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Amir's state visit to Qatar marks new chapter in historic ties

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah will head, Tuesday, an official delegation in a state visit to Qatar.

Meanwhile, Kuwaiti Ambassador to Qatar, Khaled Al-Mutairi said on Tuesday that the visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Qatar would further strengthen the historical and fraternal ties between the two nations.

Al-Mutairi told KUNA that Kuwait and Qatar share a special bond that is deeply rooted in a myriad of fields, which demonstrated the transcendent relationship the two nations and their people share.

He expressed his abundant well-wishes regards to this visit, hoping the two countries and their people would flourish under wise leadership.

Separately, the Ambassador of the State of Qatar in Kuwait, Ali Al-Mahmoud, said on Monday that the visit of the Amir His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Qatar strengthens historical relations between the two countries.

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Opinion

Abolish slavery 'Kafala' system

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

IT seems as if Kuwait suffers from schizophrenia. On one hand, it has a long record filled with humanitarian and charitable works throughout the world, and on the other, visa-traders have been committing acts that harm the file of expatriates, which leads to Kuwait being placed on the blacklist of the human rights societies and international organizations.

This is because there are some who are working to accumulate their wealth from the sweat and strength of expatriates whom they bring from abroad after taking KD 2,500 to KD 3,000 from them for the work visa, and then they throw them out on the street.

Over the past years, the demand to abolish the "Kafala" (sponsorship) system has been the most important point discussed in international forums.

However, it is unfortunate that the Kuwaiti authorities have not been able to solve the problem due to pressure from influential people, who could either be some parliamentarians who were proven to trade in residency permits, or influential company owners who obtained permits to bring in a huge number of migrant workers. In fact, some of these company owners have 5,000 to 10,000 expatriates registered under fake projects.

There are also ministerial decisions that hinder in benefiting from this manpower. This is because some officials benefit from the visa trade by placing emphasis on deporting them, and then bringing in others in exchange for commissions paid to them by visa-traders. We thus have 133,000 who have been subject to the violation of both labor and residency laws as of the end of last year.

The irony is that, despite all this, the daily wage of a worker increased from KD 5 to KD 15, and that of a craftsman to KD 30, in fields in which citizens and Gulf Arabs do not work, especially construction. Irrespective of the presence of such a large number of marginal manpower as a result of the violation of the labor law, the scarcity of labor has increased. Such a situation does not exist in any country other than Kuwait.

The Arabian Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman resolved the crisis by abolishing the Kafala system and adopting more humane laws, thereby ending the suffering that had been an international menace for decades.

On the other hand, Kuwait still insists on the inhumane Kafala system, because there are profiteers from the so-called deep state who cling to this internationally forbidden trade.

Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, and Oman have enacted a law that allows the state to sponsor workers who pay fees directly to it instead of a human trafficker, and they then work in various fields. Qatar has abolished the requirement imposed on migrant workers to obtain permission from their employer.

Our government can also work on abolishing this inhumane system. It can sponsor the migrant workers, including the violators, after they pay the fees directly to the state or in installments, and thus allow them to work.

This will undoubtedly reduce the wages of the workforce as well as reduce the security burden on the state, and also cleanse the Kuwait file in international reports.

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AMIR GRACES 31st CADET BATCH GRADUATION



Amiri Diwan photo
His Highness the Amir is being presented a commemorative token during the event.



Cadets during the graduation ceremony.



KUNA photos
Graduates rejoice alongside their families in the post-ceremony celebrations.

Graduates take oath

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, patronized and attended on Monday the graduation of the 31st batch of cadets at Saad Al-Abdullah Academy of Security Sciences.

His Highness the Amir, upon arrival at the celebration's venue, was greeted by Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yusuf Saud Al-Sabah, Acting Interior Undersecretary Lieutenant General Sheikh Salem Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and the ministry's top officials.

The ceremony was attended by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, senior State officials and the graduates' families and citizens.

The ceremony started with tunes of the National Anthem, Quranic verses, then the academy acting commander, Brigadier General Mohammad Al-Roumi addressed the crowd with a speech.

He stated that the academy's capabilities aims on qualifying

the cadet officers in order to keep pace with the rapid development in scientific, training and technical progress and modernization.

