Mexico and the United States to address the migration crisis which is affecting the flow of goods, given that this measure only damages the economies of both nations," the association wrote in a statement.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection said Sunday the decision was made "in order to redirect personnel to assist the U.S. Border Patrol with taking migrants into custody."

But it also appeared the U.S. government wants Mexico to crack down on migrants riding rail cars to the U.S. border.

Elsewhere, the Lukeville, Arizona, border crossing is closed, as is a pedestrian entry in San Diego, while more officials are assigned to the entry points. Illegal crossings at the U.S. southwestern border topped 10,000 on some days this month, an unusually high number.

Also:

ACAPULCO: Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador spoke ebulliently about the recovery of Acapulco after Hurricane Otis smashed into the resort on Oct. 25, killing 52 people.

But some residents still don't have running water, sewage treatment is still deficient, tons of garbage and debris remain in the streets, and few hotels are fully open.

López Obrador predicted the once-glamorous Pacific coast city would be 100% recovered by March, and claimed many residents' homes are now in better shape than before the Category 5 hurricane hit.

"Without doubt, in March, 100 (percent)," the president said at a news briefing in Acapulco. "The majority of people's houses in Acapulco are now better than they were before the hurricane."

While hundreds of tons of debris have been removed, and some of the shattered, looted stores have reopened, things are far from close to normal.

Acapulco's economy depends almost completely on tourism, and there were few in town.

Gerardo Pérez Pacheco, of Portland, Oregon, comes to Acapulco every two years. He came again this year, and said he was impressed by the clean up efforts - even though the city is quieter than normal.

Others, like **José Luis Torres Parra** from the northern border town of **San Luis Río Colorado,** came as an act of solidarity with Acapulco. Torres Parra, who brought his family with him, said Acapulco remains one of the most beautiful bays in the world.

The government estimates that by New Year's Eve, there will be about 4,500 hotel rooms operating in 127 hotels, many of which are only partly open after Otis' winds blew out windows and even walls.

That is extremely optimistic, given that local officials estimated there are currently only 2,890 rooms available in 91 hotels, many of which are occupied by government workers called in to oversee the recovery effort.



Supporters of Jammu Kashmir National Conference shout slogans during a protest in Srinagar, Indian-controlled Kashmir, Saturday, Dec 23, 2023. Anger spread in some remote parts of Indian-controlled Kashmir after three civilians were killed while in army custody, officials and residents said Saturday. This comes two days after a militant ambush killed four soldiers. (AP)



De La Gasca



Niyonzima

Africa

UN Security Council alarmed: Members of the UN Security Council expressed alarm at the spreading violence and deteriorating humanitarian situation in Sudan, President of the Council **Jose Javier De La Gasca** said in a statement on Saturday.

They strongly condemned the reported attacks against civilians, and expansion of fighting into areas hosting large populations of internally displaced persons, refugees and asylum seekers, especially in Gezira State, where over 250,000 civilians have fled Wad Madani since the start of the Rapid Support Forces' offensive, and in the Darfur region, including the town of El Fasher.

"The members of the Security Council expressed particular concern at ongoing reports of violations of international humanitarian law and continuing human rights violations and abuses, including cases of sexual violence in conflict."

"They urged all parties to exercise restraint and protect civilians and civil infrastructure in accordance with their obligations under international law, in particular international humanitarian law," the statement reads.

They praised the efforts of humanitarian actors within Sudan and neighboring States, including UN humanitarian agencies, UN implementing partners, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and national partners.

They called upon all parties to allow and facilitate, in accordance with relevant provisions of international law and in line with United Nations guiding principles of humanitarian assistance, including humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access throughout Sudan. (KUNA)



20 dead in rebel assault: At least 20 people have been killed in Burundi following an attack by a rebel group based in the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo, a Burundian government spokesman said Saturday.

Among those killed were 12 children and three women, two of whom were pregnant, spokesman **Jérôme Niyonzima** said in a statement.

The attack targeted nine homes on Friday evening in the western town of Vugizo, close to the Lake Tanganyika border with Congo, according to the Burundian government.

RED-Tabara, a Burundian armed rebel group based in South Kivu, eastern Congo, claimed responsibility for the attack in a post on X, formerly Twitter. The group,

which denied having targeted civilians, claimed to have killed nine soldiers and a police officer.

Burundian authorities consider RED-

Tabara a terrorist movement. The group first appeared in 2011 and has been accused of a string of attacks in Burundi since 2015.

Witnesses who spoke to The Associated



A priest gives holy water as Christians gather for prayers at Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church in Nairobi, Kenya, Sunday, Dec. 24, 2023. (AP)

Press said the rebels appeared to be wearing Burundian army uniform and civilians were "left to their own devices" after the military and police fled.

"We realized they were attackers when they attacked the police position guarding the border," said Priscille Kanyange, a farmer. "Many people here were injured by bullets (as they were) trying to flee."

Farmer Innocent Hajayandi, who witnessed the attack said security forces fled, "leaving the residents to their own devices."

André Kabura a grocery shop owner, who was wounded in both legs by gunfire, said the military and police were slow to regroup and fend off the attackers. (AP)



Somali army kills 130 militants: Somali army killed 130 of Al-Shabab militants during its latest military operation in central and south Somalia, said a media source on Sunday.

The Defense Ministry mentioned in statement that the forces, working in cooperation with locals and international partners, managed to confiscate weaponry and military equipment, reported the official news agency (SONNA).

The Somali Army continues to conduct operations to eliminate Shabab militants. (KUNA)

USD stabilizes

The exchange rate of the US Dollar against the Kuwaiti Dinar stabilized on Sunday at KD 0.307, while the Euro exchange rate rose by 0.51 percent to KD 0.338 compared to Thursday's prices, said the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK).

The CBK's daily bulletin revealed that the exchange rate of the British Pound Sterling rose by 0.43 percent to KD 0.390, the Swiss Franc by 0.67 percent to KD 0.359, while the Japanese Yen stabilized at KD 0.002. (KUNA)

Gold prices went up to USD 2,053 USD per ounce after the closing of last week's exchange market, a historical price for gold in 2023.

A report issued by the Kuwaiti company (Dar Al-Sabaek) said that last week witnessed significant jumps for gold as it approached the level of USD 2,072 per ounce for a short period before declining at USD 2,053 per ounce.

The pricing was supported by data received from the United States that indicated a decline in inflationary pressures

and bets on an early reduction in interest rate by the US Federal Reserve (Central Bank).

The report added that the rise in gold prices coincided with the decline of the US Dollar index against the basket of major currencies by 0.15 percent to close at 101.7 points, and the decline in US personal consumption expenditure prices "unexpectedly" by 0.1 percent on a monthly basis (November 2023).

It was revealed that the market is preparing for the first cut in the US interest

gold prices at USD 2,053 per ounce last week

rates by the end of the first quarter of 2024, explaining that "Faster and more frequent cuts in the interest" mean a further rise in gold during the coming period.

The report indicated the futures prices of gold for delivery next February rose by 0.85 percent, reaching USD 2,069 per ounce, achieving weekly gains of 1.65 percent.

The report expect that gold prices will continue to rise during the first quarter of 2024 due to several factors, the most important of which is the start of a cycle of

declining US interest rates.

The slowdown in global economic growth, the weakness of the US dollar, and the continued rise in geopolitical risks, especially military operations in the Middle East and threats of stopping global maritime shipping lines in Bab Al-Mandab Strait and the Arabian Sea.

Regarding the local market, the report stated that the prices of gold (24 karat) reached KD 20.3 per gram, while 22 karat gold reached KD 18.6 and the silver closed at KD 284 per kilo. (KUNA).

Market Movements

23-12-2023

	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts
UAE - DFM	+0.44	4,022.92	PAKISTAN - KSE 100	-1.98	61,608.15
JAPAN - Nikkei	+0.09	33,169.05	SAUDI - Tawadul	-0.69	11,621.93
PHILIPPINES - PSEI	+0.49	6,501.00	EGYPT - EGX 30	-2.14	24,305.09

Business

US consumer confidence climbs to a 5-month high

Dollar continues to trend lower amid expectations of lower interest rates

By National Bank of Kuwait

The US Dollar index continues to trade on a downward trajectory, closing the week at 101.71, after a steep decline that followed a dovish speech delivered by Fed Chair Jerome Powell. The decline served as a relief to some of the dollar's counterparts, where the British pound and the Euro gained momentum against the dollar, closing the week at 1.1010 and 1.2700 respectively. While the USDJPY currency pair was seen trading at a low of 140.9 this month, levels not seen since August, a drop that delivered a relief note to the Bank of Japan as they decided to keep interest rates unchanged in their latest monetary policy meeting held earlier in the week. A falling dollar seemed to have coincided with a drop in the bond market, with the 10-year treasury yields falling to around 3.84%, as the market is starting to bet on rate cuts in the upcoming months.

North America

US Consumer Confidence Climbs to a Five-Month High

The US consumer confidence report released in December showed an increase to a five-month high, with the index figure coming in at 110.7, higher than the previous figure of 101.0, and higher than the expected 104.6. The report showed an increase in confidence among all age groups in the US, with the largest increase showing in the 35-54 age group with annual incomes of \$125,000 and above. The increase comes despite continued worries of high inflation rates, with consumers indicating plans to purchase assets such as motor vehicles, houses, and major appliances in the next 6 months. The increase in confidence can be attributed to the recent rally in the stock market, with indices like the Dow Jones and the S&P 500 climbing up to record highs in the last quarter of 2023, as well as an easing in inflation and lower gasoline prices.

Unemployment Claims Continue to Show a Resilient Labor Market

The number of Americans filing for new unemployment claims rose to 205k in the latest unemployment claims data released in December, higher than the previous figure of 203k, yet lower than the expected increase to 214k. The figure supports the narrative of a resilient and healthy job market, as Feds keep a close eye on employment data for indications about the economy's health, after a higher-than-expected retail sales data in November, which showed a 0.3% increase from the 0.2% decline in October. A resilient job market during tight economic condition has led to diminishing expectations of a recessionary state and supported the Feds goal of achieving a soft landing in its battle against inflation.

Core PCE Slows in November

The personal consumption expenditure price index (PCE) data released on Friday showed a 0.1% decline month-over-

Highlights

■ Unemployment claims in the US climb to 205k, up from 203k in the previous figure.

■ UK inflation decreases to 3.9%, the lowest rate seen in two years, raising the question of when the Bank of England should start cutting interest rates.

■ The US consumer confidence report shows an increase to 110.7, as the possibility of a soft landing seems likely and fears of entering a recessionary state diminishes.

■ Gold continues to trend upwards, reaching an all-time high of \$2,121 before settling above the \$2,000 mark in the month of December.

■ US equity indices reach all time high levels as the US economy continues to show outstanding resilience to tight economic conditions.

month, compared to forecasts of no growth. The annual PCE figure showed a 2.6% rise, down from 2.9% in October versus expectations of 2.8%. While the Core PCE (excluding food and energy prices) rose by 0.1% monthly versus expectations of a 0.2% increase. Annually the core index showed that prices increased by 3.2%, down from 3.4% in October, a fresh low since mid-2021. The figures released seemed to go in-line with what Fed officials want to see to determine that the current policies are applying pressure on inflation as the PCE serves as an early indication of inflation conditions in the economy.

Europe and UK

Germany PPI m/m Drops by Record 0.5%

In the latest PPI data published, the prices of goods produced by Europe's largest economy dropped by 0.5% in the month of November, the fastest annual rate drop seen since 1949, hinting at further falls in inflation rates in the upcoming days. While producer prices of German industrial products fell by 14.7% from a year earlier, and exports of goods outside of the EU region dropping by 8.7%. The data comes in line with the contracting trend in Germany's economy in the past nine months. While the EURUSD currency pair is currently trading at a four-month high of 1.1028, potentially attributed to selling pressures for the US dollar, after expectations that the US interest rates would begin to fall in 2024.

UK Retail Sales rises in November

Retail sales data in the UK rose by 1.3% in the month of November, following a 0.0% no change reading the previous month. The data release was followed by a market reaction, leading the GBPUSD currency pair to rise to 1.27 and stabilizing at around 1.268, levels last seen in August.

Rates - 24th December, 2023

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month Forward
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	
EUR	1.0985	1.0887	1.1040	1.1010	1.0800	1.1100	1.1035
GBP	1.2769	1.2609	1.2790	1.2700	1.2500	1.2800	1.2707
JPY	142.33	141.65	144.95	142.41	141.00	145.00	140.38
CHF	0.8677	0.8711	0.8528	0.8555	0.8500	0.8900	0.8476

The marginal increase in sales, which is considered the fastest month on month since January, has indicated a resilient consumer as high rates continue to put pressure on economic conditions in the UK.

UK Inflation Drops to 2-year lows

In the latest news released, inflation in the UK dropped to its lowest rate in two years, with the latest CPI year-over-year reading showing a 3.9% rate, lower than the 4.3% anticipated figure. While the drop was mainly due to a drop in energy prices, it has fueled expectations about when the Bank of England will be lowering interest rates in the upcoming year. BoE officials have taken a strict stance regarding their approach in fighting inflation and keeping rates higher for as long as needed. Keeping a close eye on economic trends in the upcoming period to determine the next course of action.

Asia Pacific

BoJ Officials Keep Monetary Policy Unchanged

The bank of Japan has decided to keep its ultra-loose monetary policy unchanged in its last monetary policy meeting held on December. The decision is considered in line with market expectations, while officials await further evidence about the conditions of prices and wages in Japan's economy, as positive data might push for a shift away from the massive monetary stimulus. The central bank also decided to maintain its dovish stance regarding negative interest rates, after some expectations for a near end to the current rates after a drop in the US dollar pushed the Japanese yen to gain some value the past weeks.

Reserve Bank of Australia Keeps Interest Rates Unchanged

In the latest monetary policy minutes published by the Reserve Bank of Australia, board members have decided to keep rates unchanged at their current 4.35% rate, as opposed

to a 25 bps rate hike. The decision comes after officials saw "encouraging signs" of progress towards their fight against inflation, which decreased to 5.4% in the third quarter, from 7% in the beginning of the year. The board members also indicated that demand continues to surpass supply, while consumption growth remains weak, stating that the risk of inflation could remain high for a longer period. The AUDUSD currency pair, supported by a weaker US dollar, continued an upward trend throughout the week, closing the week at around 0.6801.

Commodities

Oil Shifts from a Downward Trend

Oil prices showed a slight recovery in the week after a two-month downtrend which followed diminishing worries about the geopolitical tensions that affected the global economy. With the crude oil WTI futures climbing to 74.087 from a low of 68.98 in the previous week, and the Brent crude oil futures climbing to 79.58 from the previous 73.17. The increase can be linked to a decision made by the decision from the minister of Mineral Resources, Oil, and Gas in Angola, which was to retract the country's membership from OPEC, as it no longer serves the country's best interest. The decision came shortly after OPEC+ members held a meeting, in which it was decided to extend output cuts through 2024.

Gold Rallies to Record Highs

Gold started the week with an upward rally after expectations for rate cuts from the Federal Reserve rose, gaining almost 83 dollars of value before settling in the \$2,050 price range. As geopolitical tensions seem to cool down, the focus on gold prices is shifted more towards the next course of action for the feds.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti Dinar
USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30730.

