



Happy New Year to all

There will be no issue of the Arab Times on Sunday and Monday. The next issue of the Arab Times will appear on the news-stands on Tuesday morning. — See you then

Kuwait greenlights part-time work

Opinion

Does justice, fairness exist in Kuwait?

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

WHAT does justice mean? How can the law become a standard for the progress of nations?

To answer these questions, there is a practical lesson that happened in one of the American universities. Without any introduction, a professor asked one of the students: What is your name? When the student responded, the professor asked him to exit the lecture hall. When the student attempted to defend himself, the professor rebuked him and chased him out. As the student left feeling mistreated, everyone in the lecture hall remained silent.

The professor went on with the class. He asked the students: Why were the laws put in place? The students gave various answers. One said: "Laws exist to control people's behavior." Another added: "They are there to be implemented,"

while another said: "So that the strong do not oppress the weak."

The professor said: "All of the answers are true, but not sufficient." A fourth student replied: "Laws exist in order to achieve justice." Then the professor responded: "Yes, this is the answer."

He asked again: "Now what is the point of laws if justice is not achieved?" He added: "Now answer without fear. Did I treat your classmate unjustly and unfairly when I expelled him from the hall?"

They all replied: "Yes". He furiously asked: "Then, why did you remain silent? What is the benefit of laws if we do not have the courage to implement them? When someone is subjected to injustice and you do not defend the truth, you lose your humanity. Humanity is not negotiable."

Ever since democracy existed, its foundation has been based on justice. For 60 years until this day, we have fell short of how to deal with the concept of democracy. This is due to the fact that our society lives on farms between tribes and sects. Thus, loyalties varied and conflicts of interests prevailed; making our democracy more like groupings closer to cantons.

This anomalous situation has produced national assemblies based on deals -- whether in buying votes, or tribal and sectarian terror; while the weak governments have been unable to exercise their natural powers.

In addition, the Constitution granted the ruler the right to suspend it for a specific period in order to correct the political course, as required by the supreme interests of the State.

There is no doubt that Kuwait, as it has done for 400 years, has proven its ability to overcome obstacles; because the relationship between the ruler and the ruled is based on transparency, frankness and national loyalty.

Unfortunately, all of these changed six decades ago due to the lack of understanding democracy on one hand, and the exploitation of loopholes in the Constitution to consolidate the influence of the powerful on the other hand. This happened through some sheikhs, wealthy people or sectarian and tribal components. Despite all this experience, we still appear as amateurs.

Nonetheless, to get out of this impasse, a developed vision is necessary, whether through the Constitution or laws. What we are witnessing today is a number of urgent obstacles -- whether in the National Assembly as if it were the ruler, or the ruling family which, in recent years, seemed isolated from society as a result of conflicts between some of its members, paving the way

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Mask mandate for medical staff

JN.1 coronavirus variant detected in Kuwait

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: Official Spokesman of the Health Ministry and Director of the Health Communication Center Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad has confirmed that the country detected the new coronavirus variant – JN.1 – through the results of the genetic testing carried out by the ministry's teams recently, indicating these teams have been monitoring the prevailing patterns or variants of

coronavirus and other viruses. Al-Sanad reassured citizens and residents that monitoring such mutations is expected and does not cause concern, as the health situation is stable and there are no unusual preventive measures at present; pointing out that this time of the year is the period for active seasonal respiratory viral diseases. He reiterated the advice for those who show signs or symptoms of infection not to mingle with others, and to seek medical help when symptoms persist or increase in severity.

He affirmed that the ministry provides seasonal vaccinations for influenza and bacterial pneumonia or the updated version of the Covid vaccine through 42 centers in all governorates; especially for groups most vulnerable to infection and complications like those above 60 years old, those with chronic diseases such as respiratory system problems and diabetes, and those with heart, kidney and immunodeficiency diseases.

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'With employer's nod'

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has issued a ministerial decision on allowing private sector employees to work part-time for a third party (another employer) on the condition that they obtain approval from the original employer.

The decision is in line with the provisions of the Council of Ministers' resolution on addressing the demographic imbalance issue.

It stipulates that employees in the private sector are now allowed to engage in part-time work with another employer for a maximum of four hours per day, provided they obtain a part-time work permit from the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM). It exempts the contracting sector from the maximum hours condition due to the market's manpower needs.

This decision aims to take advantage of the skills and experience of the workforce inside Kuwait as an alternative to guaranteeing rights over recruitment, which contributes to addressing the demographic imbalance issue and meeting the labor market needs in the current period.

The decision shall take effect at the beginning of January 2024, so that the employers can develop their businesses. This step contributes to investing in the strength of existing workers in a bid to meet the manpower needs of the labor market.

In addition, PAM continues to take the necessary steps to regulate the labor market and cover its manpower needs.

Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled has also instructed PAM to allow employers to permit a group of their employees to work remotely; that is, if the employees can complete their tasks without the need to be present at the workplace in accordance with the regulations laid down by the authority for employers and employees in the private sector.

These decisions and directives aim to support the employers and develop work mechanisms in the private sector in line with the technological developments and in order to improve the business environment, as well as enable employers to grow their businesses and meet the needs of the Kuwaiti market.

'Threat to democracy'

MPs slam attempts to suspend Constitution

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: A number of MPs have reacted angrily to calls for the suspension of the Constitution, stressing that commitment to the Constitution is the safety valve of the nation.

MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri argued such calls are unjustifiable and are made by people who could have done something against the Constitution. He said some of these people consider the Constitution a hindrance to their personal interests, while others adopt such calls in a hypocritical manner since they shun legislation and monitoring. He affirmed that only Allah and commitment to the Constitution can ensure the stability of Kuwait.

MP Abdullah Fehad pointed out that he and his colleagues took the oath to respect the Constitution and protect the people's freedom and interests; hence, they must stand against calls to suspend the Constitution, which is the most outstanding achievement of the nation. He said vibrant nations never take backward steps, as they always seek for more freedoms and reforms. He urged those calling for the suspension of the Constitution to stop what they are doing, emphasizing that their attempts to disrupt the constitutional security will definitely fail.

MP Osama Al-Shaheen asserted that such calls are utterly rejected; indicating Kuwait is a democratic nation and those behind these calls must be sued as per Article 29 of the Penal Code, considering they are pushing for the collapse of the regime.

MP Meteb Aayed Al-Raathan warned that the suspension of the Constitution has always led to unforgettable disasters in the country. He said those making such calls want to promote sectarianism and racism, stating these people must read history carefully in order to learn a valuable lesson; particularly when the entire people of Kuwait faced the Iraqi invasion. He added the Constitution is a safety valve for the people and the political leadership.

Stagnation

MP Soud Al-Asfour asserted this is not the first time and it will not be the last to hear calls aimed at attacking the citizens' right to play their role in managing their country. He thinks those calling for suspension of the Constitution ignored the previous experience when such a move led to nothing but deterioration and stagnation. He argued that correction means developing both the executive and legislative authorities without marginalizing any of them.

MP Adel Al-Damkhi rejected the calls to suspend the Constitution, stressing this is tantamount to a coup aimed at causing cracks in the social fabric that could lead to massive chaos. He added that only the envious and anti-democracy people want to benefit from such calls, because they cannot live in justice and freedom.

Former MP Marzouq Al-Khalifa said the ongoing systematic campaign against the Constitution is the partner of futile campaigns. He observed that whenever the corrupt are hurt, the green light is turned on for suspicious campaigns to kick off. He asserted that whoever adopts the idea of suspending the Constitution is considered a traitor to the social contract between the ruler and the ruled. He added that only the Constitution protects the rights of the people and keeps the nation safe. He said the corrupt traders are exhausted due to the recent legislative achievements, so they want to take revenge by disrupting the legislative process.

In a related development, five political blocs issued a joint statement rejecting attempts to suspend the Constitution. These blocs include the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), Kuwait Democratic Forum (KDF), Kuwait Progressive Movement (KPM), National Islamic Alliance (NIA) and National Charter Group (NCG).

These blocs reaffirmed their commitment to adhere to the Constitution, since it is the basis of democracy and the legitimate channel for public political participation. They pointed out that commitment to the Constitution has always been the life jacket of the nation whenever it faces exceptional crises.

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Photo by Omar Al-Said Omar

A captivating sight unfolds as migratory birds gather on an abandoned ship near Usheirej, forming a mesmerizing spectacle, especially with a flock of Loha birds settling in the area.

Migratory birds settle at an abandoned ship in Kuwait

Every winter, thousands of migrating birds travel across Kuwait's coastline to reach their winter home.

However, Omar Al-Said Omar, a member of the Kuwait Environmental Lens team, has seen something different this year. At an abandoned ship near Usheirej, a flock of Loha

birds settled, creating an aesthetically stunning scene.

Omar told KUNA thousands of Loha birds migrate to Kuwait during the winter months due to the country's suitable environment, from Um Al-Namel Island to Al-Judailiyat bay, Jahra and Sulaibikhat.

Unexpectedly, Omar discovered that the birds had been preserved on the same ship for six years after tracking and snapping pictures at the same location. Omar also described the seabirds' capacity to live in groups, dive to a depth of 45 meters and catch fish. (KUNA)

Al-Asoumi highlights Kuwait's ongoing support for Palestinians

Arab Parliament lauds Kuwait's Gaza stance

NewsWatch

IRBIL: The Global Coalition against the so-called Islamic State (IS or Daesh) shot down an explosive-laden drone in Bahrika district, Irbil governorate, northern Iraq.

The foiled attack, the second drone attack on the coalition forces in two days, resulted in no casualties, the anti-terror directorate of Kurdistan region said in a brief statement on Wednesday. (KUNA)

TEHRAN: Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Mohammad Eslami dismissed Wednesday reports that Iran accelerated the pace of producing enriched uranium to the purity level of 60 percent.

"We are enriching [uranium] to the very 60 percent purity; we have neither changed our work nor expanded our capacity," Eslami said in a statement quoted by Iran's official news agency. (KUNA)

TEHRAN: Iran held a funeral Thursday for a high-ranking general of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard who was killed by an alleged Israeli airstrike in Syria.

Hundreds of mourners accompanied the flag-draped casket of Gen. Razi Mousavi from a central square of Tehran to a shrine in the north of the city where he was buried. (AP)

CAIRO, Dec 28, (Agencies): President of the Arab Parliament (AP) Adel Al-Asoumi has expressed his thanks to Kuwait's political leadership, topped with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, for its patriotic stances towards Palestinian people.

Speaking to KUNA in a statement during an AP meeting on Palestine, Al-Asoumi said Kuwait's positions in support of the Palestinian cause and the steadfastness of Palestinians on their occupied territories have been noticed and witnessed over the history.

He referred to Kuwait's air bridge of humanitarian and relief aid to help Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip that have been subject to the Israeli occupation forces' aggression since October 7.

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Health Ministry hosts 93 visiting doctors in 3 mths

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28, (KUNA): Kuwait's Ministry of Health hosted 93 specialized doctors from around the world, as part of its visiting-doctors program in the past three months.

In a statement on Thursday, ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said the ministry receives a number of consultants specialized in different medical fields every month.

He added that the goal of the program besides treating patients, is sharing experience, as well as discussing the recent developments in the medical world through seminars and workshops.

Meanwhile, Dr Al-Sanad warned against the increasing number of accidents related to cars, motorcycles and buggies during the camping season.

There are 700 cases of such accidents reported since the beginning of December, mostly of youth of

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KUNA photo
The new police station at T1.

24/7 police station operational at 'T1'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28, (KUNA): The Ministry of Interior (MoI) has announced that it inaugurated a police station at Kuwait International Airport (T1) that will start work around-the-clock as of Thursday.

Those efforts came out of keenness of the security institution to achieve integration at all sites, and prepare and modernize police

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Prayer Timings

Fajr 05:16 Asr 14:39
 Sunrise .. 06:41 Maghrib .. 16:58
 Zohr 11:49 Isha 18:20

Local

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

'New visa system to be introduced in Feb 2024'

Kuwaitis will not require visa to travel to UK soon: British envoy

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: The United Kingdom announced that all countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council will move to the electronic travel authorization (ETA) system as of February 2024, reports Al-Qabas daily.

The British government indicated that citizens of the Gulf countries will not need visas when visiting the United Kingdom, as the British authorities will work to improve border operations to facilitate the entry of tourists, students and businessmen.

Meanwhile, the British Ambassador to Kuwait, Belinda Lewis, told Al-Qabas that the new visa system will be introduced from the beginning of February 2024 and indicated that the application of the ETA for Kuwaiti citizens will make travel to the United Kingdom much easier and more flexible, and there will be no need to get a visit visa.



Belinda Lewis

The British envoy confirmed the UK government readiness to implement the new visa system, expressing her hope that this new system will encourage more Kuwaitis to visit the United Kingdom, explaining that tourists can apply for an electronic travel permit valid for two years for 10 British pounds, i.e. It is equivalent to 3.7 Kuwaiti dinars, whether for adults, children or infants, starting from February 1, 2024, and said it takes about three working days to complete the application.

She added, a large number of people have applied for the old Visa Waiver Scheme (EVW) but the Home Office does not keep figures on the number of people from each country.

Lewis praised the depth of bilateral relations between the two countries, explaining that the United Kingdom and Kuwait will continue to benefit from the close friendship "we share to develop new areas of cooperation, noting that the volume of trade has witnessed remarkable growth after reaching 5.1 billion pounds sterling, an increase of 66.8% over last year."

She went on to say, "Our defense and security partnerships have also flourished, including cybersecurity, air and maritime security, military cooperation,

and counter-terrorism cooperation, and ties between individuals have strengthened, which is reflected in the presence of about 10,000 Kuwaiti students in world-class UK universities."

She added: "Locally, the British Council continues to provide training and testing in the English language in partnership with local schools and colleges, as more than 6,000 students took IELTS exams through the Council.

She said the British officials are currently working to agree on a new date for holding the tenth meeting of the Joint Steering Committee during the first three months of 2024 in London, explaining that many events have been postponed due to the death of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad.

She pointed out that the nineteenth meeting of the Joint Steering Group between the United Kingdom and Kuwait (JSG) was held in Kuwait City last February.

She pointed out that the first strategic dialogue between the United Kingdom and Kuwait was held last March, and it was a good opportunity for our Foreign Minister and the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister to discuss important matters and foreign policy topics.

The British Ambassador praised the four visits made by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad to the United Kingdom, the last of which was in October to attend a special meeting with the King of Britain, considering that these visits represent a prominent and important point.

The British Ambassador renewed her condolences on the death of the late Amir, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, noting that he left behind an important legacy. He passed away after a career devoted to public service, and made significant contributions to enhancing regional stability, alleviating humanitarian crises and strengthening relations between the United Kingdom and Kuwait.

Ambassador Belinda Lewis praised the military and defense cooperation between the two countries, noting that a number of successful joint military exercises had been conducted between the two sides, especially the British-Kuwaiti Desert Warrior exercise.

She added, close cooperation between our militaries continues to play a key role in maintaining our security and mutual prosperity.

Bird flu virus feared

Import ban on meat and eggs

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: Secretary of the Supreme Committee for Food Safety at the Public Authority for Food and Nutrition Eng Adel Al-Suwait said the committee has recommended banning the import of all types of bird meat from some countries due to the outbreak of bird influenza virus, reports Al-Anba daily.

In a press statement, Al-Suwait revealed that the committee made the following recommendations during its

meeting number 9/2023: Impose an import ban on all types of fresh, chilled, frozen and processed poultry meat of all types and their derivatives; as well as table eggs, unless they underwent heat treatment at a temperature of 70 degrees Celsius. This is measure is recommended due to the outbreak of the highly virulent bird flu in 12 states in the United States of America; as well as Morbihan, France.



The remains of the Kuwaiti citizen are carried by his relatives and other Kuwaiti citizens for burial. His body was found burnt in his car in Al-Anbar province of Iraq before two days.

Huge turnout at funeral

Kuwaiti and Saudi laid to rest

By Abdunnasser Al-Aslami

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: Kuwaiti citizen Faisal Al-Mutairi and Saudi citizen Anwar Al-Dhefai, who died while they were on a hunting trip in a desert near Anbar, Iraq, were buried in Sulabikhat Cemetery on Thursday.

A large crowd of media figures, intellectuals, politicians and ordinary citizens attended the funeral. They called for a thorough investigation of the case by the ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs to establish the actual circumstances leading to death of Al-Mutairi and Al-Dhefai.

Media personality Saleh Al-Mutairi, uncle of the late Faisal, disclosed that he feels so sad. He stressed that his nephew and his

companion were murdered, stating they did not die due to a bomb explosion as claimed by the Iraqi Authorities. He confirmed holding pieces of evidence that the vehicle of the victims was targeted. According to what he obtained from Iraqi media institutions, guns were fired at the vehicle.

MP Falah Al-Hajri expressed condolences to the families of the victims and to the people of Kuwait, underscoring the need for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to present a report on the issue.

MP Badr Nashmi Al-Anzi also expressed condolences to the victims' families, pointing out that Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah exerted tremendous efforts, but he must continue working hard to find out the truth.



Participants at the training program – Principles of Photography.

KUNA ends photography training program

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

Mustafa Al-Bader, Head of the Design and Photography department at the news agency, stressed in remarks to KUNA the importance of media and public relations workers to learn

about the principles of photography and the difference between cameras and lenses to help them perform their tasks.

Al-Bader explained the program touched on the types of cameras and lenses and their uses and functions, noting that the program participants did some practical training as well as a field photography trip to integrate the programs theoretical and practical learning.

The training program also explained some

photography theories, applications on the camera, focus systems and how to use lighting in photography.

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

Accidents kill, maim scores

Entry prohibited for 7 sports cars seized at border

By Munaif Nayef

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: Official spokesman of the Ministry of Health Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad has warned about the rising number of injuries and deaths resulting from road incidents, especially in the North and South, including the camping sites, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement, Al-Sanad disclosed that the concerned departments have received 700 accident reports since the beginning of December 2023; indicating the victims were transported through land and air ambulances. He said most of those involved in road accidents are young men and women who sustained different injuries like cuts, bone fractures, bruises and internal bleeding while others died. He added the ministry dealt with 130 motorcycle and all-terrain vehicle accidents in December alone, as well as 50 run over cases. He urged the parents to guide their children and raise their awareness about the need to be careful to avoid such accidents.

He also unveiled the ministry's plan to invite internationally renowned doctors from different countries to Kuwait every month, clarifying that the purpose is not to handle critical cases but to pass on the experience and expertise to Kuwaiti doctors through training programs, lectures and workshops, which will contribute to ongoing efforts to reduce the need for overseas treatment. He said the ministry hosted 93 doctors from various countries in the last three months.

In another development, Al-Sanad confirmed the commitment of the ministry to implement the digitalization of services; stating the employees can now obtain certificates through the Sahel application including "To Whom It May Concern", job, experience and continuous salary payment certificates. He pointed out that Assistant Undersecretary for Administrative Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Fares announced these electronic services earlier. He affirmed it is now easy for the employees to obtain the aforementioned documents, stressing that certificates obtained through Sahel are approved by all public institutions and banks.

Sports cars seized: Seven sports cars were seized in Nuwaiseeb border as the drivers committed grave traffic violations like reckless driving and ignoring security and safety regulations in compliance with the directives of Director of the General Traffic Department (GTD) at the Ministry of Interior Major General Yousef Al-Khaddah.

According to a security source, this is the result of the intensified efforts of GTD under the monitoring of Assistant Director General for Technical Affairs Brigadier Muhammad Al-Adwani and field supervision of Brigadier Ashraf Al-Amir in coordination with Kuwait General Administration for Customs (KGAC).

The source confirmed that the necessary measures have been taken in line with Article 19(bis) of the relevant law, indicating the above-mentioned vehicles are now banned from entering Kuwait.



ABK announces Alfoz winners.

ABK announces Alfoz weekly, and quarterly 'draw winners'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is excited to announce Abdulghaffar Ahmad AlHumoud as the KD 100,000 Alfoz winner of the quarterly draw and Shaikha Khaleel Ali as the KD 10,000 Alfoz winner of the weekly draw that were held on Monday 25 December 2023 under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

To show appreciation for their loyalty, ABK recently increased the number of draws and prizes, making it even more enticing for customers to join. Introducing a new KD 20,000 monthly draw and an exceptional KD 100,000 quarterly draw, it has become even more enticing for customers to join the Alfoz family.

ABK has also made it easier for customers to enter the draws and increase their chances of winning by granting an entry for every KD 10 deposited as opposed to KD 100 previously. This means that the more customers save, the higher their chances become to win these amazing prizes.

ABK encourages everyone to open an Alfoz draw account or increase their balance to participate in the upcoming monthly draw to turn their dreams into reality.

To learn more about the Alfoz account and its range of exciting draws and prizes, please follow the ABK's Instagram account @abk_kuwait, visit eahli.com, contact Ahlan Ahli 1 899 899 or visit one of the Bank's branches across Kuwait.

New website launched

'Renew car, bike license online'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28, (KUNA): The Kuwait Insurance Regulatory Unit announced Wednesday launching a website for issuing and renewing the mandatory third-party motor insurance certificates for private cars and motorbikes as of January 1, 2024.

The website (www.beema.iru.gov.kw) allows car and motorcycles owner to issue new or to renew their insurance certificates through simple steps, Head of the IRU Mo-

hammad Al-Otaibi said in a press statement. The move is part of the state strategy for digital transformation of government services, he pointed out.

Al-Otaibi noted that during the website pilot period, car and motorbike owners have the choice to renew their insurance documents through the website or visiting an office of one of the authorized insurance firms across the country.

KISR opens registration for student training course

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28, (KUNA): The Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), through its Department of Workforce Development, has officially opened registration for the 35th spring student training course. This program is designed for eighth and ninth-grade students attending both public and private schools. Scheduled to take place from January 21 to February 1, the institute aims to offer an enriching educational experience during this period.

Mona Al-Failakawi, the Director of the Institute's Workforce Development Department, announced in a press statement that registration will be ongoing until January 6. To be eligible, students

must have an overall average of no less than 75 percent in the academic year 2022/2023. Additionally, they are required to successfully complete a personal interview conducted by a special committee.

Al-Failakawi outlined the diverse scientific programs included in the course, such as "Sail in the World of Water," "Inventors of the Future," "Engineering Design," "Reverse Engineering," and "Adventures in Architecture." These programs will be conducted under the supervision of experienced researchers specializing in each field. The focus is on skill development through engaging training methods, including laboratory experiments and field visits.

Highlighting the institute's commitment to fostering scientific research and cultivating a research-oriented mindset among the youth, Al-Failakawi emphasized that these courses align with the Amiri decree. This decree encourages Kuwaitis to actively participate in scientific research endeavors.

She clarified that submitting an application does not guarantee acceptance, and students interested in registering are urged to apply through the institute's website. The deadline for personal interviews is set for January 7, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation process to select participants for this educational opportunity.

Other Voices

Prayer, meditation and workers' loss

By Ahmad alarraf

Diverse cultures around the globe pursue various avenues to fulfill their spiritual needs, whether through religious prayers or meditation. Prayer is often structured around specific texts, designated times and places, and sometimes involves specific attire and preparatory rituals.

To the contrary, meditation is a practice devoid of religious affiliations and is undertaken for personal needs. Despite my attempts to align with the requisites of meditation and detach from my surroundings, I encountered failure.



alarraf

Those who sought to assist me faced similar challenges, emphasizing the potential benefits of physical massage in relaxing the body and alleviating stress.

Unlike prayer, meditation remains relatively unknown to the majority despite its simplicity. It can be performed at any time, in any attire, and in any location with relative tranquility. It is believed to alleviate daily stresses, reducing preoccupation with life's challenges.

I observed that many meditation practitioners had navigated through difficult life circumstances, such as financial loss, the demise of a loved one, failed relationships, depression, or despair over illness or addiction, leading them to discover solace in meditation.

In contrast, my relatively smooth journey may explain why my need for such practices did not crystallize as prominently.

It appears that prayer fulfills a fundamental need for individuals and adherents of various faiths. Each faith prescribes its unique approach to prayer, serving as a ritual for organizing people's lives, instilling religious duties, and providing spiritual sustenance. Individuals may seek mercy, forgiveness, health, wealth, security, and express gratitude for divine blessings through prayer.

The society of the island, the birthplace of Islam, was a challenging environment, compelling its inhabitants to secure sustenance, safety, and family through invasion -- the only known method of survival.

Islam introduced prayer at specific times of the day to align with the circumstances of that era. People would pray the evening prayer and then retire early due to a lack of means to stay awake for extended periods.

As the human body requires around eight hours of sleep, the biological clock naturally prompts awakening at dawn for the morning prayer, initiating the day, followed by the remaining prayers.

Shiite Muslims, representing around 20% of the Muslim population, adopted a practice of combining the noon and afternoon prayers, as well as the sunset and evening prayers, reducing the daily prayer frequency to three times instead of five.

The origin and reasons for this "combination" practice remain unclear, though it has historical precedence during times of war, travel, and disasters.

Some argue that the conventional method of prayer is challenging in modern life, characterized by continuous work hours requiring creativity. It is essential to approach prayer with sincerity, avoiding a routine recitation of the same words throughout one's life.

The concern is not the brief duration of each prayer but rather the psychological and mental preparation preceding it -- often overlooked, particularly in the face of today's fast-paced and demanding lifestyles.

Over three decades, I dealt with a paw factory in Malaysia, founded by a Chinese immigrant supported by a Malaysian Muslim workforce. The advent of the petrodollar era brought preachers who convinced the workers to perform their prayers in mosques, leading to the construction of numerous mosques around each farm, disrupting work schedules. Faced with the dilemma of either closing the factory or replacing Muslim workers with Chinese counterparts, the latter option was chosen, resulting in significant job losses.



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Liquor bottles found in the bootlegger's possession.

Boys driving without license held

Local brew sold as foreign liquor

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: A security force from the Public Security Sector, upon instructions from the Undersecretary, Major-General Abdullah Al-Rujaib, raided a local liquor factory, yesterday, in Salmiya and took into custody an unidentified expatriate and seized from him 123 bottles of booze, 3 barrels full of raw material, and tools and equipment for making, bottling, and packaging liquor.