Al-Roumi extended his deepest appreciation to his Highness the Amir and Kuwait's leadership, and congratulated the families of the graduates on this honorable ceremony.

Then the ceremony of handing over the academy flag began from the 31st batch to the 47th batch of officer cadets, followed by the final results for the graduates delivered by the assistant commander of the academy, Brigadier General Ali Al-Wuhaib.

Names of the graduates were declared and His Highness the Amir handed over the trophies to the excellent graduated officers and high honor students at the academy.

This was followed by the graduates entering the parade ground to take the oath, delivered by the Commander of the Education and Examinations Battalion, Brigadier General Ahmed Al-Radhan.

His Highness the Amir was awarded a memento on the occasion before he departed the ceremony venue.

'No changes to Election Law'

Newly turned 21-year-olds added to Kuwait voter lists

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh, Raed Yousef and Fares Al-Abdan
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: Citizens, who have turned 21 years old, will be added to the lists of eligible voters in preparation for the 2024 parliamentary elections, say reliable sources.

Sources disclosed that the lists will include the voters' names and their home addresses as per the civil identification cards. Sources also confirmed that the voters lists are the same as the 2023 elections plus the citizens who reached 21 years old.

Meanwhile, the government has finally broken its silence over the rumor spread on social media platforms that the rights to vote and run for elections will be limited to those holding citizenship as per Article One of the Nationality Law.

Head of the Local Affairs Secretary in the Information Ministry

Amer Al-Ajmi, who spoke on behalf of the government, vehemently denied the rumor.

In a press statement, Al-Ajmi pointed out that "in the last few days, news has spread about the alleged amendment of the Election Law; depriving a segment of citizens of the right to vote and contest the elections as per the Nationality Law. This rumor is baseless, it undermines national unity, and divides the ranks."

In another development, a source from the government confirmed the issuance of a decree on the resumption of the appointment, promotion, transfer and secondment of employees in all State agencies.

On Dec 5, 2023, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad, who was the Crown Prince then, issued a decision to "suspend the appointment, promotion, transfer and secondment of employees in all State agencies for a period of three months, subject for renewal in the interest of the public."



Amiri Diwan photo
His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah hands one of the outstanding graduates his diploma.

Airfare costs soar as demand peaks

Kuwait airport braces for holiday rush

By Muhammad Al-Musleh

Al Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: Agencies at Kuwait International Airport are working tirelessly to accommodate the surge in passenger traffic expected during the upcoming national holidays, implementing a series

of measures to ensure smooth operations.

According to airport sources, departures are expected to exceed 130,000 passengers from the 22nd to the 27th of this month, with Dubai, Istanbul, Jeddah, Cairo, and Doha being the most popular destinations.

However, the increased demand for travel tickets, evident through electronic reservation systems and travel offices, has led to a significant rise in prices, up to 100% for certain destinations.



Photo by Mahmoud Jadedd
Travelers stand in anticipation at the check-in counter, ready for their upcoming adventure.

Tourism experts attribute this spike in ticket prices to the usual supply and demand dynamics, exacerbated by the approaching holidays. Kamal Kabsha noted that with improving global conditions, travel demand has been steadily rising annually, particularly ahead of the Ramadan period. Consequently, ticket prices for sought-after destinations like Cairo and Jeddah have soared by over 100%.

Ayman Zandah, General Manager of Salhia World Tourism and Travel Company, observed a strong demand for distant destinations such as London, Rome,

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Day by Day

SOME lament that people have changed, citing drastic shifts in societal conditions, and lamenting a pervasive atmosphere of fear.

Conversely, others bemoan the loss of honesty and trust, asserting that individuals have become inherently distrustful and self-serving. Pessimists argue that goodwill among peers has waned, replaced by a pervasive sense of apprehension and isolation.

This narrative reflects a broader perception of societal decay, with morals purportedly eroding and fear becoming a dominant force. However, such viewpoints may stem from apprehension towards confronting life's uncertainties and adapting to evolving circumstances.

... Yet tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar

Newswatch

KUWAIT CITY: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Monday a cable of condolences to King Abdullah II of Jordan.

In the cable, His Highness the Amir expressed his deepest and sincere condolences on the death of the father of Princess Rajwa Al-Hussein, Khaled bin Musaed Al-Saif, wishing the King and his family solace.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also sent on Monday a cable of condolences to Jordanian Crown Prince Al-Hussein bin Abdullah.