Kuwait telecoms landscape is set for 'transformation'

Public-Private Partnership Project in the offing

By Ahmad Fathi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Public-Private Partnership Projects Authority, in collaboration with the Ministry of Transportation, has issued an invitation to specialized companies and alliances, both local and international (excluding entities licensed by the Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority or its affiliates), to submit qualification applications for the fixed telecommunications network development project. This initiative aligns with the provisions outlined in Law No. 116 of 2014, which pertains to partnerships between the public and private sectors, and its accompanying executive regulations.

The fixed telecommunications network development project seeks to establish a collaborative venture between the public and private sectors with the overarching goal of enhancing fixed telecommunications networks. It encompasses various facets, including the design, financing, construction, operation, maintenance, and transfer of ownership of the fixed telecommunications network within the State of Kuwait. Furthermore, the project company is entrusted with the responsibility of operating the existing fixed telecommunications network associated with

Busiest holiday travel season in years off to a smooth start with few airport delays

NEW YORK, Dec 24, (AP): The holiday travel rush hit its peak Friday as mild weather and lower flight cancellation rates raised hopes for merrier drivers and airline passengers than last year.

U.S. airlines are predicting a blockbuster holiday season and have projected confidence they can handle the crowds after hiring thousands of pilots, flight attendants and other workers, seeking to avoid the delays and suspensions that marred travel last year and culminated with the Southwest Airline debacle that stranded more than 2 million people.

Airlines have canceled just 1.2% of U.S. flights so far this year, the lowest in five years, but bad weather is always a threat. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg has warned the government will be holding the airlines accountable to operate smoothly and treat passengers well if there are disruptions. Earlier this week, Transportation Department announced a settlement in which Southwest will pay \$140 million for its meltdown last year.

Some 70 flights had been can-

celled in the U.S. by early Friday evening and about 3,480 had been delayed, according to FlightAware.

The Transportation Security Administration screened more than 2.6 million passengers on Thursday, which had been projected to be one of the busiest travel days, along with Friday and New Year's Day. That's short of the record 2.9 million that agents screened on the Sunday after

Thanksgiving, since travel tends to be more spread over Christmas and New Year's.

Travel has been strong this year - surpassing pre-pandemic levels - even though many Americans say they are worried about the economy. The TSA has already screened 12.3% more travelers than it had by this time last year and 1.4% more than in 2019.



Passengers make their way through the security lines at George Bush Intercontinental Airport on Thursday, Dec. 21, 2023, in Houston. (AP)

the fiber optic network in areas currently lacking coverage. This initiative is set to be accomplished within five years from the date of the public-private partnership agreement, with the ultimate aim of extending coverage to 90% of homes and businesses.

Highlighting the Ministry of Communications' strategic objectives for the public-private partnership, several key goals have been articulated. These include ensuring that the network supports speeds exceeding 10 gigabytes per second under the man-

agement of the project company, deploying a fiber-optic network to cover 90% of homes and businesses within five years from the partnership agreement, enhancing customer services, offering job opportunities, providing training for Kuwaitis in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector, and reducing the operational costs of the Ministry of Transportation.

Beyond these specific objectives, the public-private partnership contract is designed to bring about broader benefits.

Kuwait Airways receives 'Burgan', last of its Airbus A320neo aircraft

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Kuwait Airways has received its ninth and last Airbus A320neo aircraft, named "Burgan", which arrived in Kuwait at Terminal 4, from the Airbus factory in Toulouse, France on Thursday.

On this occasion, Kuwait Airways Chairman, Captain Abdulmohsen Al-Fagaan, stated, "Kuwait Airways is pleased to receive the last of its Airbus A320neo aircraft. This aircraft uses the latest technologies to ensure passenger comfort, safety, and fuel efficiency and KAC has successfully completed the receipt of the total number of aircraft from this batch. Moreover, these nine A320neo aircraft will contribute greatly to achieving the anticipated objectives pursued by the Blue Bird, as part of its strategic objectives to expand its network, linking Kuwait to the world."

Al-Fagaan added, "The presence of the A320neo in the fleet will enhance Kuwait Airways' position as a leading airline in the regional and global aviation industry, where the company is constantly developing its customer experience, and is steadfast in providing the best of services. KAC is also keen to provide all means of comfort and safety for its passengers during each flight. The arrival of the A320neo is a continuation of developing the prominent services that are provided to KAC's valued customers on its aircraft, in addition to various air transport services."

Al-Fagaan pointed out that the plans developed by KAC's Board of Directors were progressing in the right direction and as scheduled since assuming his duties at the company. He also indicated that the arrival of the new aircraft is a qualitative leap in the development of the Blue Bird's fleet with modern advancements, which suits the requirements of the esteemed passengers.

Al-Fagaan also stated that with the arrival of the last Airbus A320neo aircraft, Kuwait Airways' fleet will consist of 33 aircraft, or-

ganized as follows:

- 3 Airbus A330-200 aircraft.
- 7 Airbus A320-200CEO aircraft.
- 10 Boeing B777-300ER aircraft.
- 9 Airbus A320NEO aircraft.
- 4 Airbus A330-800 aircraft.

Al-Fagaan continued by saying that in accordance with KAC's agreement to restructure its fleet with Airbus, signed in February 2022, Kuwait Airways will receive 6 Airbus A321neo aircraft with a capacity of 169 seats and 3 Airbus A321neo-LR with 169 seating capacity in the coming years featuring advanced technical specifications.

Al-Fagaan explained, "The A321neo has additional advantages that will enable Kuwait Airways to achieve its objectives in terms of profitability and sustainability. The company will also achieve significant savings in operating costs due to the commonalities between the Airbus aircraft, its integrated models, and its flexibility in capacity. Today, the A321neo and the A330neo have proven to deliver up to 30% lower operating costs, when operated together."

Al-Fagaan concluded his statement by highlighting Kuwait Airways' continuous efforts to provide new and advanced services, that are aligned with the commercial aviation industry and with international requirements, which will undoubtedly satisfy and meet the aspirations of its valued customers. In this regard, he also thanked everyone who had contributed to the development of the national carrier and commended the role of Kuwait Airways' employees in the various sectors for their extensive efforts in the service of the country.

Technical specifications of the A320neo

The A320neo is one of the latest of this type of aircraft which provides outstanding efficiency in operational performance, designed to operate on short and medium haul routes. The aircraft is characterized by reduced fuel consumption per flight hour.



Kuwait Airways staff pose beside the newly-received aircraft.

Platform to nurture and develop next generation of banking professionals

ABK launches MASAR development program for Kuwaiti professionals

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) proudly announces the launch of MASAR, a comprehensive development program tailored specifically for associate and entry-level Kuwaiti professionals. This six-month immersive learning journey is designed to cultivate and enhance soft and professional skills, fostering well-rounded and high-performing bankers who are pivotal to the Bank's long-term growth strategy. Moreover, the program is aimed at individuals who have displayed promising potential on both personal and professional levels.



Al Arbash

MASAR is strategically developed to help participants explore and maximize their potential as future talents within ABK. Through a carefully curated curriculum, the program seeks to inspire and empower participants to unleash their potential, enabling them to thrive in their careers at ABK.

Commenting on its launch, Afrah Alarbash, General Manager of Human Resources at ABK, expressed, "We are thrilled to introduce MASAR as a platform to nurture and develop the next generation of banking professionals. This program reaffirms our commitment to investing in the growth and potential of our Kuwaiti workforce, ensuring that they are equipped with the necessary skills to succeed in their careers at ABK."

The MASAR program is an integral part of ABK's initiatives to enhance engagement and retention of high-potential individuals. It further aims to seamlessly integrate these individuals into the fabric of the organization through networking opportunities and tailored developmental experiences. Facilitated in collaboration with IDRAK Training & Consul-



Group photo during ABK's MASAR groundbreaking development program for emerging Kuwaiti banking professionals.

tancy, offering state-of-the-art learning & development facilities and specializing in training, MASAR is set to accommodate a cohort of 15 staff members holding a bachelor's degree and possessing 2-5 years of professional experience. The program has been meticulously designed to prepare participants for the next stage of their careers, aligning with ABK's unique needs. Through MASAR, participants will be engaged in a comprehensive range of activities, including creative exercises, motiva-

tional talks, team challenges, and interactive learning exercises. They will also benefit from practical learning experiences, such as real case scenarios and out-of-the-classroom learning, providing them with the tools to effectively apply their newfound knowledge in the workplace.

"We have carefully crafted MASAR to provide a dynamic and holistic learning experience. By combining business-ready skills, interactive learning, and out-of-the-classroom experiences,

we aim to nurture a generation of high-performing professionals who will make valuable contributions to the growth and success of ABK and the industry as a whole," concluded Alarbash.

The MASAR program is a testament to ABK's commitment to fostering the growth and development of its workforce, underscoring the Bank's dedication to investing in the next generation of banking professionals in Kuwait.

Since its establishment in 1967, ABK has progressed to become one of the leading Kuwaiti banks in the region that offers a wide array of personal, corporate, and private banking products and services. ABK also provides a broad range of local, regional, and global investment solutions and services through its subsidiary, ABK Capital.

Across the region, the Bank offers individuals and corporates the convenience of comprehensive banking and financial services in the Egyptian market through ABK-Egypt's network of 44 branches.

This is in addition to ABK's three branches located in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) in the United Arab Emirates, servicing both Kuwaiti and Emirati individual and corporate clients.

ABK is a strong supporter of Central Bank of Kuwait and Kuwait Banking Association's 'Let's Be Aware' awareness campaign. Through its various initiatives, the Bank aims to promote financial inclusion by educating Kuwaiti society about customer rights, responsibilities, and the different types of banking and special needs services. Additionally, ABK consistently provides strategic information on how to avoid banking and financial fraud, loan application requirements, digital services, and more. For more information about ABK, please follow the Bank's Instagram account @ abk_kuwait, visit eahli.com, contact Ahlan Ahli 1 899 899 or visit one of the Bank's branches across Kuwait.



Photos during the KCICAI's 3rd Annual International Conference, themed 'Expand Your Horizon'.

'Expand Your Horizon'

KCICAI 3rd Annual International Conference 'pushes' boundaries

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Kuwait Chapter of The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (KCICAI) organized its 3rd Annual International Conference, themed "Expand Your Horizon," with the objective to provide finance professionals a dynamic platform to broaden their knowledge, skills, and perspectives in an ever-evolving financial landscape. The conference brought together industry experts, thought leaders, and practitioners to explore innovative strategies, emerging trends, and transformative technologies that are reshaping the finance sector.

The conference's tagline - CARE "Create, Adapt, Reinvent, Excel," encapsulates the core philosophy driving the event - empowering finance professionals to navigate a rapidly changing world with creativity, adaptability, and a commitment to continuous improvement. By fostering an environment of learning and upholding excellence, one can guarantee sustained growth and relevance in an ever-changing marketplace.

Distinguished speakers at the event included, Dr. U S Vishal Rao, a Scientist, and Inventor of Artificial Voice Box; Utpal Sheth, CEO at RARE Enterprises (a Rakesh Jhunjhunwala Firm) and Mohammed Qahtani, World Champion Public speaking who shed light on these expanding horizons and the frontiers of the future by creating opportunities where none existed, "Adapted" to challenging situations, "Reinvented" the default rulebook and inevitably "Excelled" in their respective fields.

After the registration and networking, the program started with National Anthem of Kuwait, National Anthem of India, ICAI motto song, followed by lighting of traditional lamp. KCICAI Chairperson, CA Rabin Gonsalves, welcomed the audience officially briefing about the event and achievements of the chapter during past. A video message of CA Aniket Sunil Talati, President of ICAI was played as he couldn't attend the program personally.

Following thereafter, Vice Chairperson CA Aditya Dhanuka welcomed and introduced the Chief Guest H.E. Dr. Adarsh Swaika, the Indian Ambassador to Kuwait, who in his inaugural address, appreciated the Indians, the largest expatriate community in Kuwait - working in all fields, for their dedication and hard work for the country they live and for being an important part of development of India.

CA Sweta Chipra, executive committee member of KCICAI, proficiently delivered the introduction of the Guest of Honor, CA Suresh Prabhu, Former Union Minister and Senior Parliamentarian, Government of India. CA Suresh Prabhu won everyone's heart by his humorous speech which covered many ongoing issues. He spoke about the difficulties of passing the CA exams which is still a nightmare for him and many as it still awakens him from sleep with a fear of exam even after so many years. He highlighted the saturation of infrastructure and necessity of planning of new venture for the professional growth and satisfaction of themselves as well as the countries they work to face global challenges.

A souvenir was released to mark the event by chief guest and other dignitaries. Special Dignitary Sabah Mubarak Al-Jalawi, Chairman Kuwait Accountants & Auditors Association (KAAA) was present during the event. CA Rohit Agrawal, Secretary of the KCICAI, was privileged to introduce Adullah Marwan Al-Essa, Board Member of Kuwait Accountants

& Auditors Association (KAAA). Adullah spoke about the necessity of regularly updating knowledge by studying and acquiring additional certification for Chartered Accountants.

CA Venkata Ramana Badida, Executive Member of KCICAI, added a personal touch to the event with the introduction of CA Ranjeet Kumar Agarwal, Vice President ICAI, who then gave a brief on how Indian CAs contribute to the growth of the country they work for and to the growth of the world. He explained the growth of digitalization and easy access of data comparing to the old filing system which reduced the extra work of CAs.

All the dignitaries were honoured with mementos from office bearers of KCICAI.

A panel discussion on "India: At the Threshold of Greatness" was conducted between a trail-blazer in the field of finance Anuj Singhal, Managing Editor, CNBC Awaaz, an investment maestro CA Sunil Singhania, CEO & Founder of Abakus Asset Manager LLP and CA Sanjeev Agarwal, CEO & Managing Director, Middle East & India, Protiviti Member Firm. The growth of manufacturing, India's contribution to the world, financial saving situation of families, taking risk in trading, alternative energies etc., were discussed by panel. A question answer session was conducted during which panel members answered the queries of audience on these issues.

A raffle draws was conducted to keep the excitement in audience in which Novel Wilfred Cutinha among the audience won 8 grams' gold sponsored by Malabar Gold.

As the news of sad demise of H.H. Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of the State of Kuwait announced, the event was concluded immediately with a minute of silence and playing Quran verses on the screen.

Following events were missed for the day due to the mourning and respect to the departed soul of HH Amir.

- Dr. U S Vishal Rao's talk on "Possibility to Actuality - Making of a Possibilitarian".
- Utpal Sheth's talk on "Wealth Management techniques from a Dalal Street Wizard".
- Mohammed Qahtani's talk on "The Journey of a Stuttering Champion".
- Felicitation of Event Sponsors, media personnel and Overseas ICAI Chapter members.
- Vote of thanks by CA Aditya Dhanuka, Vice Chairperson KCICAI.

The conference intended to provide a platform for professionals to exchange ideas, share best practices, and explore innovative solutions to contemporary challenges in the finance and accountancy sector. Attendees gained valuable insights into the latest industry trends, technological advancements, and regulatory changes.

Key themes explored during the conference included digital transformation, sustainable finance, ethical considerations in financial decision-making, and the role of accountants in driving organizational success. The event successfully fostered a sense of collaboration and knowledge-sharing among attendees.