During initial investigation interrogation, the suspect admitted to manufacturing approximately 150 bottles of alcohol per day, filling them inside imported liquor bottles, pressing the lids and sealing them, making the buyer believe that the stuff is imported liquor and selling them for 60 dinars per bottle.

The suspect and the contraband have been referred to the Directorate General of Drugs and Alcohol Control.

Meanwhile, the Operations Sector of the General Traffic Department organized a security campaign yesterday evening against violators of traffic laws and reckless drivers in several areas of Al-Ahmadi, including Al-Sabahiya, Umm Al-Haiman, and Fahd Al-Ahmad, and arrested 16 people were, including 6 Kuwaiti juveniles, reports Al-Anba daily.

Some of those arrested were caught driving without license and others for installing exhausts to make annoying sounds and driving recklessly putting their lives and the lives of others in jeopardy.

The 6 juveniles were referred to the Juvenile Prosecution and the others were referred to the General Traffic Department. During the campaign 32 traffic violations were issued and 15 cars were impounded and towed to the traffic detention garage.

Off-duty police officer stabbed in altercation

Selling drugs to youths, boys

By Mansour Sultan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: The Capital security patrolmen referred two young men to the General Administration for Drug Control after they were caught in the Sulaybikhat area in a state of drug use and in possession of narcotic substances and abuse tools, reports Al-Anba daily.

The two young men were arrested on suspicion of a car driving in a zigzag manner, and after forcing its driver to stop, it was discovered that his companion was in a state of drug use. Upon precautionary inspection of them, narcotic substances (shabu, hashish, chemicals) and drug paraphernalia were found on them.

Officer stabbed: An unidentified officer with the rank of first lieutenant, working in Al-Jahra Traffic, went to Al-Jahra Hospital to receive treatment for a stab wound he suffered during an altercation with another person in the Saad Al-Abdullah area.

A security source told Al-Anba that the officer's condition is stable, and that he received about 3 stitches in the arm as a result of a stab wound.

The daily said at the time of the incident the officer was off duty and in civilian clothes.

The source stated the security men identified the perpetrator after listening to statements given by the victim and that the accused is being sought by the police.

The incident has not been recorded as an



The drug pusher and the contraband found with him.

assault on the securitymen since he was off duty.

Drugs sold to youths: Personnel from the Criminal Security Sector have taken into custody an unidentified expatriate for selling narcotic substances to young men and juveniles, reports Al-Anba daily.

The daily said the suspect was taken into custody in the Ahmadi Governorate, during an ambush set by police for him in Wafra area and caught him in possession of 43 sachets of the narcotic meth.

The security authorities said prior to the arrest CID men put the trafficker under surveillance for a long time and then after confirming his activity arrested him.

During interrogation he told police he was selling the drugs cheap until his clients became addicted and then exploited them.

He has been referred to the Public Prosecution.

Who will compensate them for their losses?

"THE country and its citizens mourned the death of their Amir, of whom only goodness, love, and simplicity of life are remembered," columnist Iqbal Al-Ahmad wrote for Al-Qabas daily.

"Mourning was declared in Kuwait, and many adhered to it during this period, not only out of commitment, as much as it was real feelings and sadness for the loss of this great human being.

"Life in Kuwait stopped almost completely, when official departments were suspended and many places, a large part of which were not entertaining, were closed for a few days.

"However, there are aspects of life that work cannot stop in such circumstances, because their work never falls within the category of entertainment, relaxation, and joy.

"Question: Did the export of Kuwaiti oil stop since the first day of mourning?

"Certainly not, and it is impossible for this to be done because this will certainly affect the source of life and livelihood of Kuwait, which will affect important matters in the country. Therefore, there are interests that cannot be excluded from mourning, because they are not joy, mirth, or dancing.

"I know that there are "good intentions" efforts and attempts that have been published and circulated, such as expressions of mourning, in a way that we have not seen before, in commitment to declaring official mourning for the death of the prince, such as the type of clothing, listening to music in cars, and so on.

"This raises an important question: Is there a clear framework for public and official mourning that is required of everyone living in Kuwait?

"For example: Why do customs operations stop due to the disruption of all government agencies, as well as parks, cultural and scientific centers, and entertainment for children?

"Many business owners complained about the accumulation of their goods, which arrived in the country one day before the declaration of mourning, as they were piled on the ground, and left for the three days of mourning on the customs floor, which caused confusion and chaos when they went to receive them, and some of them were even surprised that they were damaged because they require special conditions. Special storage, such as roses and some food products, causing losses to them, so who will compensate them for their losses?

"Al Shaheed Park closed its doors for three days. Why? It is a place for sport, calm and relaxation. I understand that the cafes and music are closed? But its doors must remain open, especially with all forms of entertainment stopping during the three days of mourning.

"We need an accurate and clear definition of the manifestations of official mourning in the country in the event of the death of the Amir of the country, or any figure of standing locally or externally, and for the issue not to be left to people's judgments and guesses.

"It is necessary to take into account the losses that could befall some businesses, in which the cessation of work for one day is considered a major loss for its owners, let alone three days (activities far from the areas of entertainment and normal work).

"Not leaving the arena open for

any action ... without framing and clarification for everyone, will avoid many repercussions.

"As we noted, and this was a source of admiration and appreciation for the Amiri Diwan and the responsible authority, the good arrangement and order in the mourning demonstrations, we hope that this will also apply to the issue of official mourning, and the classification of official and unofficial bodies that are concerned with official mourning.

"May God reward Kuwait for its dear loss, and grant success to its new Amir for the benefit of the country and its people."

Also:

"In the aftermath of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's speech during the oath session, a faction advocating for progressive population openness has introduced the notion that we are all essentially children of the same lineage," columnist Youssef Al-Jalal, wrote for Al-Rai daily.

"According to this theory, there is no intrinsic Kuwaiti identity, no differentiation between indigenous and naturalized citizens, and no room for false claims or dual nationalities. This perspective stems from a paragraph in His Highness's speech that alludes to an agreement between the government and the Council potentially harming the nation's interests, leading to a shift in Kuwaiti identity.

"To those espousing this theory, we pose the question: "Should we alter the indigenous population as the Americans did, in line with your support for Western ideals of civilization, openness, and democracy?" Interestingly, within two days, news surfaced about an individual with dual citizenship (Kuwaiti/Saudi) attempting to cross the Kuwaiti border using a Saudi ID, leading to his arrest.

"Skeptics may dismiss this as an isolated case, but a significant portion of news outlets remains oblivious to such incidents. Another report tells the story of an Egyptian woman, may she rest in peace, who was recorded with no specified nationality in all her transactions in the State of Kuwait.

"To those advocating for change and openness, we question why you persist in addressing the issue of counterfeiters, duplicators, and those who transitioned from naturalization to establishment. Whenever a Kuwaiti citizen raises concerns about this, it seems to intensify the scrutiny on your part. Is there a particular reason for this?

"If resolving this matter is your objective, it is not an insurmountable challenge. We propose that there will be no revocation of citizenship. Instead, you will retain all existing privileges, with the only alteration being your eligibility for nomination and voting in the National and Municipal Councils. The outcomes of these elections will reflect the public's sentiment. Housing, employment, labor support, supplies, and other benefits will remain unchanged for all.

"Should a citizenship review body be established, its authority would extend to examining all files, both original and naturalized statuses. Subsequently, individuals would have the option to retain their original nationality or choose Kuwaiti nationality through naturalization. Similarly, those who engaged in forgery would have their original nationality reinstated. There is no need for apprehension; we are a nation of compassion, and your well-being is assured, God willing."

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes

Minister eyes facilitation of public

Car transfer service goes online starting Feb 1, 2024

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28, (Agencies): The Ministry of Interior launched a vehicle renewal service for citizens and residents through the unified government application "Sahel," starting next January 2, through a 6-step mechanism, which exempts vehicle owners from going to insurance company offices and obtaining a paper copy of the registration book, reports Al-Rai daily.

The Ministry also launched a vehicle transfer service, starting next February 1.

A statement from the General Department of Security Relations and Media at the Ministry of Interior stated that the launch of this service came under direct directives from the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled, as part of the ministry's efforts and steps towards completing the process of digital transformation and digitizing services provided to the public.

The ministry pointed out that these services come within the framework of alleviating the effort and facilitating the public in the process of renewing and registering vehicles, through the government "Sahel" application.

The ministry identified the following six steps:

■ Log in "online" to purchase the insurance policy, enter vehicle ownership data. The insurance value is paid, whether for one or two years, according to the client's desire.

■ Approval occurs after determining and paying the value of the insurance policy, and officially approving it by sending a special "code" to the vehicle owner, confirming the validity of the insurance policy.

■ Visit the technical inspection departments in the governorates or companies accredited by the General Traffic Department, where it is done; show the insurance policy number, after which the

136 cash fraud cases in 2 weeks

575 illegal persons nabbed in massive raids

By Munaif Nayef

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: Teams from various sections at the Residency Investigations General Department in the Ministry of Interior have conducted a massive security campaign covering different areas, resulting in the arrest of 575 individuals who violated the Residency and Labor laws.

In a press statement, the Public Relations and Security Media General Department at the ministry confirmed that the day and night campaigns conducted by teams from the Search and Investigations Section, Monitoring and Coordination Section, Violators Follow-up Section, and Administrative and Financial Services Section in Hawally, Salmiya, Mubarakiya, Mahbouda, Farwaniya, Fahheel, Sharq and Shuwaikh led to the arrest of the abovementioned number of individuals of different nationalities.

Security sources confirmed that the Deportation General Department at the ministry is expediting procedures for the deportation of those arrested, pointing out that the campaigns

vehicle will be inspected to ensure the conditions of security, durability and safety.

■ After the vehicle passes the technical inspection and standards management, the procedures are completed through the management system. The General Traffic Department then will send a text message to the vehicle owner via the "Sahl" application, upon completion of the procedures.

will continue during the New Year holiday with the aim of arresting all those who violated the Residency and Labor laws, as well as those involved in immoral activities.

136 cash fraud cases: The Public Prosecution has announced the activation of the virtual room for handling financial fraud and money laundering cases, in cooperation with the General Criminal Investigation Department in the Interior Ministry and the Kuwait Banking Association, reports Al-Anba

The prosecution disclosed that the number of reports on financial fraud operations from Dec 7-23, 2023 reached 136; while the amount involved totaled KD185,500.

It warned against banking with dubious parties for any purpose -- whether by using bank links, receiving payments or completing sales, as it could result in stopping the activation of bank accounts until the validity of those transactions is verified.

It advised those who might have experienced unauthorized deduction or transfer from their bank accounts to quickly report such incident to their respective banks.

■ Pay the technical inspection fees "online" in the amount of 2 dinars and 5 dinars in exchange for a stamp.

■ Upon completion of the technical inspection and payment, the vehicle driver is left with the choice of going to obtain a logbook ownership on paper, or just a copy of it "online", which is approved by patrols and security points.

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Two sustainable development projects worth \$8 million to be implemented

KSR partners with UNICEF, IsDB for Afghanistan development

Promotions and benefits await KOC employees after decision cancelled

Workers union says it has concluded deal with oil company

By Najeh Bilal
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: The Kuwait Oil Company's Workers Union announced that a number of promotions and benefits for the company's employees will be implemented immediately after the decision to suspend promotions is cancelled.

On its official X account, the union explained that it has concluded a deal with KOC, which includes the following:

- the approval to provide vacancies for 16 job grades in the departments of accounting, human resources and assets.
- the approval of the job title of the first security officer under job grade 15 and allowing the workers under this grade to work according to the shift system according to the workers' demands. This will bring about vacancies in the entire lower grade jobs in addition to filling the vacancies in the fire brigade.
- the approval to separate between the production and distribution processes which will allow a number of workers to be promoted to higher positions.

ABK announces official closure days on the occasion of the New Year 2024

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) extends its greetings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, as well as the government, people, and residents of Kuwait on the occasion of the New Year.



Greeting Card for New Year 2024

ABK discloses that its branches will be closed on Sunday, 31 December 2023 and Monday, 1 January, 2024, to resume operations on Tuesday, 2 January, 2024. During this time, ABK's newly launched digital branch in Al Khiran will be functional to provide service to customers from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

The Bank has also confirmed its full operational readiness to serve customers 24/7 via its various digital platforms throughout the New Year holiday. This includes Online Banking via eahli.com, Mobile Banking through the ABK app, as well as the Bank's call center Ahlan Ahli 1 899 899.

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 net-

work 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.

the approval to promote a senior laboratory technician and bring back the chief laboratory technician to the laboratory laboratories in Al-Ratqa area.

the approval to conduct a comprehensive study on all job titles at the examining oil fields examination department

the approval to study gas related operations for engineers and technicians, according to which the promotions, which will lead to their promotions.

Meanwhile, the sources said, "The events witnessed in the extraordinary general assembly meeting of the Kuwait Oil Company Workers Union the day before yesterday led to the resignations of some members of the union's board of directors in protest against the assembly being held without a quorum."

They explained that these are what the Kuwait Oil Company workers have been demanding for a long time. It came as a shock when these demands were fulfilled in one sentence, following the unfortunate events that marred the extraordinary general assembly meeting, the aim of which was to vote on the proposed new changes in the bylaws of the union's system to achieve certain goals.

JEDDAH, Dec 28, (KUNA): Kuwait Society for Relief (KSR) signed on Wednesday two partnership deals with the United Nations Children's Fund UNICEF and Afghanistan Humanitarian Trust Fund (AHTF) - an affiliate of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), to implement two sustainable development projects.

The deal with UNICEF aims to implement a water project that benefits in rural communities in remote areas, KSR Treasurer Jamal Al-Nouri told KUNA.

The project, which will cost USD four million and complete in 12 months, will provide safe water for nearly 64,000 people in Faryab, Helmand and Farah provinces, he said.

KSR will contribute USD one million to the project, Al-Nouri pointed out.

The second agreement aims to launch

eight primary health facilities that will provide healthcare for women in vulnerable communities in the provinces of Nuristan, Ghazni and Zabul.

The project will cost up to USD four million, of which KSR will contribute USD one million. Upon completion in 24 months, it will benefit 141,000 females, or nearly eight percent of females in the targeted areas, he added.

On his part, Kuwait Consul General in Jeddah and Permanent Representative to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Mohammad Al-Mutairi said his country offered USD 500,000 in emergency assistance to the AHTF. The financial assistance was channeled under a ministerial decree adopted by Kuwait cabinet in last August, said Al-Mutairi who attended the signing ceremony in Jeddah.



Up to 600 orphans benefit from Al-Mzeiny orphans care and rehabilitation center. KUNA photos

Number of charities being honored

MoSA hails Kuwaiti charities work, efforts

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28, (KUNA): Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of State for Women and Children's Affairs Sheikh Fares Al-Sabah praised on Thursday the efforts of charities inside and outside of Kuwait.

This came in a press release commemorating the honoring of a number of charities with the attendance of multiple top officials in fields of charitable and humanitarian work.

Al-Sabah stressed the importance of automation and digitalization in charitable work, which contributed to achieving the ministry and charities' goals, adding that the ministry played a

huge role in supporting charity work by solving their problems and easing their difficulties.

The Social Development Assistant Secretary at the ministry, Khaled Al-Ajmi said in a similar statement that this honoring comes to shed light on the role of the charities with certificate of conformity and their efforts.

Chief of Al-Eslah Society (Islamic Society for Social Reform) Dr. Khaled Al-Mathkour praised the role of the ministry toward humanitarian and charitable work, adding that the ministry reflects Kuwait's work in the fields on an international level.



Empty parking spaces show lack of employees' attendance in government institutions on the last day of the week and before the start of holidays for the New Year 2024. Photo by Mahmoud Jadeed

Moderate, partly cloudy weather expected in weekend; cool nights

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28, (KUNA): The Meteorological Department anticipates a moderate and partly cloudy weekend weather forecast with a tendency for cool to cold conditions at night, accompanied by the possibility of scattered rain, occasionally thundery. Director of the Department, Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi, informed Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that weather indicators and numerical models suggest the country is under the influence of a surface depression extension coinciding with an upper atmosphere cold air depression. This situation is causing the proliferation of low and medium clouds, interspersed with cumulonimbus clouds.



Al-Qarawi

Al-Qarawi noted the likelihood of scattered light to moderate rain, occasionally thundery in specific areas, along with possible fog formation, reduced horizontal visibility, and sea waves rising to more than 6 feet. Today's weather, Thursday, is expected to be moderate and cloudy with variable winds shifting to the northeasterly direction. Wind speeds will be light to moderate, occasionally active at 8 to 40 kilometers per hour, with a chance of scattered light rain, possibly thundery at times. Maximum temperatures are forecasted between 21 and 23 degrees Celsius, and the sea conditions will be light to moderate, with waves occasionally reaching heights of 2 to 6 feet.

For tonight, the weather is anticipated to be cold to cold and cloudy, with northwesterly to variable winds at light to moderate speeds (8 to 28 kilometers per hour). There is a possibility of scattered rain and fog in some areas, and the expected minimum

temperature will range between 13 and 15 degrees Celsius. The sea is projected to have light to moderate waves, occasionally reaching heights of 1 to 3 feet.

Looking ahead to tomorrow, Friday, the weather is predicted to be moderate, partly cloudy to cloudy, with northwesterly to variable winds at light to moderate speeds (8 to 32 kilometers per hour). There is a chance of scattered rain, potentially thundery at times, and maximum temperatures are expected to range between 21 and 23 degrees Celsius. The sea conditions will be clear with light to moderate waves, occasionally reaching heights of 1 to 4 feet. Friday night is expected to be cold to cold and partly cloudy, with northwesterly to variable winds at light to moderate speeds (8 to 30 kilometers per hour). There is a possibility of scattered rain, and the expected minimum temperature will be between 12 and 14 degrees Celsius. The sea is anticipated to have light to moderate waves, ranging from 1 to 4 feet.

Looking further ahead to Saturday, the weather is fore casted to be moderate and partly cloudy, with light to moderate northwesterly to variable winds at speeds ranging from 8 to 32 kilometers per hour. There is a chance of scattered rain, potentially thundery at times, and the expected maximum temperatures will range between 20 and 22 degrees Celsius. The sea conditions will be light, with waves ranging from 1 to 4 feet. Saturday night is projected to be cold to cold and cloudy, with northwesterly to variable winds at light to moderate speeds (8 to 28 kilometers per hour). The expected minimum temperature is between 10 and 12 degrees Celsius, and the sea will have light to moderate waves, ranging from 1 to 3 feet.

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The Editorial Department of the Arab Times bid farewell to Yem Kalisha Basha, who left Kuwait, after working for 41 years. All the staff members wished him good luck and a long, happy life in India.



Photos by Rizk Taufiq



Representatives of the Kuwaiti National Assembly and members of the Arab Parliament, Dr. Muhammad Al-Huwaila, Ahmed Lari, Hamdan Al-Azmi, and Khaled Al-Munis.

PAAET pursues steps toward further development: official

New specializations, programs to meet labor market needs

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28, (KUNA): Director General of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training Dr. Hassan Mohammed Alfajam has affirmed the approach toward further development with new specializations and programs and meeting the needs of the labor market.

Marking PAAET's 41st anniversary Thursday, Dr. Al-Fajam said in a press release that the curricula and programs have been updated and new ones have been set up to

meet the market requirements.

Enrollment in PAAET's colleges and academies has substantially increased, he said, revealing that the number of graduates, in 2022-2023, reached 12,197, bringing the number of graduates since the authority's establishment to more than 60,000.

PAAET executes various tasks in the academic and social service sectors, holding conventions and activities intended to enhance scientific and cultural cooperation among researchers and academics. Moreover, it regularly hosts elite specialists and scientists from various countries.

Over the past months, PAAET management crafted the new general strategy, envisaging objectives toward further development, Dr. Alfajam said, adding that the recent visible involve-

ment was due to multiple agreements that had been worked out with various institutions in the country, singling out an agreement with the Gulf University for Science and Technology, last February, another one between PAAET's Higher Institute of Telecommunication and Navigation and Kuwait Oil Company in March.

He also mentioned an agreement with the Arab Planning Institute, in June, an accord with the division of education and training in the Minister of Interior, in September, in addition to many other accords.

PAAET was founded when the late Amir, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, issued on December 28, 1982, a decree in this respect with aim of boosting national social and economic development.

Does justice

Continued from Page 1

for some who have external agendas to conspire against the rule. We witnessed a sample of it in the demonstrations of 2001 and 2012, in addition to threats to overthrow the system.

All of this was reflected in society, which today is searching for salvation, even if it means disrupting the work of the Constitution for some time. The political leadership should have a team of advisors that puts the interest of the nation on top of any other interest, and approve a legal system that is consistent with the latest developments; as well as governments that are not based on quotas or personal benefits and a modern electoral law.

This also applies to the Prime Minister and the ministers, as they do not put their interests before the national interest.

What is happening in the world is greater than the interests of some who refuse to correct the social contract that Kuwait has known throughout the past centuries.

Hence, we do not reach the conclusion that the law professor reached when he asked his students: What is the benefit of justice if it is not implemented?

Our leadership, it is a mistake to postpone today's work until tomorrow.

24/7 police

Continued from Page 1

stations to offer the best comprehensive services for both citizens and expats, the Ministry's security media and public relations department said in a statement.

This facility receives complaints and reports from investigation offices, and the preventive and criminal department at the ministry, it added.

Upon the directives of First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, there would be a comprehensive plan to revamp police stations in all areas nationwide, with the aim of upgrading security services, according to the statement.

Health Ministry

Continued from Page 1

both genders suffering head injuries, broken bones, dislocated joints, internal bleeding and death cases, he noted.

Dr. Al-Sanad called on parents to bring awareness to their children about the dangers of reckless driving and encourage them to abide by traffic laws to protect their lives and the lives of others.

JN.1 coronavirus

Continued from Page 1

He also reiterated the Public Health Sector's recommendation for medical and technical support staff in hospitals and centers to cover the mouth and nose while at work.

In addition, reliable sources from the health sector affirmed the slight increase in the number of infections in various governorates in December. Sources cited an increase in the number of infections by one to two cases during the current month compared to previous months, stating that the rate of Covid infections in Kuwait during the year 2023 ranges between 600 to 900 cases with an average of 100 to 150 cases in each governorate.

Sources added the daily average of infections ranges from 10 to 12 in each governorate – an affirmation of the small number of infections in the

country compared to infections during the Corona pandemic, which was recording daily four times the current monthly infection rate. Sources said this means there is no reason to fear or worry about the spread of Coronavirus in the country.

It is worth mentioning that the World Health Organization (WHO) recently announced a high rate of infection with the virus around the world, recording 854,673 infections and 3,005 deaths worldwide within four weeks, with Russia ranking first among the countries – 279,359 infections.

The organization's data indicated a heterogeneous picture of infections and deaths in the regions, as new cases of the virus in Southeast Asia rose by 88 percent in four weeks and the death rate more than tripled.

In a related development, acting Undersecretary of the ministry Dr Abdul Rahman Al-Mutairi issued a circular obliging medical and technical assistant staff in hospitals, specialized medical centers and primary health care centers to wear masks during the official working period. This is in addition to the need to maintain clean hands by frequently washing them with water, soap and disinfectant. It is also recommended to complete seasonal respiratory vaccinations, especially the updated version of the Covid vaccine and the flu vaccine.

MPs slam

Continued from Page 1

They voiced objection to anti-Constitution statements, affirming that the Constitution protects the people's rights and freedoms. They believe that those calling for suspending the Constitution are using the freedom of expression and academic freedom as excuses to spread wrong and destructive opinions.

They warned about the dangerous consequences of such attempts backed by corrupt and suspicious figures. They then asked all the concerned parties like the executive, legislative and judicial authorities as well as the civil society organizations, to condemn and foil attempts to instigate a coup against the Constitution, and to consider such attempts as crimes targeting the State's foundations and inciting chaos.

Meanwhile, National Assembly Speaker Ahmed Al-Saadoun recently met with a delegation from Kuwait Journalists Association consisting of Chairman of the Board of Directors Dr Zuhair Ibrahim Al-Abbad and board members Zaid Uqab Al-Khateeb, Muhammad Ali Al-Kandari and Dr Fahd Marzouq Al-Anzi.

He also had a meeting with Kuwaiti Ambassador to South Korea Zeab Al-Rashedi.

Arab Parliament

Continued from Page 1

He indicated that a preparatory meeting was held for the AP plenary session due on Thursday that discusses situation in Palestine and Palestinians' sufferings.

Al-Asoumi underlined that the AP continues backing the Palestinian cause via parliamentary diplomacy, urging all agencies that could put pressure on the occupying Israeli entity to halt its aggression and violation on Gaza, and the citizens of the West Bank and Jerusalem.

The Arab League called on Thursday for an immediate ceasefire and halt of Israeli occupation aggression against the Gaza Strip, which would open the doorway for the safe delivery of necessary relief aid to the war-torn region.

In a speech to the Arab Parliament special session on supporting Palestine and the Gaza Strip, the league's Assistant Secretary for Palestinian Affairs and Occupied Arab lands Ambassador

Saeed Abu-Ali said, "All those who opposed an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip are partners in the heinous crimes and have blood on their hands."

The misery connected with the Palestinian cause could only be solved through ending occupation and establishing an independent state of Palestine within the June 1967 borders and east Jerusalem as capital of the country, indicated Abu-Ali, stressing that any military solution to the situation would be detrimental to the Palestinian people and their rights for dignity and freedom.

Abu-Ali followed by saying that the Israeli occupation government, for years, had been committing acts of horror against the Palestinian people, killing them, abusing them, and destroying their lives and honor.

The separation of the issue of the Gaza Strip from what was occurring in the West Bank is another attempt to de-legitimize the Palestinian cause, but this would not take place, affirmed the Arab League official.

The two state solution would only come via a true international determination to bring it into reality, indicated the official who affirmed that the majority of the world was in support of the step save a few countries who stand against justice and truth.

The Israeli war machine is committing and act of genocide that must be stopped at all cost and the world must implement international resolutions to halt these crimes, he added.

He went on to say that, 2.5 percent of the Gaza population were either massacred, wounded, or missing, revealing that 60 percent of total infrastructure in the Strip was completely destroyed.