Kuwait's Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem sent a cable of condolences to King Abdullah II of Jordan.

The Prime Minister expressed his deepest condolences and solace over the death of the father of Princess Rajwa Al-Hussein, Khaled bin Musaed Al-Saif. (KUNA)

KUWAIT CITY: The State of Kuwait, namely the Ministry of Education, has been granted a seat in the permanent bureau of the UNESCO framework conference for education, culture and arts.

The mandate to occupy the seat lasts for four years and it is among the memberships granted to Arab states.

The conference, held in Abu Dhabi on February 13-15, grouped ministers of education, teaching and culture from several states. (KUNA)

Prayer Timings

Fajr 05:05 Asr 15:15
 Sunrise .. 06:24 Maghrib .. 17:40
 Zohr 12:02 Isha 18:57

Local

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

Weather

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:
By Day: Warm with light variable wind to light to moderate northwesterly wind, with speeds of 06-26 km/h.

By Night: Rather cold to cold with light to moderate northwest-

erly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of 08-26 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	23	16

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

Worshippers will be provided with all means: Eng Al-Otaibi

Mosques Sector declares readiness for Ramadan knocking on door

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The Assistant Undersecretary for the Mosques Affairs at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Eng. Bader Turki Al-Otaibi revealed the completion of the sector's preparations to welcome Ramadan this year, and harness all capabilities, plans and programs for the holy month.

In a press statement, Eng. Al-Otaibi said, "We have prepared a package of activities, programs, advocacy events, and internal and external hosting so that mosques will be an attractive factor for worshippers where they will be provided with all means. This comes in line with the sector's annual tradition and is aimed to maintain the trust of worshippers that it gained in previous years, renew activities, sharpen motivation to achieve the desired goals, and contribute to the mosques' delivery of their preaching mission."

The mosques sector performs its mission through nine departments that provide administrative and cultural services and maintain mosques."

Eng. Al-Otaibi explained that periodic meetings are being held to monitor the completion of the work. This year will witness a group of works, events and preparations. The work began by preparing the mosques, completing the maintenance work, providing the necessary periodic maintenance for them, cleaning them, and preparing the women's prayer rooms and outdoor courtyards, as well as

ensuring the presence of regular maintenance teams around the clock, especially since the mosques are a torch of activity during this period of the year.

He urged contractors to quickly complete the major construction and maintenance works, prepare civil and electrical works, audio, air conditioning, and elevators, and implement contractual conditions.

Eng. Al-Otaibi said, "The mosques were also equipped with cleaning work, ensuring the cleanliness of all mosque facilities, and providing large quantities of cleaning materials. Dawa programs and cultural activities have been approved in mosques, such as fatwa councils, public lectures, scientific courses, Sharia education lessons, educational lessons, and thoughts of faith."

The episodes of the fifth electronic Ramadan Center for the current world, titled "In the House of Prophecy", were recorded for a group of distinguished sheikhs, with 30 episodes to be broadcasted throughout the days of Ramadan via the ministry's various websites, the Kuwait Mosques application, and social media.

The cultural plans and Ramadan programs for the administrations of the six mosques and the activities of Ramadan centers and retreats have been completed, in addition to the approval of hosts for preachers, lecturers and readers from outside the State of Kuwait.

These activities, which will be announced soon, come in fulfillment of the ministry's mission to consolidate moderation and Islamic morals, spread religious and cultural awareness, care for the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet, care for mosques, and strengthen national unity."



Eng. Al-Otaibi



Traditional Arabic tea is prepared on coal at a campsite in the Kuwaiti desert after a rich meal of lamb and rice, mixed with raisins and pine seeds. The tea is beneficial for digestion.

'4 and half hours duty must'

Flexible timings ... two hours window to start work

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The Civil Service Commission (CSC) has announced that the number of official working hours in the public sector during the holy month of Ramadan will be four hours and a half; affirming the flexible working hours mechanism remains in effect such that the window for starting work during Ramadan will be from 8:30 am to 10:30 am, report Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement, the CSC explained the employees can choose the time to start work from 8:30 am to 10:30 am; provided they complete four and a half hours, without prejudice to the 15 minutes grace period specified for all employee at the beginning of the working day and the additional 15 minutes for females at the end of the working day.