KCICAI expresses gratitude to the esteemed speakers, sponsors, and participants who contributed to the success of its 3rd Annual International Conference. The institute remains committed to advancing the profession of chartered accountancy and looks forward to future endeavours that will continue to expand horizons and drive excellence in the financial industry.

— See Also Page 4

Al-Shall highlights discrepancies in Kuwait quarterly labor report

9% surge in employment sparks data skepticism

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Al-Shall's weekly report said that the quarterly report on labor statistics as of June 30, 2023 issued by the Central Administration of Statistics published numbers that are either incorrect, or they need explanation and interpretation because they contradict all the goals of development, population, and labor policies, reports Al-Anba daily.

Al-Shall explained after excluding family sector workers, these numbers indicate that total employment increased between June 2022 and 2023, by about 173.1 thousand workers, or by 9%, to rise to about 306.5 thousand workers, and if the increase is added to it with family sector employment, the rate of increase in one year will reach about 11.9%.

The total Kuwaiti workforce as of June 30, 2023 was about 447.1 thousand workers, including female workers, about 258.9 thousand workers, and their percentage of the total Kuwaiti workforce was about 57.9%. This means, on the one hand, that Kuwait is the most advanced and fair country in the world in terms of women's equality.

Unemployment

On the other hand, these numbers may be read as an artificial and unsustainable labor market whose goal is employment as long as public finances are able to absorb disguised unemployment, and it is the duty of official statistics officials to provide their interpretation of the meaning of these numbers.

Al-Shall's report said that the growth rate of Kuwaiti employment in a year amounted to about 1.94%, while the growth rate of non-Kuwaiti labor reached about 11.1%, that is, more than 5 times the growth of Kuwaiti labor, which led to a decline in the percentage of Kuwaiti labor to the total from 22.9% to 21.4%.

The report added, "If it is true, it is a reality that is contrary to all the goals of the government's visions, its development plans, and the programs of successful governments, because all its repercussions on the country's economic, financial, and social performance are negative, even if it is not true, and we hope so, as the country needs a revolution in the manufacture of its statistics, so growth increases."

Modernization in the world today has become digital, and we know that national statistics in the country are lagging and weak.

The proportions of employment according to nationality to the total number of workers are 24.5% for Egyptian workers, 23.1% for Indian workers, and 21.4% for Kuwaiti workers. The percentage of the latter is mentioned in another table in the same report, 21.7%, and those percentages are after excluding the family sector, so those percentages change to 30.2% for Indian workers, 16.8% for Egyptian workers, and 15.5% for Kuwaiti workers after adding family sector workers.



Travelers are seen in a queue outside the passport offices in Harare, on Dec. 20, 2023. Atop many Christmas wish lists in economically troubled Zimbabwe is a travel document and people are flooding the passport office this holiday season ahead of a price hike planned in the New Year. (AP)

Zimbabwe fed by economic gloom, price hike

Christmas rush to get passports

HARARE, Zimbabwe, Dec 24, (AP): Atop many Christmas wish lists in economically troubled Zimbabwe is a travel document, and people are flooding the passport office this holiday season ahead of a price hike planned in the New Year.

The desperation at the office in the capital city of Harare is palpable as some people fear the hike could push the cost of obtaining a passport out of reach and economic gloom feeds a surge in migration.

Nolan Mukona said he woke up at dawn to get in line at the passport office but when he arrived at 5 a.m. there were already more than 100 people waiting. Some people had slept outside the office overnight.

"The only thing that can make my Christmas a cheerful one is if I manage to get a passport," said the 49-year-old father of three. "I have been saving for it for the last three months and I have to make sure I get it before January."

At \$120, passports were already pricey for many in a country where the majority struggle to put food on the table. The finance minister's budget proposals for 2024 said passport fees would rise to \$200 in January, sparking an outcry. The hike was then reduced to \$150.

Several million Zimbabweans are estimated to have left the southern African country over the past two decades when its economy began collapsing. The migration has taken renewed vigor in recent years as hopes of a better life following the 2017 ouster of longtime president Robert Mugabe fade. The late president was accused of running down the country.

Many people, including professionals such

as schoolteachers, are taking short nursing courses and seeking passports to leave for the United Kingdom to take up health care work.

According to figures released by the U.K.'s immigration department in November, 21,130 Zimbabweans were issued visas to work in the health and care sector from September last year to September this year, up from 7,846 the previous year. Only India and Nigeria, countries with significantly larger populations than Zimbabwe, have more people issued such work visas.

Many more Zimbabweans choose to settle in neighboring South Africa.

According to South Africa's statistics agency, just over 1 million Zimbabweans are living in that country, up from more than 600,000 during its last census in 2011, although some believe the figure could be much higher as many cross the porous border illegally.

The economic desperation has coupled with the expected increase in the price of travel documents to create an end-of-year rush.

The passport office has increased working hours to operate at night to cater to the growing numbers. Enterprising touts sell spots for \$5 for those who want to skip the line.

"It's my gateway to a better life," said Mukona of the passport he hopes to get.

He plans to leave his work as an English teacher at a private college to migrate to the United Kingdom as a carer. Once there, he hopes to have his family follow, a move that may be endangered by recent proposals by U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to change migration visa rules to limit the ability of migrant workers to bring their families to the U.K.

YEAR-ENDER

Business Plus



From inflation battles to AI dominance

Stories that shaped 2023 economic narrative

The tide turned against inflation. Artificial intelligence went mainstream - for good or ill.

Labor unions capitalized on their growing might to win more generous pay and benefits.

Elon Musk renamed and rebranded the social media platform Twitter, removed guardrails against profanity or obscene posts and ranted profanely when advertisers fled in droves.

The American housing market, straining under the weight of heavy mortgage rates, took a wallop.

And Taylor Swift's concert tour scaled such stratospheric heights that she invigorated some regional economies and drew a mention in Federal Reserve proceedings.

A look back at 10 top business stories in 2023:

The Fed and most other major central banks spent most of the year deploying their interest-rate weapons against the worst bout of inflation in four decades. The trouble had erupted in 2021 and 2022 as the global economy roared out of the pandemic recession, triggering supply shortages and igniting prices.

By the end of 2023, though, the Fed, the European Central Bank and the Bank of England had taken a breather. Their aggressive rate hikes had brought inflation way down from the peaks of 2022, when Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent energy and grain prices rocketing and intensified price spikes.

In the United States, the Fed's policymakers delighted Wall Street investors by signaling in December that 2024 would likely be a year of rate cuts - three to be exact, in their expectations - and not rate hikes. The Bank of England and ECB sounded a more cautious note, suggesting that inflation, though trending down, remained above their target.

"Should we lower our guard?" Christine Lagarde, the ECB president, told reporters. "We ask ourselves that question. No, we should absolutely not lower our guard."

The Council on Foreign Relations, which tracks interest rates in 54 countries, found that central banks turned aggressive toward inflation in the spring of 2022. Policies remain tight, the council found, but the overall anti-inflation stance has eased.

Artificial intelligence thrust itself into public consciousness this year. But the technology, while dazzling for its ability to retrieve information or produce readable prose, has yet to match people's science fiction fantasies of human-like machines.

Catalyzing a year of AI fanfare was ChatGPT. The chatbot gave the world a glimpse of advances in computer science, even if not everyone learned quite how it works or how to make the best use of it.

Worries escalated as this new cohort of generative AI tools threatened the livelihoods of people who write, draw, strum or code for a living. AI's ability to produce original content helped fuel strikes by Hollywood writers and actors and legal challenges from bestselling authors.

By year's end, the AI crises had shifted to ChatGPT's own maker, OpenAI, which was nearly destroyed by corporate turmoil over its CEO, and to a meeting room in Belgium, where European Union leaders emerged after days of talks with a deal for the world's first major AI legal safeguards.

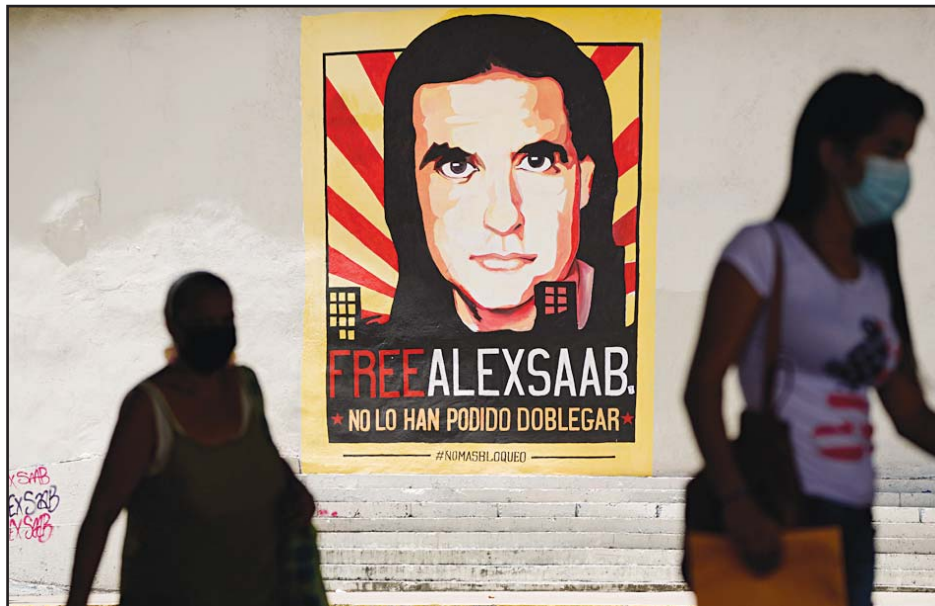
The long-battered American labor movement flexed its muscle in 2023, taking advantage of widespread worker shortages to demand - and receive - significantly better pay and benefits. From Hollywood writers and actors to autoworkers to hotel workers, 510,000 laborers staged 393 strikes in the first 11 months of 2023, according to Cornell University's Labor Action Tracker.

Under its pugnacious new president, Shawn Fain, the United Auto Workers struck the Big Three automakers - Ford, General Motors and Stellantis, the parent of Chrysler, Jeep and Ram - and won pay raises, improved benefits and numerous other concessions.

Hollywood writers and actors, as a result of their walkouts, secured higher pay and protection from the unrestricted use of artificial intelligence, among other concessions.

The unions' gains marked a resurgence for their workers after years following the Great Recession of 2007-2009 when union power further dwindled, wage gains languished and employers seemed to have their pick of job candidates. An explosive economic rebound from the COVID-19 recession of 2020 and a wave of retirements left companies scrambling to find workers and provided labor unions with renewed leverage.

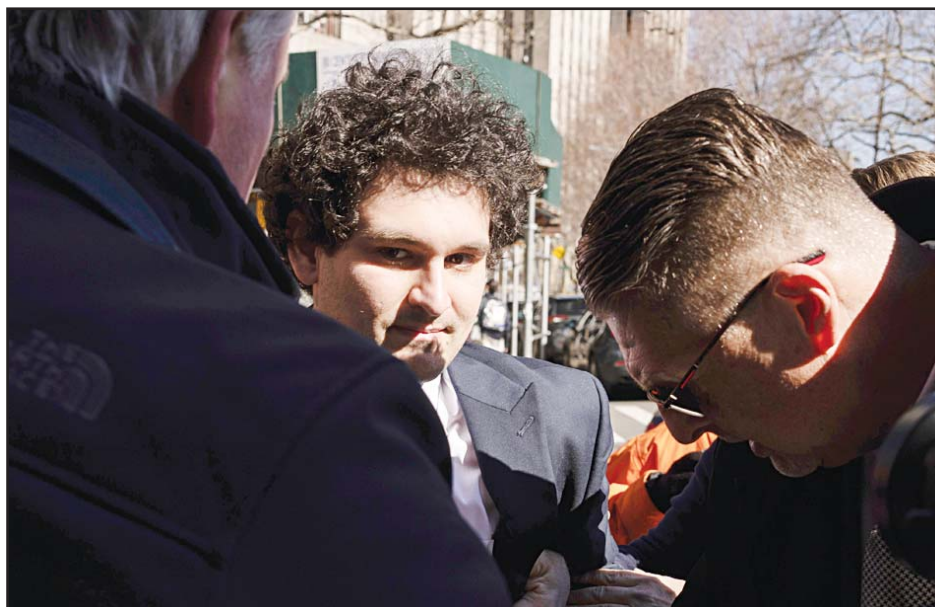
Still, even now, unions remain a shadow of what they once were: As



Pedestrians walk near a poster asking for the freedom of Colombian businessman and Venezuelan special envoy Alex Saab, in Caracas, Venezuela, Sept. 9, 2021. The Associated Press has learned that the Biden administration has released a close ally of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in swap for jailed Americans. Alex Saab, who was arrested on a U.S. warrant for money laundering in 2020, was released from custody Wednesday. (AP)



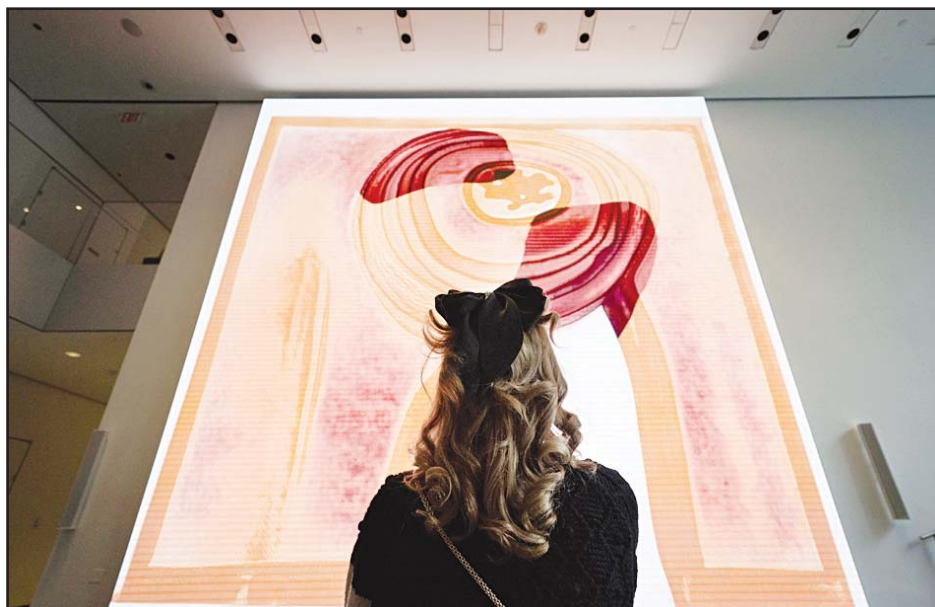
A Chinese soldier stands guard outside the Great Hall of the People after the opening ceremony of The Third Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, Oct. 18, 2023. In China, growth is hobbled by the collapse of an overbuilt real estate market, sagging consumer confidence and high rates of youth unemployment. (AP)



Sam Bankman-Fried, the founder and former CEO of the crypto exchange FTX, arrives at court in New York, on March. 30, 2023. A jury convicted Bankman-Fried of wire fraud and six other charges in November, 2023. (AP)



A pedestrian carries an umbrella past a Silicon Valley Bank Private branch in San Francisco, on March 14, 2023. In 2023, the financial industry faced a banking crisis of a scale not seen since 2008. Three midsized banks failed: Silicon Valley Bank, Signature Bank and First Republic Bank. (AP)



A visitor looks at artist Refik Anadol's "Unsupervised" exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art, on Jan. 11, 2023, in New York. The AI-generated installation was meant to be a thought-provoking interpretation of the museum's prestigious collection. Worries escalated in 2023 as a new cohort of generative AI tools threatened the livelihoods of anyone who writes, draws, strums or codes for a living. (AP)



A development of new homes is shown in Middlesex Township, Pa., on April 19, 2023. The U.S. economy and job market largely avoided painful fallout in 2023 from the Federal Reserve's relentless campaign against inflation but American real estate took a big hit. (AP)

of last year, roughly 10% of U.S. employees belonged to labor unions, way down from 20% in 1983. And back in the 1970s, the United States experienced an average of 500 strikes a year, involving 2 million workers, said Johnnie Kallas, a labor expert at Cornell.