Abu-Ali called for implementing UNSC Resolution 2720 allowing for the increased delivery of crucial humanitarian relief aid into Gaza before the matters slide into uncharted territories.

Meanwhile, Israeli forces bombarded cities, towns and refugee camps across Gaza overnight and into Thursday, killing dozens of people in a widening air and ground offensive against Hamas that has forced thousands more to flee from homes and shelters in recent days.

The war has already killed over 20,000 Palestinians and driven around 85% of the population of 2.3 million from their homes. Much of northern Gaza has been leveled, and it has been largely depopulated and isolated from the rest of the territory for weeks. Many fear a similar fate awaits the south as Israel expands its offensive to most of the tiny enclave.

Israel has vowed to dismantle Hamas - which is still putting up stiff resistance, even in the north - and bring back more than 100 hostages still held by the militants after their Oct. 7 attack into southern Israel, in which some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed.

Israeli officials have brushed off international calls for a cease-fire - saying it would amount to a victory for Hamas.

The United States - while providing crucial support for the offensive - has urged Israel to take greater measures to spare civilians and allow in more aid. But humanitarian workers say the amount of food, fuel and medical supplies entering is still far below what is needed, and 1 in 4 Palestinians in Gaza are starving, according to U.N. officials.

An Israeli airstrike on a home in the northern town of Beit Lahiyeh - one of the first targets of the ground invasion that began in October - buried at least 21 people, including women and children, according to a family member.

Bassel Kheir al-Din, a journalist with a local TV station, said the strike flattened his family house and severely damaged three neighboring homes. He said 12 members of his family - including three children aged 2, 7 and 8 - were buried and presumed dead, and that nine neighbors were missing.

Major events in Kuwait during 2023

Jan 27: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's Representative and Chief of His Highness the Crown Prince's Diwan, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, arrived in Saudi Arabia to attend the Formula E race due in Diriyah Governorate.

Feb 1: His Highness the Crown Prince and Amir Representative Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attended at Bayan Palace flag hoisting ceremony, sponsored by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Feb 6: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah patronized and attended the final match of His Highness the Crown Prince Cup between Al-Arabi and Al-Salmiya teams at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

Feb 14: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, patronized and attended the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) Award ceremony for the years 2020-21, as well as Al-Sumait Prize for African Development in the fields of education and health, at Bayan Palace.

Feb 15: His Highness the Amir Representative, His Highness the Crown Prince, attended a luncheon held by Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at Azayez farm in Kuwait's northern Al-Abdali area.

April 9: His Highness the Crown Prince, representing His Highness the Amir, visited the traditional poets diwaniya and Kuwait Deaf Club.

April 10: His Highness the Crown Prince, representing His Highness the Amir, visited Kuwait Blind Society and Kuwait Disabled Sport Club.

April 10: His Highness the Crown Prince receives, at Bayan Palace, His Highness the Prime Minister and his ministers for taking oath.

April 17: His Highness the Crown Prince represented His Highness the Amir in giving a speech marking the last 10 days of Ramadhan and announced he would dissolve the 2020 National Assembly based on Article 107 of the Constitution.

May 4: His Highness the Amir's representative, His Highness the Crown Prince flew to London to attend the inauguration ceremony of King Charles III.

May 19: His Highness the Amir's representative, His Highness the Crown Prince delivered Kuwait's speech at the Arab Summit in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

May 24: His Highness the Crown Prince received Vice President of Google Cloud Company Vinton Cerf.

July 19: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince received, at Bayan Palace, His Highness the Prime Minister and his government for taking constitutional oath.

July 20: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince inaugurated the National Assembly's first regular term of the 17th legislative session, urging MPs not to waste time to settle scores and irresponsible practices, but to achieve and develop.

Aug 8: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-

Jaber Al-Sabah received Gulf Cooperation Council Secretary General Jassem Al-Budaiwi.

Aug 28: His Highness Kuwait's Crown Prince headed to the UK to attend and sponsor a ceremony marking the 70th anniversary of the inception of Kuwait Investment Office at the invitation of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

Aug 29: His Highness the Crown Prince held talks with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, focusing on bilateral relations, which date back more than a century.

Aug 29: Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attended celebration of Kuwait Investment Office (KIO) 70th anniversary.

Sept 20: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah departed to China to attend the 19th Asian Olympic Games at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Sept 21: His Highness the Crown Prince met with Kuwaiti athletic mission participating at the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, China.

Sept 22: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah met with Chinese President Xi Jinping and held official talks.

Sept 22: Several bilateral agreements have been signed between Kuwait and China in attendance of His Highness the Crown Prince and the Chinese President.

Sept 23: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attended the opening ceremony of the 19th Olympic Asian games.

Sept 23: His Highness the Crown Prince received Prime Minister of South Korea Han Duck-soo and accompanying delegation.

Oct 3: His Highness the Crown Prince received at Bayan Palace judge Dr. Adel Boursesli who swore in as the new president of Kuwait's Supreme Judicial Council and the head of the Court of Cassation.

Oct 20: Representative of His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince headed to Saudi Arabia to take part in ASEAN meeting.

Oct 21: Representative of His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince gave Kuwait's speech at the Cairo peace summit.

Oct 25: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah paid a visit to King of Britain and Northern Ireland, Charles III.

Oct 31: His Highness the Amir Representative, His Highness the Crown Prince gave a speech at the inauguration of the second session of the 17th legislative term.

Nov 11: Representative of His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah gave Kuwait's speech at the joint Arab Islamic summit in Riyadh.

Nov 14: His Highness the Crown Prince received Google Cloud CEO Thomas Kurian and accompanying delegation at Bayan Palace.

Nov 21: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Kuwaiti athletes who won medals at the 19th Asian Games held in Hangzhou.

Kuwait government:

Jan 9: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Barrak Al-Shaitan briefed the cabinet on the strategic partnership deal signed with Google Cloud to support comprehensive digital transformation in all government and state-run bodies.

Jan 17: Kuwait's Cabinet issued a statement regarding a decree pardoning the freedom-restricting penalty imposed on a number of individuals in a court ruling.

Jan 23: The cabinet decided on ending exceptional salaries as per article 80 of the social security law, and tasked the economic affairs ministerial cabinet with examining all related decisions.

Jan 24: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah handed government resignation letter to His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Feb 6: Kuwait's council of ministers approved draft decision on demographic organization

Feb 6: Upon directives from the state political leadership, the cabinet ordered a private jet to be sent to the quake-hit areas in Turkey to evacuate Kuwaitis there.

March 5: Minister of commerce and industry and state minister for communication affairs and information technology, Mazen Al-Nahedh, issued decision banning cash transactions of more than KD 10 in private pharmacies.

April 5: Minister of Social Affairs and Social Development Mai Al-Baghlhi signed resolutions stipulating recruitment of nationals at cooperative societies.

May 1: The government, in a meeting, approved a draft decree to dissolve the National Assembly and referred it to His Highness the Crown Prince and decided to send relief aid for Sudan.

May 3: The government approved, in an extraordinary meeting, a draft decree to call on eligible voters to cast ballots on the June 6, 2023 legislative elections.

May 15: The government approved a proposal by the Public Authority for Sport to hold an annual sports day nationwide.

May 18: Minister Al-Baghlhi instructed cooperative societies to pay 50 percent of their Zakat (alms) money for insolvent citizens.

May 29: Minister of Commerce and Industry Mohammad Al-Aiban signed a resolution allowing operation of 54 commercial activities without the need of having locations for them.

June 4: His Highness the Prime Minister sponsored and attended a ceremony to honor most valuable players for 2023.

June 7: The government discussed a resignation letter to His Highness the Crown Prince.

June 18: A decree issued regarding formation of a government headed by His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Sabah.

June 19: The government formed a ministerial committee with a mandate of coordinating priorities and laws with the National Assembly

To be continued

Free trade agreements cover goods, services, and more: Al-Budaiwi

GCC accord with South Korea to enhance trade cooperation

RIYADH, Dec 28, (KUNA): GCC Secretary General Jassem Al-Budaiwi on Thursday said the freshly-crafted free trade agreement between the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Republic of South Korea would lead to boosting commercial exchanges between the two sides.

The GCC said in a statement that Al-Budaiwi signed with South Korean Trade Minister Ahn Duk Geun the joint statement to conclude negotiations and reach a free trade agreement between the GCC and Seoul.

This agreement will contribute to increasing volume of bilateral trade, commercial exchange in goods and services and enhance economic diversification between the GCC member states and South Korea, he said.

According to the statement, Al-Budaiwi said that the signing came after over five rounds of negotiations and reflected the real common desire to strengthen the strategic partnership and economic cooperation between the two sides.

According to Al-Budaiwi, who was cited in the statement, the free trade agreements are a result of the GCC leaders' directives to advance common trade and investment interests and strengthen the Cooperation Council's economic ties with other nations and



KUNA photo
GCC Secretary General Jassem Al-Budaiwi with South Korean Trade Minister Ahn Duk Geun during the signing ceremony.

international blocs.

He stated that the agreement included trade in goods and services, government procurement, digital trade,

cooperation in the fields of small and medium enterprises, customs procedures, intellectual property and other topics of common interest.



Officials investigate at the site of seven vehicles crash, in Sakarya Turkey, Thursday, Dec. 28, 2023. Turkish officials say a chain-reaction crash Thursday involving seven vehicles on a motorway in northwest Turkey has killed at least 10 people and injured 57 others. The pileup occurred Thursday in dense fog and low visibility some 93 miles from Istanbul. (AP)

Deadly pileup on Turkish motorway claims 10 lives

Dense fog leads to fatal chain collision

ANKARA, Turkey, Dec 28, (AP): A chain-reaction crash Thursday involving seven vehicles on a motorway in northwest Turkey killed at least 10 people and injured 57 others, officials said.

The pileup occurred in dense fog and low visibility on the Northern Marmara Highway in Sakarya province, some 150 kilometers (93 miles) from Istanbul.

An investigation has been launched into the accident but Gov. Yasar Karadeniz of Sakarya said it likely occurred when a vehicle hit a truck in poor visibility, triggering other crashes at the rear.

At least three intercity buses were involved in the crash.

Authorities believe some passengers died when they left their vehicles and were struck by another vehicle, Karadeniz told reporters at the

'Escalating conflict'

Egypt urges its nationals to leave Sudan without delay

CAIRO, Dec 28, (KUNA): The Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs advised its nationals in all states of Sudan to leave the country immediately due to the escalating conflict there.

The Ministry warned, in a statement on Wednesday, the Egyptian citizens against travel to Sudan under any circumstances for their safety.

The Egyptian Embassy in Khartoum has managed to evacu-

ate 18 students, males and females, and some of their family members who were trapped in the city of Wad Madani, Gezira State, as fighting spread recently to the state.

In collaboration with the Sudanese authorities, the evacuees have been rushed from the city to the Egyptian consulate in the Red Sea city of Port Sudan and then to the Egyptian borders, the statement added.

scene. Seven of the injured were in serious condition, the governor said.

Police and emergency personnel were seen clearing the wreckage at the scene.

Qatar court reduces death sentence handed to eight Indian navy officers

NEW DELHI, Dec 28, (AP): Qatar's Court of Appeal reduced Thursday the death sentence handed in October to eight retired Indian navy officers on spy charges, the Indian foreign ministry said. Ministry spokesman Arindam Bagchi said in a statement the detailed verdict has not been received yet. "We are in close touch with the legal team as well as family members to decide on the next steps," he said.

India's ambassador to Qatar and other officials were present in the Qatari court along with the family members and New Delhi will continue

providing consular and legal assistance, Bagchi said. "We will also continue to take up the matter with the Qatari authorities," he said.

Qatari authorities provided New Delhi consular access to the eight Indian nationals during their trial.

Bagchi said no further comment was possible due to the confidential and sensitive nature of the case.

The eight were charged with spying while working at Al Dahra, a consulting company in the oil-rich Gulf state that advises the Qatari government on submarine acquisitions, according to

Indian media reports. The Qatari government's media office declined to comment on Thursday's ruling.

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani on the sidelines of the COP28 summit in Dubai in December. It was unclear whether the two leaders discussed the case.

Millions of Indians live and work in the Gulf, a large number of them as semi-skilled or unskilled workers. They constitute an important source of income for India and contribute to the success of Gulf economies.

Iraq and Spain discuss bilateral ties, agree to sign 'strategic' partnership

BAGHDAD, Dec 28, (KUNA): Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Al-Sudani and his Spanish counterpart Pedro Sanchez Thursday discussed bilateral ties including prospecting signing of economic and strategic partnerships, in addition to resuming the work of the joint committee in its 13th session by mid-2024.

Al-Sudani invited Spanish companies to work in the development

road projects, which Iraq intends to extend from the Gulf area to the Turkish borders, affirming that the government instructed Iraqi ministries and authorities to collaborate with Spanish companies, according to a statement by the Prime Minister Media Office.

The prime minister wished to benefit from the Spanish expertise in the fields of solar energy, tourism, and in

facing climate change, in addition to cooperating in the fields of security, culture, environment and sustainable development.

Al-Sudani commended the Spanish stand against the Israeli occupation's aggression on Gaza and its efforts in helping the Palestinian people, stressing that the international community must act to stop the serious violations occurring in Palestinian lands.

Year-ender

Major events in Saudi Arabia 2023

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28, (KUNA): Saudi Arabia witnessed many events in 2023 that touched on many fields. Following are major events throughout the year:

Jan 9: Crown Prince, Prime Minister and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Saudi Public Investment Fund Mohammad bin Salman announced the 5th major project Al-Diriyah owned by the Saudi Public Investment Fund.

Jan 10: The Saudi Council of Ministers approved the Arab Federation of Internal Auditors.

Jan 12: CEO of the Saudi Fund for Development and Pakistani Undersecretary of the Ministry of Affairs signed an agreement to finance Pakistan with USD one billion to support its economy.

Jan 22: The Saudi Zakat Authority launched the "Global Logistics Platform" initiative.

Jan 29: Saudi Etihad football team won Saudi Super Cup 2022-23.

Jan 30: The Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a service of issuing entry visa for all purposes.

Jan 30: Aramco signed more than 100 agreements and MoU estimated at USD 7.2 billion to help develop a diversified and sustainable industrial system.

Jan 30: Kuwaiti Ambassador Jassem Al-Budaiwi was appointed GCC Secretary-General.

Jan 31: Saudi Statistics Authority confirms Saudi's real GDP was achieved during 2022, a growth of 8.7 percent compared to 2021.

Feb 1: Saudi Arabia and Oman signed MoU to finance the infrastructure project for the Special Economic Zone in Oman, estimated at about USD 320 million.

Feb 1: Saudi Arabia and Oman signed 13 investment MoU between private and government sectors valued at USD 266 million.

Feb 1: The Saudi Public Investment Fund signed an agreement with AeroFarms to build a company based in Riyadh aimed at establishing indoor vertical farms in Saudi, Middle East and North African region.

Feb 2: Saudi King relieved the governor of the Saudi Central Bank from his position and appointed Ayman Al-Sayyari as governor of the bank.

Feb 2: Saudi Energy Minister and French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs signed MoU to set a plan for cooperation in the energy sector.

Feb 12: Saudi Arabia sends first Saudi female and male astronauts to the international space station.

Feb 15: Saudi Ports Authority and Maersk shipping company sets a logistics area for the company in the Middle East at Jeddah Islamic Port, valued at USD 346 million with 2,500 job opportunities.

Feb 16: Crown Prince, Prime Minister launched the new Square Development Company in line with Saudi Vision 2030 targets.

Feb 21: Saudi Arabia signed a deposit agreement with the Central Bank of Yemen valued USD one billion.

Feb 22: Saudi Arabia celebrated the founding day anniversary.

March 1: Saudi King issued a royal decree that the 11th of March of every year as World Science Day.

March 1: Saudi ACWA Power signed three agreements with the Ministry of Energy of Kazakhstan and the Kazakh Sovereign Wealth Fund to establish a wind power plant and store renewable energy within one GWh batteries.

March 5: Saudi King issued a number of royal orders, including the appointment of Eng. Ibrahim Al-Sultan as Minister of State and a member of the Council of Ministers, and the appointment of Salman Al-Dosari as Minister of Media.

March 7: The Saudi Cabinet approved MoU for cooperation in the field of tourism between the Saudi Ministry of Tourism and Kuwait's Ministry of Information.

March 10: Saudi Arabia, Iran and China agreed to resume diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran and to reopen their embassies within two months.

March 12: Aramco announced its financial results for 2022, recording an income of USD 161 billion, its highest annual profit listed on the Saudi Stock Exchange.

March 13: Riyadh Air, the new Saudi national air carrier launched by the Saudi Public Investment Fund, announced its first order for the aircraft fleet by purchasing 72 Boeing aircrafts.

March 20: Aramco signed an agreement with DHL to establish a new global center for logistics services in Saudi Arabia to enhance operations.

March 22: The 155th session of the GCC Ministerial Council kicked off in Riyadh.

March 23: Saudi Aramco signed a non-binding MoU with Samsung Electronics Co., Ltd. to determine a strategic cooperation plan aimed at localizing the industrial system.

April 2: Saudi Ministry of Energy

a voluntary reduces its crude oil production of 500,000 barrels per day, starting May until the end of 2023.

April 13: Crown Prince, Prime Minister and Chairman of the Council of Economic Affairs and Development launched four special economic zones in strategic around the country.

April 15: Saudi Airlines suspends all flights to and from Sudan until further notice.

April 16: King Abdullah University of Science and Technology launched a satellite, in cooperation with Vandenberg Space Base in the US.

April 16: Saudi Crown Prince Prime Minister, Chairman of the Council of Economic and Development Affairs and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Public Investment Fund announced the completion of transferring four percent of the total shares of Aramco from state ownership to the Saudi Public Investment Fund.

April 20: Saudi Supreme Court declares that tomorrow is the first day of Eid Al-Fitr for this year 1444 AH.

April 22: Saudi Arabia announced the arrival of Saudis and a number of nationals, including diplomats and international officials, after evacuating them from Sudan.

May 1: Aramco and the Saudi Public Investment Fund signed an agreement with Baosteel Iron and Steel Co. Ltd. of China to establish the largest complex for the manufacture of steel in Saudi.

May 2: 14 Saudi citizens and 206 people from four countries arrive to Jeddah from Sudan.

May 2: The Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the Saudi Cultural Attache building in Sudan was stormed.

May 8: King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief) launched a campaign through Sahem platform to help the Sudanese people.

May 9: Saudi Arabia resumes the work of its diplomatic mission in Syria.

May 12: Saudi Arabia and US announced that representatives of SAF and RSF sign a declaration of commitment to protect civilians in Sudan.

May 17: Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed the "Road to Mecca" initiative agreement as part of the Saudi Vision 2030.

May 19: The 32nd Arab Summit kicked off in Jeddah amidst hopes to set new working plan for joint Arab action.

May 19: Declaration issued at the conclusion of the 32nd Arab Summit in Jeddah, reaffirms support to Yemen's security and stability and fulfills the aspirations of the Yemeni people.

May 19: Declaration issued at the conclusion of the 32nd Arab Summit in Jeddah, confirms follow-up to developments in the situation in Sudan.

May 23: Saudi National Development Fund agrees to financing the largest green hydrogen production plant in the world, in NEOM, worth USD 2.74 billion.

May 24: Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs restores its diplomatic relations with Canada.

June 2: The Ministry of Hajj and Umrah announced that tomorrow is the last day for issuing licenses to perform Umrah before the Hajj season.

June 4: The Saudi Ministry of Interior announced the implementation of the death sentence against three people.

June 5: Saudi Arabia launched the investment and privatization project for sports clubs, after completing the executive procedures for the first phase.

June 7: Saudi American meeting begins in Riyadh.

June 9: Saudi Arabia and US announced that the two parties in Sudan have reached an agreement.

June 11: Saudi Investment Minister launched modern Silk Road project between the Arab world and China.

June 11: Saudi and Syrian Chambers of Commerce agreed to reopen economic cooperation.

June 15: Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched electronic tourist visa.

June 15: Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah opens an air route from Sanaa Airport to King's Airport Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah.

June 15: The General Presidency for the Affairs of the Two Holy Mosques prepares 20 different exhibitions during Hajj season for the first time.

June 16: Saudi Crown Prince meets with French President on an official visit to Paris to head the Saudi delegation participating in the Summit for a New Global Financial Pact.

June 17: Saudi Arabia and the US announce the agreement of representatives of SAF and RSF on a cease-fire throughout Sudan for 72 hours.

June 19: Saudi Supreme Court announced June 19, 2023 the first day of Dhu Al-Hijja.

June 20: The Saudi Cabinet approved their accession to the UN

Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods (CISG).

June 21: Saudi NEOM and the German Volocopter announced the successful completion of a series of trials of vertical electric vehicles (air taxis), after obtaining a special flight permit.

June 27: The Saudi General Authority for Statistics announced that the total number of pilgrims for this year has reached 1,845,045.

June 27: Saudi Arabia announced its support for the accession of the African Union as a permanent member of (G20).

July 2: Saudi Arabia rejected extremist burning a copy of the Holy Qur'an in Stockholm.

July 2: OIC discussed incident of burning a copy of the Holy Qur'an in Sweden.

July 3: Saudi Arabia extend the voluntary reduction in oil production until the end of Aug.

July 5: OIC called on the media to combat Islamophobia and insulting religious symbols.

July 8: Saudi Arabia and France issue a joint statement on energy cooperation.

July 11: Ministry of Hajj and Umrah announced the issuing of Umrah permits through Nusuk or Tawakkalna applications.

July 12: The General Secretariat of GCC and the Arab Planning Institute signed a MoU to enhance cooperation in various fields.

July 16: GCC and Japan signed a joint statement to resume negotiations on free trade agreement.

July 16: Saudi Arabia and Japan signed 26 MoUs and investment agreements.

July 17: Saudi Arabia and Turkey signed nine MoU at the Saudi-Turkish Investment Forum in Jeddah.

July 17: Saudi Arabia and Turkey signed a number of bilateral cooperation agreements.

July 19: Jeddah hosts the first summit between GCC and Asian countries' Central Banks.

July 19: Leaders of the GCC and the five Central Asian countries participants in the summit.

July 20: Saudi Arabia condemned the repeated incident of desecration of a copy of the Holy Qur'an in Stockholm.

July 25: The Saudi Fund for Development signed an agreement with the Arabian Gulf University to finance a project to supply medical devices for the academic hospital of King Abdullah Medical City in Bahrain, worth USD 46 million.

July 26: The Saudi Ministry of Defense announced the downing of an F-15SA fighter plane during a training mission and the martyrdom of its crew.

Aug 1: Saudi Arabia announced providing economic support to Yemen valued at USD 1.2 billion.

Aug 2: Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the launch of the electronic visa for citizens of Britain and Northern Ireland.

Aug 3: Saudi Arabia announced an extension of the voluntary oil production cut of one million barrels per day for a month and possibility of extending or increasing this reduction.

Aug 6: Saudi Tourism Authority announced electronic visit visas for eight new countries.

Aug 6: Participants in the meeting of national security advisors held in Jeddah, stress the importance of continuing consultations in order to achieve peace.

Aug 6: The air connectivity program and Saudi Airlines launched direct flights between Beijing and Riyadh.

Aug 6: Saudi Public Investment Fund announced the arrival of total assets for the year 2022 amounts to about USD 595 billion.

Aug 7: Saudi Arabia announced the signing of an agreement and two MoUs between Saudi and Turkish companies for localization manufacture of drones.

Aug 8: The Organizing Committee of the World Combat Games added six games.

Aug 8: The Saudi Council of Ministers announced the establishment of Presidency of Religious Affairs.

Aug 8: Saudi Arabia announced that Al-Ula Governorate will host the Lahib Al-Alam endurance race.

Aug 15: Al-Hilal Saudi Club announced the signing of Brazilian star Neymar.

Aug 22: Al-Nasr Saudi Club qualifies for the group stage of the AFC Champions League 2023-24.

Aug 28: Saudi Ministry of Defense announced that a Royal Saudi Air Force Tornado fighter plane had crashed during a training.

Sept 3: Saudi Arabia announced the holding of the third edition of the International Mining Conference.

Sept 4: Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Prince Mohammad bin Salman announced the establishment of a global water organization based in Riyadh.

Sept 5: Saudi Arabia announced the extension of the voluntary oil production cut of one million barrels per day until the end of 2023.

Sept 5: FIFA held the draw for the Club World Cup FIFA Saudi Arabia in Jeddah.

Sept 5: Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the arrival of Saudi Ambassador-designate to Iran to start his duties.

World News Roundup

Obituary

Glock developer dies

Architect of 'Modern EU'
Delors passes away at 98

BRUSSELS, Dec 28, (AP): Jacques Delors, a Paris bank messenger's son who became the visionary and builder of a more unified Europe in his momentous decade as chief executive of the European Union, has died in Paris, the Delors Institute think tank told The Associated Press on Wednesday. He was 98.

"The whole of Europe mourns the death of one of its greatest architects," the institute said in a statement. "The best results of European integration cannot be dissociated from the vision, the courage, the conviction, the perseverance and the relentless work which characterized Jacques Delors' work during his 10 years at the head of the European Commission."

Paying tribute, the office of French President Emmanuel Macron said: "This grandson of farmers and the son of a bank employee, whose rise was entirely due to his talent, never allowed the lofty heights to corrupt his human righteousness."



Delors

Delors "became the builder of the EU as we know it today," German Chancellor Olaf Scholz wrote on X, formerly Twitter. "It is our responsibility to continue his work today for the good of Europe."

For many, the owlish but hard-driving Socialist and Catholic was simply "Mr. Europe." The EU, which stretches these days from Finland to Portugal and is home to some 450 million people, was dubbed "the house that Jacques built" by a popular biography.

Under his 1985-1995 tenure at the head of the EU's bureaucracy in Brussels, member countries agreed to tear down barriers that prevented the free movement of capital, goods, services and people.

Delors was also key in drawing up the blueprint for economic and monetary union, which led to the creation of the European Central Bank and the euro currency.

Masterpiece

The latter, considered by many to be Delors' masterpiece, is now official tender for 20 of the 27 EU nations.