Implement

The CSC pointed out that to implement the flexible working hours system, the automated systems in the government entities should allow multiple verification of arrival and departure times; as well as the calculation of the number of official working hours and the grace period individually for each employee. It clarified that this system does not apply to the employees subject to the reduced working hours mechanism based on the legally prescribed reasons, and those subject to the 'partial absence without pay' mechanism in terms of determining the arrival and departure times.

The CSC said the calculation of the grace period, tardiness and hours for calling in sick at the beginning of the work day is included in this decision, indicating the grace period is calculated after 10:30 am -- the last start of work timing in the flexible working hours system.

It added that a government entity may oblige its employees to follow one work period or let them choose from the specified timings. It also stressed that the decision does not affect the shifting or guard systems in force and does not entail the application of the provisions of this law on the disbursement of any additional compensation, allowances, incentives or bonuses.

The CSC stipulated the flexible Ramadan timings as follows:

- from 8:30 am to 1:00 pm
- from 9:00 am to 1:30 pm
- from 9:30 am to 2:00 pm
- from 10:00 am to 2:30 pm
- from 10:30 am to 3:00 pm

'Co-ops not buying local produce to face penalty'

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The Cooperatives Sector in the Ministry of Social Affairs has toughened penalties for the boards of directors of cooperative societies that are not committed to the implementation the mechanism for the direct purchase of local products at a rate of not less than 75 percent of their actual needs, reports Al-Jarida daily quoting a reliable source.

The source disclosed that the committee formed as per the recent administrative decision on supporting the promotion of local agricultural produce in cooperatives will work for a period of four months; during which it will conduct field visits to the approved sales outlets to attend auctions, follow up and tally the participating cooperatives and their daily purchase rates, uncover violations, and then take the necessary legal measures.

The source said: "The committee will submit periodic reports about cooperatives that are not committed to implementing Ministerial Resolution number 115/T of 2022 on supporting the promotion of local agricultural products in cooperatives. Article 13 of this resolution stipulates penalties for erring cooperatives, starting with a warning to address the violation, up to the issuance of a 'judicial seizure' report that will lead to the suspension of the bank credit for a certain period. Other penalties include non-submission of the erring cooperative's requests to the concerned committees in the ministry, halting its transactions in governmental and private agencies, and suspending its employment file in coordination with the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM)."

The source added that the committee will also tally the daily purchases of vegetables in each cooperative, compare them to the actual needs, and monitor the quantities of local products available in the market to ensure the daily needs of cooperatives are covered.



The new KUNA logo depicts Kuwait map.

KUNA photo

KUNA launches its new logo

Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) launched on Monday its new logo, depicting the State of Kuwait's map, at a celebratory ceremony marking the national days, attended by a large number of the staff and led by the Director General Dr. Fatma Al-Salem. The designer, Mohammad Sharaf, said in a statement at the ceremony that the tag symbolized the news agency's embrace of state-of-art technology.

The new logo mirrors KUNA's modernity and history, while the old one carries the news agency's abbreviated

name and shape of the planet, The Earth, he said, noting the new emblem remains colored in blue.

Mariam Al-Zanki, the managing editor in the Arab news department and supervisor of "KUNA Smart Oasis," affirmed in her speech KUNA's keenness on staying abreast of the huge digital transformation at the global level and employing the artificial intelligence, alluding to the recently inaugurated AI section.

She revealed that KUNA planned launch of an AI-dependent magazine. (KUNA)



The Minister of Foreign Affairs in talks with the Undersecretary-General of the United Nations and the Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

KUNA photo

FM receives ESCWA official

Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya received Monday Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Dr. Rola Dashed, at the ministry headquarter.

The meeting focused on enhanc-

ing the close cooperation between the State of Kuwait and ESCWA at national, regional, and international levels. Discussions delved into the economic, social and environmental aspects of development, exploring opportunities for joint action within this framework. (KUNA)

Moroccan poets, critics remember Kuwaiti literary figure 'Al-Babtain'

FEZ, Morocco, Feb 19, (KUNA): Moroccan poets and critics remembered Kuwaiti literary figure Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, and his virtues in promoting poetry and culture in the Arab world, specifically in Morocco as he supported literature and culture.