A little more than a year ago, Elon Musk walked into Twitter's San Francisco headquarters, fired its CEO and other top executives and began transforming the social media platform into what's now known as X.

Since then, the company has been bombarded by allegations of misinformation, endured significant advertising losses and suffered declines in usage. Disney, Comcast and other high-profile advertisers stopped spending on X after the liberal advocacy group Media Matters issued a report showing that their ads were appearing alongside material praising Nazis. (X has sued the group, claiming it "manufactured" the report to "drive advertisers from the platform and destroy X Corp.")

The problems culminated when Musk went on an explosive-riden rant in an on-stage interview about companies that had halted spending on X. Musk asserted that advertisers that pulled out were engaging in "blackmail" and, using a profanity, essen-

tially told them to get lost.

"Don't advertise," X's billionaire owner said.

Remarkably, the U.S. economy and job market largely avoided pain in 2023 from the Fed's relentless campaign against inflation - 11 interest-rate hikes since March 2022.

Not so the housing market. As the Fed jacked up borrowing rates, the average 30-year fixed-rate mortgage rate shot up from 4.16% in March 2022 to 7.79% in October 2023. Home sales crumbled. For the first 10 months of 2023, sales of previously occupied homes sank 20%.

Yet at the same time and despite the sales slump, home prices kept rising. The combination of high mortgage rates and rising prices made homeownership - or the prospect of trading up to another house - unaffordable for many.

Contributing to the squeeze was a severe shortage of homes for sale. That, too, was a consequence of higher rates. Homeowners who were sitting on super-low mortgage rates didn't want to sell their houses only to have to buy another and take on a new mortgage at a much higher rate. Mortgage giant Freddie Mac says 60% of outstanding mortgages still have rates below 4%; 90% are below 6%.

If 2022 was the year that the crypto-

currency industry collapsed, 2023 was the year of the spillover from that fall.

The year's headlines from crypto were dominated by convictions and legal settlements as Washington regulators adopted a much more aggressive stance toward the industry.

A jury convicted Sam Bankman-Fried, the founder and former CEO of the crypto exchange FTX, of wire fraud and six other charges. Weeks later, the founder of Binance, Chengpeng Zhao, agreed to plead guilty to money laundering charges as part of a settlement between U.S. authorities and the exchange. Among the other crypto heavyweights that met legal trouble were Coinbase, Gemini and Genesis.

Yet speculation that crypto may gain more legitimacy among investors helped more than double the price of bitcoin. After years of delays, regulators are eventually expected to approve a bitcoin exchange-traded fund. Whether that would prove sufficient to sustain bitcoin's rally over the long run remains to be seen.

Historically, high interest rates benefit banks; they can charge more for their loans. But in 2023, higher rates ended up poisoning a handful of them. The industry endured a banking crisis on a scale not seen since 2008.

Three midsized banks - Silicon Valley Bank, Signature Bank and First Republic Bank - collapsed.

For years, banks had loaded up their balance sheets with high-quality mortgages and Treasuries. In an era of ultra-low rates, those mortgages and bonds paid out puny interest.

Enter the specter of inflation and the Fed's aggressive rate hikes. As rates jumped, the banks' bonds tumbled in value because investors could now buy new bonds with much juicier yields. With pressure on the banks mounting, some anxious depositors withdrew their money. After one such bank run, Silicon Valley collapsed. Days later, Signature Bank failed. First Republic was seized and sold to JPMorgan Chase.

Investors remain concerned about midsized institutions with similar business models. Trillions of dollars in commercial real estate loans that remain on these banks' books could become problematic in 2024.

From Austria to New Zealand, stock markets rallied through 2023. As inflation eased, stocks climbed despite sluggish global economic growth.

A tumble in crude oil prices helped slow inflation. A barrel of Brent crude, the international standard, dropped

14% through mid-December on expectations that the world has more than enough oil to meet demand.

An index that spans nearly 3,000 stocks from 47 countries returned 18% in U.S. dollar terms as of Dec. 11. Healthy gains for Apple, Nvidia and other U.S. Big Tech stocks powered much of the gains. So did the 45% return for the Danish pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk, which sells the Wegovy drug to treat obesity and the 33% return for the Dutch semiconductor company ASML.

The bond market endured more turbulence. Bond prices tumbled for much of the year, and their yields rose, over uncertainty about how far central banks would go in raising rates to curb inflation.

The yield on the 10-year U.S. Treasury briefly topped 5% in October to reach its highest level since 2007. Yields have since eased on the expectation that the Fed is done raising rates.

Over the past three years, the global economy has absorbed one hit after another. A devastating pandemic. The disruption of energy and grain markets stemming from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. A resurgence of inflation. Punishing interest rates. (AP)

editor's choice



'Boys in the Boat' gives Hollywood treatment to rowing

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo., Dec 24, (AP) — The journey from nowhere to an Olympic gold medal is a tale as old as time.

Just as well-worn, but far less explored, are the stories about great athletes who realize they can't make it anywhere unless they have a way to bankroll the trip.

"The Boys in the Boat" is Hollywood and director George Clooney's way of stringing those plot lines together. That it opens Christmas Day, a mere seven months before the start of the Paris Olympics, is good fortune for the people who oversee rowing in the US and know the general public mostly either a) doesn't think about that sport or b) sees it as the exclusive playground for East Coast and Ivy League elites.

USRowing worked with producers of the movie to sponsor dozens of screenings across the country with two purposes: raising funds for an organization that received about \$3.5 million of its \$15 million budget in 2023 from charitable donations, and building awareness across racial and socioeconomic lines. One jarring stat: In 2021, a study found that only 2% of women who competed in NCAA rowing were Black. (Men's rowing isn't sanctioned by the NCAA, and so, wasn't part of the study.)

"What we're trying to do here, and what so many clubs are doing around the country, is trying to create programs and opportunities" for people to row, said USRowing CEO Amanda Kraus.

"TBITB" is about a group of poor students at the University of Washington who try out for the junior varsity crew team. It's 1936, and far from seeking Olympic glory, these guys are simply trying to find a

way to make a buck.

"All you gotta do is make the team," one of them says. "How hard can that be?"

Plenty hard, it turns out, and what ensues is the Miracle on Ice, except on water - and with one other notable difference: Most of those hockey kids always knew where their next meal was coming from.

Certainly there are others out there in a country of 330 million looking for a fresh start, a taste of the great outdoors and a chance to try something new. Kraus believes her sport might be that thing - and that all those potential rowers don't have to be daughters and sons of millionaires.

Inspire

Rowing is hoping to inspire more people like Arshay Cooper, who was a member of the first all-Black high school rowing team at Manley High School in Chicago. Cooper authored a book, "A Most Beautiful Thing," that itself was made into a movie produced by basketball stars Grant Hill and Dwyane Wade.

"In rowing, you move forward by looking in the opposite direction," is a quote from Cooper on his website that describes his worldview. "I learned that it's OK to look back, as long as you keep pushing forward."

The sport also hopes to build more programs, such as Learn to Row Day, when rowing clubs are urged to welcome newcomers and teach

them about the sport.

So much about rowing is a steep climb. Kraus says it costs around \$50,000 a year to support a Team USA rower; that comes after the tens of thousands expended on their development at the grassroots and college levels. But, she said, building a pipeline is an investment worth making, and it doesn't mean everyone has to end up at the Olympics.

"We hope people can get inspired to really check the sport out for themselves," Kraus said. "You can be 30 or 40 or 70 and go do a 'Learn to Row' course at your local club. That's a real thing. You don't have to row in college to be part of this sport."

USRowing has around 74,000 members (by comparison, the US Tennis Association has 680,000) and, like all niche sports, the Olympics are its time to shine. That makes a rowing movie a Christmas present for this sport.

The high point in the film - based on the 2013 book of the same name by Daniel James Brown that's considered rowing's bible - takes place during a particularly fraught time. At the 1936 Berlin Games, Nazi flags get better placement than the Olympic rings and Adolf Hitler is a constantly glowering presence.

Nobody, however, poses a bigger threat to the boys from Washington than the leader of America's Olympic committee, who appears unbothered as he tells their coach that, even though they won their era's version of the Olympic trials, a team with a better pedigree and more money will take their place in Berlin unless they raise \$5,000 in a week.

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This image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows Yahya Abdul-Mateen II in a scene from 'Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom.' (AP)

Film

'Lost Kingdom' ends Jason Momoa's epic underwater saga

'Aquaman' waves goodbye with trident high

By Mark Kennedy

It's perhaps appropriate that the latest Aquaman movie is about a lost kingdom. In many ways, this mini-franchise is just that, a Jason Momoa kingdom that could just quietly sink below the cinematic waves.

At least Momoa is going out swinging in "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom," an overstuffed tale that goes from desert to ice, steals from other movies like a coked-up magpie and says goodbye at the near-operatic level of a mid-franchise Marvel flick. Much of it doesn't happen underwater at all.

"Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom" is likely the final installment of the King of Atlantis' storyline for a time. The new heads of DC Studios plan nearly a dozen film and TV comic book projects in the next decade and none have Aquaman front and center.

Holding it all together is Momoa, and it's hard to overstate his charisma, humor and presence. DC Studios may regret deep-sixing this franchise if it doesn't find a home for an actor who actually looks like a real-life superhero. But, then again, they bungled it with Dwayne Johnson, too.

"Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom" is equivalent to "Thor: Love and Thunder" or "Fast X" - an attempt to raise the level of the last decent entry by keeping the same overall plot but just throwing money at it - more locations, more fights, more armies led by commanders in medieval-looking suits of armor riding underwater beasts.

In 2018 - the last time Aquaman owned the movie theaters - he battled his half-brother in the Ring of Fire, trekked to the Sahara to locate a clue about the Sacred Trident, wrecked most of Sicily, found the Hidden Sea, reunited with his mom and united Atlantis, along the way slaughtering more sea creatures than the entire Red Lobster empire.

This time, Aquaman - again under director James Wan - must reconcile with his brother (Patrick Wilson, the Ken doll of the deep) and hunt down the villain from the first film, Yahya Abdul-Mateen II as Black Manta, who is using ancient technology to destroy the globe, super mad at the murder of his dad.

The screenplay by returning writer David Leslie Johnson-McGoldrick throws everything at the sinking kitchen sink, including a cute sidekick (a genetically altered octopus) and a rare metallic ore named Orichalcum, described as "the greatest power in human history." It's basically a Kinko's copy of Eternium or Vibranium. Amber Heard is back as Aquaman's wife but this new movie is a brother-brother movie and so she's somewhat sidelined.

Dialogue

Johnson-McGoldrick unfortunately likes referencing other, better movies in the dialogue, like "Cast Away" and "Harry Potter," and layering in terrible puns like, "Put a hook in it." The sparks come from Momoa and Wilson needling each other like siblings do. Aquaman, at his heart, is a goofy, motorcycle-loving bouncer while his brother is so uptight he'd bring his own coaster to the bar.

The less gloopy visuals and plot liberally steal from "The Matrix," "Pirates of the Caribbean," "Star Wars" - Martin Short voices a Jabba the Hutt monster fish - "Jumanji," "Spider-Man" and "Fast & Furious." But credit goes to layering in some messaging about global warming - toxic algae, greenhouse gasses and rising acidity levels. There's an overused song this time - "Born to be Wild" by Steppenwolf - but it's not clear if that's for Aquaman, the man who wants to kill him or the Earth.

With rival Marvel at a bit of a crossroads - especially in the wake of its dropping of actor Jonathan Majors - DC, which has suffered its own woes with "The Flash," "Blue Beetle" and "Shazam: Fury of the ...," in 2023 - gets a chance to end the year on a high. "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom" might not be all that but it keeps its trident high even as the sea reclaims its hero.

"Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom," a Warner Bros. Pictures release that opens in theaters this weekend, is rated PG-13 for "sequences of sci-fi violence, action and some language." Running time: 143 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four.

Also:

NEW YORK: Comedian and actor Jo Koy has been

tapped to host the Golden Globes, picked by producers for his "infectious energy and relatable humor."

Koy last year saw his "Easter Sunday" become the first big studio movie with an all-Filipino ensemble. He has released five stand-up specials on Comedy Central and Netflix, including his most recent Netflix special, "Live From The Los Angeles Forum."

The Globes are recovering after scandal and several troubled years, including one without a broadcast. The show will take place on Jan. 7 and will mark Koy's first major award show hosting gig.

"We are thrilled to have Jo host the 81st Annual Golden Globe Awards and bring his infectious energy and relatable humor to kick off Hollywood's award season," said Helen Hoehne, Golden Globes president, in a statement Thursday. "We know Jo is bringing his A-game."

"I've stepped onto a lot of stages around the world in my career, but this one is going to be extra special. I'm so excited to be hosting the Golden Globes this year," said Koy in a statement. "This is that moment where I get to make my Filipino family proud."

Greta Gerwig's "Barbie" leads the Globes nominations with nine nods, including for best picture musical or comedy as well as acting nominations for Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling and three of its original songs. It is closely followed by its release date and meme companion Christopher Nolan's "Oppenheimer," which scored eight nominations, including for best picture drama and for actors Cillian Murphy, Robert Downey Jr. and Emily Blunt.

The Globes' voting body has now grown to 300 members, following backlash after a 2021 report in the Los Angeles Times found there were zero Black members in the group that was then composed of only 87 foreign journalists.

The 81st Golden Globes will be the first major broadcast of awards season, with a new home on CBS.

The Globes had long been one of the highest-profile awards season broadcasts, second only to the Oscars. Before the pandemic, it was still pulling in around 19 million viewers. (AP)

LONDON: The elusive artist Banksy displayed his latest work on a London street corner and it was taken less than hour after he confirmed its installation Friday.

A red stop sign with three military drones on it was taken in the middle of the day by a man with bolt cutters as witnesses snapped photos and shot video in the Peckham section of south London.

People commenting on Banksy's Instagram accurately predicted it wouldn't be there long after the artist posted a photo of it. Some of his work has sold for tens of millions of dollars.

"I went there thinking that people want that, I wanted to see it before something happened to it," a man who only wanted to be known as Alex told the Press Association.

He was among the many onlookers who watched in awe as a man in a red and black jacket climbed up on a bike next to the post where the sign was bolted to and began hitting it with his fists.

"We said, 'What are you doing?' but no one really knew what to do, we sort of just watched it happen," Alex said. "We were all a bit bemused; there was some honking of car horns."