But in the years leading up to his death, some of Delors' handiwork came under threat. A narrowly averted crisis over Greece shook the eurozone, while the EU's borders came under pressure from hundreds of thousands of refugees and other migrants, revealing fault lines within the bloc. In 2016, the U.K. voted to leave the EU in a repudiation of the "ever-closer union" the former EU Commission president toiled to forge.

Further expansion eastward of the EU into territory once controlled by Moscow had been halted by ferocious Kremlin opposition. And the economies of many of the bloc's member nations appeared to be stuck in idle, with persistent low growth rates and millions of people unable to find work.

In remarks that may ring as true today as when he left office, Delors in 1995 cautioned fellow Europeans that "we have a future filled with danger." He insisted their countries, which spent centuries at one another's throats in devastating and bloody wars, must continue to strive for "agreements at political, social and economic levels."

For many, the moody Frenchman with big ideas yet painstaking attention to detail was the most influential figure in constructing a more united Europe since the postwar founders of the Common Market decided to bind their nations together to prevent another war.

Wim Kok, a former Dutch prime minister, admiringly called Delors the man "who for 10 years determined the face of Europe like no other."

"I am satisfied like an artisan from whom someone ordered a table and chairs, who did everything he could to craft a fine work, and who today sees it in front of him," Delors told a newspaper reporter in 1998, three years after leaving Brussels. He added: "I consider myself to be only one element in the chain."

The EU - called the European Community when Delors took the helm - grew from 10 nations to 12 during his tenure, with a clear promise of the far greater expansion that has since taken place.

After the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, Delors moved quickly to prepare the organization for the admission of former communist countries from Eastern Europe.

From a narrowly focused trade bloc, it branched out into areas that were once the jealously guarded purview of individual governments, like foreign policy, customs and border controls, justice and home affairs.

But for many, especially in countries like Britain, Delors became the reviled personification of the overreaching Eurocrat bent on meddling in virtually all aspects of people's lives. One London tabloid called on readers to show their hostility to "the French fool" by assembling and shouting in unison: "Up Yours Delors."

British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, though using more genteel language, insisted on her country's sovereign right to fix its own course in many areas.

Delors' founding the grouping of countries far beyond its original role as an economic club toward his dream of a united Europe. He wanted to give it the institutions and tools to rival the United States and Japan, and to make it a force for peace, prosperity and security. "By the time you get to the mid '90s, there are signs of a significant backlash against European integration," said N. Piers Ludlow, associate professor at the London School of Economics and Political Science. "A potential European superstate was always thought of as science fiction, but that specter becomes a lot more credible."

Ludlow said Delors was "in a league of his own" as EU Commission president but that he overreached at the end, alienating some European leaders who became "fed up with this guy who hogged the limelight." A German businessman once likened Delors to the autocratic King Louis XIV of France.

Also:

VIENNA: Gaston Glock, the Austrian developer of the handgun that bears his name, died on Wednesday. He was 94.

The Glock company announced his death, the Austria Press Agency reported.

Glock, a reclusive engineer, founded the company in 1963 in Deutsch-Wagram, near Vienna. It has since expanded around the world, including a U.S. subsidiary founded in 1985.

Glock handguns are used by police and some countries' military forces, as well as private users. The weapon was significantly lighter, cheaper and more reliable than the models available when it was created.

Glock said on its website that its founder "was not only revolutionized the world of small arms in the 1980s, but also succeeded in establishing the Glock brand as the global leader in the handgun industry."



Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, center, meets with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, top left, partially covered, and his Secretary of Foreign Relations Alicia Barcena, top right, at the National Palace, the office and residence of the president, in Mexico City, Wednesday, Dec. 27, 2023. (AP)

US delegation meets with Mexico's government on migrant influx

Mexican officials moved to clear a migrant encampment on the banks of the Rio Grande river Wednesday as U.S. officials met with Mexico's president to press for measures to limit a surge of migrants reaching the U.S. southwestern border.

Mexico began clearing tents, both occupied and unoccupied, from the encampment in the border city of Matamoros, across from Brownsville, Texas, starting Tuesday. The effort, backed by bulldozers and work-

ers with machetes, continued Wednesday as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken talked with President Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico City.

López Obrador has said he is willing to help, but he wants to see progress in U.S. relations with Cuba and Venezuela, two of the top sources of migrants, along with more development aid for the region.

But Mexico's top priority appeared to be getting the United States to reopen border crossings that

were closed because of the migrant surge.

"We spoke about the importance of the border, and about the economic relationship ... the importance of reopening the border crossings, that is a priority for us," Foreign Relations Secretary Alicia Barcena said following the meeting in Mexico City, which was also attended by U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and homeland security adviser Liz Sherwood-Randall. (AP)

America

Colorado GOP takes appeal to US Supreme Court

Trump's presidential eligibility challenged

DENVER, Dec 28, (AP): The Colorado Republican Party has appealed that state's supreme court decision that found former President Donald Trump is ineligible for the presidency, the potential first step to a showdown at the nation's highest court over the meaning of a 155-year-old constitutional provision that bans from office those who "engaged in insurrection."

The first impact of the appeal is to extend the stay of the 4-3 ruling from Colorado's highest court, which put its decision on pause until Jan. 4, the day before the state's primary ballots are due at the printer, or until an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court is finished. Trump himself has said he still plans to appeal the ruling to the nation's highest court as well.

The U.S. Supreme Court has never ruled on Section 3 of the 14th Amendment, which was added after the Civil War to prevent former Confederates from returning to government. It says that anyone who swore an oath to "support" the constitution and then "engaged in insurrection" against it cannot hold government office.

The Colorado high court ruled that applies to Trump in the wake of his role in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, intended to stop the certification of President Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 presidential election. It was the first time in history that the provision was used to block a presidential contender's campaign.

"The Colorado Supreme Court has removed the leading Republican candidate from the primary and general ballots, fundamentally changing the course of American democracy," the party's attorneys wrote. The filing was

posted on the website of a group run by Jay Sekulow, a former attorney for Trump representing the Colorado Republican Party who announced he was filing the appeal Wednesday. Colorado Republican Party chairman Dave Williams also said the appeal was filed Wednesday.

The attorneys added: "Unless the Colorado Supreme Court's decision is overturned, any voter will have the power to sue to disqualify any political candidate, in Colorado or in any other jurisdiction that follows its lead. This will not only distort the 2024 presidential election but will also mire courts henceforth in political controversies over nebulous accusations of insurrection."

Campaign

The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to take the case, either after the Colorado GOP's appeal or Trump's own appeal. If Trump ends up off the ballot in Colorado, it would have minimal effect on his campaign because he doesn't need the state, which he lost by 13 percentage points in 2020, to win the Electoral College in the presidential election. But it could open the door to courts or election officials striking him from the ballot in other must-win states.

Sean Grimsley, an attorney for the plaintiffs seeking to disqualify Trump in Colorado, said on a legal podcast last week that he hopes the nation's highest court hurries once it accepts the case, as he expects it will. "We obviously are going to ask for an extremely accelerated timeline because of all the reasons I've stated, we have a primary coming up on Super Tues-

day and we need to know the answer," Grimsley said.

More than a dozen states, including Colorado, are scheduled to hold primaries March 5 - Super Tuesday.

To date, no other court has sided with those who have filed dozens of lawsuits to disqualify Trump under Section 3, nor has any election official been willing to remove him from the ballot unilaterally without a court order.

The Colorado case was considered the one with the greatest chance of success, however, because it was filed by a Washington D.C.-based liberal group with ample legal resources. All seven of the Colorado high court justices were appointed by Democrats.

However, the unprecedented constitutional questions in the case haven't split on neatly partisan lines. Several prominent conservative legal theorists are among the most vocal advocates of disqualifying Trump under Section 3. They argue the plain meaning of the constitutional language bars him from running again, just as clearly as if he didn't meet the document's minimum age of 35 for the presidency.

The half-dozen plaintiffs in the Colorado case are all Republican or unaffiliated voters.

Trump has been scathing about the cases, calling them "election interference." He continued that on Wednesday as he cheered a ruling earlier that day by the Michigan Supreme Court leaving him on the ballot, at least for the primary, in that state.

"The Colorado people have embarrassed our nation with what they did," Trump said on Sean Hannity's radio show.



A member of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force stands guard next to a surface-to-air Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) missile launcher vehicle in Funabashi, east of Tokyo, on Jan. 18, 2018. Japan's defense spending will increase more than 16% next year under a record military budget approved Friday, Dec. 22, 2023, that is intended to accelerate the deployment of long-range cruise missiles that can hit targets in China or North Korea. (AP)



Wu



Kim

Asia

China reaffirms military threat:

Weeks before Taiwan holds elections for its president and legislature, China renewed its threat to use military force to annex the self-governing island democracy it claims as its own territory.

Defense Ministry spokesperson Col. Wu Qian on Tuesday reported Thursday at a monthly briefing that China's armed forces would "as always take all necessary measures to firmly safeguard our national sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Taiwan's 23 million people overwhelmingly favor maintaining the island's de facto independent status, leaving the Jan. 13 polls to be decided largely by concerns over housing prices, health care, employment and education. China has continued sending warships and fighter jets near Taiwan as an intimidation tactic, even as Taiwan's military said it's raising alert levels before the vote.

The ruling party's candidate, William Lai, holds a lead in most surveys, while the main opposition Nationalist Party's candidate, Hou You-yi, has sought to appeal to voters who fear a military conflict with China that could draw in the United States and lead to massive disruptions in the global economy. (AP)

Kim vows to bolster war readiness:

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called for bolstered war readiness to repel what he said were unprecedented United States-led confrontational moves, state media reported Thursday, as rival South Korea vowed a stern retaliation against any provocations by the North.

Kim's comments during the key po-

litical meeting tasked with setting state objectives for 2024 indicated North Korea will likely continue weapons tests to modernize its nuclear arsenal. Observers say Kim likely hopes to eventually use his boosted arsenal as leverage in potential diplomacy with Washington, possibly after the 2024 U.S. presidential election in November. (AP)

Indonesia's navy pushes boat: Indonesia's navy said Thursday that it forcibly pushed a boat packed with refugees back to international waters after the vessel approached the shores of Aceh province.

The province that forms part of Sumatra island has seen an increasing number

of arriving boats, most carrying Rohingya refugees from southern Bangladesh. Large numbers of Rohingya fled to Bangladesh in 2017 following military attacks on members of the persecuted Muslim minority in their homeland of Myanmar.

The Indonesian navy said a coast guard vessel detected a boat thought to be carrying Rohingya refugees entering Indonesia's waters on Wednesday. A helicopter from a navy ship subsequently spotted a wooden vessel near Weh island in north Aceh province, the navy said. (AP)

Hong Kong man jailed: A Hong Kong man was sentenced Thursday to six years in prison after pleading guilty to a terrorism charge under a Beijing-imposed national security law for his involvement in a foiled plot to bomb court buildings.

Prosecutors said Ho Yu-wang, 19, was the plot mastermind who planned to manufacture explosives and target court buildings in 2021. The plot, involving mostly secondary students back then, was foiled due to a police investigation, while no bombs were made and no casualties occurred, the prosecution earlier said. Police said they raided a guesthouse room in 2021 and seized equipment believed to be used for making explosives.

They also alleged Ho had written notes saying that his goal was to destabilize Hong Kong, promote conflicts between the central government and others, and build up a resistance group. Two other defendants received a jail term of up to six years for an alternative charge. (AP)



Damaged houses are seen in the Stalybridge area of Greater Manchester after a 'localised tornado' ripped off roofs and brought down walls as Storm Gerrit continued to impact the country, Manchester, England, Thursday, Dec. 28, 2023. (AP)

	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts		
UAE	DFM	+0.28	4,049.53	JAPAN	Nikkei	+0.42	33,539.62
SAUDI	Tadawul	+0.36	11,931.92				
EGYPT	EGX 30	+1.40	24,691.43				
PAKISTAN	KSE 100	+1.84	62,110.89				
PHILIPPINES	PSEI	-0.87	6,519.11				

Business

Opportunities basket thinner in 2024

UAE carries GCC real estate transacted value over Jan-Oct '23

By Kamco Invest

Slim pickings & selective focus in 2024

Opportunities basket thinner in 2024: Real Estate supply in most segments could quickly get sensitive to market-wide headwinds in 2024, but frontline developers with strong liquidity should be able to calibrate swiftly to bring the right product types to the market. We expect residential developers in Dubai & Riyadh with dominant brand equity, an attractive product mix, and market sensitive payment plans to achieve sell-through of its new launches build-to-sell (BTS) portfolio going forward in Dubai & Riyadh. Separately, office markets in Riyadh and Dubai are expected to remain strong as they compete for their market share of regional headquarters (RHQ) and new Grade-A office space supply from developers remains limited. For retail, best-in-class super regional malls and community-linked malls in key markets should witness strength in typical late-cycle trends, as they should continue to achieve higher occupancy rates and should mitigate tenant portfolio risks adequately. In the industrial warehouse market, specialized warehouses will remain in demand and in short supply in 2024. These spaces should witness stable yields of +8% as owners push up rents, thereby contributing to a widening rental gap for lower quality spaces.

UAE carries GCC RE transacted value over Jan-Oct 2023 beyond full year 2022 estimate: Real estate sale transactions in the GCC over Jan-Oct 2023 reached USD 171.6 Bn and surpassed the full year estimate for 2022 of USD 165.8Bn. Dubai RE transactions contributed 52.1% of the region's total transacted value and was able to offset the decline of the other key markets such as Saudi, Qatar and Kuwait. The average value per transaction achieved over Jan-Oct 2023 for GCC real estate was up by 22.1% y-o-y, as investors continued to see value for market leading real estate products despite the strong pricing demanded by developers. Further, we believe that strong late-cycle pricing outperformance will continue for unique superior-quality assets in GCC's real estate sub-segments in 2024, but this growth is expected to materialize only in specific markets as investors become selective and watch overall economic activity and interest rates. Going forward, we expect a slower pace of price increases across key residential markets in 2024, as typical late-cycle stabilization is witnessed, and supply calibrates to more normalized demand.

Leading developer equities to outperform in 2024: The Refinitiv GCC Real Estate Total Return Index gained by 19.2% outperformed the MSCI GCC index (-2.4%) over the first eleven months of the year, driven by strong performances from Dubai (+32.9%) and Abu Dhabi (+29.0%) and Saudi Arabia's RE Management & Development (+21.4%) indices. The outperformance of the UAE and Saudi RE Management & Development indices is largely restricted to sector leading developers with strong pricing power and pipelines who continue to witness robust demand and sell-through of their projects. In 2024, we expect the rally to continue for select developer names and prefer them over REITs and income generators as strong liquidity on their balance sheets would enable them to maintain market share and achieve higher IRR projects and opportunistic cross-border M&A activity.

UAE carries GCC RE transactions in 2023

Real estate sale transactions in the GCC over Jan-Oct 2023 reached USD 171.6 Bn, up 21.1% y-o-y from USD 141.7 Bn over the same period in 2022, based on our analysis of available official estimates. Dubai's transactions contributed 52.1% of the region's total transacted value and was able to offset the decline of the other key markets such as Saudi, Qatar and Kuwait. RE value transacted in Dubai increased almost 57% y-o-y over Jan-Oct 2023 based on data from DXB Interact, mainly driven by strong pricing for leading developers and off-plan demand of luxury properties and single-family, multi-family homes of above AED 5 Mn. While data for Abu Dhabi was only available until 9M-2023, transacted value of Abu Dhabi real estate also reportedly jumped by 56% over 9M-2023. Both UAE markets pushed the aggregate value transacted in the GCC over Jan-Oct 2023 beyond the full year estimate for 2022 of USD 165.8Bn. The number of transactions in the GCC however remained broadly stable y-o-y (-0.8%) over the first ten months of 2023 and reached 495,872 deals, despite a jump of over 43% and 36% witnessed in Dubai & Abu Dhabi's RE transactions.

Nevertheless, the average value per transaction achieved over Jan-Oct 2023 for GCC real estate was up by 22.1% y-o-y, as investors continued to see value for market leading real estate products despite the strong pricing demanded by developers. In Dubai, off-plan transactions continued their strong momentum with off-plan volumes jumping by over 40%

over Jan-Nov 2023 when compared to full year 2022 estimates, while registering a healthy 9.8% increase in average off-plan value per transaction from end -2022.

Separately in Saudi Arabia, mortgage activity continued to trend downwards over Jan-Oct 2023 due to higher mortgage rates and higher pricing of residential products. Going forward, we expect a slower pace of price increases across key residential markets in 2024, as typical late-cycle stabilization is witnessed, and supply calibrates to more normalized demand. Mortgage rates and rental affordability should impact end user ownership trends especially in markets such as UAE & Saudi Arabia and determine the future course of residential transaction activity, in our view.

Selective focus from investors to combine with slim pickings in 2024

Real Estate supply in most segments could quickly get sensitive to market wide headwinds in 2024, but frontline developers with strong liquidity should be able to calibrate swiftly to bring the right product types to the market. Further, we believe that strong late-cycle pricing outperformance will continue for unique superior-quality assets in GCC's real estate sub-segments in 2024, but this growth is expected to materialize only in specific markets as investors become selective and watch overall economic activity and interest rates. Moreover, ESG considerations are expected to become a more integral part of commercial supply in terms of design elements and ratings such as LEED, BREEAM and occupier demand. We believe residential developers in Dubai & Riyadh who possess dominant brand equity, an attractive product mix, and market sensitive payment plans can achieve sell-through of its new launches build-to-sell (BTS) portfolio going forward. Separately, office markets in Riyadh and Dubai are expected to remain strong as they compete for their market share of regional headquarters (RHQ) and new Grade-A office space supply from developers remains limited. For retail, best-in-class super regional malls and community linked malls in key markets should witness strength in typical late-cycle trends, as they should continue to achieve higher occupancy rates and should mitigate tenant portfolio risks adequately. In the industrial warehouse market, specialized warehouse spaces will remain in demand and in short supply in 2024, pushing up rents for such spaces and widening the rental gap with lower quality spaces.

Residential RE prices price growth to moderate, yields to stabilize in 2024

Growth in residential real estate prices in key markets continued into Q3-2023, driven by investment demand and slower completion of the supply pipeline. In Dubai, prices rose 18.4% by Nov-2023 y-o-y as per ValuStrat, driven mainly by higher demand for single-family homes and luxury villas, while incremental supply for those products continues to be limited as compared to supply. As a result, villas reportedly witnessed price gains of 23.3% y-o-y, while apartment price gained by 14.1% as on Nov-2023, according to data from ValuStrat. Developers in Dubai continue to monetize improved specifications and continue to tweak post-completion plans of their new launches to keep price momentum going. In Abu Dhabi, residential price growth was muted at 3% y-o-y at the end of Q3-2023 as per JLL, as demand was reportedly strong for new developments, especially within the investment zones, with a particular emphasis on townhouse and villa projects. In Riyadh sales prices gained by 7% y-o-y at the end of Q3-2023 as per JLL, as Riyadh regional business hub ambitions led to an increased demand for residential units. Jeddah also witnessed a similar price growth of 7% y-o-y, as per JLL. Nevertheless, rising prices and interest rates are increasing affordability concerns in Saudi residential markets and contributing to a decrease in sales activity as per consultants.

In terms of rents, Dubai reportedly witnessed a 28.9% y-o-y jump in average residential rents as per ValuStrat, as investors continued to raise rents to maintain gross yields which are around 6.5%. Other rental markets such as Riyadh (+3%), Kuwait (+2.5%) and Abu Dhabi (+1%) also witnessed marginal increases y-o-y, based on trends from JLL, ValuStrat and REMI respectively. In 2024, we expect the pace of price and rental growth across key markets to moderate barring unique market-leading residential projects from developers who possess strong brand equity and pricing power. For the broader market, we expect typical late-cycle stabilization to be witnessed and as supply calibrates to more normalized demand, while investors and end users should remain cautious about higher interest rates and affordability.

We believe residential developers in Dubai & Riyadh who possess dominant brand equity, an attractive product mix, and market sensitive payment plans can achieve sell-through of its new launches build-

Central Bank of Kuwait reports 2.9 pct increase in total deposits

Govt deposits in local banks rise by 30.5% over 11 mths

By Ahmad Fathi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: In November, the Central Bank of Kuwait released its monthly statistics, showcasing a 2.9% increase in total deposits throughout the first 11 months of 2023. The surge amounted to approximately 1.35 billion dinars, elevating the total deposits from 46.91 billion dinars in December 2022 to 48.269 billion dinars by the end of November.

Breaking down the data, the Central Bank categorizes deposits into private sector, government, and public institution deposits. Private sector deposits rose by 1.26%, reaching 37.38 billion dinars in November from 36.914 billion dinars in December. Government deposits in local banks witnessed a substantial 30.5% increase over the 11-month period, soaring from 3.37 billion dinars in December 2022 to 4.405 billion dinars in November. Conversely, deposits of public institutions experienced a 2% decrease, declining from 6.62 billion dinars in December to 6.482 billion dinars in November.

In the realm of credit facilities, the aggregate cash credit facilities provided by banks across various sectors demonstrated a 1.9% growth during the first 11 months of 2023, reaching 53.463 billion dinars by the end of November. This monthly balance increased by 0.6%, marking a rise of about 338 million dinars from October's 53.125 billion dinars. On an annual basis, the balance grew by approximately 1.099 billion dinars compared to 52.364 billion dinars in No-

General market index gains 54.04 pts

KSE rebounds after 4 consecutive red sessions

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: The Kuwait Stock Exchange indices finally rebounded after four red sessions yesterday, the indices recorded an increase, and liquidity was also at high levels, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The general market index achieved gains of 0.80 percent, or 54.04 points, to close at the level of 6786.92 points, with liquidity amounting to 48 million dinars as 173.4 million shares were traded through 11,297 transactions. 120 shares were traded, of which 58 gained and 39 lost, while 23 remained unchanged.

The Premier Market Index gained 0.91 percent, or 66.76 points, to close at 7,439.75 points, with liquidity amounting to 36.2 million dinars; 97.5 million shares were traded through

6,601 transactions. 31 shares were traded, of which 22 gained and 5 lost, while only 4 settled without change.

The main market index also rose by 0.42 percent, or 23.09 points, to close at the level of 5,556.08 points, with liquidity amounting to 11.8 million dinars; 75.9 million shares were traded through 4,696 transactions. 89 shares were traded, of which 36 gained and 34 lost, while 19 remained unchanged.

Good bounce and high liquidity Kuwait Stock Exchange trading began to be stable and declined during the first hour, and the shares of the Eva Block and the Unicap shares were the best.

Rasiyat shares also moved and were in green in addition to common, while the leading shares were stable with no significant changes except for a

decline in Boubyan Petrochemicals shares by more than 1 per cent but the situation did not last long, as it was the penultimate session of this year, as the leading stocks moved significantly during the second half of the session, led primarily by Human Soft stock, as it achieved a large jump of 5 percent.

Boubyan Petrochemical's stock also rebounded and entered the green zone, and KFH rose, then NBK stock followed them during the auction periods and turned green, with gains exceeding a percentage point, with the green color prevailing in most of the leading stocks and the Premier Market Index.

Likewise, the main market stocks, especially the EVA bloc, all turned green with varying gains, most of which were limited and headed in profit.

2023. Monthly consolidated personal facilities dropped by 29.8%, amounting to 3.38 billion dinars from 4.822 billion dinars, with consumer loans decreasing by 6.6% to 852.2 million dinars. Housing loans also saw a 37% decline, reaching 1.759 billion dinars from 2.79 billion dinars.

Examining bank assets, local banks experienced a 3.2% growth in total assets during the 11 months, reaching 87.189 billion dinars by the end of November from 84.486 billion dinars in December. Net foreign assets of local banks grew by 13.9%, amounting to 11.797 billion dinars. Shareholders' equity in local banks increased by 0.3% to 14.41 billion dinars.

In terms of official reserve assets, the State of Kuwait witnessed a 2.17% decline, with reserves totaling \$45.9 billion at the end of November 2023. This reflects a decrease from \$46.974 billion in November 2022 and a 4.67% decline since the beginning of 2023.

Settlement operations between local banks surged by about 59.14% in November 2023 compared to the previous year, reaching 27.789 billion dinars. Despite a 0.57% annual decrease in transactions via checks, the total value of executed checks declined by 2.84% to 1.504 billion dinars. The average transaction conducted by checks decreased by 2.31% to 7.20 thousand dinars, despite a monthly growth of 1.69%.

GCC RE Transactions Breakdown – USD Bn



Source: Kamco Invest Research, Govt Sources, DXB Interact, *9M-2023 only available

to-sell (BTS) portfolio going forward. Having said that aggregate supply and launches in most residential markets could quickly get sensitive to market wide headwinds in 2024, but frontline developers with strong liquidity should be able to calibrate swiftly to bring the right product types and volumes to the market. Mortgage rates and rental affordability should impact end user ownership trends especially in markets such as UAE & Saudi Arabia and determine the future course of residential transaction activity, in our view. Nevertheless, over the long term national programs should such as Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030's vision of increasing homeownership from 60.6% in 2022 to 70% by 2030, and the strategic roadmaps set through initiatives such as the Dubai 2040 Urban Master Plan and D33 agenda should increase demand for residential developments.

RHQ markets remain hot on limited supply

Prime office spaces in Dubai (+29%) and Riyadh (+11%) witnessed significant rental increases as demand continued for superior quality office premises, and as certain industries continued to expand their footprint in these markets. Both markets also represent aspirations of becoming the regional headquarters for corporates. Saudi Arabia launched the regional headquarters program (RHQ Program) and announced tax incentives for foreign companies that locate their regional headquarters in the kingdom, including a 30-year exemption for corporate income tax. In Dubai, Asteco reported that there was increased demand, strong rents and waiting lists for well-managed and superior fully fitted office spaces from companies looking to expand their existing footprint.