This came in seminar organized by the Moroccan Association for Arab Academic Studies and the Research Group on Moroccan-Kuwaiti Cultural Communication in cooperation with Faculty of Letters and Humanities as well as Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdullah University.

Moroccan poet and critic Abdullah Al-Alawi said in a statement to KUNA that cultural movement in Kuwait has evolved significantly, with rich history, as the poet and critic Abdulaziz Al-Babtain was one of the prominent figures in this movement.

As he recalled Al-Babtain's support for training courses in language and rhetoric at Fez, Meknes and Rabat Universities during 2005-2016.

Al-Alwai also commended the Kuwaiti figure's organization of the Abi Al-Qasim Al-Shabbi course in Fez in 1994 and the Abi Tamam course in Marrakech in 2014, furthermore, his support and dissemination of publications and libraries that "had strong impact on the Moroccan cultural movement".

On his part, Moroccan poet Ahmad Mafdy said that Al-Babtain was prominent figure in intellectual and cultural work in the Arab world.

He revealed that the Kuwaiti figure helped to recognize what was obscured in the Arab nation, a step assisting in the gathering of the scattered Arab literary culture, unify it and make it capable of influencing minds and souls of the writers, poets and



Abdulaziz Al-Babtain

critics in the Arab world.

Nabeela Al-Hamani, a Moroccan poet said on her part, Al-Babtain's impact on literature was unforgettable through his institution and would last for decades for all the future generations.

Al-Babtain dedicated his money, thoughts, and efforts to the serve Arab culture and cognitive development to build civilizations that culture and knowledge the main foundation, as he established libraries, including Al-Babtain Library for Arabic Poetry in Kuwait and Al-Babtain Library at Al-Quds University, she added.

He founded schools and universities in many countries, established Abdulaziz Al-Babtain Scholarship since 1974, Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain's Poetic Creativity Award, as well as translation centers, and other entities.

Other Voices

The next health disaster?

By **Ahmad alsarraf**

Recently, I have noticed good development in the services provided by health services, through two hospitals. I also noticed a remarkable development in the work of the "Medical Warehouse Management" in Subhan.

Circumstances prompted me to repeatedly visit Al-Amiri Hospital and the cancer treatment hospital complex, in the Al-Sabah Medical District, and the development of work there caught my attention in a positive way worthy of praise.

As for the Subhan Medical Warehouses, their work has recently become smoother, more streamlined, and even more transparent than it was thirty years ago. Thank you for the efforts of those in charge of the three authorities, and for the efforts of the Minister of Health, with our hopes for the continued development of work in the two hospitals, and in the warehouse system, which is sensitive and important.

A few days ago, after an unjustified wait that lasted for years, the Ministry of Interior opened the door to those wishing to visit the country, while accepting applications for family members.

One of the reasons for preventing the two groups from entering the country, other than flimsy security reasons, was that their entry would put pressure on medical services, especially for those with incurable diseases.

The response to this was that it is possible to require that the visitor obtain an insurance policy that will cover the expenses of his treatment in Kuwait, and this is the practice in many countries.

I thought that this was what happened recently, after the Ministry of Interior opened the door to visits to almost everyone, but it later became clear that the situation was not the case, as nothing had changed from what it was before, and a visitor suffering from an incurable or serious illness can still enter the cancer hospital.

For example, and receiving care, treatment and medicine, the hospital administration cannot deny him treatment, for many reasons that will take a long time to explain. The reason for this ease is due to the fact that circumventing the regulations, in these cases, is not difficult, and thousands have already resorted to the same path.

All a visitor wishing to receive treatment has to do is call emergency services and request an ambulance, in order to be transferred to the accident department at the nearest hospital, from where he will most likely be admitted to one of the rooms to receive treatment and medication!

There are currently many patients in government hospitals, who came to the country on visit visa, and are receiving treatment in government hospitals, including cancer, and their numbers are increasing, especially with the permission to visit and join family!

Therefore, it is necessary for the Ministry of Health to continue providing treatment to every resident or visitor, as this is the state's humanitarian duty.

However, the Ministry of Interior must not allow entry to a visitor who does not have a life insurance policy that covers, at a minimum, the cost of treating incurable diseases. If he is in the country, and it turns out that he does not have an insurance policy, for some reason, the costs of his treatment will be borne by the entities that hosted him, other than the official authorities and five-star hotels, for example.