The man then left and returned a few minutes later with bolt cutters to finish the job. Another man stabilized the Lime rental bike he stood on and he then removed it and ran away. (AP)

MEXICO CITY: Cristina Pacheco, the foremost chronicler of street life in Mexico City for half a century, died Thursday at 82.

With her newspaper column and television shows, Pacheco shed light on the common, unsung heroes who kept Mexico's economy and culture alive.

Pacheco was most often seen walking the streets of Mexico City, conducting animated interviews with craftspeople, street vendors, merchants, musicians and people from all walks of life.

"With more than 50 years in the world of journalism, Cristina Pacheco was close to her people and to each and every story she heard on the streets of Mexico," according to an announcement by her show, "Talking with Cristina," which confirmed her death.

Her daughter, Laura Emilia Pacheco, also confirmed the

death, but did not specify a cause. Pacheco was married to Mexican writer José Emilio Pacheco, who died in 2014.

Pacheco had taken a leave from her television show earlier this month, citing "health reasons, serious health reasons," without specifying what they were.

Pacheco's trademark television



Pacheco



Tusk

show, "Where We Live," ran from 1978 to 2009, and in 2010 was recognized by UNESCO as "a memory of the life of Mexico City and other regions in the country." (AP)

WARSAW, Poland: Viewers in Poland watched a remolded main evening newscast on TVP

state television Thursday, after the country's new, pro-European Union government took control of state media to free it from the control and propaganda of the previous right-wing ruling team.

Prime Minister Donald Tusk, whose Cabinet took office last week, has promised to free the outlet and other state-owned media

of the former ruling conservatives' propaganda and divisive policies.

The first broadcast under the new authorities began with experts and officials explaining why programs under the previous government violated standards of fairness and objectivity, and why the new government had to make changes quickly. (AP)

People & Places

Film

Emotional odyssey

Haigh explores past & pain of 'All of Us'

NEW YORK, Dec 24, (AP) — **Andrew Haigh** began getting a sense of the knockout power of his new film, "All of Us Strangers," a few days after it premiered at the Telluride Film Festival.

"I'd run into people who had seen the film three days before. I'd be talking to them and they'd just start crying," Haigh says, laughing. "And I'm sort of both apologetic and quite glad that it shook them to their core."

Haigh, the 50-year-old British filmmaker of "45 Years" and "Lean on Pete," is accustomed to strong responses from his films. His 2011 breakthrough, "Weekend," about a tender but brief romance, is considered a landmark of queer cinema.

"That that film has had an effect will probably always be the thing that I'm most proud of," Haigh said in an interview earlier this fall when "All of Us Strangers" was playing at the New York Film Festival.

Yet Haigh's latest, which opened in limited release Friday, may be his most shattering. Andrew Scott stars as Adam, a lonely screenwriter who, while toiling on a script, is transported back to his childhood home where he finds his long-dead parents (Claire Foy, Jamie Bell) as they were when Adam was 12. At the same time, Adam is hesitantly exploring a relationship with a neighbor named Henry (Paul Mescal).

The result is something magical and mournful that draws profound connections between familial love and romantic love, between gay life and estrangement, and between a pair of strangers nursing shared wounds. For Haigh, who shot the childhood scenes in the home he grew up in, it was also highly personal.

"I was entering my past as Adam was entering his," Haigh says. "The whole process felt like a slightly expensive therapy session."

Here are edited excerpts from the conversation.

AP: This is the first time you've attempted something in a metaphysical realm. Was it daunting?

Haigh: It was really daunting. When you set a film, everyone's like, "What's it like? What can you compare it to?" And I knew I was going to be in for a tricky ride because I couldn't think of anything to compare it to. I'm obviously trying to do something different that is not really a traditional ghost story. It's a metaphysical realm, but I still wanted it to feel grounded.

AP: You depart from the Japanese novel by Taichi Yamada the film is based on, adding the romantic storyline. What led you in that direction?

Haigh: I loved the central idea in the novel about the parents but wanted to add this layer of this relationship and how that relates to the grief of losing his parents, wrapped up in the trauma, as he sees it, of growing up an outsider, growing up gay. I felt they meshed in a really interesting way. Those kind of traumas and pains and struggles can be linked. And I always wanted to tell a story about the pain that we carry around with us, and how easily it can come to the surface again.

AP: That was also the case in your "45 Years," where a longtime married couple is rocked when the husband's long-ago lover is found in a melting glacier. Both films have a frozen-in-time element.

Haigh: I think all of my films are concerned with time. "Weekend" is set over 48 hours. "45 Years" is set over a week, yet it seems to go back in time. Time feels really unstable to me. You can be transported back 40 years just by hearing a song. And you can feel what it felt like when you were 12, you can literally feel it in your whole body. We're constantly haunted. The love that you feel for people that have been lost is as intense years and years later. It's exactly the same intensity of feeling. Nothing else is like that, that intensity.

AP: There's a scene when Adam tells Henry about his parents' death but says it was a long time ago. Henry replies, "I don't think that matters."

Haigh: That to me is such a key line. I think for lots of things, we're convinced that we've gotten over them. We're told, "Time heals all wounds." But it doesn't. You feel it in your body, physically. You remember the pain you used to feel. We pretend we're OK but, of course, most of the time we're not. And we're still children. I'm 50 now and sometimes I feel like, "My God, I'm 10." How is that even possible? You're supposed to become an adult. When does this happen that I become an adult?

AP: One of the movie's most lovely moments is when Adam puts on his childhood pajamas.

Haigh: Exactly. It's so absurd, that moment. We all still want our Christmases to be like we remember even if those Christmases were miserable at the time. We kind of have this strange nostalgic sense of what childhood should have been. I think for a lot of queer kids, there's a sense of grief that they feel that their childhood wasn't the childhood that they wished they could have had. There's a sort of mourning that queer people can go through wishing desperately for a thing that didn't exist.

AP: Did you feel that way?

Haigh: Absolutely. I felt like an outsider for a very long time as a kid. It took me a long, long, long time to come to terms with my sexuality. I didn't come out until my mid- to late-20s. It took me a long time. And my childhood had some complications. I always felt on edge. And I think that's how a lot of people feel, whether you're gay or not. Lots of kids feel slightly estranged from their family.

AP: The way you introduce Jamie Bell's character — he seems almost like a potential lover — seems to immediately draw a connection between his relationship with Adam and Adam's relationship with Henry.

Haigh: I feel really strongly that parental love is how you understand love in general. So it's bound to feed into romantic love. I always found that the feeling of romantic love is so similar to the feeling of love you have for your family. There's a difference, but they're so connected, which is why it's so hard to forge relationships unless you felt huge amounts of love and protection when you're younger.

AP: I wouldn't want to give away the film's gorgeous ending, but I have to ask what pushed you to conclude it in such a cosmic way?

Haigh: I do want it to have some kind of cosmic feeling to it. Someone said to me, "Stars can be dead for millions of years but you still see their light." A little bit cheesy, I guess, but, still, it's sort of true. Also as a kid, I never thought growing up in the '80s that I would be able to be gay and have a relationship and be in love. I thought it was an impossibility. When I was making the film, I was like: You know what? I'm going to make the sense of love massive. I want to go into the stars.



Haigh



This image provided by NBC shows Jon Cryer, as Jim, (left), and Abigail Spencer, as Julia, in a scene from the television series 'Extended Family.' (AP)

Television

Love, laughter and drama in 'Extended Family'

Celtics owner's life inspires TV sitcom

BOSTON, Dec 24, (AP) — When Boston Celtics owner Wyc Grousbeck felt like his life could be the premise for a television sitcom, he knew just where to turn: His friend Tom Werner, a Red Sox owner and TV veteran who was behind megahits like "The Cosby Show," "Roseanne" and "That '70s Show."

The result is "Extended Family," which premieres on NBC on Saturday night (8 p.m. EST, following the football) starring Jon Cryer ("Two and a Half Men"), Donald Faison ("Scrubs") and Abigail Spencer ("Grey's Anatomy," "Suits") in a love triangle inspired by the real-life dynamic that developed between Grousbeck, his new wife and her ex-husband — a lifelong Celtics fan.

"He looked at her like: 'There's a million guys in New England you could be dating,'" said Werner, who advised the three on developing the show and joined them as an executive producer. "What am I going to tell my friends?"

The ensuing hijinks play off the decision by Emilia Fazzalari and George Geyer to follow their divorce with an arrangement called nesting: Instead of making the children bounce around during custody swaps, the kids stay in the family apartment and the parents move in and out.

"The nest is someplace where Julia and I have tried to give our kids the false impression that nothing has changed," Jim Kearney (Cryer) says in the pilot, which revolves around a true story in which Geyer was left in charge of his daughter's goldfish "Googles" while she was at summer camp. The fish dies, they decide to replace it with a look-alike, and then wackiness ensues.

Fazzalari and Geyer said the unusually amicable divorce was an attempt to minimize the disruption for their two children.

"We decided to get divorced, and we decided that we should pay the price for that, not the kids," Geyer said in a recent interview. "You can choose two routes when you get divorced. You can choose to be horrible or you can make the best of it. And we chose to make the best of it."

And everything was fine — until Fazzalari started dating Grousbeck.

In the pilot, Jim hits Celtics owner Trey Turner (Faison) up for tickets and his ex-wife Julia Mariano (Spencer) says: "Looks like we both met the man of our dreams." But in real life there were more mixed emotions for Geyer, who grew up outside of Boston, went to Boston College and raised his kids as Boston sports fans while living in New York.

"It has to sting, right?" he said. "I'm a Celtics fan and she starts dating the owner of the Celtics? Not to mention being Irish and growing up in Boston and having all my Boston friends — you know how they like to give people a hard time. You can imagine the grief I've taken from them as far as my wife being now married to the owner of the Boston Celtics."

Characters

On a recent Zoom call, Grousbeck, Fazzalari and Geyer banter good-naturedly, just as the characters do. When Geyer refers to Fazzalari as his wife, she corrects him: "ex-wife"; Geyer gives Grousbeck a hard time about the trade of NBA championship-winning point guard Rajon Rondo.

"It's not a documentary," Geyer said. "But if you watch the way the three characters interact on screen, it is pretty similar."

And though there are some ideas taken from their lives, most of the stories are created in the writers' room, where Geyer, who is mostly retired after working 30 years for Bloomberg LLP, sits in two weeks a month as a contributor. "I even have gotten one or two lines into the show," he said.

Werner said he is often approached by people who think they have good ideas for a TV show, much like Red Sox fans make lineup suggestions. ("It's kind of like when someone says, 'Why didn't you take that pitcher out in the seventh inning?'" he said. "Everyone thinks they're smarter than the manager.")

But he was sold on the premise for "Extended Family" when he was on vacation in Mexico with Grousbeck and Fazzalari and he overheard her talking — and laughing — to Geyer on the phone.

"I hang up and Tom goes, 'I thought you were going to have a conversation with your ex-husband.' I go, 'No, that was my ex-husband.'" Fazzalari said. "Wyc at that point said, 'Let me tell you about this interesting situation. I actually think it's a sitcom.'"

Werner sent them some past treatments as examples, and then gave them notes on their effort. Grousbeck and Fazzalari — who also created tequila company Cincoro with NBA great Michael Jordan — and Geyer are executive producers of the show and involved in the casting, set design, costumes and scripts.

Veteran actor and writer — and fervent Boston sports fan — Mike O'Malley was brought on as the showrunner and creator.

"When they call you to do something like this, you're excited because you think you might get some good tickets," said O'Malley, who also worked with Werner — and NBA star LeBron James — on the series "Survivor's Remorse." "But then you realize: If I blow this, I might be persona non grata."

Comedian Lenny Clarke brings his authentic Boston accent to his part as Jim's father. Former Celtic — and Laker — Rick Fox, who has a few dozen acting credits, plays the team's general manager. The show, which has been picked up for 13 episodes, is scheduled to move into a regular timeslot on Tuesday nights at 8:30 p.m. EST starting Jan. 2.

One way "Extended Family" does keep it real: It uses the Celtics name and other actual NBA intellectual property. There is an external shot of the TD Garden, where the Celtics play, and a scene that takes place in a luxury suite festooned with framed jerseys — the No. 00 of Robert Parish, the No. 20 of Ray Allen, and the No. 41 of ... Kelly Olynyk?

"The show wasn't going to be the same if it was the Boston Bluebirds," Grousbeck said. "The NBA said: 'Go for it.'"

The pilot was shot during the 2022 NBA Finals, when Grousbeck and Fazzalari happened to be spending some time in California to watch the Celtics play (and ultimately lose to) the Golden State Warriors.



Mike O'Malley arrives at the world premiere gala screening of 'Concussion' during the AFI Fest on Nov. 10, 2015, in Los Angeles. (AP)



Hochul



Coleman

Variety

NEW YORK: Rapper **Travell "G. Dep" Coleman**, who walked into a New York police precinct in 2010 and admitted to committing a nearly two-decade-old cold case murder to clear his conscience, has been granted clemency by Gov. **Kathy Hochul**.

Now 49, Coleman has served 13 of a 15-year-to-life sentence. With his sentence being commuted by the Democratic governor, he will now be allowed to seek parole earlier than his original 2025 date.

Coleman is one of 16 individuals granted clemency by Hochul in an announcement made Friday. They include 12 pardons and four commutations. It marked the third time Hochul has granted clemency in 2023. "Through the clemency process, it is my solemn responsibility as governor to recognize the efforts individuals have made to improve their lives and show that redemption is possible," Hochul said in a written statement.

The rapper earned an associate's degree while in prison and facilitated violence prevention and sobriety counseling programs, while also participating in a variety of educational and rehabilitative classes, according to Hochul's office. His clemency application was supported by the prosecutor in the case and the judge who sentenced him. (AP)

ATHENS, Greece: Fancy seeing the ancient Acropolis uncluttered by thousands of selfie-snappers? A solution is in the works, but it will set you back up to 5,000 euros (\$5,500).

Starting April 1, 2024, Greece plans to offer exclusive guided tours of its most powerful tourist magnet to handfuls of well-heeled visitors outside normal opening hours.

The measure is part of an overhaul of ticketing policy for Greece's archaeological sites and museums, which will see across-the-board increases as of April 2025.

An official at Greece's Culture Ministry said Friday that the new Acropolis service will apply to a maximum four groups of up to five people each. It will cost 5,000 euros (\$5,500) per group, although individuals prepared to cover the full group fee are welcome to visit on their own.

Nikoletta Divari-Valakou, head of the ministry's cultural resources development, said the proceeds will be plowed back into cultural projects.

"We decided to implement (the measure) ... because there is demand, people have been asking for it," Divari-Valakou told The Associated Press.

"It won't harm the archaeological site, indeed it will contribute to its better

promotion," she added. "And the revenues will be reinvested in cultural projects and monuments."

The visits, with certified guides, will last up to two hours; from 7-9 a.m. just before the site opens, or 8-10 p.m. after it closes.

Divari-Valakou said if it goes well, the program could be expanded from 2025 to include other major sites.