Office space developers in the region continue to hold supply tight due

to the time-lag between conceptualization of design and completion due to potential risks of supply entering weak economic conditions. Aggregate office space in GCC's key markets is expected to reach 29.85 Mn sq.m by the end of 2023, from 28.54 Mn sq.m in 2022, based on our analysis of consultant data. As a result of the lower supply of quality spaces, prime office spaces in Abu Dhabi (+9%), Jeddah (+11%) and Kuwait (+3.5%) also witnessed gains in rents y-o-y at the end of Q3-2023. BFSI (banking, financial services and insurance) and O&G (oil & gas) and newer sources of demand such as TMT (Technology, Media & Telecom) remain primary drivers of additional take-up of quality spaces. BFSI re-established itself as the key sector driving office space demand within key office markets such as Riyadh, Dubai, and Abu Dhabi in 2023, while we expect TMT, AI, Robotics, Healthcare/Pharm and Legal corporates to remain active occupiers, on a continuation of a trend which emerged since 2020. Moreover, certain multi-national corporates will continue to prefer sustainable and energy-efficient office spaces that are LEED certified, with allocation towards wellness components and better infrastructure connectivity.

Suitability still underserved in industrial warehouses

Quality and specialized industrial warehouse spaces remained in demand throughout the GCC and in short supply. Rents for such spaces moved higher, widening the rental gap with lower quality spaces, while underserved markets such as Riyadh witnessed YTD rental gains of +30% at the end of Q3-2023 as per CBRE. Demand for warehouses with international specifications remains strong, and owners who can retrofit older assets are able to command a premium, based on consultant data across the

GCC.

Saudi Arabia introduced the Logisti platform - a transport and logistics initiative under the National Industrial Development and Logistics Program (NIDLP) that targets to provide 59 logistics centers of over 100 Mn sq.m across Saudi Arabia by 2030. Vacancy rates in Riyadh and Jeddah have reportedly reached low single digit percentages. Demand continues from e-commerce, as Modon has signed a deal to build 14 new high-tech warehouses that will be operated based on a public-private sector partnership model. In the UAE, industrial warehouse activity reportedly remained relatively subdued, due to the lack of available stock, as per CBRE. They mentioned that this resulted in a market, where tenants are pushed to comply with landlords' terms with lower incentives. Knight Frank mentioned that international funds and investors were drawn towards the 8.50-8.75% yield in H1-2023 and estimate demand to compress yields by 50bps by the end of 2023. They further expect the yield compression to potentially lower investor demand for industrial assets going forward if interest rates remain high causing yield compression to slow or even reverse.

Super-regional malls comeback strong in 2023

All retail real estate markets in the GCC barring Doha (ValuStrat:-7.6%) witnessed rental growth y-o-y at the end of Q3-2023, as per consultant data. Kuwait's retail malls witnessed rental growth of 6%-7% y-o-y by Dec-2023 as per REMI, while JLL mentioned that UAE retail mall owners continued to optimize their spaces to attract footfall and tenant demand which has pushed rents higher by 5% y-o-y in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Mall space owners across markets continue their focus on increasing their Family Entertainment (FEC) footprint to

attract footfalls. On the demand side retailers are constantly evaluating their mall space expansion plans and the potential impact from increasing omnichannel strategies such Click & Collect, and influencer-driven marketing campaigns to maintain profitability and market share. Nevertheless, we believe that brick-and-mortar retail has established its place in the overall retail market in 2023, and the risk of retail e-commerce largely pinning hopes of achieving continuous market share gains has clearly stabilized. Further, mall space owners of best-in-class super regional malls and community-linked retail spaces should keep natural vacancy rates of 4%-5% and witness rental growth as retail returns as late-cycle favorites. In such landmark mall spaces, retailers would continue to look for more strategic locations for their outlets and will be willing to pay a premium for better visibility. Mall owners of such spaces should be able to mitigate tenant portfolio risks by monitoring KPIs such as footfalls, tenant sales and occupancy cost ratios (OCRs), that should be able to enable them to achieve contract renewals or tenant rollover at favorable rental rates. In markets such as Dubai, mall operators have reportedly been able to repurpose spaces that witness lower footfall into vibrant service hubs that offer a range of amenities such as clinics and gyms.

Developer RE equities led 2023 as outperformers

Real estate equity indices in the UAE and Saudi Arabia's RE Management & Development index continued their outperformance and witnessed strong gains over Jan-Nov 2023. The Refinitiv GCC Real Estate Total Return Index gained by 19.2% outperformed the MSCI GCC index (-2.4%) over the first eleven months of the year, driven by strong performances from Dubai (+32.9%) and Abu Dhabi (+29.0%) and Saudi Arabia's RE Management & Development (+21.4%) indices. The Saudi REITs index (-12.3%) and Qatar (-8.8%) were major decliners in the regional real estate listed space.

The outperformance of the UAE and Saudi RE Management & Development index is largely restricted to developers who are sector leaders with strong pricing growth and pipelines, who continue to witness robust demand and sell-through of their projects. In 2024, we expect the rally to continue for select developer names and prefer them over REITs and income generators as strong liquidity on their balance sheets would enable them to maintain market share and achieve higher IRR projects and opportunistic cross-border M&A activity. Further, share price sensitivity to potential interest rate cuts and fluctuation of occupancy rates could potentially impact secondary income generating properties more in our view.

Achievements showcase excellence in banking and corporate responsibility

AUB's successful journey culminates in 6 awards, 3 certifications in 2023

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: Ahli United Bank (AUB) crowns its enduring journey of success, which began since its inception in 1941, by receiving numerous awards and certificates in 2023 from prestigious international agencies known for their stringent requirements and precise criteria in selecting awardees. This achievement serves as a confirmation of the bank's successful efforts and a commendation for its outstanding performance.

Commenting on these prestigious awards, Mrs. Jehad Al-Humaidhi, member of the Board of Directors and CEO of AUB, said: "We are delighted with the continued recognition of the bank through this diverse array of awards received in 2023. These accolades affirm the bank's ability to maintain its success achieved over more than eighty years of banking experience."

Al-Humaidhi further extended her gratitude to the bank's management and employees for their efforts in achieving these well-deserved awards, which highlighted the success of their work in advancing this leading institution. In conclusion, Al-Humaidhi expressed her wishes for a new phase of the bank's success under its merger with Kuwait Finance House, one of the largest and best Islamic financial institutions globally.

Best Remittance Service in the Middle East and North Africa for 2023

Moreover, Ahli United Bank has been awarded Best Remittance Service in the Middle East and North Africa for 2023 by MEED magazine. This recognition is attributed to the bank's collaboration with SWIFT Payment Controls, SWIFT GPI, Afaq, and KNPS, which have provided the Bank with the latest technologies and security features.



Al-Humaidhi



AUB awards during the year

These partnerships have given the bank a significant competitive advantage in the region. Additionally, the bank stands out for its fast, secure, and convenient online money transfer platform, offering competitive exchange rates.

Excellence in Customer Protection/Fraud Control Award

In recognition of its exceptional efforts in customer protection and fraud prevention, Ahli United Bank has been honored with the Excellence in Customer Protection-Fraud Control award in the Middle East and North Africa 2023 by MEED, the renowned international magazine. The Bank received this award based on its implementation of advanced

AUB offers services to customers during New Year holiday

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: Ahli United Bank (AUB) announced in a press release that it will close all its branches from Sunday, December 31, 2023 on the occasion of the New Year, and will resume its official work on Tuesday, January 2, 2024.

AUB has confirmed that during this period customers will be able to conduct their banking services through the bank's electronic channels, including mobile and Internet Banking (www.ahliunited.com.kw), and through the

24/7 telebanking 'Hayakom' service through 1812000. Furthermore, customers can also conduct their financial transactions through the bank's ATMs which are conveniently located across Kuwait.

security measures, fraud detection systems, and customer protection protocols.

Best Bank in Internal Sharia Audit Award

Furthermore, Ahli United Bank won Best Bank in Internal Sharia Audit Award in Kuwait for the year 2023 by the renowned International Finance magazine. This recognition is based on the efficiency and effectiveness of the Bank's internal Sharia control system, its framework for assessing Sharia risks, the Sharia audit procedures guide, and effective Sharia training methods.

The Best CSR Initiatives Award

In recognition of its pioneering role and diverse initiatives in the field of social responsibility, Ahli United Bank (AUB) recently won the Best CSR Initiatives Award, in Kuwait for the year 2023 by the prestigious global International Finance magazine.

Best Corporate Digital Bank* in Kuwait for the year 2023

AUB was recognized with "Best Corporate Digital Bank" in Kuwait for the year 2023. This prestigious award, presented by the renowned Global Finance magazine, recognizes banks that provide advanced local, regional, and global banking solutions, coupled with cutting-edge technological innovations to deliver modern services and products that meet customer needs and aspirations.

AUB branches in Qadsiyah and Bayan receive LEED

GOLD Certification

AUB is thrilled to announce that two of its branches; Qadsiyah and Bayan received the prestigious LEED GOLD v4.1 O+M: Existing Buildings Rating System - Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification. This esteemed recognition is developed by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), the most widely used green building rating system and an international symbol of excellence.

The prestigious ISO 9001:2015 certification

AUB received the prestigious ISO 9001:2015 certification for information technology infrastructure for the second year in a row. This reflects the Bank's leadership and excellence in the field of information technology and its ability to adhere to the highest standards of technical services to ensure quality, continuity, and security for all banking operations and services provided to its customers.

AUB achieves Payment Cards Data Security (PCI-DSS V3.2.1) Certificate

AUB has once again achieved the prestigious Payment Cards Data Security (PCI-DSS V3.2.1) certificate. This distinguished certificate, the highest in its class, is conferred by SISA LLC, one of the largest cybersecurity assessment companies in the Middle East and licensed by the PCI Council, attesting to the bank's excellence in cybersecurity and its commitment to the protection of banking card information.

New research aims to develop knowledge among members of society

Environmental and social risks, governance and Kuwaiti financial sector

ESG Risks and the Kuwaiti Financial Sector

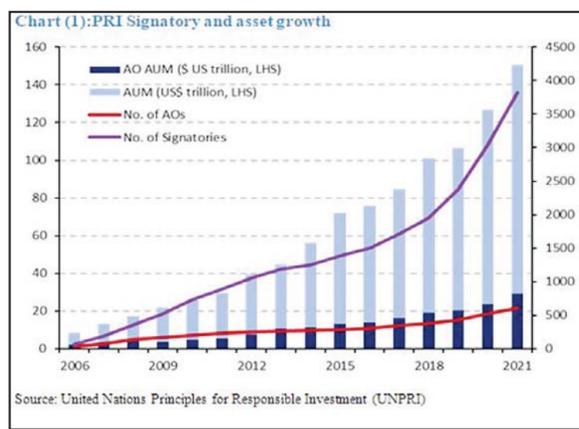
The Kuwait Institute of Banking Studies (KIBS) has recently published a research paper titled "ESG Risks and the Kuwaiti Financial Sector" that discusses the evolution of ESG issues, main frameworks used for reporting, the backlash against the adoption of these issues in various economic activities, and the progress if ESG implementation in GCC countries and Kuwait. The research pointed to the strong scores of Kuwaiti banks in the governance pillar, while highlighting the low score of these banks in the environmental pillar given that the banks are still in an early stage compared to banks in advanced economies. However, the Kuwaiti Boursa issuance of the ESG guide, the central bank support, and banks commitment to sustainability issues could help in raising their scores across different rating agencies over the medium to long term.

What is the definition of the ESG?

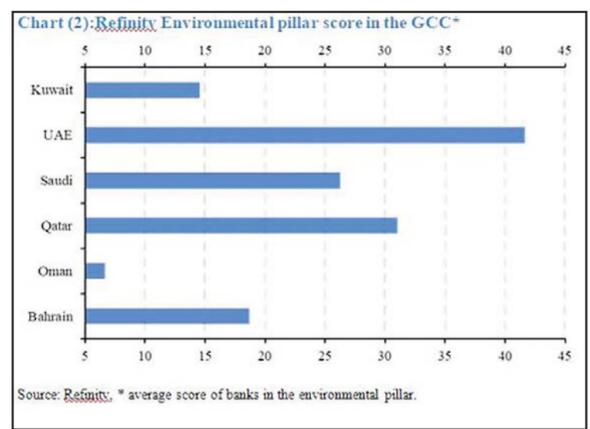
The Environmental, Social, Governance (ESG) term could be traced back to the UN's "Who Cares Wins" report, which focused on explaining the interconnectedness between the environmental, social and governance issues to investors. The ESG issues became more prevalent with the developing of the Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI) with the number of signatories growing from 63 to 4,902 by March 2022 and assets under management reaching \$121.3 trillion, up from \$6.5 trillion in 2006 (See chart 1). Rising attention towards climate-related issues, the adoption of the Paris agreement, and the UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development have resulted in increasing the focus of international organizations and central banks to incorporate ESG factors into their supervisory frameworks. However, no uniform definition nor standard disclosure format of ESG has been adopted globally to support assessing ESG criteria across companies and countries. Therefore, the ESG term is often used to express the frameworks used for caring about the environment on a global scale without failing to notice the economic and financial viability. It's also used interchangeably with sustainable investing, denoting an investment approach in which analysis goes beyond purely financial factors. The development of the ESG concepts have led to a growing number of ESG rating agencies that assign ESG scores, as well as new and evolving reporting frameworks, all of which are aiming at improving the transparency and consistency of the ESG reporting. In addition, many ESG investment vehicles have emerged, including green bonds, mutual funds, ETFs, and index funds. These instruments make it easier for investors to align their investment decisions more closely with ESG factors to enhance their sustainability while attracting more investments and customers. Financial institutions have also sought to incorporate ESG issues into their frameworks as they are considered a main pillar for ensuring the adoption of ESG principles in the economy through access to finance, which could help in achieving a smoother transition toward a low carbon economy.

Main frameworks for ESG implementation

Growing attention toward environmental and social issues has increased reporting pressures on companies to communicate their ESG commitments and standards, contributing to the development of the ESG reporting standards and frameworks. These frameworks offered a structured approach to evaluating a company's practices and ESG-related business risks and opportunities, including its impact on the environment and society. However, navigating through these frameworks amid rising complexity became increasingly important for companies and financial institutions in recent years given that each framework focuses on different aspects of ESG and has its own reporting requirements. For example, the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) focuses specifically on the institution's carbon footprint, whereas the GRI covers the reporting of inclusiveness of stakeholders, sustainability, and integrity. Moreover, the Task Force on Climate Disclosure (TCFD) is primarily focused



Source: United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment (UNPRI)



Source: Refinitiv, * average score of banks in the environmental pillar.

on the renewable energy and financial ESG disclosures, while Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) aims at providing relevant information eligible for comparing the performance related to sustainability issues across companies and countries. Therefore, companies should first determine their ESG goals before choosing a suitable reporting framework given the lack of standardization and the continuous development of reporting frameworks overtime, which could increase the scope of coverage into new areas that were not addressed in the past.

The pushback against implementing ESG standards

The increased focus on ESG issues has drawn criticism to the attempts to incorporate them with businesses operations and investments. Critics often refer to limited ability of the private sector to reverse climate change without having adequate regulations, they also point to the incompatibility of ESG standards with profit maximization as they imply taking additional investment risk to promote social and environmental policy goals. Moreover, ESG metrics and the lack of reporting standardization while some companies engage in "greenwashing", which include exaggerating their ESG commitments for marketing purposes, making it difficult to compare ESG performance among different companies. In addition, some companies focus on superficial short-term changes rather than addressing core systemic issues. Criticism has also reached ESG analytics, and their materiality topics focus on the environmental and social issues instead of focusing on the impact of ESG factors on firm valuation. However, supporters of ESG standards see criticism as a necessary step that helps in refining strategies while reconciling controversial topics including climate change, energy transition, profitability, and shareholder's value. Moreover, regulators around the world are encouraging firms to focus on their long-term sustainability and value creation while aiming to prevent greenwashing through holding businesses accountable for their ESG commitments. Also, many steps to standardize the ESG metrics are underway such as the SASB, the TCFD, and the GRI are working on creating consistent frameworks for measuring and reporting ESG performance. By standardizing metrics, implementing regulatory oversight, promoting long-term approach, engaging with stakeholders, and finding the right balance between profit and purpose, ESG can evolve into a powerful tool for sustainable and ethical business practices. Accordingly, the outlook for ESG policies adoption remains positive though efforts are being made to address the legitimate concerns of ESG critics to ensure its long-term viability.

The state of ESG implementation in the GCC countries

The GCC economies are more vulnerable to the challenges of sustainability and the impact of climate change. In response to these challenges, countries' visions included multiple elements that emphasize diversifying economies away from oil dependence, increasing the share of renewables in energy mix, achieving SDG goals, and align their emission with Paris agreement baseline scenario. Sustainable finance emerges as a crucial tool to achieve these targets, which allows the GCC to align policy making with international development

priorities. However, ESG standards have yet to register a sufficient impact on the banking industry despite the shift towards enhanced ESG reporting and rising awareness of its benefits.

The banking sector in the GCC economies remains a significant contributor to GDP and the main source for financing. Therefore, this presents an opportunity to accelerate the transition in these countries through vigorous adoption of sustainable finance policies and ESG standards. Banks in the region are advancing in this area as most banks already publish sustainability reports while adhering to the ESG disclosure standards published by stock exchanges around the region, which include a recommended set of metrics that shows the company's ability to hedge sustainability related risks and identify new opportunities to create long-term value for stakeholders. Nevertheless, disclosure forms and standards in the GCC have

yet to be fully aligned, which propelled the GCC Exchanges Committee to publish a unified set of ESG disclosure metrics, while accounting for regional sensitivities. The disclosure metrics included 29 standards (10 Environmental, 10 Social, and 9 Governance) that are in line with the World Federation of Exchanges and Sustainable Stock Exchanges Initiative and contain categories, including GHG emissions, energy & water usage, gender pay and diversity, employee turnover, data privacy, ethics and more.

Moreover, banks in the GCC region have adopted several ESG-related initiatives, including green and sustainable finance initiatives, given their growing exposure to global financial markets and the rising attention from rating agencies, with the support of the region's central banks. For example, the Saudi central bank is keen to incorporate ESG standards in banks

operational frameworks and risk management through the financial sector development program, which is part of the Saudi 2030 vision. The UAE has established a Sustainable Finance Working Group (SFWG) to facilitate the transition and ensure the adoption of sustainable finance at a national level. In Bahrain, the central bank issued a circular to all licensees in March 2022 aimed at ensuring licensees regulated in the area of climate-related risk management followed by an ESG module for all listed financial institutions in November 2023 on reporting requirements.

Furthermore, the One Planet Sovereign Wealth Fund Coalition, of which the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) and Saudi Arabia Public Investment Fund (PIF) are founding members, has assisted Sovereign Wealth Funds (SWFs) looking to integrate policy and ESG factors into the investment management process since 2017. The KIA reiterated its commitment to sustainable financing as it announced its intention to make the ESG central to its outlook while transitioning toward ESG compliance for the entire portfolio. In addition, the PIF in collaboration with Tadawul group are planning to establish an exchange platform for carbon offsets and credits in the MENA region, which contributes to the Paris Agreement goals. The carbon-trading platform will be the main destination for companies and organizations seeking to reduce emissions.

Kuwaiti banks progress in ESG implementation

Banks in Kuwait have made a solid progress towards the adoption of sustainable policies. Almost all banks publish annual sustainability reports that tackle their efforts in reducing carbon footprints, the responsible usage of water and energy resources, and their climate-related policies and materiality topics. Moreover, listed banks in the Kuwaiti Boursa adhere to the ESG voluntary disclosure guidelines, which helps in unifying reporting practices while being in line with United Nations Sustainable Stock Exchanges (SSE) initiative, and the KPIs from the World Federation of Exchanges (WFE). The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) also played a supporting role through issuing various laws, directives, and instructions for data protection, updating corporate governance regulations, and cybersecurity initiatives. In addition, the recent ESG directives, which included imbedding ESG factors within banks' governance, strategy, and risk management while stressing the need for including climate-related factors in the process of the Internal Capital Adequacy Assessment Process (ICAAP). These directives were in line with Basel core principles of effective supervision as they are sufficiently broad and resilient to include supervisory responses to climate financial risks. Furthermore, the CBK gave priority to green products in its regulatory sandbox tests. However, Kuwaiti banks adoption of ESG practices is relatively recent, same as other banks in the GCC region, putting them at the early stages compared to other major banks in the advanced economies and emerging markets.

However, Kuwaiti banks' ESG scores remain within the GCC banks average, ranging between medium to high risk (Sustainalytics), average (MSCI), and satisfactory ESG performance (Refinitiv)

Table (1): Kuwaiti Banks latest ESG rankings

No.	Bank Name	Sustainalytics*	MSCI**	Refinitiv***
1.	National Bank of Kuwait	27.4	BBB	59/100
2.	Commercial bank of Kuwait	N/A	N/A	34/100
3.	Gulf bank	30.7	BBB	41/100
4.	Al-Ahli bank of Kuwait	32.2	N/A	49/100
5.	Burgan Bank	34.8	N/A	N/A
6.	Al-Ahli united bank	26.5	N/A	49/100
7.	Kuwait international bank	37.4	N/A	30/100
8.	Kuwait Finance House	25.1	BBB	37/100
9.	Boubyan bank	29.5	BB	69/100
10.	Wafaa bank	34.9	N/A	N/A
11.	Industrial bank of Kuwait	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table (2): Kuwaiti Banks ESG pillar scores according to Refinitiv

No.	Bank Name	Score	Environmental	Social	Governance	Notes
1.	National Bank of Kuwait	59/100	Environment: 35 Emissions: 27 Resource use: 62 Innovation: 21	Social: 56 Human rights: 78 Product responsibility: 94 Workforce: 31 Community: 50	Governance: 73 Management: 78 Shareholders: 48 CSR strategy: 84	Based on FY2021 data
2.	Commercial bank of Kuwait	34/100	Environment: 8 Emissions: 42 Resource use: 6 Innovation: 0	Social: 16 Human rights: 0 Product responsibility: 27 Workforce: 13 Community: 14	Governance: 72 Management: 94 Shareholders: 48 CSR strategy: 0	Based on FY2022 data
3.	Gulf bank	41/100	Environment: 10 Emissions: 25 Resource use: 36 Innovation: 0	Social: 27 Human rights: 38 Product responsibility: 28 Workforce: 17 Community: 34	Governance: 72 Management: 66 Shareholders: 48 CSR strategy: 78	Based on FY2021 data
4.	Al-Ahli bank of Kuwait	49/100	Environment: 24 Emissions: 21 Resource use: 41 Innovation: 21	Social: 40 Human rights: 24 Product responsibility: 58 Workforce: 38 Community: 22	Governance: 71 Management: 82 Shareholders: 48 CSR strategy: 30	Based on FY2021 data
5.	Kuwait international bank	27/100	Environment: 3 Emissions: 19 Resource use: 0 Innovation: 0	Social: 28 Human rights: 0 Product responsibility: 28 Workforce: 19 Community: 66	Governance: 35 Management: 26 Shareholders: 66 CSR strategy: 34	Based on FY2021 data
6.	Kuwait Finance House	34/100	Environment: 3 Emissions: 0 Resource use: 0 Innovation: 5	Social: 30 Human rights: 0 Product responsibility: 28 Workforce: 12 Community: 84	Governance: 52 Management: 70 Shareholders: 26 CSR strategy: 0	Based on FY2021 data
7.	Boubyan bank	66/100	Environment: 19 Emissions: 56 Resource use: 60 Innovation: 0	Social: 61 Human rights: 45 Product responsibility: 94 Workforce: 38 Community: 9	Governance: 91 Management: 98 Shareholders: 83 CSR strategy: 69	Based on FY2022 data
8.	Ahli United Bank	49/100	Environment: 22 Emissions: 25 Resource use: 29 Innovation: 19	Social: 50 Human rights: 24 Product responsibility: 30 Workforce: 54 Community: 51	Governance: 87 Management: 56 Shareholders: 62 CSR strategy: 58	Based on FY2020 data

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9.	Boubyan bank	29.5	BB	69/100
10.	Wafaa bank	34.9	N/A	N/A
11.	Industrial bank of Kuwait	N/A	N/A	N/A

court rejects Alibaba's effort to quash case

A judge in New York has ruled that Alibaba must face a lawsuit by a U.S. toymaker alleging that the Chinese e-commerce giant's online platforms were used to sell counterfeit Squishmallows.

Judge Jesse Furman of the Southern District Court of New York refused Alibaba's request to dismiss the case filed by Kelly Toys Holdings, which makes the popular plush toys.

Kelly Toys is owned by Jazwares, a toy company whose

parent company Alleghany Corp. is controlled by billionaire Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway.

There was no immediate comment by Alibaba, China's biggest e-commerce company. Among other things, Alibaba based its motion to dismiss on how it was named in the lawsuit as Alibaba.com instead of its formal corporate name.

In its complaint, Kelly Toys said sales of faked Squishmallows by merchants using Alibaba sites continued despite earlier lawsuits

demanding they be stopped. The company had earlier filed the case to stop about 90 e-commerce companies from selling counterfeit versions of the toys. Alibaba was named as a defendant in March.

"Kelly Toys alleges that, notwithstanding that awareness, infringing listings - including some by the Merchant Defendants - have continued to proliferate on the Alibaba platforms," Furman wrote. (AP)

2 models of Apple Watch can go on sale again

Two higher-end models of the Apple Watch can go on sale again after a federal court temporarily lifted a sales halt ordered by the International Trade Commission over a patent dispute.

The ITC, a federal agency, ordered the halt in October to block Apple from using specific technologies underpinning a blood-oxygen measurement system in its Series 9 and Ultra 2 watches. Apple has been embroiled in an intellectual property dispute with

the medical technology company Masimo over those technologies.

Apple cut off online sales of the watches in the U.S. last week just days from the Christmas holiday to comply with the ITC ruling. The court's action will allow sales of the two Apple Watch models pending its decision on whether to also permit sales as it weighs Apple's appeal.

The two watch models will be available at Apple's online store by noon Pacific Time on Thursday,

according to the company. They will return to some Apple stores Wednesday, with wider availability expected by Saturday.

This isn't the first patent roadblock the Apple Watch has run into as the company morphs its watches into health-management devices.