□ □ □

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diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Justification for legal curbs in the Election Commission

"A GROUP of Kuwaiti women filed an appeal against Article 16 of the draft government law regarding the establishment of the General Elections Commission, which requires women to adhere to the rules and provisions approved in Islamic Sharia in order to exercise their right to contest elections and to cast their ballots," columnist Iqbal Al-Ahmad wrote for Al-Qabas daily.

"This group of female lawyers and activists considered the second paragraph of this article (as a group of public benefit associations had previously noted), after approving the establishment of the commission, to be a blatant violation of the constitution,



Iqbal Al-Ahmad

calling for a review of the draft law and the abolition of the aforementioned article.

"A clear and direct question, with no confusion or circumvention: What is the justification for the legal controls in the conditions of work in the Election Commission? Has non-compliance with Sharia controls, according to the 'intentions' of some legislators, become an obstacle and a barrier to some of the rights of Kuwaiti women, similar to men, and to a group of women that 'these' considered outside the scope of Islamic Sharia, and therefore it is permissible for them to acknowledge or deny their rights, contrary to what the Constitution stipulates?"

"This type of guardianship, which some legislators adopted, has become an unjustified obstacle to the principle of freedoms and rights for a group of Kuwaiti women, whom they considered to be outside their 'concept' of religious commitment, because this is considered discrimination and deprivation of one of their rights."

"Unfortunately, we in Kuwait have become restricted by the thinking and approach of 'some legislators' of some laws, which stipulate certain rights for Kuwaiti women, according to their convictions, their orientations, and their belief. Research the legislator's intent in setting this condition, and are women's rights in Kuwait today linked to who legislates?"

"It is very possible that a day or two before the elections, if this clause is approved, a regulation will be drawn up to implement it, requiring the woman voter to 'veil' as a condition for adhering to the Sharia controls, especially in the absence of a 'clear and complete explanation' of the meaning of the Sharia controls, and what they mean precisely. 'As for the content of this in the Muslim woman's commitment to all the main obligations, which are crystallized by moral behavior and dealing with others, and what Islam calls for in terms of honesty, good deeds, and so on, it does not matter in this part."

"But if a corrupt, thief, liar, and hypocrite man comes forward and exercises his right to vote, the doors are open to him, because the 'legal controls' part is not required of him as a man."

"The Sharia law, according to their understanding, is required according to the external appearance only, and therefore if we adopt their understanding of matters, we will allow the thief and the corrupt men, and even some women who are considered in their view to be committed to the 'legitimate controls' formally, but they are not devoid of some behaviors that do not please God or His Prophet (PBUH), while women who do not meet the 'legitimate controls' formally according to their interpretation, according to their own view, and according to their priorities, are prohibited from voting."

"If 'legitimate controls' are to be applied to women 'out of justice' as a condition for election what is the standard for this for men?"

"Will I have to take a hijab in my car to put it on my head before I enter the electoral headquarters, and as soon as I finish voting and leave the hall, I remove it from my head? Is this hypocrisy acceptable to you, and falls within the framework of adherence to the legal controls for Muslim women?"

"What about Kuwaiti Christians? How will it be dealt with if Sharia controls are adopted as a condition for election? Who is authorized to interpret or determine the meaning of legal controls?"

"I understand that some women in some institutions and private bodies have accepted to wear the hijab based on the requirements of work and staying in their positions, and this certainly stems from their own convictions, and we respect that, but for this to be generalized to the women of Kuwait is unacceptable, and does not comply with Article Seven of the Constitution of Kuwait which begins with 'justice, freedom, and equality are the pillars of society,' and the word 'justice' preceded others due to its importance in our great constitution."

Also:

"I recently spent two days in Riyadh attending the Gulf Forum, a significant

event held in the Kingdom for the first time. This marks a pivotal moment indicating the opening of doors for the forum, which had previously traversed the Gulf but encountered regional obstacles. Now, with the prospect of a collective welcome, the Riyadh leg of the forum holds the key to hope," columnist **Abdullah Bishara** wrote for Al-Qabas daily.

"The forum's agenda primarily focused on exploring the relationship between development and culture, emphasizing the role of culture in driving successful development projects."