Dominating the Athens skyline, the Acropolis and its 2,500-year-old marble monuments — including the Parthenon Tem-



Callum Turner (from left), George Clooney and Joel Edgerton pose for a portrait to promote the film 'The Boys in the Boat,' Saturday, Dec. 9, in Los Angeles. (AP) — Details Page 11

ple, whose sculptures prompted a decades-old dispute with **Britain** — is Greece's most-visited ancient site. Amid a surge of tourist arrivals in the country, it attracted more than 3 million people in 2022. (AP)

WASHINGTON: As children around the world eagerly await Santa's arrival on Christmas, the military is ready to track him and see if he's using any new technology.

Armed with radars, sensors and aircraft, the North American Aerospace Defense Command in **Colorado** keeps a close watch on Santa and his sleigh from the moment he leaves the North Pole. And it once again will share all those details so everyone can follow along as Santa travels the globe beginning Christmas Eve.

NORAD, the military command that is responsible for protecting North American airspace, has launched its noradsanta.org website, social media sites and mobile app, loaded with games, movies, books and music. And there's a countdown clock showing when the official tracking of the sleigh will start.

The military will track Santa with "the same technology we use every single day to keep North America safe," said U.S. Air Force Col. **Elizabeth Mathias**, NORAD's chief spokesperson. "We're able to follow the light from Rudolph's red nose." (AP)

War amputees embrace advanced prosthetics

Bionic prostheses empower wounded Ukrainian soldiers

KYIV, Ukraine, Dec 24, (AP) — When Alexis Cholas lost his right arm as a volunteer combat medic near the front lines in eastern Ukraine, his civilian career as a surgeon was over. But thanks to a new bionic arm, he was able to continue working in health care and is now a rehab specialist helping other amputees.

The 26-year-old is delighted with his sleek black robotic arm — he described it as “love at first sight” — and realizes how lucky he was to get one.

Mobility

“There are fewer (bionic) arms available than lost ones,” Cholas said.

Russia’s war on Ukraine has created a massive need for prosthetic limbs. An estimated 20,000 Ukrainians have had amputations since the war started in February 2022, many of them soldiers who lost arms or legs due to blast wounds.

Only a small number was able to receive bionic prostheses, which are more advanced and can provide greater mobility than the traditional prosthetic limbs.

They are also far more costly than conventional prostheses.

Bionic artificial limbs typically pick up electrical signals from the muscles that remain above the amputation site, thanks to something called myoelectric technology, to carry out an intended motion.

Cholas’ bionic arm was made by Esper Bionics. Before 2022, the Ukrainian startup primarily targeted the United States market, but due to the sharp rise in demand for prosthetic limbs caused by the war, Esper now distributes 70% of its products at home.

The company’s production hub in the capital of Kyiv is working at full capacity, with more than 30 workers producing about dozen bionic hands a month.

In one corner of the factory, a small group of engineers huddle as they program, assemble and test the elegant bionic arms — known as Esper Hand. Each finger’s movement on the robotic hand is accompanied by a soft whirring sound, assuring the engineers of its smooth operation.

Bohdan Diorditsa, head of strategic relations at the company, says that despite ramping up production, Esper Bionics is struggling to keep up with demand, with almost 120 people on the waitlist.

In Ukraine, the company says it provides the bionic prostheses at zero profit for about \$7,000 a piece, just enough to cover production costs. In the United States, the Esper Hand sells for more than \$20,000.

“We do not consider Ukraine as a market, but rather as an opportunity to help,” says Diorditsa.

Compared to a conventional prosthesis, which is designed to replicate

simple basic functions of a missing arm or leg, a bionic one offers the capability to restore fine motor skills.

“Everyone wants them,” says Anton Haidash, a prosthetist at Unbroken, a municipal center in the city of Lviv that focuses on rehabilitation of civilians and soldiers affected by the war. The center has helped provide prosthetic limbs to about 250 people so far, including about 20 bionic arms.

The difference in cost is significant. While bionic limbs can cost up to \$50,000, conventional artificial limbs are priced at \$800-\$2,700, Haidash says.

Ukrainians can get the regular artificial limbs free of charge through the public health care system. However, to get a bionic prosthesis, they normally need additional funding from charities or rehabilitation centers such as Unbroken, which depend on donations.

And while patients can make the final decision about the type of prostheses they want, a variety of factors, including the nature of the injury and the person’s occupation, also play a role.

Unbroken purchases bionic prostheses from German and Icelandic companies as well as Esper Bionics, whose notable advantage is having both a manufacturing and a service center in Ukraine. This means people don’t need to travel abroad when a repair or resizing is required.

Interactions

Another outstanding characteristic of the Esper Hand, which is powered by artificial intelligence, is its ability to adapt over time, learning the user’s unique interactions with the hand.

After getting outfitted with his bionic arm, Cholas went back to volunteering as a combat medic on the front lines, while in his day job in Kyiv he works as a rehabilitation specialist in a public hospital. Most of his patients are members of the military or civilians who, like him, have lost limbs. He says their shared experience helps him quickly develop a rapport with his patients.

“I now know a lot not only from textbooks but also from my own experience,” he says.

Cholas speaks to his patients encouragingly as he examines their injuries. His movements with the bionic hand are natural and fluid. He effortlessly removes a bandage and dresses a patient’s wounds without the assistance of nurses.

The bionic prosthesis allows him to perform even delicate movements, such as picking up a grape without crushing it, he says.

“I feel uncomfortable when I’m without the prosthesis,” he says. “But when I have the bionic arm on, I feel comfortable. It’s like a part of you.”



Dr. Alexis Cholas (left), examines amputated limb of Serhiy Hohdan, Ukrainian soldier at the hospital’s rehabilitation center in Kyiv, Ukraine, Wednesday, Nov. 8, 2023. (AP)

Endocrinology consultants call for action to reduce ASCVD risk

20% of Kuwait’s type 2 diabetes patients have atherosclerotic heart disease: study

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Novo Nordisk, a global healthcare company, announced today the results of its PACT MEA study on people living with type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM). This study found that all people with T2DM in Kuwait are at a high risk of developing atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD), and that 20% of them are already diagnosed with ASCVD. This is the first time such a study, sponsored by Novo Nordisk, was conducted to understand the burden of ASCVD in T2DM with the findings published in renowned scientific journals.

Consultant in Endocrinology and Metabolism, and the lead investigator for PACT MEA study in Kuwait Dr. Hessa Alkandari, said “While we were aware of Kuwait’s high prevalence of T2DM, PACT MEA provided valuable insights into the local burden of ASCVD among people with T2DM locally. The study highlights unmet needs on multiple fronts in managing T2DM patients at high risk of developing ASCVD.”

Screening

Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital Senior Consultant Endocrinologist, and a key investigator in the PACT MEA study, Dr. Waleed Al-Al-Dahi, believes that the study results are a wake-up call to both the healthcare community and people living with T2DM to take necessary steps to reduce the burden of ASCVD. He stressed the importance of actions such as a healthy lifestyle, regular screening for ASCVD, controlling risk factors such as lipids, blood glucose, blood pressure, and body weight, adhering to medications, and following physicians’ advice diligently to minimize the risk of developing ASCVD in people living with T2DM.

PACT MEA’s overall study sample included 3,726 individuals, with the participation of 350 patients from Kuwait, 366 from Bahrain, 346 from Qatar, 550 from Egypt, 576 from



PACT MEA group photo.

Jordan, 996 from South Africa, and 542 United Arab Emirates. Eligible patients were those aged 18 years and over who had been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes (T2D) at least six months before study entry. The weighted distribution of cardiovascular risk categories, as per the 2021 ESC guidelines, revealed that 69% were classified as high risk, and nearly 30% as very high risk.

Novo Nordisk Vice President and General Manager in the Gulf, Mr.

Venkat Kalyan, expressed the company’s gratitude for collaborating with Kuwait’s most prominent investigators through this study. He stressed the importance of local studies in taking the necessary steps forward and confirmed the company’s commitment to developing new medicines for people with diabetes. Additionally, Novo Nordisk is keen on providing appropriate solutions for chronic diseases, particularly diabetes and obesity, in accordance with the latest scientific research.

Novo Nordisk, a leading global healthcare company founded in 1923 and headquartered in Denmark, drives change to defeat diabetes, obesity, and rare blood and endocrine diseases. Building on its pioneering work in diabetes, the company discovers scientific breakthroughs, delivers its medicines to patients worldwide, and works to prevent and ultimately cure diseases. With 61,400 employees in 80 countries, Novo Nordisk delivers its products in around 170 countries.

Extraordinary birth story

Woman with double uterus gives birth to 2 babies

Empowering oncology in Sub-Saharan Africa

Int’l collaboration improves cancer care in Africa

DORA, Ala., Dec 24, (AP) — An Alabama woman with two uteri and two cervixes has given birth to two babies after carrying one of them in each uterus.

Kelsey Hatcher of Dora, about 28 miles (45.06 kilometers) northwest of Birmingham, gave birth to two girls on Wednesday and Thursday after a combined 20 hours of labor.

Hatcher was diagnosed with a double uterus, also called uterus didelphys, when she was 17. The rare congenital condition occurs in 0.3% of women, according to a report published by the University of Alabama at Birmingham. There is an “estimated one-in-a-million chance” of carrying a baby in both uteri, also known as a dicavitary pregnancy, the report says.

The older child, Roxi, was born on Tuesday, and Rebel arrived on Wednesday. Hatcher told WVTM-TV that both she and the newborns are healthy. Her husband, Caleb, was with her in the hospital, she said. “That was our first moment of just us four together,” Hatcher said. “And really getting to breathe that in and be in the moment and look at the girls together.”

PLYMOUTH MEETING, Pa., Dec 24, (Agencies) The National Comprehensive Cancer Network — an alliance of leading academic cancer centers in the United States — is celebrating six years of working alongside the African Cancer Coalition (ACC), the American Cancer Society (ACS), and the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI), as part of Allied Against Cancer. The collaboration was formed to support and empower the Sub-Saharan African oncology community to advance health system capacity, deliver high-quality cancer care, and improve access for all patients.

Allied Against Cancer’s work involves several initiatives, including the development of NCCN Harmonized Guidelines for Sub-Saharan Africa. These evidence-based recommendations are based on in-region expert

consensus on context-appropriate approaches for treating nearly all adult cancers across more than a dozen countries throughout the region.

“The oncology community in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is working with NCCN to enhance the capacity of our professionals to meet the challenge of cancer care in SSA and cases that are increasing at a significant rate,” said Professor Isaac Adewole, Former Nigerian Minister of Health, Co-Chair of ACC. “Allied Against Cancer activities and tools like the NCCN Harmonized Guidelines help us to ensure cancer care can be provided according to the latest research, based on all available resources. Standardizing care according to established best practices allows us to better anticipate what our needs will be, including medication, making it easier to negotiate prices

and increase necessary infrastructure as well as participate in clinical trials and international conferences or meetings.”

The first NCCN Harmonized Guidelines for Sub-Saharan Africa debuted in November of 2017, during the biennial African Organisation for Research and Training in Cancer (AORTIC) International Conference on Cancer in Africa in Kigali, Rwanda.

Since then, the library has grown to 54 NCCN Harmonized Guidelines for Sub-Saharan Africa, providing best practice cancer treatment recommendations for more than 92% of all adult cancer incidence in the region, including breast, prostate, and cervical cancers, as well as supportive care resources and screening recommendations. Recently, the groups have focused on the development of pediatric guidelines.

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Uconn edges St John's 69-65

Florida Atlantic knocks off Arizona in 2OT at Desert Classic

Pistons 'match' NBA record for longest losing streak in season

James scores season-high 40 points, Lakers beat Thunder to end 4-game skid

NEW YORK, Dec 24, (AP): The Detroit Pistons matched the NBA record for the longest losing streak in a single season, falling 126-115 to the Brooklyn Nets on Saturday night for their 26th straight loss.

The Pistons joined the 2010-11 Cleveland Cavaliers and 2013-14 Philadelphia 76ers, dropping to 2-27 in their first season under Monty Williams. They were in the game in the second half before the Nets put them away with a 15-0 run to open a 21-point lead and ensure that Detroit would remain winless since Oct. 28.

The teams will meet again Tuesday night in Detroit, with the Pistons nearing the overall longest skid in league history. The 76ers lost 28 consecutive games from late in the 2014-15 season through early 2015-16.

Mikal Bridges had 29 points, seven assists and six rebounds for the Nets, who put seven players in double figures and snapped their five-game losing streak. Cam Thomas scored 20 points.

The Nets shot 52% from the field, showing plenty of energy in their second night of back-to-back games after losing to the NBA champion Denver Nuggets on Friday. They got some easy baskets thanks to the Pistons, whose 14 turnovers led to 22 points.

Jaden Ivey scored 23 points for the Pistons, who started 2-1 before their free fall toward infamy.

Lakers 129, Thunder 120

In Oklahoma City, LeBron James scored a season-high 40 points and Los Angeles beat Oklahoma City to snap a four-game losing streak.

Anthony Davis, who had called this a must-win game, added 26 points, 11 rebounds and seven assists for the Lakers. Rui Hachimura scored 21 points and Austin Reaves chipped in 11 points and 10 assists for Los Angeles,



Golden State Warriors guard Brandin Podziemski (2) drives toward the basket during the first half of the team's NBA basketball game against the Portland Trail Blazers in San Francisco, Saturday, Dec. 23, 2023. (AP)

which had gone 1-5 since winning the In-Season Tournament.

The 38-year-old James was 13 of 20 from the field, hitting five 3-pointers without a miss, and made all nine of his free throws. He also had seven rebounds, seven assists and two blocks.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 34 points for Oklahoma City. The Thunder had won three straight and five of six.

Celtics 145, Clippers 108

In Los Angeles, Jayson Tatum scored 30 points and Boston kicked off its Christmas weekend in Southern California with a victory over Los Angeles.

Jaylen Brown added 24 points and Jrue Holiday had 20 points and seven assists. At 22-6, Boston remained tied

with Minnesota for the overall NBA lead after the Timberwolves beat Sacramento on Saturday night.

BASKETBALL

The Celtics went 25 of 53 from 3-point range in winning for the seventh time in eight games. Boston shot 52.1% overall in the same arena where it will play a Christmas Day rivalry showdown against the Los Angeles Lakers.

Paul George scored 21 points for Clippers, who were without Kawhi Leonard for the second consecutive game because of a left hip contusion.

Los Angeles has lost both games following a nine-game winning streak.

Timberwolves 110, Kings 98

In Sacramento, Anthony Edwards had 34 points and 10 assists, Rudy Gobert added 21 points and 17 rebounds and Minnesota beat Sacramento to remain tied with Boston for the NBA lead.

Jaden McDaniels had 20 points and Kyle Anderson scored 10 for Minnesota in place of star center Karl-Anthony Towns, who sat out with left knee soreness.

De'Aaron Fox had 27 points and six assists for Sacramento. Domantas Sabonis finished with a triple-double of 17 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists.

The Kings shot 8 of 33 from beyond the arc, the fewest 3-pointers they've made in a game this season. Minnesota outrebounded Sacramento 43-40 and forced 11 turnovers.

Mavericks 144, Spurs 119

In Dallas, Luka Doncic scored 39 points in a triple-double and Dallas routed San Antonio after Spurs rookie star Victor Wembanyama was a late scratch when he sprained an ankle during warmups.

Doncic, who had 12 rebounds and recorded his 10th assist just before leaving the game for good at the end of the third quarter, had his 36th 30-point triple-double, one shy of LeBron James for third on the career list.