Last year, the ITC ruled that Apple had infringed on the wearable EKG technology of AliveCor - a decision the Biden administration declined to overturn. (AP)

Rapid development of AI threatens to significantly upend publishing industry

NY Times sues OpenAI, Microsoft for using stories to train chatbots

NEW YORK, Dec 28, (AP) - The New York Times is striking back against the threat that artificial intelligence poses to the news industry, filing a federal lawsuit Wednesday against OpenAI and Microsoft seeking to end the practice of using its stories to train chatbots.

The Times says the companies are threatening its livelihood by effectively stealing billions of dollars worth of work by its journalists, in some cases spitting out Times' material verbatim to people who seek answers from generative artificial intelligence like OpenAI's ChatGPT. The newspaper's lawsuit was filed in federal court in Manhattan and follows what appears to be a breakdown in talks between the newspaper and the two companies, which began in April.

The media has already been pummeled by a migration of readers to online platforms. While many publications - most notably the Times - have successfully carved out a digital space, the rapid development of AI threatens to significantly upend the publishing industry.

Web traffic is an important component of the paper's advertising revenue and helps drive subscriptions to its online site. But the outputs from AI chatbots divert that traffic away from the paper and other copyright holders, the Times says, making it less likely that users will visit the original source for the information.

"These bots compete with the content they are trained on," said Ian B. Crosby, partner and lead counsel at Susman Godfrey, which is representing The Times.

Committed

An OpenAI spokesperson said in a prepared statement that the company respects the rights of content creators and is "committed" to working with them to help them benefit from the technology and new revenue models.

"Our ongoing conversations with the New York Times have been productive and moving forward constructively, so we are surprised and disappointed with this development," the spokesperson said. "We're hopeful that we will find a mutually beneficial way to work together, as we are doing with many other publishers."

Microsoft did not respond to requests for comment.

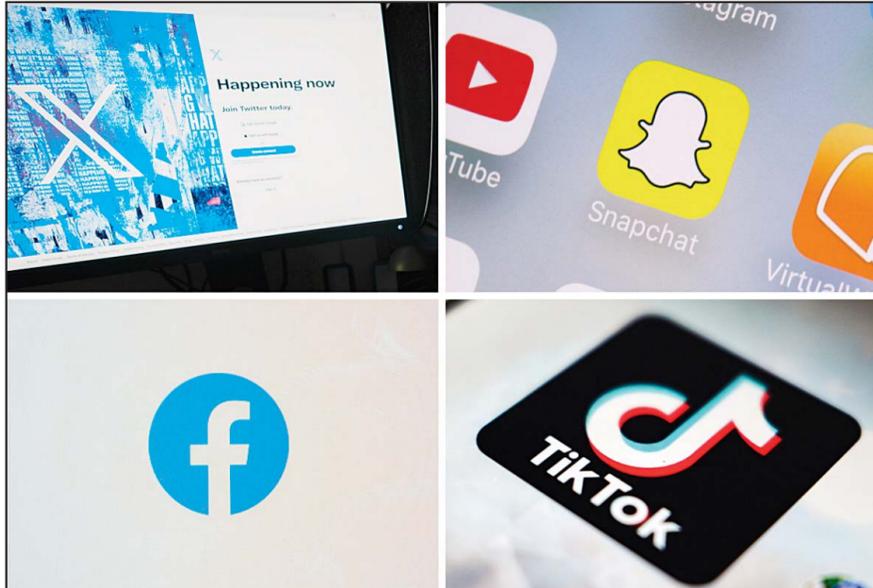
Artificial intelligence companies scrape information available online, including articles published by news organizations, to train generative AI chatbots. The large language models are also trained on a huge trove of other human-written materials, which helps them to build a strong command of language and grammar and to answer questions correctly.

But the technology is still under development and gets many things wrong. In its lawsuit, for example, the Times said OpenAI's GPT-4 falsely attributed product recommendations to Wirecutter, the paper's product reviews site, endangering its reputation.

OpenAI and other AI companies, including rival Anthropic, have attracted billions of dollars in investments very rapidly since public and business interest in the technology exploded, particularly this year.

Microsoft has a partnership with

Harvard study finds social media companies made \$11 bln in US ad revenue from minors



This combination of photos shows logos of X, formerly known as Twitter, top left; Snapchat, top right; Facebook, bottom left; and TikTok, bottom right. Social media companies collectively made over \$11 billion in U.S. advertising revenue from minors last year, according to a study from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health released Wednesday, Dec. 27, 2023. (AP)

Platforms failed to meaningfully self-regulate

OpenAI that allows it to capitalize on the company's AI technology. The Redmond, Washington, tech giant is also OpenAI's biggest backer and has invested at least \$13 billion into the company since the two began their partnership in 2019, according to the lawsuit. As part of the agreement, Microsoft's supercomputers help power OpenAI's AI research and the tech giant integrates the startup's technology into its products.

The paper's complaint comes as the number of lawsuits filed against OpenAI for copyright infringement is growing. The company has been sued by several writers - including comedian Sarah Silverman - who say their books were ingested to train OpenAI's AI models without their permission. In June, more than 4,000 writers signed a letter to the CEOs of OpenAI and other tech companies accusing them of exploitative practices in building chatbots.

As AI technology develops, growing fears over its use have also fueled labor strikes and lawsuits in other industries, including Hollywood. Different stakeholders are realizing the technology could disrupt their entire business model, but the question will be how to respond to it, said Sarah Kreps, director of Cornell University's Tech Policy Institute.

CAMBRIDGE, Massachusetts, Dec 28, (AP): Social media companies collectively made over \$11 billion in U.S. advertising revenue from minors last year, according to a study from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health published on Wednesday.

The researchers say the findings show a need for government regulation of social media since the companies that stand to make money from children who use their platforms have failed to meaningfully self-regulate. They note such regulations, as well as greater transparency from tech companies, could help alleviate harms to youth mental health and curtail potentially harmful advertising practices that target children and adolescents.

To come up with the revenue figure, the researchers estimated the number of users under 18 on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter) and YouTube in 2022 based on population data from the U.S. Census and survey data from Common Sense Media and Pew Research. They then used data from research firm eMarketer, now called Insider Intelligence, and Qustodio, a parental control app, to estimate each platform's U.S. ad revenue in 2022 and the time children spent per day on each platform. After that, the researchers said they built a simulation model using the data to estimate how much ad revenue the platforms earned from minors in the U.S.

Researchers and lawmakers have long focused on the negative effects stemming from social media plat-

forms, whose personally-tailored algorithms can drive children towards excessive use. This year, lawmakers in states like New York and Utah introduced or passed legislation that would curb social media use among kids, citing harms to youth mental health and other concerns.

Meta, which owns Instagram and Facebook, is also being sued by dozens of states for allegedly contributing to the mental health crisis.

"Although social media platforms may claim that they can self-regulate their practices to reduce the harms to young people, they have yet to do so, and our study suggests they have overwhelming financial incentives to continue to delay taking meaningful steps to protect children," said Bryn Austin, a professor in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Harvard and a senior author on the study.

The platforms themselves don't make public how much money they earn from minors.

Social media platforms are not the first to advertise to children, and parents and experts have long expressed concerns about marketing to kids online, on television and even in schools. But online ads can be especially insidious because they can be targeted to children and because the line between ads and the content kids seek out is often blurry.

Vulnerable

In a 2020 policy paper, the American Academy of Pediatrics said children are "uniquely vulnerable to the persuasive effects of advertising because of immature critical thinking skills and impulse inhibition."

"School-aged children and teenagers may be able to recognize advertising but often are not able to resist it when it is embedded within trusted social networks, encouraged by celebrity influencers, or delivered next to personalized content," the paper noted.

As concerns about social media and children's mental health grow, the Federal Trade Commission earlier this month proposed sweeping changes to a decades-old law that regulates how online companies can track and advertise to children. The proposed changes include turning off targeted ads to kids under 13 by default and limiting push notifications.

According to the Harvard study, YouTube derived the greatest ad revenue from users 12 and under (\$959.1 million), followed by Instagram (\$801.1 million) and Facebook (\$137.2 million).

Instagram, meanwhile, derived the greatest ad revenue from users aged 13-17 (\$4 billion), followed by TikTok (\$2 billion) and YouTube (\$1.2 billion).

The researchers also estimate that Snapchat derived the greatest share of its overall 2022 ad revenue from users under 18 (41%), followed by TikTok (35%), YouTube (27%), and Instagram (16%).

Exceptions? Burgers, lattes

US companies are picky about investing in China

WASHINGTON, Dec 28, (AP) - There's been no shortage of tough news for China's economy as some of the world's biggest brands consider or take action to shift manufacturing to friendlier shores at a time of unease about security controls, protectionism and wobbly relations between Beijing and Washington.

Count Adidas, Apple and Samsung among those looking elsewhere.

But as a tumultuous 2023 for the Chinese economy comes to a close, there has been at least one bright spot for Beijing when it comes to foreign investment: American fast-food chains have decided a market of 1.4 billion people is simply too delicious to pass up.

KFC China's parent company opened its 10,000th restaurant in China last month and aims to have stores within reach of half of China's population by 2026. McDonald's is planning to open 3,500 new stores in China over the next four years. And Starbucks invested \$220 million in a manufacturing and distribution facility in eastern China, its biggest project outside the U.S.

Investments

This is surely not what Chinese President Xi Jinping had in mind as he made the case to American CEOs about the upside of China's "super-large market" last month while he was in San Francisco for a summit of world leaders. The investments in fast food and other consumer goods, while Washington is curbing exports of computer chips and other advanced technology, don't fit into China's own blueprint for modernizing its economy.

"As you try to interpret the signals from McDonald's and Starbucks" and other chains, says Phil Levy, chief economist at the supply chain management firm Flexport, "note what the industries are: These are not high-tech burgers."

And while some U.S. companies are increasing investments in the world's second-largest economy, overall foreign investment began falling this year. In the July-September quarter, net foreign direct investment in China sank to a deficit of \$11.8 billion, the first quarterly deficit since Beijing began publishing the data in 1998.

As tensions simmer between China and its Western trading partners, many multinational companies are shifting investments to other places, such as Southeast Asia or India, or repatriating their earnings. That has sapped China of a key engine when its economy has yet to fully recover from the disruptions of the pandemic and a property industry crisis that has been a drag on growth.

Beijing puts some of the blame on U.S. government policies.

Commerce Ministry spokesperson Shu Jueting said recently, "The U.S. side has repeatedly politicized economic, trade and technology issues and overstretched the concept of security, abused export control measures, and restricted trade and investment in China by its own enterprises, which is forcing enterprises to give up opportunities in the Chinese market

and opportunities for win-win cooperation."

A survey released in September by the U.S.-China Business Council, which represents American companies in China, suggested that the uncertainty has taken a toll: 43% of its members said China's business environment had deteriorated in the past year, and 83% said they were less optimistic about China than they had been three years ago. Twenty-one percent said they were investing fewer resources in China, versus just 10% who were investing more.

Surveys of European and Japanese companies have shown similar results.

While China's market is gigantic, it's ailing. Unemployment among young Chinese rose to over 20% by June, the last time the government released that data. Housing prices are falling and the stock market is down nearly 15% since the summer. That's left many Chinese feeling nervous about spending.

Still, bullishness for China as other industries try to de-risk and detangle from Beijing may be a profit-increasing strategy for the fast-food industry.

"We believe there is no better time to simplify our structure, given the tremendous opportunity to capture increased demand and further benefit from our fastest-growing market's long-term potential," McDonald's CEO Chris Kempczinski said as the Chicago-based company announced in November it was increasing its minority 20% ownership of its McDonald's licensed stores in China, Macau and Hong Kong to 48%.

Burgers and lattes don't raise the sorts of friction that more high-tech industries have in the complicated U.S.-China relationship. Those strains have persisted under the presidency of Joe Biden, who took office vowing to do more to counter China's expanding military clout and its menacing of neighbors, to improve the country's treatment of Uyghur and other ethnic minorities, and to crack down on intellectual property theft.

Relations

Relations hit a low point in February when Biden ordered a Chinese spy balloon that traversed the continental United States to be shot down. Beijing, which claims self-governed Taiwan as its own territory, also protested a stopover in the U.S. by the island's president, Tsai Ing-wen, earlier this year. China answered fresh U.S. controls on exports of advanced computer chips and the technology to make them with limits of its own on exports of vital commodities like graphite, gallium and germanium, all metals used in making semiconductors, solar panels, missiles and radar.

The relationship appears to be stabilizing somewhat as 2023 winds down, highlighted by last month's Biden and Xi meeting outside San Francisco. But since then, Biden's top advisers have said there are no plans to shift the strategy of tightening regulations and blocking U.S.-based high-tech investments in China, citing the need to safeguard national security.



A sign for The New York Times hangs above the entrance to its building, Thursday, May 6, 2021 in New York. (AP)

New Mexico native will oversee state's \$49 bln savings portfolio amid windfall from petroleum

SANTA FE, N.M., Dec 28, (AP) - A state cabinet secretary and former economist to the Legislature was selected Wednesday to oversee New Mexico's \$49 billion nest egg of savings and trust accounts at the State Investment Council.

As state investment officer, Albuquerque native Jon Clark will oversee financial assets including the New Mexico land grant permanent fund - built largely from petroleum production on state trust lands since the 1970s to benefit schools, hospitals and other public institutions.

The 11-member investment council - a board of elected and appointed officials with Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham serving as chair - conducted a nationwide search that generated more than 80 applications.

Clark in 2019 joined the Economic

Development Department and rose this year to acting cabinet secretary at an agency that administers annual incentives worth hundreds of millions of dollars aimed at creating private employment opportunities, from job-training grants to film production "rebates" that can offset nearly one-third of local spending.

Prior to that, he worked as an analyst and chief economist to the budget and accountability office of the Legislature.

Steve Moises retired on Oct. 1 after a 13-year stint as state investment officer. Clark starts work at an annual salary of \$285,000.

Management of New Mexico's state investments has taken on increasing significance amid an unprecedented surge in state government income from oil and natural gas production in

the Permian Basin that overlaps southeastern New Mexico and portions of western Texas.

Voters last year approved an increase in annual distributions from the land grant fund to public schools and early childhood education programs. At the same time, state lawmakers have been setting aside billions of dollars in surplus state income each year in a variety of trust accounts for the future, in case the world's thirst for oil falters.

The State Investment Council oversees New Mexico's early childhood education trust, created in 2020 to generate investment earnings and underwrite an ambitious expansion of public preschool, no-cost child care and home nurse visits for infants. The fund already holds roughly \$6 billion.



Women walk by a Nike Store at an outdoor shopping mall in Beijing on Saturday, Dec. 23, 2023. It was tumultuous 2023 for the Chinese economy. (AP)



'You Are Gonna Hear Me Roar'

celebrity

«Did you really make it?»
Yes, I am a “self-made millionaire”
and I want to tell you how I did it, not to brag,
but because it can be done. Too often people
see the glory, but they don't know the story.



STEFANIA LO GATTO
WITH ROBERTA CUTTICA

YOU ARE GONNA HEAR ME ROAR

STEFANIA LO GATTO
WITH ROBERTA CUTTICA

YOU ARE GONNA
HEAR ME ROAR



BRUNO EDITORE

The book cover of Stefania Lo Gatto's 'You Are Gonna Hear Me Roar' tells her tale of a self-made millionaire.

Features

ARAB TIMES
FRIDAY-SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29-30, 2023

Meet Stefania Lo Gatto

... the kitten turned lioness

By Paul Francis X. Fernandes
Arab Times/Al-Seyassah Staff

In the quiet corners of adversity, where the echoes of life's challenges reverberate, there emerges the resolute tale of a woman thrust into the tumultuous embrace of abandonment where shadows of uncertainty cloaked a once-shared future, and the weight of responsibility fell squarely on her shoulders left with nothing but determination and the echo of her children's laughter.

Meet Stefania Lo Gatto, a woman whose narrative unfolds the destiny of a woman left alone with her three little boys and not a penny to her name. In the crucible of abandonment, she discovered the mettle of her own strength — a force that would propel her through the trials of single parent, transforming a story of heartbreak into a saga of resilience and unwavering maternal love.

As we delve into the chapters of the journey of Stefania Lo Gatto, who since childhood, was nickname “Lo Gattina” (The Kitten), we witness the raw emotions of struggle through her book and the triumphant spirit that



Stefania Lo Gatto poses with her book 'You Are Gonna Hear Me Roar'.

defied the odds stacked against her — a narrative of rebuilding, of turning the echoes of abandonment into a symphony of survival, as she navigates the rough terrain to provide not just material but also emotional support for her children.

The story of Stefania Lo Gatto is a testament to the indomitable human spirit — a beacon of hope that shines brightly even when the path seems obscured by shadows. Stefania tells the Arab Times her poignant journey unravelling the layers of her resilience, determination, and the boundless love that fueled her pursuit of a brighter future for herself and her three little boys.

Masterpiece

Her book, “You Are Gonna Hear Me Roar,” is a tapestry woven from the threads of her life's trials, triumphs, and the profound lessons learned along the way. This autobiographical masterpiece, adorned with hues of personal development, mindset exploration, and the anthem of women's empowerment, didn't emerge from a solitary decision but was sparked by the discerning vision of an editor friend during the moment of personal breakdown.

“From the ashes of despair,” she tells the Arab Times, “I rose to become a self-made millionaire within a mere span of years. Through the pages of my book, I share not only my ascent but also a guiding principle — that ‘if I could conquer adversity and reshape my destiny, so too can others’.”

The book's cover, featuring a kitten beholding its reflection as a lioness in the water, mirrors her journey from the struggles of single mother to becoming a resilient provider for her cherished ‘cubs’.

Despite my petite stature, I defied expectations, dedicating four years to construct my own empire. The journey was marked by the laborious process of writing, editing, and refining — a task made possible with the help of my steadfast friend and writer.

She says for hours I would speak out my emotions to my friend and she would write them down.

“As I navigated the realms of my memories, embracing both the painful lows and exhilarating highs with unwavering honesty and cheerfulness, I embarked on a psychological therapy-like journey.

Four months became an immersive period, during which I poured countless hours into the meticulous craft of storytelling,” she recalls.

The most gratifying aspect emerged post-publication — a flood of letters, messages, and emails attesting to the transformative impact of my story on readers' lives.

Connections burgeoned, particularly with women who found resonance in my journey, resulting in invitations to TV stations and the blossoming of genuine friendships. The success, prominently displayed on Amazon, manifested in a growing circle of followers and heightened interactions.

Stefania was nominated for various awards due to her remarkable networking and marketing skills. Furthermore, she has had the honor of speaking in front of more than 25,000 people and has managed to inspire her audience while keeping them engaged.

She says, network marketing is friendship, empathy and sharing successes, because “I am always at the side of who believes in it and works hard. Network marketing is the closest star in your sky, if only you believe in it.”

Yet, fame brought an unexpected paradox — I became a familiar face on the streets, while those recognizing me remained shrouded in anonymity. This surreal dynamic occasionally unveiled vulnerability and embarrassment; nonetheless, as life ebbs and flows, the journey persists — a testament to the enduring spirit encapsulated within the pages of “You Are Gonna Hear Me Roar.”

“‘You Are Gonna Hear Me Roar’ is as an autobiographical account of my life, intertwining personal development, mindset, and women's empowerment themes throughout.

When asked about her next book, the self-made millionaire says, it is a painstaking job and has no future plans because “This immersive process consumed four months of my life, during which I dedicated countless hours to writing, rewriting, editing, and refining the narrative.”

Choices

This extraordinary woman has climbed the peaks of network marketing, but it is also a true-life tale in which many women can recognize themselves. Like her, they have to find the strength to rise again, making sacrifices and difficult choices.

From the province of Milan, where she grew up, to an inflexible and romantic Switzerland, from an exclusive university life in London to a suffocating New York, from Portugal — her joy and pain — to the United Arab Emirates where she resides today, Stefania Lo Gatto's journey is filled with great loves, textbook betrayals, moments of pain, faith, loneliness, and redemption.

It's a story that, by showcasing the unstoppable vitality of the protagonist, can instill confidence, hope, and inspiration.

In her famous quote she says, “Choose a job you love and you will never work a day in your life”

Originally from Italy currently living in Dubai, Stefania Lo Gatto, a mother with 3 boys unfortunately found herself one day as a single mom after going through a hard divorce. She got involved in network marketing as a way to get her life back on track and also to create a better future for her sons and within 3 years was able to build a global business in over 23 countries including the USA, Italy, Dubai, Germany and many more.

Lo Gattina's book inspires millions

editor's choice



People & Places

Television

Will viewers tune in?

Reinvented 'Globes' back with new start

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif., Dec 28, (AP) — The Golden Globe Awards are back on the first Sunday in January with plenty of behind-the-scenes changes aimed at cementing a yearslong comeback effort.

The show is known for its celebration of film and television and as an early stop for awards season contenders. Scandals have led to a membership revamp and a new broadcaster for the Jan. 7 show, but a key question remains: Will viewers tune in?

Here's what to know about the 81st Golden Globe Awards.

Viewers in the United States can catch the ceremony, broadcast live from the Beverly Hilton Hotel, beginning at 8 p.m. Eastern. It will air beginning at 5 p.m. on the West Coast.

The three-hour show will have a strong lead-in since CBS is airing an NFL game directly before the Globes.

CBS says the show will air on its app and stream on Paramount+, but there's an important caveat. Only Paramount+ subscribers with the Showtime add-on will be able to watch the show live. Otherwise, it'll be available on the streaming platform on Monday.

The 81st Golden Globe Awards will be the first major broadcast of awards season, with a new home on CBS. And while to audiences it might look similar on the surface, it's been a tumultuous few years behind the scenes following a bombshell report in the Los Angeles Times. The 2021 report found that there were no Black members in the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, which voted on the awards.

Stars and studios boycotted the Globes and NBC refused to air it in 2022 as a result. After the group added journalists of color to its ranks and instituted other reforms to address ethical concerns, the show came back in January 2023 in a one-year probationary agreement with NBC. The network did not opt to renew.

In June, billionaire Todd Boehly was granted approval to dissolve the HFPA and reinvent the Golden Globes as a for-profit organization. Its assets were acquired by Boehly's Eldridge Industries, along with Dick Clark Productions, a group that is owned by Penske Media whose assets also include Variety, Deadline, The Hollywood Reporter, Rolling Stone and Billboard.

Comedian **Jo Koy**, who has headlined several Netflix specials and starred in last year's comedy film "Easter Sunday," will host the Globes.

Organizers cited his "infectious energy and relatable humor" in announcing Koy would headline the event.

Hosting the Globes typically requires serving a mix of biting humor to the audience of film and television stars and keeping the ceremony from getting too sloppy.

Categories

Previous hosts include Ricky Gervais, whose jokes were particularly caustic, the duo of Tina Fey and Amy Poehler and last year's emcee, Jerrod Carmichael.

"Barbie" is the top nominee this year, followed closely by "Oppenheimer."

The films reflect one unique aspect of the Globes - they split the top film winners into two categories. With Greta Gerwig's "Barbie" and Christopher Nolan's "Oppenheimer" leading the way, it gives the show a chance to capitalize on the Barbenheimer craze that boosted theaters in 2023.

Films nominated for best motion picture drama include "Oppenheimer," Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon," Bradley Cooper's "Maestro," Celine Song's "Past Lives," Justine Triet's "Anatomy of a Fall" and Jonathan Glazer's "The Zone of Interest."

In the best motion picture musical or comedy category, "Barbie" was joined by Ben Affleck's "Air," Cord Jefferson's "American Fiction," Alexander Payne's "The Holdovers," Todd Haynes' "May December" and Yorgos Lanthimos' "Poor Things."

"Succession" was the top-nominated television program, with nine nods including for series stars Brian Cox, Jeremy Strong, Sarah Snook and Kieran Culkin, followed by Hulu's "The Bear."

The Golden Globe Awards had long been one of the highest-profile awards season broadcasts, second only to the Oscars.

The show was touted as an A-list party whose hosts often took a more irreverent tone than their Academy counterparts. It also only honored the flashiest filmmaking categories - picture, director, actors among them - meaning no long speeches from visual effects supervisors or directors of little-known shorts.

But the voting body was a small group of around 87 members who wielded incredible influence in the industry and often accepted lavish gifts and travel from studios and awards publicists eager to court favor and win votes.

Some years, the HFPA were pilloried for nominating poorly reviewed films with big-name talent in hopes of getting them to the show - the most infamous being "The Tourist," with Angelina Jolie and Johnny Depp. In the past decade, they've more often overlapped with the Oscars. The show also recognizes television.

Before the expose and public relations crisis though, no one in the industry took much umbrage with who was voting on the awards. The show had become an important part of the Hollywood awards ecosystem, a platform for Oscar hopefuls and was, until recently, a reliable ratings draw. As of 2019, the broadcast was still pulling in nearly 19 million viewers. In 2023, NBC's Tuesday night broadcast got its smallest audience ever for a traditional broadcast, with 6.3 million viewers.

The group nominating and voting for the awards is now made up of a more diverse group of over 300 people from around the world.

Also:

LOS ANGELES: 2024 kicks off in a big way with "America's Got Talent: Fantasy League" hosted by **Terry Crews**. In this competition, **Mel B** returns to judge alongside **Simon Cowell**, **Howie Mandel** and **Heidi Klum**, where they each select from a talent pool of past winners, finalists, fan favorites and other standout contestants from the global "Got Talent" franchise to form their own team of 10 acts. The judges will then guide their acts through the competition where the audience determines who advances to the semi-finals and finals. The extravaganza begins Tuesday, Jan. 1 on NBC and streams on Peacock.

True crime fans were hooked by Max's "The Curious Case of **Natalia Grace**," about an Indiana couple who in 2010 adopted a 6-year-old girl with dwarfism from **Ukraine** named Natalia Grace. Within two years they began to question Natalia's identity and believed she was in her early 20s, a fraud and dangerous. While that docuseries focused on the adopted parents' story, Grace shares her version in "The Curious Case of Natalia Grace: Natalie Speaks."



Tom Smothers does yo-yo tricks during arrivals at CBS's 75th anniversary celebration Sunday, Nov. 2, 2003, in New York. Tom Smothers, half of the Smother Brothers and the co-host of one of the most socially conscious and groundbreaking television shows in the history of the medium, has died, Tuesday, Dec. 26, 2023 at 86. (AP)

Obituary

Comedy legend leaves a laughter-filled legacy

Comedian Tom Smothers dies at 86

LOS ANGELES, Dec 28, (AP) — Tom Smothers, half of the Smother Brothers and the co-host of one of the most socially conscious and groundbreaking television shows in the history of the medium, has died at 86.