The Spurs entered the game on a 1-21 skid, and their luck didn't get any better when Wembanyama stepped on a ball boy's foot after taking a few steps following a shot before the game. The 19-year-old sensation got his right ankle retaped and wanted to play, but coach Gregg Popovich held the nearly 7-foot-4 Wembanyama out for precautionary reasons.

Jeremy Sochan had 23 points and nine rebounds for the Spurs, who lost their fourth straight since stopping an 18-game losing streak, which set a franchise record for the second consecutive season.

Grizzlies 125, Hawks 119

In Atlanta, Ja Morant had 30 points and 11 assists and Memphis beat Atlanta to improve to 3-0 since his return.

Desmond Bane had 37 points for the Grizzlies, who had not won three straight games all season while stumbling to a 6-19 start as Morant served a 25-game suspension for waving a gun multiple times on social media. Bane also had seven rebounds and six assists.

Atlanta's Trae Young made history in defeat, finishing with 30 points and 13 assists. It was his seventh consecutive game with at least 30 points and 10 assists, tying Oscar Robertson for the longest such streak in NBA history. Robertson set the mark in 1964-65.

Bucks 130, Knicks 111

In New York, Giannis Antetokounmpo had 28 points, seven assists and seven rebounds and Milwaukee beat New York, opening a two-game series with its seventh straight victory.

Bobby Portis added 23 points and 11 rebound to help the Bucks beat the Knicks for the ninth straight time. They will try to do it again Monday in front of a national TV audience as the leadoff game to the NBA's Christmas schedule.

Jalen Brunson scored 36 points for New York.

Nuggets 102, Hornets 95

In Charlotte, Michael Porter Jr. scored 22 points, Nikola Jokic had 18 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists and Denver held Charlotte Hornets without a field goal for more than 11 minutes in the third quarter.

Jamal Murray added 20 points and 12 rebounds for Denver, which opened the second half on a 25-1 run and outscored the Hornets 30-9 in the third quarter.

Miles Bridges led Charlotte with 22 points. The injury-riddled Hornets have lost seven straight.

LAS VEGAS, Dec 24, (AP): Johnell Davis had 35 points and nine rebounds and No. 14 Florida Atlantic beat No. 4 Arizona 96-95 in double overtime on Saturday in the Desert Classic, the Owls' first win over a top-10 team.

Giancarlo Rosado made the back end of two free throws with just under a minute remaining for what turned out to be the winning point for the Owls (10-2), who beat their second ranked opponent of the season. FAU defeated then-No. 12 Texas A&M 96-89 on Nov. 24.

Caleb Love, who led Arizona (9-2) with 26 points, missed a 3-pointer at the buzzer. He was one of five Wildcats to score in double figures. Pelle Larsson added 15 points.

Jalen Gaffney scored 20 points and Alijah Martin added 13 for FAU, which made a surprising run to the Final Four in the NCAA Tournament last season.

Vladislav Goldin, who entered leading the nation in shooting at 75.9% and FAU in scoring at 15.1 points per game and rebounds (7.0), was in foul trouble most of the game. He picked up his fifth foul in the first overtime and finished with seven points and three rebounds.

Uconn 69, St. John's 65

In Hartford, Tristen Newton scored 12 of his 15 points in the second half, including a key free throw with just under 17 seconds left, and UConn held off St. John's.

Samson Johnson, starting in place of injured center Donovan Clingan, added 16 points for the Huskies (11-2, 1-1 Big East) and Cam Spencer scored 15.

Joel Soriano had 14 points and 11 rebounds to lead St. John's, which had won six of seven. Daniss Jenkins added 13 points for the Red Storm (8-4, 1-1).

The Huskies will be without the 7-foot-2 Clingan for about a month. The school said the sophomore, who

missed a month of the preseason with a right foot injury, injured a tendon in the same foot Wednesday during a loss at Seton Hall.

Memphis 77, Vanderbilt 75

In Memphis, David Jones scored 21 of his 28 points in the second half as Memphis held on to deal Vanderbilt its fourth straight loss.

Jahvon Quinerly added 13 points for Memphis (10-2), which won its fifth straight.

Ezra Manjon led Vanderbilt with 22 points. Tasos Kamateros, Jason Rivera-Torres and Tyrin Lawrence each scored 12 points for Vanderbilt (4-8).

Lawrence hits two free throws with 13.3 seconds left to pull Vanderbilt

BASKETBALL

within 75-73. From there it became a free-throw shooting contest as Jones and Jaqualon Roberts each split a pair of free throws. Then, Quinerly made one of two free throws and Memphis held a 77-74 advantage with 9 seconds left. Kamateros made one free throw, cutting the Memphis lead to the final 77-75 score.

Mississippi 89, Southern Mississippi 72

In Biloxi, Matthew Murrell had a season-high 26 points and five assists. Jaylen Murray scored 21 points and unbeaten Mississippi defeated Southern Miss.

The victory extended one of the nation's longest winning streaks and wrapped up a 2-0 week for an Ole Miss (12-0) team that's ranked inside the AP Top 25 for the first time since 2019.

Southern Miss (6-6) was led off the bench by Cobie Montgomery, who scored 13 of his 15 points in the first half. The Golden Eagles' bench produced 40 points while the starting five hit just 10 field goals.



UConn's Tristen Newton (2) shoots against St. John's Zuby Ejiyor (24) and Chris Ledlum (8) during the first half of an NCAA college basketball game, Saturday, Dec. 23, 2023, in Hartford, Conn. (AP)

Inter beat Lecce

Osimhen sent off for Napoli in their 2-0 defeat at Roma

ROME, Dec 24, (AP): Victor Osimhen followed his contract renewal with Napoli in the worst possible way as he got sent off in a 2-0 defeat at Roma in Serie A on Saturday.

Defending champion Napoli ended the match with nine men as Matteo Politano was also red-carded shortly before Lorenzo Pellegrini scored the opener.

Romelu Lukaku sealed the match for Roma, which moved up to sixth, a point above Napoli and three points below fourth-placed Bologna.

Napoli was looking to bounce back from a 4-0 humiliation at home to Frosinone in the Italian Cup on Tuesday.

SOCCER

The tension was high at the Stadio Olimpico with both coaches booked for dissent in the first half amid a large number of fouls and protests. It was little surprise when Politano was shown a straight red card in the 66th minute for kicking out at Nicola Zalewski after having his jersey tugged by the Roma midfielder.

Roma broke the deadlock 10 minutes later when attempts by Sardu Azmoun and then Stephan El Shaarawy were charged down but the latter turned into an assist for Pellegrini, who fired the home side ahead.

Osimhen renewed his contract earlier Saturday to 2026 and was eager to celebrate with a goal but, instead, he received a second yellow card in the 86th, 13 minutes after his first booking, and was sent off.

Roma doubled its tally in stoppage time when Lukaku combined with Evan Ndicka to finish off a counter-attack.

Bravo Bisceck

There was an unlikely scoring replacement for Lautaro Martinez when defender Yann Bisceck bagged his first goal for Inter Milan and launched the Serie A leader to a 2-0 victory over Lecce.

Bisceck - who hit the woodwork moments earlier - flicked in a free kick with the back of his head two minutes from the break to help Inter bounce back from a midweek Italian Cup defeat and consolidate top spot in

the league. Bisceck also had a header fingertipped over the bar in the second half.

Inter moved four points ahead of Juventus, which won at Frosinone 2-1.

Inter doubled its tally in the 78th following a moment of magic from Marko Arnautovic, who controlled a pass from Barella and waited for him to sprint into the box before sensationally backheeling it to him to slot into the bottom left corner.

Lecce winger Lameck Banda was shown a straight red card and sent off five minutes later for dissent.

Lautaro was unavailable for the first time in 89 matches after the Argentine World Cup winner was injured on Wednesday during the Italian Cup exit to Bologna.

Lautaro, the Serie A leading scorer with 15, is expected back early in the new year. Another key player, Federico Dimarco, was also out hurt.

Youngest player

Kenan Yildiz became the youngest foreigner to score for Juventus in Serie A when he netted on his full debut.

The 18-year-old Yildiz had six substitute appearances this season and was made a starter for the first time by Massimiliano Allegri.

The teenage Turkey forward netted just 12 minutes in, gathering from Filip Kostic before forcing his way past three defenders and firing into the bottom left corner.

Substitute Jaime Baez levelled for Frosinone early in the second half but Juventus restored its lead nine minutes from time with a goal by a substitute of its own, when Dušan Vlahovic headed in Weston McKennie's cross.

Impressive Bologna

Bologna consolidated fourth place and closed the gap on third-placed AC Milan to two points with a 1-0 win over Atalanta.

Lewis Ferguson headed in a corner with four minutes remaining. Bologna also knocked two-time defending champion Inter out of the Italian Cup midweek.

Torino rescued a 1-1 draw at home against relegation-threatened Udinese. Hellas Verona beat 10-man Cagliari 2-0 to leapfrog Claudio Ranieri's side and go a point clear of the drop zone.

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Qatar's state-of-the-art tennis complex praised

Dr. Abdulaziz commends Qatar Tennis Federation for hosting Elite Championship



Organizing committee and tournament participants pose for a group photo.

DOHA, Dec 24: The third Arab Elite Tennis Championship, hosted by Qatar was inaugurated at the Khalifa International Tennis Complex in Doha. The prestigious event is proudly sponsored by the Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait and KGL.

Dr. Abdullah Abdulaziz, the Secretary-General of the Kuwaiti Arab Tennis Federation, expressed his utmost confidence in the organizational capabilities of the Qatar Tennis Federation, led by Nasser Al-Khelaifi. He praised Qatar's state-of-the-art tennis complex and the extensive experience of the Qatari organizers in hosting major sporting events. Dr. Abdulaziz, speaking at the tournament's press conference, conveyed warm greetings from Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Arab Tennis Federation. He emphasized that the success of the previous two editions held in Kuwait motivated the Federation to continue, with the aim of hosting all member states and promoting tennis more robustly across Arab countries.

TENNIS

Acknowledging the pivotal role of the General Sports Authority in facilitating the Arab Federation's mission in Kuwait, Dr. Abdulaziz expressed gratitude for their efforts in overcoming obstacles.

Dr. Abdulaziz extended sincere thanks to the Chairman and members of the Qatar Tennis Federation's Board of Directors for hosting the third edition, ensuring its success in record time. He also appreciated the significant support and sponsorship from the main sponsors, Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait and KGL Company. Recognizing the crucial role played by "BeIN Sports" channel group and "Al-Kas" channels, he expressed gratitude for their support and coverage of the tournament.

Saad Al-Muhannadi, the Executive Director of the Qatar Football Federation, welcomed tournament guests and participants, expressing deep apprecia-

Ex-West Indies captain to join England coaching staff for WC

LONDON, Dec 24, (AP): Former West Indies captain Kieron Pollard will join the England coaching staff for the 2024 Men's T20 World Cup, the ECB announced on Sunday.

Pollard becomes part of the England set-up specifically as an assistant coach for the June tournament.

The 36-year-old former Somerset all-rounder from Trinidad and Tobago will provide expertise of Caribbean conditions when the competition is co-hosted by the West Indies and the United States.

Pollard helped the West Indies win the T20 World Cup in 2012 and has played a record 600-plus matches in the format.

The ninth edition of the T20 World Cup will be held between June 4 and June 30, with the final to be staged at the Kensington Oval in Barbados.

England will defend the title they won for the second time in Australia 13 months ago in a tournament expanded from 16 to 20 teams.

English allrounder Tom Curran's appeal to have his four-match ban overturned for intimidating an umpire during a recent Big Bash League match has been



Pollard

dismissed. Cricket Australia had charged Curran on Thursday with a level-three offence under clause 2.17 in the code of conduct following an incident that occurred during the Sydney Sixers' team warm-up before its match against the Hobart Hurricanes on Dec. 11.

Video footage of the incident showed Curran apparently refusing to comply with the umpire's direction to stay off the wicket while warming up.

Curran - who has been capped for England in all three formats

CRICKET

and is in his fourth season with the Sydney Sixers - then went to the other end to complete another practice run-up and almost collided with the umpire, who had stood on the bowling crease to prevent Curran from again encroaching onto the pitch.

A verbal altercation between Curran and the umpire immediately followed.

Cricket Australia confirmed in a statement on Sunday that the Sixers' appeal against the English international allrounder's four-match ban was dismissed with the original sanction to stand.

"Umpires are part of the lifeblood of cricket and it is essential they are respected and appreciated by players at all levels of the game," CA's General Manager, Big Bash Leagues Alistair Dobson said.

to showcase the event in the most beautiful way possible. Al-Muhannadi praised the Arab Federation's efforts in spreading and developing tennis.

Al-Arabi look to reclaim top spot from Al-Qadsia

Al-Nasr eye revenge against Al-Salmiya

By Hassan Musa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Al-Arabi are set to extend their recent run of excellence by securing a new victory in the Zain Premier League championship.

The team is eager to reclaim the top spot from Al-Qadsia as they face Al-Shabab at 5:30 pm in the eleventh round. Meanwhile, the round concludes with a match between Al-Nasr and Al-Salmiya at Ali Sabah Stadium, kicking off at 8:00 pm.

Al-Qadsia currently lead the league after defeating Al-Jahra 2-1, despite playing with nine players due to the expulsion of Aziz Nasari and Daniel Gibola in the previous round. The team secured the lead with a goal from Badr Al-Mutawa in the 11th minute, with Al-Jahra responding through Rodrigo in the 66th minute. In the 90th minute, Vitor scored the winning goal from a penalty kick. Al-Qadsia now hold 25 points, while Al-Jahra remain at two points in last place.

Al-Mutawa is now just four goals away from becoming the historic top scorer in the league, currently held by Syrian striker Firas Al-Khatib with 162 goals.

In its first match, Al-Arabi (23 points) aim to continue their excellent form, seeking a fourth consecutive victory in



Badr Al-Mutawa tries to dribble pass Jahra players.

the competition. The team has recently triumphed over formidable opponents, including Kuwait (3-0), Kazma (4-0), and Al-Salmiya (2-0). Bosnian coach Darko Nestorovic looks to maintain the winning streak, emphasizing the team's defensive solidity, offensive prowess, and outstanding possession.

Al-Arabi aim to avoid a draw, which Al-Shabab imposed on them in the first encounter (1-1).

On the other side, Al-Shabab (11 points) are determined to regain balance after consecutive losses to Al-Fahaheel and Al-Qadsia with scores of 0-2 and 0-4, respectively.

In the second match, Al-Nasr (16 points) have multiple objectives: seeking revenge against Al-Salmiya, who

SOCCER

defeated them 3-2 in the first division, and securing a new victory to strengthen their position in the league. Al-Salmiya (14 points) aim to overcome a recent decline in performance, having not won in the last three rounds, with draws against Al-Qadsia and Al-Fahaheel (1-1 and 0-0, respectively) before losing to Al-Arabi (0-2).

Northwestern closes out its season with fourth straight victory

Air Force pounds James Madison on ground to win Armed Forces Bowl

FORT WORTH, Texas, Dec 24, (AP): Emmanuel Michel rushed for a career-best 203 yards and two 1-yard touchdowns and Zac Larrier passed for one TD and ran for another score, leading Air Force to a 31-21 win over No. 24 James Madison in the Armed Forces Bowl on Saturday.

Air Force (9-4) posted its fifth consecutive bowl win after losing its last four games of the season.

James Madison (11-2) lost in regulation for the first time this season while playing in the program's first bowl game. The Dukes, who are completing their transition to the FBS level from FCS, earned the berth after there weren't enough bowl-eligible teams to fill all the spots.

Air Force's triple-option offense got the better of the top run defense in the FBS. The Falcons entered second in rushing at 275.8 yards per game, and finished with 351 yards.

James Madison gained 283 total yards - only 26 rushing. Jordan McCloud finished 20 for 33 for 257 yards with three TD passes and an interception for the Dukes.

Las Vegas Bowl

Northwestern 14, Utah 7

In Las Vegas, Ben Bryant passed for 222 yards and found Bryce Kirtz in the corner of the end zone midway through the fourth quarter, helping Northwestern beat Utah.

Bryant went 22 for 34 with two touchdowns as Northwestern (8-5) closed out its season with a fourth straight win. The Wildcats limited Utah (8-5) to 221 yards and had two interceptions and a fumble recovery.

Bryson Barnes was 8 for 13 for 55 yards with two interceptions for the Utes, who lost three of their last four games. Utah's only score was a 6-yard touchdown run by Micah Ber-

nard early in the fourth quarter.

Birmingham Bowl

Duke 17, Troy 10

In Birmingham, freshman Grayson Loftis threw for 183 yards and Duke's defense came up with a final stop to beat Troy.

Jeremiah Lewis intercepted Troy's Gunnar Watson at the 50-yard line with 1:22 remaining to secure the victory for the Blue Devils (8-5).

Troy (11-3), the Sun Belt Conference champion, fell short of finishing the season on an 11-game winning streak for the second straight year. The Trojans couldn't find an offensive rhythm against a Blue Devils lineup altered by transfer portal departures.

Jaylen Coleman ran for Duke's only touchdown. Todd Pelino kicked three field goals for the Blue Devils.

FOOTBALL

Both teams were playing with interim coaches after Duke's Mike Elko departed for Texas A&M and Troy's Jon Sumrall took the job at Tulane.

Camellia Bowl

Northern Illinois 21, Arkansas State 19

In Montgomery, Rocky Lombardi passed and ran for touchdowns and Northern Illinois held on to beat Arkansas State when the Red Wolves couldn't convert a late 2-point pass.

Antario Brown rushed for 132 yards for the Huskies (7-6), who won six of their final eight games.

Neither team scored in the second half until Jaylen Raynor's 13-yard touchdown pass with 1:14 left to Corey Rucker. Raynor's potential tying 2-point pass sailed out of the end zone, and Arkansas State (6-7) couldn't convert the onside kick.

The 25-year-old Lombardi completed his seventh and final college season by going 18 of 29 for 200 yards. Grayson Barnes had 105 yards and a score on five catches.

Famous Idaho Potato Bowl

Georgia State 45, Utah State 22

In Boise, Darren Grainger threw for 257 yards and three touchdowns and ran for two more, Freddie Brock rushed for a career-best 276 yards and a score, and Georgia State rolled past Utah State.

Georgia State (7-6), which had lost five of six entering the game, scored 31 straight points to break it open. Utah State (6-7) fell apart after rolling up 161 yards of offense in the first quarter, tallying just 186 yards in the final three periods.

Grainger, a senior who transferred from Furman in 2021, was 19-of-22 passing and rushed for 111 yards,



Air Force fullback Emmanuel Michel holds the Armed Forces Bowl most valuable player award following an NCAA college football bowl game against James Madison in Fort Worth, Texas. Air Force won 31-21. (AP)

accounting for 368 yards of total offense to earn MVP honors.

Hawaii Bowl

Coastal Carolina 24, San Jose State 14

In Honolulu, Ethan Vasko threw three touchdown passes and Coastal Carolina beat San Jose State in the Hawaii Bowl on Saturday night for its second bowl victory.

Vasko completed 20 of 33 passes for 199 yards and ran for 50 yards on 17 carries for the Chanticleers (8-5). The Spartans (7-6) had won six in a row.

Vasko threw a 2-yard scoring pass to Matt Alaimo in the first quarter, connected with Kendall Karr on another 2-yarder in the third quarter and closed out the scoring in the fourth with an 8-yard scoring pass to Sam Pinckney, who made a leaping one-handed grab. Pinckney had eight catches for 123 yards.

Down 17-0, San Jose State scored two touchdowns in a four-minute span in the fourth quarter.

68 Ventures Bowl

South Alabama 59, Eastern Michigan 10

In Mobile, freshman Gio Lopez threw for three touchdowns and ran for another, and South Alabama trounced Eastern Michigan.

Playing on their home field at Hancock Whitney Stadium, the Jaguars (7-6) scored on their first three possessions, led 38-3 at halftime and outgained Eastern Michigan (6-7) 627 yards to 150. It was the first bowl victory for South Alabama, which joined the FBS in 2012.

Lopez split time with Desmond Trotter, who started in place of the injured Carter Bailey. Trotter threw a TD pass and ran for a score. Jamaal Pritchett caught eight passes for 127 yards and two TDs.

Al-Arabi secure well-earned win in volleyball league 'final' round



Al-Arabi and Burgan players vie for the ball.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: In a thrilling matchup, Al-Arabi emerged victorious with a 3-2 score against Burgan in the final round of the first division of the volleyball league. The intense competition saw Al-Kuwait defeating Al-Tadamon 3-0, and Kazma claiming a similar 3-0 victory over Al-Yarmouk.

Maintaining their flawless record, Al-Kuwait continues to lead the standings with an impressive 25 points. Al-Arabi, with this win, elevated its score to 19 points, tying with Burgan, while Yarmouk stands at 10 points, and Al-Tadamon trails with 6 points.

With the top four teams advancing to the semi-finals, the stage is set for exciting matchups. The first will face the fourth, and the second will take on the third in a "play-off" system involving three matches in the semi-finals. The winners will then progress to the final match, following the same system.

The clash between Al-Arabi and Burgan was intense throughout. Burgan dominated the first half, securing a 25-16 lead. However, Al-Arabi mounted a strong comeback, taking the second half 25-22. Al-Akhdar continued its momentum in the third half, dominating with a score of 25-11. Despite Burgan's win in the

VOLLEYBALL

fourth game (25-21), Al-Arabi sealed the victory in a tiebreaker, claiming a decisive 15-5 win. This well-deserved triumph temporarily places Al-Arabi in third place.

In the second match, Al-Kuwait faced challenges from Al-Tadamon but secured victory in three rounds with scores of 26-24, 25-14, and 25-22. Following suit, Kazma concluded their match against Yarmouk in three games, securing victories with scores of 25-15, 25-23, and 25-18.



Wolverhampton Wanderers' Matheus Cunha, (right), vies for the ball with Chelsea's Thiago Silva during the English Premier League soccer match between Wolverhampton Wanderers and Chelsea at Molineux stadium in Wolverhampton, England. (AP)

Sports

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Wolves hang on to beat wasteful Chelsea

Arsenal still on top of EPL

WOLVERHAMPTON, England, Dec 24, (AP): Chelsea slumped to a third defeat in four Premier League games as second-half goals from Mario Lemina and Matt Doherty earned Wolverhampton a deserved 2-1 victory at Molineux on Sunday.

Lemina headed in unmarked from Pablo Sarabia's corner early in the second period, just reward after Gary O'Neil's side had weathered early pressure and the hosts had spurned a host of chances, most glaringly from Raheem Sterling.

Chelsea labored to find a way back, but as has been the case for much of the season, failed to find the key pass in the final third, with Cole Palmer ineffective. Then in stoppage time and with the visitors committed forward, Wolves broke

SOCCER

and Hugo Bueno crossed for Doherty to take advantage of a poor clearance to slot home a second.

Substitute Christopher Nkunku headed his first Chelsea goal in the dying minutes, but Mauricio Pochettino's side slipped to a third away league defeat on the spin.

Armando Broja spurned the game's first opening. After Sterling fed Malo Gusto down the right, his low cross into the box arrived perfectly at the foot of the Albanian, playing as a lone striker with Nicolas Jackson moved to the wing. Looking to shoot first time, Broja missed and the chance was gone.

Sterling was Chelsea's most dangerous threat in the first half, running at Wolves down either flank and pitching inviting deliveries. The best of them fell to Jackson who had found space, but as the ball dropped, his touch failed to match his movement and the pass squirmed beneath his foot and away.

Jim buys minority stake in Man Utd

MANCHESTER, England, Dec 24, (AP): More than a year after it was put up for sale, Manchester United said Sunday that British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe had bought a minority stake in the storied Premier League club.

Ratcliffe, who owns petrochemicals giant INEOS and is one of Britain's richest people, has bought a stake of "up to 25%" of the 20-time league champions and will invest \$300 million in its Old Trafford stadium.

As part of the deal, United said Ratcliffe would take responsibility for the club's soccer operations.

Then after half an hour, it was Sterling's turn to spurn a chance. The England international did brilliantly to harry and dispossess Joao Gomes, Wolves' last man, who dithered on the ball deep in his own half. With the defense stranded upfield, Sterling advanced on goal with Jackson and Palmer wide open beside him. Either player would have had a tap-in but Sterling went alone and hit a weak shot straight at Jose Sa.

Arsenal stayed on top of the English Premier League after holding on to draw Liverpool 1-1 at Anfield.

Arsenal led through Gabriel's fourth-minute header but Mohamed Salah evened the score in the 29th. Salah's 151st Premier League goal moved him to 10th on the all-time list. Liverpool pressed hardest in the second half and hit the woodwork twice.

Mikel Arteta's team will go into Christmas a point ahead of Liverpool.

Defending champion Manchester City is likely happiest with the result after seeing two of its title rivals drop points.

City, which fell to fifth while it was away winning the Club World Cup in Saudi Arabia this week, is six points behind Arsenal with a game in hand.



Fatima Hayat and Hamad Al-Musaibih stand in the middle of the heroes and heroines.

Al-Mulaifi claims top spot in 120 cm height category

Al-Musallam secures victory in 2nd round of Equestrian League

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Equestrian excellence was on display as Abrar Al-Musallam, representing the Hunting and Equestrian Club, clinched the top spot in the second round of the Kuwaiti Show Jumping Equestrian

League's third edition. The event, held at the Kuwait Equestrian Center, witnessed robust participation from both male and female riders across various local clubs.

In the prestigious ninth round, the

Grand Prix, featuring a challenging height of 140 cm, Abrar Al-Musallam distinguished herself by advancing to the decisive round. With an impeccable performance, she claimed the first position with a faultless run in 41.65

seconds, leaving no room for penalties. Following closely were riders Abdul Rahman Al-Fazi, Ali Al-Kharafi, Ghazi Al-Jariwi, Antonio Moroso from Italy, and Hala Al-Mulla, with Fatima Al-Mulla also making an impressive ascent. The champions were crowned by Masoud Hayat, a member of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Olympic Committee and the Director of the Corporate Relations Department at Zain Telecommunications Company, Hamad Al-Musaibih.

At the 130 cm height category, Aws

EQUESTRIAN

10-man Atletico end mini-slump

BARCELONA, Spain, Dec 24, (AP): Ten-man Atletico Madrid edged Sevilla 1-0 at home to ensure they entered the Spanish league winter break still in touch with the front-runners.

The game in Spain's capital was originally scheduled for September but was postponed due to a forecast for bad weather.

Halftime substitute Marcos Llorente made an immediate impact by scoring just a minute after the restart. Atletico then defended with poise while play-

ing a man down for the final 20 minutes after substitute Caglar Soyuncu received a direct red card in the 70th.

"When you come off the bench you always try to give your team something extra," Llorente said. "We only had winning on our minds. Now it is time to disconnect and then we are right back at it."

Real Madrid and surprise package Girona are at the top of the standings with a seven-point lead over Atletico and Barcelona one round before the competition reaches its halfway point.



Anthony Joshua, (left), and Otto Wallin fight during a boxing match at Kingdom Arena in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. (AP)

Joshua scores TKO over Wallin in Saudi Arabia

Parker stuns Wilder in unanimous decision

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia, Dec 24, (AP): Anthony Joshua stopped Otto Wallin with a fifth-round technical knockout and Joseph Parker stunned Deontay Wilder in a unanimous decision in a heavyweight doubleheader at the Kingdom Arena.

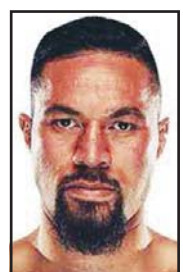
The doubleheader was expected to set up a March bout between Wilder

and Joshua.

dog according to FanDuel Sportsbook, looked like the better fighter throughout, while the 38-year-old Wilder looked his age in a matchup of former heavyweight champions.

Parker (34-3-0) dominated from the start, landing powerful punches with his right hand while keeping Wilder on his heels with a smart and methodical approach.

"Dangerous fight, tough fight, we trained very hard for this," Parker said. "We had great momentum coming into this fight. The strategy was to stay calm, stay relaxed, stay focused ... every minute of every round. This is a great finish to the year."



Parker

There was only one round in which Wilder got the better of Parker.

"My timing was off a little bit," Wilder said. "He did a great job of avoiding a lot of my punches. I did feel like I had the upper hand, but things happen. We move on to the next step."

In the main event, Wallin's corner called for the stoppage at the end of the fifth round.

Joshua, a strong favorite, needed more than just a victory to convince skeptics his best days weren't behind him. The British boxer earned some style points against the 33-year-old Wallin, who is from Sweden.

Joshua (27-3-0) hadn't looked the same since holding the WBA, IBF and WBO titles. But the 34-year-old delivered a throwback performance, jabbing and moving forward with confidence while backing down Wallin (26-2-0). A strong right-left combination in the fifth round eventually led to the stoppage.

Kuwait set to host U-18 tournament

Asian Coordination Committee green lights 'lineup' for Gulf Basketball Championships

DUBAI, Dec 24: Thamer Al-Shanfa, the Secretary of the Basketball Federation, has confirmed that the Asian Coordination Committee has given its approval for the upcoming Gulf tournaments, whether they are qualifiers for the Asian tournaments' finals or not. The decision was made during a recent meeting in Dubai, attended by all committee members.

According to Al-Shanfa, the first of these tournaments will take place on March 1st and 2nd next year for the under-18 category, featuring the 3x3 game in Muscat. Another significant event is the Gulf Women's Club Championship, scheduled for May and organized by the UAE Federation in Abu Dhabi.

In the pipeline, Kuwait is set to host the Gulf Championship for U-18 youth teams, a qualifying event for the Asian Finals, from July 31 to August 5. Doha will then host the Gulf Championship for

U-15 youth teams from August 15 to 19.

Highlighting a noteworthy return, Al-Shanfa revealed that the Gulf Championship for men's teams (general) is set to be held in Manama from September 1 to 6, marking the end of a five-year hiatus.

Regarding the Gulf Championship for women's teams, Al-Shanfa mentioned that it is under con-

BASKETBALL

sideration, and if Gulf teams confirm participation, Saudi Arabia is likely to be the host.

To ensure the preparedness of all Kuwaiti teams, the National Teams Committee has devised a comprehensive preparation plan, commencing with two external camps for junior and youth teams during the spring break.



Asian Coordination Committee meeting in progress.