The National Comedy Center, on behalf of his family, said in a statement Wednesday that Smothers died Tuesday at home in Santa Rosa, California, following a cancer battle.

"Tom was not only the loving older brother that everyone would want in their life, he was a one-of-a-kind creative partner," his brother and the duo's other half, Dick Smothers, said in the statement. "Our relationship was like a good marriage - the longer we were together, the more we loved and respected one another. We were truly blessed."

When "The Smother Brothers Comedy Hour" debuted on CBS in the fall of 1967 it was an immediate hit, to the surprise of many who had assumed the network's expectations were so low it positioned their show opposite the top-rated "Bonanza."

But the Smother Brothers would prove a turning point in television history, with its sharp eye for pop culture trends and young rock stars such as the Who and Buffalo Springfield, and its daring sketches - ridiculing the Establishment, railing against the Vietnam War and portraying members of the era's hippie counterculture as gentle, fun-loving spirits - found an immediate audience with young baby boomers. The show reached No. 16 in the ratings in its first season.

Creative

It also drew the ire of network censors. After years of battling with the brothers over the show's creative content, the network abruptly canceled the program in 1970, accusing the siblings of failing to submit an episode in time for the censors to review.

Nearly 40 years later, when Smothers was awarded an honorary Emmy for his work on the show, he jokingly thanked the writers he said had gotten him fired. He also showed that the years had not dulled his outspokenness.

"It's hard for me to stay silent when I keep hearing that peace is only attainable through war," Smothers said at the 2008 Emmy Awards as his brother sat in the audience, beaming. He dedicated his award to those "who feel compelled to speak out and are not afraid to speak to power and won't shut up and refuse to be silenced."

During the three years the show was on television, the brothers constantly battled with CBS censors and occasionally outraged viewers as well, particularly when Smothers joked that Easter "is when Jesus comes out of his tomb and if he sees his shadow, he goes back in and we get six more weeks of winter." At Christmas, when other hosts were sending best wishes to soldiers fighting overseas, Smothers offered his to draft dodgers who had

moved to Canada.

In still another episode, the brothers returned blacklisted folk singer Pete Seeger to television for the first time in years. He performed his song "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy," widely viewed as ridiculing President Lyndon Johnson. When CBS refused to air the segment, the brothers brought Seeger back for another episode and he sang it again. This time, it made the air.

After the show was canceled, the brothers sued CBS for \$31 million and were awarded \$775,000. Their battles with the network were chronicled in the 2002 documentary "Smothered: The Censorship Struggles of the Smother Brothers Comedy Hour."

Talent

"Tom Smothers was not only an extraordinary comedic talent, who, together with his brother Dick, became the most enduring comedy duo in history, entertaining the world for over six decades - but was a true champion for freedom of speech, harnessing the power of comedy to push boundaries and our political consciousness," National Comedy Center Executive Director Journey Gunderson said in a statement.

Thomas Bolyn Smothers III was born Feb. 2, 1937, on Governors Island, New York, where his father, an Army major, was stationed. His brother was born two years later. In 1940 their father was transferred to the Philippines, and his wife, two sons and their sister, Sherry, accompanied him.

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, the family was sent home and Maj. Smothers remained. He was captured by the Japanese during the war and died in captivity. The family eventually moved to the Los Angeles suburb of Redondo Beach, where Smothers helped his mother take care of his brother and sister while she worked.

The brothers had seemed unlikely to make television history. They had spent several years on the nightclub and college circuits and doing TV guest appearances, honing an offbeat comedy routine that mixed folk music with a healthy dose of sibling rivalry.

They would come on stage, Tom with a guitar in hand and Dick toting an upright bass. They would quickly break into a traditional folk song - perhaps "John Henry" or "Pretoria." After playing several bars, Tom, positioned as the dumb one, would mess up, then quickly claim he had meant to do that. As Dick, the serious, short-tempered one, berated him for failing to acknowledge his error, he would scream in exasperation, "Mom always liked you best!"

They continued that shtick on their show but also surrounded themselves with a talented cast of newcomers, both writers and performers.

Among the crack writing crew that Smothers headed were future actor-filmmaker Rob Reiner, musician Mason Williams and comedian Steve Martin, who presented Smothers with the lifetime Emmy. Regular musical guests included John Hartford, Glen

Campbell and Jennifer Warnes.

Bob Einstein had a recurring role as Officer Judy, a dour Los Angeles police officer who once cited guest Liberace for playing the piano too fast. Leigh French, as the hippie earth mother in the segment "Share a Little Tea With Goldie," always appeared to have been drinking something brewed with more than just tea leaves.

The brothers had begun their own act when Tom, then a student at San Jose State University, formed a music group called the Casual Quintet and encouraged his younger brother to learn the bass and join. The brothers continued on as a duo after the other musicians dropped out, but began interspersing comedy with their limited folk music repertoire.

Their big break came in 1959 when they appeared at San Francisco's Purple Onion, then a hot spot for new talent. Booked for two weeks, they stayed a record 36. Booked into New York's Blue Angel, they won praise from The New York Times, which described them as "a pair of tart-tongued singing comedians." But to their disappointment, they couldn't get on "The Tonight Show," then hosted by Jack Paar.

"Paar kept telling our agent he didn't like folk singers - except for Burl Ives," Smothers told The Associated Press in 1964. "But one night he had a cancellation, and we went on. Everything worked right that night."

Audience

The brothers went on to appear on the TV shows of Steve Allen, Ed Sullivan, Garry Moore, Andy Williams, Jack Benny and Judy Garland. Their comedy albums were big sellers and they toured the country, especially colleges.

Television first came calling in 1965, casting them in "The Smother Brothers Show," a sitcom about a businessman (Dick) haunted by his late brother (Tom), a fledgling guardian angel. It lasted just one season.

Shortly after CBS canceled the "Comedy Hour," ABC picked it up as a summer replacement, but the network didn't bring it back in the fall. NBC gave them a show in 1975 but it failed to find an audience and lasted only a season. The brothers went their separate ways for a time in the 1970s. Among other endeavors, Smothers got into the wine business, launching Remick Ridge Vineyards in Northern California's wine country.

"Originally the winery was called Smothers Brothers, but I changed the name to Remick Ridge because when people heard Smothers Brothers wine, they thought something like Milton Berle Fine Wine or Larry, Curly and Mo Vineyards," Smothers once said.

They eventually reunited to star in the musical comedy "I Love My Wife," a hit that ran on Broadway for two years. After that they went back on the road, playing casinos, performing arts centers and corporate gatherings around the country, remaining popular for decades.



Danny Masterson arrives at an event on March 24, 2014, in Los Angeles. Authorities said Wednesday, Dec. 27, that 47-year-old Masterson has been admitted to North Kern State Prison to serve his sentence for two rape convictions. (AP)

Variety

JOHANNESBURG: Renowned South African playwright, producer and composer **Mbongeni Ngema** has died in a car crash at the age of 68, his family said.

"Ngema was killed in a head-on car accident while returning from a funeral he was attending in **Lusikisiki** in the **Eastern Cape** this evening," his family said in a statement Wednesday. The celebrated playwright was a passenger in the vehicle involved in the crash.

He was best known for creating the hit **Sarafina!** which first premiered on Broadway in 1988. It was adapted into a musical drama starring **Whoopi Goldberg** in 1992, becoming an international success and was nominated for the Tony and Grammy Awards.

Sarafina! told the story of a young student and how she inspired her peers to fight against racial segregation in apartheid **South Africa** after her teacher was thrown in jail.

Apartheid was an institutionalized system that discriminated against non-whites and ensured South Africa was ruled by the minority white population from 1948 till the early 1990s.

Ngema's body of work included the lauded theatre production **Woza Albert**, which first showed in 1981 and went on to win more than 20 awards across the world. The political satire explored the second coming of Jesus Christ as a black man, returning to **South Africa** as a black man. (AP)

DELANO, Calif.: "That '70s Show" actor **Danny Masterson** has been sent to a **California** state prison to serve his sentence for two rape convictions.

Authorities said Wednesday that the 47-year-old Masterson has been admitted to **North Kern State Prison**, and they released his first prison mug shot. The photo shows him wearing orange prison attire, with long hair and a beard. (AP)

BOGOTA, Colombia: Pop star **Shakira** was immortalized in her Colombian hometown of **Barranquilla**, where officials unveiled a giant bronze statue of the music diva known around the world for her catchy tunes and exhilarating moves.

The six-meter (20-foot) tall monument depicts the multiple Grammy and Latin Grammy winner in one of her famous belly dancing outfits, with her hips swaying to her right and her arms raised gracefully toward the sky.

A plaque under the statue says that on Feb. 2, 1977, the town of "Barranquilla and the world witnessed the birth of a heart that composes, hips that don't lie, a voice that moves masses and a pair of bare feet that walk for the good of children and humanity."

The statue, located on a recently built promenade along the Magdalena River that runs along the edge of the town, was unveiled in a small ceremony on Tuesday attended by Shakira's parents and the mayor, **Jaime Pumarejo**.

However, the bronze giant is not the Caribbean town's first Shakira statue. In 2006, Barranquilla unveiled a Shakira monument that depicts the pop star in her early days, playing an acoustic guitar and wearing jeans and boots. That statue stands near the entrance of the local soccer stadium. (AP)

LONDON: **Bill Granger**, the Australian chef, food writer and restaurant owner who brought Aussie-style food to international capitals from London to **Seoul**, has died. He was 54.

Granger's family said on social media Tuesday that the chef died in a hospital in London on Christmas Day.

"A dedicated husband and father, Bill died peacefully in hospital with his wife **Natalie Elliott** and three daughters, **Edie**,



Granger



Ngema

Inès and Bunny, at his bedside in their adopted home of London," the family statement said. It gave no further details.

Born in 1969 in **Melbourne, Australia**, Granger was a self-taught cook who launched a chef's career over three decades after dropping out of art school. He opened his first restaurant in 1993 in the **Sydney** suburb of **Darlinghurst**, where he soon became known for his breakfasts served at a central communal table. (AP)

A call to learn from COVID-19

UN chief urges strengthening epidemic prevention

Neglect takes toll

Steep rise in elder deaths amid pandemic struggles

HARRISBURG, Pa., Dec 28, (AP): Pennsylvania recorded a steep increase in the deaths of older adults following an abuse or neglect complaint the last few years, as COVID-19 ravaged the nation, complaints grew and agencies struggled to keep caseworkers on staff.

The staggering increase shown in state data - from 120 deaths reported in 2017 to almost 1,400 in 2022, a more than tenfold increase - may have had several contributing factors, and the state and county-level agencies that field and investigate complaints gave varying answers explaining why.

Mostly, Pennsylvania's Department of Aging and county-level agency officials speculated that it had to do with a growing population of people 65 and older, an increase in complaints and the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on older adults.

One county said errors in its data entry procedure - now corrected - led to undercounting in the initial years. Another pointed to cases staying open longer.

Some county agencies wouldn't answer questions about it at all.

The increase came as agencies in Pennsylvania and nationwide struggled to keep caseworkers on staff through the pandemic and manage caseloads.

The Department of Aging said it has no data to suggest that a lack of caseworkers contributed to the increase in deaths, and suggested that the data could be misleading since the deaths may have had nothing to do with the original abuse or neglect complaint.

"The data does not make any correlation between the provision of protective services and how the older adult died," the agency said.

Causes

The department doesn't track causes of death, and individual county-level agencies aren't required to provide that information to the state. When caseworkers enter data on a case, they are given a choice of reasons for why a case was closed, including death.

If anything changed in recent years, state efforts to train caseworkers likely improved how data on cases was recorded and entered, former department employees and county officials said.

It's not clear to what extent better data collection helps explain Pennsylvania's increase, but evidence suggests that other similar jurisdictions did not see a similarly steep increase.

Officials from the National Adult Protective Services Association said they had not heard discussion of such a steep increase in deaths among the state programs that investigate abuse and neglect complaints of adults.

Although states have different practices for investigating complaints and collecting data, two states with similar-sized populations - Illinois and Michigan - also reported significant increases in deaths.

But those increases - roughly triple during the pandemic - were nowhere near the proportion of Pennsylvania's.

The broader death rate of older adults did not increase nearly as steeply during the pandemic, going from about 4% of those 65 and older in 2018 to 4.5% in 2021, according to federal statistics.

All told, Pennsylvania's data shows caseworkers reported closing 120 neglect or abuse cases due to death in 2017.

That number rose steadily every year. It reached 784 in 2020, 1,284 in 2021 and then 1,389 in 2022 - rising by more than 10 times in five years, or more than 1000%.

The number of complaints called into caseworkers rose over that period, too. But it rose by a much smaller pro-

portion - by about half, or 55%, according to state data.

This year, the pace of cases closed due to death slowed a bit, but still remained well above 2020's pace. Through the first six months of 2023, the number of deaths was 528, on pace for 1,056 over the full year.

The department also doesn't disclose the details of case investigations or what shortcomings it finds when it inspects the performance of the 52 county-level "area agencies for aging" across Pennsylvania.

Some agencies are county-run while others are nonprofits, and field calls about elder abuse or neglect under state contracts. They employ caseworkers to investigate complaints and coordinate with doctors, service providers and if necessary, law enforcement.

Most calls involve someone who lives alone or with a family member or caregiver. Poverty is often a factor.

The department released the deaths data in response to a request filed by The Associated Press under Pennsylvania's open records law.

Records

The AP submitted the request after reviewing internal emails - also released through an open records request - showing that state protective services staff had become alarmed at how Philadelphia's agency had handled the cases of three people in 2021.

The department refused to disclose the fate of the three people - including when a state lawmaker asked about it following AP's story on it.

In Pennsylvania, state data shows caseworkers took longer to close some cases as the pandemic wore on and often handled more cases than state regulations allow.

The shortage of caseworkers during the COVID-19 pandemic became so extreme that, in 2021, then-Gov. Tom Wolf's administration took the extraordinary step of marshaling state employees to handle investigations for Philadelphia's agency.

The agency, the nonprofit Philadelphia Corporation for Aging, reported four cases closed due to death in 2017. By 2020, that number rose to 220. In 2021, it hit 472 before dropping to 295 in 2022.

Bob Burns, the director of Dauphin County's Area Agency on Aging, said he wasn't surprised by the increase in deaths, considering the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The shortage of caseworkers leads to higher caseloads because it might take longer to close out a case, Burns said. But, he said, counties began using experienced caseworkers up front to quickly investigate complaints to determine right away if a person was in a dire situation.

Gov. Josh Shapiro's secretary for the Department of Aging, Jason Kavulich, told lawmakers in a March hearing that many county-level agencies "are struggling for a variety of reasons, from not having adequate staff to a high number of staff turnover to some serious training issues, that we need to get them up to an acceptable level of understanding."

Even before the pandemic, the performance of area agencies on aging had drawn criticism.

In 2018, the state's internal investigation agency, the Office of Inspector General, issued a report that criticized how the state and counties handle abuse and neglect reports. That report pointed to failures to properly investigate complaints under timelines required by state law and inadequate staffing of the Department of Aging office that monitors those agencies.

NEW YORK, Dec 28, (KUNA): UN Secretary-General **Antonio Guterres** called on the international community to capitalize on COVID-19 epidemic management to strengthen prevention.

"COVID-19 is a human tragedy. But it has also created a generational opportunity. An opportunity to build back a more equal and sustainable world," he wrote in a message marking the International Day of Epidemic Preparedness on Wednesday.

"The response to the pandemic, and to the widespread discontent that preceded it, must be based on a New Social Contract and a New Global Deal that create equal opportunities for all and respect the rights and freedoms of all," Guterres pointed out.

"COVID-19 is no longer the international public health emergency it was, but it is still circulating, and its devastating effects are still with us.

"Economic damage inflicted by the pandemic endures. Many healthcare systems are struggling.

Millions of children are threatened by disease after missing out on routine childhood vaccinations.

"And three years after the first COVID-19 vaccines were developed, billions of people remain unprotected - overwhelmingly in developing countries.

"When the next pandemic arrives, we must do better. But we're not yet ready. We must prepare and act on the lessons of COVID-19.

"Working together, the world must improve surveillance of viruses, strengthen health systems, and make the promise of Universal Health Coverage a reality.

"We must renounce the moral and medical disaster of rich countries hoarding and controlling pandemic healthcare supplies,

and ensure everyone has access to diagnostics, treatments and vaccines. And we must strengthen the World Health Organization's authority and financing.

"These efforts are making progress. The High-level meeting on Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response in September agreed a robust political declaration. This complements the negotiations on a pandemic accord in Geneva.

"On this International Day of Epidemic Preparedness, I urge countries to build on this momentum by delivering a strong, comprehensive accord, focused on equity, by next year's World Health Assembly in May.

"Together, let's act on the lessons of COVID-19, prepare, and build a fairer, healthier world for all," the Secretary-General concluded.

The International Day of Epidemic Preparedness is observed annually by the UN member states on December 27.



Guterres

The Conversation

Effective, fewer side effects

Customizing mRNA is next frontier for personalized medicine: expert

By Angie Hilliker

University of Richmond

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

While using mRNA as medicine is new, mRNA has been inside you for your entire life. The cells in your body create mRNAs that serve as instructions to make specific proteins you need to function. Researchers can create new mRNAs to correct those instructions when they aren't working.

I am a molecular biologist who studies how cells control their mRNAs to make the proteins they need, a basic question of how life works at the cellular level. While most scientists studying mRNAs are not creating new drugs, this fundamental understanding of how mRNA works laid the foundation for other scientists to create effective mRNA medicines like COVID-19 vaccines.

By tweaking these instructions, scientists can create powerful new medicines to repair a variety of problems in your cells.

To understand what the mRNAs in your cells are doing for you, let's start with its more well-known relative, DNA.

DNA is like a set of cookbooks full of different recipes, or genes, to make proteins. People make about 100,000 different proteins that are essential for normal function, such as breaking down nutrients and carrying out other important chemical reactions.

When cells need to make one of those proteins, they don't read the recipe directly from DNA. Instead, they make a copy in the form of a similar molecule - that's the mRNA. The "m" stands for messenger, as mRNA contains the message, or recipe, that codes for a protein. About one-third of a cell's energy is devoted to maintaining the proteins you need, so cells are well equipped to recognize, use and then destroy mRNA once it's no longer needed.

The language of mRNA is made of four building blocks called nucleotides, nicknamed A, U, C and G. The recipe to make a protein contains only three-letter words, meaning there are just 64 possible words. Scientists know exactly which words correspond to each protein building block, so they can easily read an mRNA recipe and know what protein will be made. Mutations in the DNA cookbook can alter or delete an mRNA recipe, leading to disease-causing mistakes in critical proteins.

While mRNA has been within us all along, it took decades of research for scientists to understand how cells recognize mRNA and use it to

make protein. But it eventually became clear that mRNA could be a powerful medical tool.

Since scientists understand how mRNAs code for proteins, they can easily create recipes for any protein. These recipes can be edited to meet the needs of the patient, whether this means providing a whole new mRNA recipe or tweaking an existing one to make a slight variation of the protein.

Producing mRNA treatments is also scalable because scientists can make large amounts of mRNA in the lab. The method to make one mRNA is the same for all mRNAs, unlike typical drugs where each compound has its own unique chemistry and requires different manufacturing methods. It's like learning how to make risotto: Once you've learned the basic recipe, you can make endless variations.

Another benefit of using mRNAs as drugs are cells' natural ability to destroy them when they aren't needed. Since mRNAs aren't permanent, doses can be easily changed to meet the changing needs of the patient.

Immune

The COVID-19 vaccines from Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech are the first mRNA-based medicines to gain FDA approval. When these vaccines are injected into your arm, the mRNA is absorbed into some of your cells, which read the mRNA recipe and make the spike protein the virus uses to invade cells. Your immune system recognizes this spike protein as foreign and makes antibodies that prepare your body to attack the virus if you encounter it later.

These mRNA vaccines demonstrate the flexibility of mRNA-based therapies. As the virus that causes COVID-19 mutates, new viral variants can evade existing antibodies and cause new waves of illness. However, scientists are able to sequence new mRNA recipes based on these variants and tweak the vaccine recipes to match them. Boosters containing these edited recipes teach your body to make new antibodies that target the latest versions of the viral spike protein.

There are already clinical trials underway for other mRNA-based vaccines, including vaccines for seasonal flu, herpes and respiratory syncytial virus.

There are also many more vaccines in earlier stages of development to combat diseases like norovirus, Lyme disease, Zika and shingles.

The potential for mRNA-based medicine extends beyond vaccines to prevent infectious disease. One example is the use of mRNA to treat cancer.

Some mRNA cancer treatments work like vaccines by training your immune system to specifically target cancer cells. As cancer cells grow, they rapidly gain mutations in many genes. Cancer vaccines contain mRNA recipes based on mutations commonly found in certain types of tumors. When injected into the body, the mRNAs from the vaccines allow normal cells to make those mutated proteins and broadcast them to the immune system, ramping up production of antibodies. These antibodies bind to cancer cells and mark them for immune attack.

Finding the correct protein target for a given cancer is essential. Ideally, the target is unique to the cancer cell so the immune system doesn't attack healthy cells. The target protein should also be easy for the immune system to sense, making surface proteins good targets. Cancer vaccines, like BioNTech's BNT-111 for melanoma, target the most common cancer mutations in hope of helping many patients. But patients won't benefit from the treatment if their cancer cells don't have those particular mutations.

Because it is so easy to change the mRNA recipes, cancer vaccines can be part of a personalized medicine plan where doctors sample a patient's tumor, sequence key genes and adjust the mRNA treatment to include recipes specific to that patient's cancer. Clinical trials using this personalized approach for pancreatic cancer are underway.

Many diseases arise from cells making the wrong protein, a mutant version of protein or too little of the normal protein. If scientists can deliver a corrected version of the mRNA recipe to enough affected cells, then the mRNA will provide the means to make the proper protein.

Scientists are exploring the use of mRNA to treat heart disease, neurodegenerative disease, bone loss and much more. Although most of these studies are still very early in development, they provide hope for future treatments using mRNA for protein replacement therapies.

For example, one mRNA drug increases the formation of new blood vessels, which can improve wound healing in diabetic patients who have poor blood circulation and higher amputation risks. Another example is using mRNAs to treat propionic acidemia, a disease where children have low levels of two liver proteins that normally prevent toxic byproducts from building up in the body.

The ability to easily customize and produce mRNA increases their potential as effective, personalized therapies - with fewer side effects - that can help many people. (AP)

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Marsh falls just short of his fourth test century

Australia recover to lead by 241 runs over Pakistan in 2nd test

Beekman, Virginia ease past Morgan State 79-44



UConn's Cam Spencer (12) passes off against St. John's Joel Soriano (11) and Daniss Jenkins during the first half of an NCAA college basketball game, Saturday, Dec. 23, 2023, in Hartford, Conn. (AP)

Grand Canyon downs Bethesda

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va., Dec 28, (AP): Reece Beekman had 17 points and seven assists as Virginia beat shorthanded Morgan State 79-44 on Wednesday night.

Beekman had 11 points and five assists in the first half to help build a 43-16 lead. The Cavaliers opened on a 14-5 run as Morgan State went 2 of 9 from the field in the first seven minutes. The Bears finished the half making just 6 of 23 (26%) with nine turnovers. Virginia made 18 field goals, five coming from distance.

Virginia led by at least 19 points the entire second half.

Jacob Groves, Andrew Rohde and

Leon Bond III each scored 10 points for Virginia (10-2). Ryan Dunn had 10 rebounds to go with eight points.

Rob Lawson scored 14 points and Kamron Hobbs added 13 for Morgan State (4-11). The Bears were without starters Winston Tabbs, averaging 16.4 points per game, and Will Thomas, 10.1 ppg.

BASKETBALL

Morgan State was held to 34% shooting from the field with 19 turnovers. The Cavaliers entered ranked second nationally in scoring defense (55.3 ppg), fourth in turnovers per game (8.9) and sixth in field goal percentage defense (36.9).

Virginia is 5-0 in the series, while limiting the Bears to 48 or fewer points in the past three contests - including 45 in the last meeting on Dec. 3, 2018.

Grand Canyon 124, Bethesda 74
In Glendale, Ariz., Jovan Blacksher Jr. scored 20 points to help Grand Canyon defeat Bethesda (Calif.) 124-74 on Wednesday in front of a military-only audience at Luke Air Force Base.

Lok Wur had 15 points, nine rebounds and three blocks, and Isaiah Shaw added 13 points for the Antelopes (11-1), who extended their winning streak to eight games. Josh Baker scored 11 points to go with seven rebounds, nine assists and four steals.

Grand Canyon led 67-35 at halftime behind 17 points from Blacksher.

Jonathan Ileleji scored a game-high 34 points on 13-of-28 shooting for Bethesda, which is part of the National Christian Collegiate Athletic Association. Jonathan Akharoh added 10 points and Kizhoni Blunt had eight points and eight rebounds.

MELBOURNE, Australia, Dec 28, (AP): Australia lost its first four wickets for 16 runs in its second innings but a 153-run stand between Steve Smith and Mitchell Marsh had the hosts in a good position with two days to play in the second cricket test against Pakistan.

Marsh was out for 96 and Smith for 50 to leave Australia at 187-6 at stumps Thursday and with a 241-run lead going into the fourth day at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

CRICKET

Marsh fell just short of his fourth test century after Salman Ali Agha hung onto a spectacular diving catch in the slips. Smith battled his way to his first test 50 since the Ashes from 176 balls, the second-slowest half-century of his career.

"It's obviously disappointing. I thought we navigated our way out of a tricky situation in that partnership with (Smith)," Marsh said.

"I guess there's a lot of history at this ground, the Boxing Day test, and a bloody big honors board that I was close to getting on, but it wasn't meant to be. Hopefully I get one more crack at it."

Captain Pat Cummins took his 10th five-wicket total in test matches earlier to help Australia earn a 54-run first-innings lead. But Pakistan came back from the innings break to take the wickets of Usman Khawaja for a duck and Marnus Labuschagne for five, leaving



Australia's David Warner gestures as he walks off after losing his wicket to Pakistan during the third day of their cricket test match in Melbourne, Thursday, Dec. 28, 2023. (AP)

ing Australia two wickets down for only six runs and an overall lead of 60 at lunch.

Cummins, who swung the Boxing Day test in Australia's favor late on day two, grabbed two wickets on Thursday morning to finish with figures of 5-48. Pakistan's tail showed far more resistance than expected to push its overnight score from 194-6 to be dismissed for 264 in reply to Australia's 318.

Australia's 54-run lead after the first innings was helped by Pakistan's 52 extras.

Fast bowler Aamir Jamal frustrated Australia's bowling attack Thursday, hitting an unbeaten 33 in just his second test. Afridi, who

averages 6.74 with the bat, also thrashed his way to his highest test score of 21.

Cummins had strong support from spinner Nathan Lyon (4-73). Pakistan is trying to avoid losing its 16th consecutive test in Australia.

Australia had resumed Wednesday on 187-3, following a rain-interrupted first day of play in which only 66 of the scheduled 90 overs were bowled.

Australia won the first test in Perth by 360 runs.

The third test in the three-match series is scheduled to begin Jan. 3 at the Sydney Cricket Ground, where Pakistan won its last test in Australia in 1995.

51 seconds apart after 628 nautical miles

LawConnect edges Comanche in 'Sydney-Hobart' yacht race

HOBART, Australia, Dec 28, (AP): LawConnect won line honors in the 78th edition of the Sydney to Hobart yacht race on Thursday, holding off defending champion Andoo Comanche by less than a minute in an exciting finish between the super maxis.

The pair of 100-foot yachts had duelled for much of the race and were well ahead of the rest of the fleet of 103 yachts that started the race on Tuesday in Sydney harbor.

LawConnect, which was runner-up in the last three editions of the race, finished in 1 day, 19 hours, 3 minutes, 58 seconds. Comanche's time was 1 day, 19 hours, 4 minutes, 49 seconds - a margin of just 51 seconds.

SAILING

It was the second-closest finish in Sydney to Hobart history after Condor of Bermuda beat Apollo by seven seconds in 1982.

Both yachts performed several late jibe tactics as they attempted to secure the lead.

"I can't believe that result. Honestly, it is a dream come true," LawConnect's skipper and owner Christian Beck said. "They took the lead pretty close to the line and we thought there was no way we could get it back."

"A wind gust came around. It was a complete surprise. There were guys who couldn't watch. It was very nerve wracking."

Comanche holds the race record of 1 day, 9 hours, 15 minutes, 24 seconds, set when it won the race in 2017.

Comanche and LawConnect were clear front-runners from just out of Sydney harbor. The pair began the trip down the New South Wales south coast at a fast clip but



Skallywag, left, and Comanche sail close during the start of the Sydney Hobart yacht race in Sydney, Tuesday, Dec. 26, 2023. The 630-nautical mile race has more than 100 yachts starting in the race to the island state of Tasmania. (AP)

fell off the race record pace. The finish was at Constitution Dock in Hobart, the capital of the island state of Tasmania.

The highest-profile retirement

of 11 race withdrawals was SHK Scallywag, one of four 100-foot super maxis which sustained a broken bow sprit and withdrew on the first evening of the race.

Mitoma a major doubt for Asian Cup

BRIGHTON, England, Dec 28, (AP): Japan forward Kaoru Mitoma is a major doubt for next month's Asian Cup after sustaining an ankle injury with his English Premier League club Brighton.

"Tomorrow we have more or less 10 injured players, maybe eight, but (the other) two players can't start the game," Brighton manager Roberto De Zerbi said on the eve of his team's home match with Tottenham on Thursday.

"Mitoma is one of them. We've lost Kaoru for around six weeks."

The 26-year-old Mitoma, a fast and skilful player, suffered his injury in Brighton's 1-1 draw against Crystal Palace last Thursday. The Asian Cup, to be played in Qatar, begins on Jan. 12 and four-time winner Japan has been drawn in Group D with Indonesia, Iraq and Vietnam.

Japan launches its campaign against Vietnam in Doha on Jan. 14.

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Winners with Ajpak officials.

Basketball team suffers 2nd straight loss vs Egypt

Kuwait face decisive clash with Morocco

CAIRO, Dec 28: Kuwait basketball team is gearing up for a crucial face-off against its Moroccan counterpart at 2:00 pm in the third round of the Arab Basketball Championship's second group competitions. Held in Cairo, Egypt, the championship runs until January 3.

In a must-win situation, Kuwait aims to secure victory and stay in contention and qualify for the second round. The team faced a setback in its second

BASKETBALL

match, suffering a 41-92 defeat against Egypt, following an initial loss to Tunisia at the tournament's commencement.

In the same round, Tunisia secured a 66-54 victory over Morocco. The championship follows a single-round league system, with the top teams from each group advancing to face each other in the quarter-finals.

With nine teams participating, including the withdrawal of the Jordanian team, the last team in the second group, consisting of five teams, will exit the tournament after the group stage. The Blue Group comprises teams from



Kuwaiti player is guarded by Egyptian during their match.

Morocco, the Emirates, Tunisia, and the host Egypt. The second group features Algeria, Mauritania, Somalia, and Libya.

Egypt took early control, showcasing excellence in both defensive and offensive aspects. The first quarter concluded with Egypt leading 22-6. Although the performance of Kuwait improved somewhat in the second quarter, they struggled to compete with

the formidable Egyptian team, entering halftime with a score of 52-17.

Egypt maintained its dominance in the third quarter, with Kuwait players attempting to keep up. However, Egypt ended the quarter with a commanding lead of 81-33. The final quarter underscored the Egyptian national team's dominance, concluding the match with an impressive 92-41 victory, securing a substantial 51-point margin.

Event attracts thousands of sports enthusiasts

AJPAK 'made' Travancore Badminton Tourney for Nedumudi Venu Ever Rolling Trophy exciting

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: Alappuzha Jilla Pravasi Association (AJPAK) conducted its Travancore Badminton Tournament Season-3 for Nedumudi Venu Memorial Ever Rolling Trophy in iSmash Badminton Academy Court, Al-Shabab Sports Club, Ahmadi on 14th and 15th December 2023. The tournament attracted thousands of sports enthusiasts for two days and remarked by many as a magnificent event.

Nedumudi Venu Memorial Ever Rolling Trophy was presented to the winners under the leadership of AJPAK's President Binoy Chandran.

In an exciting competition in the Lower Intermediate category, Jarais and Vineesh were the winners. Anish and Faisal bagged the second position in this category.

Shibu Mala and Joel won the Higher Intermediate category while Fino Mathew and Vishnuchandran

bagged the second position.

In the above 85+ category, Sanjeev and Noorohim were the winners in the 85+ category while Rajakumar and Salim bagged second position in this category.

Ajay and Akhil won the Advance category while Jolly and Tony bagged the second position.

BADMINTON

Manju Unnikrishnan and Saira Majeed won the women's 18+ category while Sneha Varghese and SajiniRajan bagged the second position.

Intra Alappuzha teams competed for the AJPAK Travancore trophy, and the winners were Anai Kumar and Varun Joshi. The combination of Chetan Sharma and Arvind secured the second position.

The trophies were presented to the winners by AJPAK Chair-

man Rajeev Naduvilemuri, General Secretary Cyril John Alex Champakulam, Treasurer Kurian Thomas Pynummottil, Sports Wing General Secretary Libu Pai-padan, Program Convener Manoj Parimanam, Vice President Abdul Rahman Panchiri, Advisory Board Member Mathew Chennithala, Joint Treasurer Suresh Chennithala, Rahul Dev, Vanithavedi Convener Sunita Ravi, Secretary Sam Anthony, Executive Members Sumesh Krishnan, Suresh Chennithala, Anai Kumar, Linoj Varghese, Sinju Francis, Fino Mathew Pallippad, John Thomas.

Women's Wing Chairperson Hanans Shan, Secretary SuchitraSaji, Secretary HariPathiyoor, Executive Member Shan, Jyothis and Tournament Coordinators Prakash Muttel, Jyothiraj, Thomas Kunnil, Chetan Sharma, AjoAdoor, Jiji led tournament to a grand success and ever memorable.

Durant has 18th career triple-double, Suns sink Rockets

76ers dominate Magic without Embiid

ORLANDO, Fla., Dec 28, (AP): Tyrese Maxey scored 23 points, Tobias Harris and De'Anthony Melton added 22 each and the Philadelphia 76ers beat the Orlando Magic 112-92 on Wednesday night while playing without reigning NBA MVP Joel Embiid.

Paul Reed had 15 points, 10 rebounds and three blocks for the 76ers while starting at center for Embiid, the league's leading scorer who missed a second straight game because of a sprained right ankle. Philadelphia has won nine of its past 11 games.

Franz Wagner scored 24 points for the Magic, who were held to a season low in scoring and have lost five of seven.

Suns 129, Rockets 113

In Houston, Kevin Durant had 27 points, 10 rebounds and a career-high 16 assists for his 18th career triple-double, helping Phoenix beat Houston to end a three-game losing streak.

Durant was 9 of 16 from the field and also had two steals and a block in Phoenix's first road victory since Nov. 26. The Suns improved to 15-15.

Eric Gordon matched Durant with 27 points in his first game back in Houston since being traded in February. He scored 17 points in the Suns' 43-point second quarter en route to a 73-55 halftime lead. Devin Booker added 20 points.

Alperen Sengun led Houston with 24 points.

Thunder 129, Knicks 120

In Oklahoma City, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and Jalen Williams each scored 36 points, and Williams hit a pair of 3-pointers in the fourth quarter in Oklahoma City's victory over New York.

Chet Holmgren added 22 points for Oklahoma City, which beat Western Conference-leading Minnesota on Tuesday night and was playing its third back-to-back this season. The Thunder are 20-9.

Julius Randle led New York with 25 points.

Cavaliers 113, Mavericks 110

In Dallas, Caris LeVert scored 29 points, hitting the go-ahead 3-pointer late in the fourth quarter, and Cleveland rallied from 20 points down in the first half to beat Dallas.

The Mavericks went five minutes without scoring in the fourth quarter

as a nine-point lead turned into a 111-105 deficit with 1:13 remaining.

Jarrett Allen had 24 points and 23 rebounds, one off his career high, to help the Cavs improve to 3-1 in the four games Donovan Mitchell has missed with an illness.

Luka Doncic scored 39 points for Dallas to get to at least 30 for the 14th time in 15 games.

Bucks 144, Nets 122

In New York, Giannis Antetokounmpo had 32 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists. Khristian Middleton added 27 points and 10 assists and Milwaukee beat a Brooklyn team that treated it like a preseason game.

BASKETBALL

The Nets rested three starters and barely played two others on the night after a victory in Detroit that extended the Pistons' losing streak to 27, an NBA single-season record. Rookie Jalen Wilson had 21 points and 10 rebounds for the Nets.

Raptors 132, Wizards 102

In Washington, OG Anunoby scored 26 points, Pascal Siakam had 22 points and 11 assists and Toronto eased past Washington.

Scottie Barnes had 20 points and 12 rebounds. The Raptors snapped a three-game slide and five-game road losing streak while beginning a stretch of nine of 10 on the road.

Washington has lost three straight to fall to 5-25 - the franchise's second-worst 30-game start.



New York Knicks forward Julius Randle (30) shoots against Oklahoma City Thunder forward Chet Holmgren (7) and in front of Kenrich Williams, right, during the first half of an NBA basketball game, in Oklahoma City. (AP)

IDAK delivers a perfect smile with international cricket victory

IDAK wins the maiden Gulf Friendship Cup

ABU DHABI, Dec 28: In a stunning display of talent and teamwork, IDAK's cricket team emerged champion in the first ever Gulf Friendship Cup (GFC), organized and hosted by the Association of Kerala Medical & Dental Graduates (AKMG), at the Mohan Singh Oval Cricket Stadium, Abu Dhabi on 8th December, 2023. Four teams participated in this tournament - AKMG GFC from UAE, IDAK from Kuwait, Indian Doctors Club (IDC) Marauders from Qatar and GB Kings from UK.

IDAK's cricket team demonstrated unparalleled commitment and expertise throughout the tournament. Combining precision and agility, this team of dentists batted, bowled, and fielded their way to victory, surprising all the cricket enthusiasts who witnessed the event.

In the Semi-final match IDAK played against IDC-Marauders. IDAK batted first and scored 124 for the loss of 1 wicket in the scheduled 12 overs. Dr Mohammed Hussain was the top scorer of the match with 56 runs off 37 balls (strike rate: 151). Mr Nithin Samuel Varughese score 41 runs off 19 deliveries (strike rate: 215). IDAK managed to win the match by 45 runs as IDC managed to score only 79 runs for the loss of 7 wicket at the end of their innings. Mr Nithin was declared the 'Best Bowler', and Dr Mohammed Hussain was declared the 'Best Batsman' and the 'Player of the Match'.

CRICKET

In the finals, IDAK faced the host team - AKMG GFC UAE. IDAK batted first and scored 153 runs for the loss of 2 wickets in the scheduled 15 overs. Team AKMG exhibited a spirited performance but could manage to score only 149 for the loss of 5 wickets. Dr Mohammed Hussain scored his 2nd half-century in the tournament and remained unbeaten at 60 runs from 43 balls. He also bagged two wickets earning him the title of the 'Best Bowler', the 'Best Batsman' and also the 'Player of the Match'.

Captain Jitendra Ariga, led the team with strategic finesse, emphasizing the importance of teamwork and more importantly, enjoying the moment. IDAK cricket team's efforts brought great pride to the President of IDAK - Dr Thomas Thomas, who was the driving force behind IDAK's decision to participate in this tournament. Fellow IDAKians flooded social media with congratulatory messages, commending the team for their exceptional performance. The full team were felicitated in a grand manner at Holiday Inn & Suites on 15th December 2023, during the Annual General Body meeting of IDAK.



Gulf Friendship Cup champions IDAK.

USC beats Louisville 42-28

Miller Moss throws Holiday Bowl-record 6 TD passes

SAN DIEGO, Dec 28, (AP): With Caleb Williams watching from the sideline, Miller Moss threw a Holiday Bowl-record six touchdown passes in his first college start and Southern California ended a frustrating season by beating No. 16 Louisville 42-28 on Wednesday night.

Moss took full advantage of the opportunity he was given when Williams opted out. Williams, the 2022 Heisman Trophy winner and presumptive first overall pick in the NFL draft, watched from the sideline wearing a white T-shirt with his No. 13 jersey hanging around his neck.

Moss was 23 of 33 for 372 yards, with one interception. He broke the Holiday Bowl record of four touchdown passes held by four players, including Jim McMahon in BYU's miracle 46-45 comeback victory over SMU in 1980. The record came late in the third quarter when Moss lobbed a 12-yard pass to a leaping Ja'Kobi Lane in the back of the end zone. Lane's second TD catch of the night gave USC (8-5) a 35-21 lead.

Isaac Guerendo ran 23 times for 161 yards and three touchdowns for Louisville (10-4).

Virginia Tech 41, Tulane 20

In Annapolis, Kyron Drones ran for 176 yards and a touchdown and threw for two scores and Virginia Tech withstood a second-half downpour to beat Tulane in the Military Bowl. Drones fumbled three times in the slippery conditions, but

the Hokies (7-6) only lost one of them. The sophomore quarterback passed for only 91 yards, but he and Bhayshul Tuten were tough to stop on the ground.

Tuten finished with 136 yards and two touchdowns on 18 carries to help Virginia Tech snap a four-game losing streak in bowls.

FOOTBALL

Tulane (11-3) was without star quarterback Michael Pratt. Both Kai Horton and Justin Ibieta played in his place, but Ibieta was carted off in the second quarter with an apparent leg injury. Makhi Hughes rushed for 88 yards.

Duke's Mayo Bowl

West Virginia 30, North Carolina 10

In Charlotte, Garrett Greene threw for 204 yards and a touchdown, Beanie Bishop Jr. returned a punt 78 yards for a score and West Virginia closed a season in which it exceeded expectations with a victory over North Carolina in the Duke's Mayo Bowl.

Traylon Ray had a 75-yard touchdown reception on the first play from scrimmage for the Mountaineers, who won their final three games to finish 9-4 after being picked to finish last in the Big 12. Selected the game MVP, Greene completed 11 of 22 passes.

North Carolina (8-5) played without star quarterback Drake Maye and top wide receiver Tez Walker, who opted out of the game to begin preparing for the NFL draft. Conner Harrell made his first college start, completing 18 of 27 passes for 199 yards and a touchdown.



Everton's James Tarkowski (center left) goes up for the ball during the English Premier League soccer match between Everton and Manchester City at Goodison Park stadium in Liverpool, England. (AP)

Sports

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Kuwaiti golf champions with other winners on the podium.

KUNA photo

Kuwait golf team secures gold and silver at Gulf Championship in Oman

MUSCAT, Dec 28: The Kuwaiti golf team achieved notable success in the Gulf Championship for age groups and girls, hosted by the Sultanate of Oman, securing a gold medal and a silver medal in the competition held over three days at the Ghala Golf Club in Muscat.

Mazen Al-Ansari, Secretary General of the Kuwait Golf Club and leader of

GOLF

the Kuwaiti delegation, announced that Salem Al-Obakal clinched first place and the gold medal in the under-16 individual category. Additionally, in the team category, players Badr Al-Ansari

and Salem Al-Abakal secured second place, earning the team a silver medal for the under-16 age group.

This victory marks Al-Abakal's third consecutive first-place win in the Gulf Championship, highlighting the player's consistent excellence. Al-Ansari emphasized the significance of this tournament as a platform that unites Gulf Cooperation Council countries,

aiming to elevate the sport of golf and its participants to regional and international levels.

Participation in such championships, according to Al-Ansari, plays a crucial role in cultivating a generation of skilled players and providing them with invaluable skills and experiences. This, in turn, prepares them to represent Kuwait with dignity and honor in

various sporting events on both regional and international stages.

The Gulf Championship was organized by the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth in the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Omani Golf Federation. The event featured the active participation of five Gulf countries: the Sultanate of Oman, Kuwait, the Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar.

Man City rally for win at Everton

Rare home victory for Chelsea

LONDON, Dec 28, (AP): Trailing 1-0 to Everton at halftime, Manchester City didn't much look like the newly crowned Club World Cup champions despite the new golden FIFA badge on the front of the players' shirts.

But Pep Guardiola had a simple message to his players at the break. "The manager (told us) at halftime to just keep believing, we haven't got this badge for no reason," City midfielder Phil Foden said. "In the second half, yeah, wow, I think we blew them away with the way we played."

Foden started the comeback by equalizing in the 53rd minute, before Julian Alvarez's penalty and a late goal by Bernardo Silva secured a 3-1 win at Everton to put the defending champions back into the Premier League's top four.

The trip to Saudi Arabia for the Club World Cup was perhaps a bit of a distraction and allowed rivals Liverpool and Arsenal to widen the gap at the top. But City now can now fully refocus on the task of winning an unprecedented fourth straight Premier League title, and this was a vital first step in showing that it can't be counted out despite a recent poor run of form.

Even with Erling Haaland still out with a foot injury, City showed it has more than enough attacking threat to turn things around against a team that had beaten Newcastle and Chelsea in its last two league home games. But it came as a cost as center back John Stones had to go off with an ankle injury before halftime.

"It doesn't look good," Guardiola said about the injury, "but we will see." League victories at Stamford Bridge have been hard to come by for Chelsea in 2023. But their last home game

of the year ended in a 2-1 win over Crystal Palace after substitute Noni Madueke converted a late penalty for the hosts.

It was just Chelsea's sixth home league win of the calendar year, and Mauricio Pochettino's team once again struggled to turn possession into goals for much of the game. With Chelsea fielding the club's youngest ever starting lineup for a Premier League game - thanks to a slew of injuries and suspensions - the Blues took the lead through Mykhailo Mudryk in the 13th minute. But the hosts missed several chances to double their advantage before Michael Olise equalized just before the break.

Just as it looked like Chelsea's inefficiency up front would cost it again,

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Madueke was tripped by Eberechi Eze inside the area and stepped up to the spot himself to send goalkeeper Dean Henderson the wrong way in the 89th minute.

That lifted Chelsea into 10th place, which is still far from where the club had expected to be at this stage when they hired Pochettino at the end of last season.

Brentford might need to start worrying about a relegation scrap.

Thomas Frank's team fell to a sixth loss in seven games after making a couple of defensive howlers in a 4-1 home defeat against Wolverhampton.

South Korea forward Hwang Hee-chan scored twice as Wolves took full advantage of Brentford's mistakes, including one that came straight after the kickoff following the visitors' opening goal. Nathan Collins' back pass to goalkeeper Mark Flekken was under-hit, allowing Hwang to round him and tap into an empty net barely 10 seconds after the restart.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with the Special Olympics delegation.

KUNA photo

Kuwait Special Olympics 2023: A Year of Achievements and Resilience

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: In 2023, Kuwait's Special Olympics experienced a dynamic year filled with diverse activities and competitions, marking a resurgence after the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The year kicked off with athletic competitions for intellectually challenged athletes, introducing the GMS system for the first time, a globally adopted method for managing and categorizing athletes and results.

In March, the third local Bocce Championship unfolded at Kazma Sporting Club, featuring 100 competitors from 21 bodies. A significant highlight was the Spe-

cial Olympics World Summer Games hosted in Berlin last June, attracting participation from 190 countries and 7,000 athletes. The Kuwaiti team excelled with seven gold medals, 10 silver, and four bronze, receiving recognition

SPECIAL OLYMPICS

from His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In efforts to enhance the integration of people with disabilities, a Sports Health Day in collaboration with the American Army was

organized. The year concluded with the inaugural walking and running race for individuals with intellectual disabilities on December 3, International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Coordinated with Al-Tomouh Club, the race saw the participation of around 130 individuals.

Rehab Buresli, Chief of the Special Olympics, expressed joy and pride in the developments in the field, commending the efforts in organizing various activities. She also lauded Al-Tomouh Club's contributions and affirmed the commitment to working diligently and elevating achievements to the next level.



South Africa's batsman Marco Jansen plays a stroke shot during the third day of the Test cricket match between South Africa and India, at Centurion Park, in Centurion, on the outskirts of Pretoria, South Africa. (AP)

India crash to innings defeat in first Test against South Africa

CENTURION, South Africa, Dec 28, (AP): Debutant left-arm pacer Nandre Burger took 4-33 as India crashed to a stunning innings' defeat to South Africa on day three of the first test on Thursday.

Burger's burst combined with two wickets each for Kagiso Rabada and Marco Jansen saw India bowled out for a paltry 131 runs in its second innings. That meant South Africa won the first test by an innings and 32 runs, taking a 1-0 lead in the two-match series.

Burger finished with a match haul of 7-83 on his test debut, while Rabada finished with 7-91 across both innings. The latter had picked 5-59 in the first innings.

The Proteas earlier finished the first innings on 408, thanks largely to a marathon 185-run knock from Dean Elgar. India had been bowled out for 245 in its first innings.

Trailing by 163 runs, India's second innings got off to the worst possible start and never recovered. Opener Yashaswi Jaiswal had been dropped at slip off the very first ball, but he didn't survive long. He was caught behind off a rising delivery by Burger for five runs off 18 balls.

Skipper Rohit Sharma was bowled for an eight-ball duck when Rabada broke through his defence in the third over.

Subman Gill played some attractive shots but was bowled playing

across the line against Burger, out for 26 off 37 balls.

Gill had added 39 runs with Kohli for the third wicket. Even so, it wasn't a comfortable partnership and India went to tea at 62-3.

CRICKET

The procession of wickets continued straight after play resumed as Jansen bowled Shreyas Iyer for six, again playing across the line.

Burger then made quick work of the lower order. First innings' centurion Lokesh Rahul was caught at second slip. Ravichandran Ashwin hung

out his bat on the first ball he faced - caught at gully for a golden duck.

Kohli played some attractive strokes towards the end, and reached 50 off 61 balls. Overall he hit 12 fours and a six, but was unable to complete his century, out caught off Jansen.

India was bowled out in just 34.1 overs across less than two sessions in a hapless batting display.

This was after South Africa added only 16 runs to its first innings post lunch. Skipper Temba Bavuma did not bat owing to his hamstring injury. Jansen was stranded at 84 not out with Jasprit Bumrah wrapping up the tail with two quick wickets. The pacer finished with 4-69 in an otherwise uninspiring Indian bowling display.

Al-Qadsia 'aim' to maintain pressure on league leaders

By Hassan Musa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: Today marks the commencement of the twelfth round of the Zain Premier League with two exciting matches. The first clash at Mohammed Al-Hamad Stadium features Al-Qadsia

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facing off against Al-Fahaheel at 4:10 pm, followed by the second match between Al-Arabi and Khaitan at Ali Sabah Al-Salem Stadium at 6:50 pm.

The action continues tomorrow with two matches. Al-Shabab takes on Al-Nasr at Sabah Al-Salem Stadium at 4:10 pm. In the first match, and the second match sees Al-Salmiya and Al-Kuwait meeting at Thamer Stadium at 6:50 p.m.

The round concludes on Sunday with a lone match at Ali Sabah

Al-Salem Stadium at 5:30 p.m., where Al-Jahra faces off against Kazma.

Al-Kuwait leads Al-Arabi on goal difference with 26 points. Al-Qadsia in the third position with 25 points, while Al-Nasr holds the fourth spot with 17 points. The rest of the standings include Al-Salmiya in fifth with 15 points, Kazma with 13 points, Al-Fahaheel with 12, Al-Shabab with 11, and Khaitan with 6 points. Al-Jahra sits in tenth and last place with only two points.

In the first match, Al-Qadsia aims to maintain pressure on the top two teams and assert its dominance over Al-Fahaheel, having previously defeated them 3-0 in the first division. The team is currently guided by Serbian assistant coaches Degan Arsov and Saleh Al-Sheikh due to the health issues of head coach Muhammad Ibrahim.

The second match features Al-Arabi, determined to continue its winning streak despite a tough battle in the last round against Al-Shabab, securing victory with a lone goal in stoppage time.