"Research papers delved into this nexus, highlighting the importance of cultural factors in shaping development outcomes. Given the expertise of many participants in cultural affairs, discussions were insightful and constructive."

"During my stay, a Saudi friend invited me to dine at Petite Mason, a renowned restaurant chain with branches in various capitals, including London. It was an eye-opening experience to witness Saudi women dining alone, without male companions or special arrangements."

"This sight, with the number of women surpassing that of men, was unprecedented in my twelve years in Riyadh. It undoubtedly prompts visitors to ponder the significant changes underway in the Kingdom."

"Indeed, Saudi Arabia has undergone a transformative 'white revolution,' propelled by enlightened leadership that recognizes the imperative of change and alignment with global trends. This evolution is grounded in a reevaluation of Islamic principles, embracing universal values while rejecting archaic superstitions. However, such progress necessitates overcoming deep-seated societal caution and fear, paving the way for gradual openness across various spheres of life."

"Remarkably, these changes have unfolded smoothly, eliciting widespread acceptance and enthusiasm, particularly among the youth."

"The Kingdom's leadership, under King Salman bin Abdulaziz and Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, has charted a visionary course toward economic diversification, innovation, and societal reform. The ambitious thirty-year plan reflects a commitment to prosperity, rational governance, and knowledge-based progress."

"The Kingdom's trajectory under Prince Muhammad bin Salman's leadership has defied expectations, ushering in an era of unprecedented dynamism and opportunity."

"Notably, the dismantling of traditional power structures and the promotion of rational discourse mark significant departures from the past while religious and social authorities once wielded considerable influence, their role is evolving in tandem with societal changes."

"The enduring impact of Saudi Arabia's transformation will reverberate throughout the Gulf region, challenging entrenched norms and inspiring progressive thinking. Kuwait, in particular, must prepare for the inevitable shifts ahead, embracing the principles of reason, knowledge, and societal advancement."

"Allah Almighty says in Surah Al-Zukhruf: 'We did not wrong them, they were the wrongdoers.' We said and all of Kuwait said it with us -- except the stakeholders -- that the sublime speech during the oath-taking meant every word uttered. At the time, we did not hear the members of the dissolved National Assembly make any sound and they replaced the words with loud applause!" columnist **Talal Al-Saeed** wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"His Highness the Prime Minister addressed the members of the Assembly: 'You are my partners in development.' It was as if he gave them the green light to raise the ceiling of the parliamentary speech, until they signed the prohibition, transgressed the authorities of the supreme leadership, and tried to tamper with the constants to move the street, imagining that this is the way to protect the Assembly from dissolution. They tried to repeat the notorious experience with the slogans, 'we will not allow you', 'we will not submit to you' and the like!"

"A solution was waiting. Did the solution wrong them or were they the wrongdoers?"

The other important aspect is that HH the Amir showed them the shortcomings and warned them publicly -- on live television, about the consequences of continuing what they did. However, the statement of His Highness the Prime Minister, which did not agree at all with the royal statement, was another green light for some members. He went too far when he said: 'I will not allow my history to play the role of an interim government to dissolve the Assembly.' His Highness added: 'We are coming with the spirit of cooperation. I will not allow myself or my history to play this role!'"

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes

Ruling upheld, expat acquitted in forgery issue

March 4 trial set for three in 'judge fire' case

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The Criminal Court has set the session of March 4 for the trial of the case filed against a ruling family member and two Bedoun residents who are accused of setting fire to Judge Sultan Buresli's property. According to the case file, officers from the Criminal Security Sector's Capital Investigation Department and Anti-Financial Crimes Department arrested the two Bedoun suspects from a livestock pen in Kabad.

These two suspects already have a criminal record of drug abuse. One of them is known for rob-

bing cash transit vehicles, especially after he was jailed for committing a similar incident in 2004, and was released from prison two years ago.

The two suspects had used a motorcycle for carrying out their operation, and they later changed the color of the motorbike from red to black to avoid being caught."

□ □ □

Ruling upheld: The Misdemeanor Section in the Court of Appeals upheld the ruling of a lower court that had previously acquitted an expatriate of forging an acknowledgment of debt amounting to KDI170,000, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Case files indicate that the victim's agent said the accused had earlier issued a payment order, obligating the victim to pay KDI170,000 as he fabricated an acknowledgment of debt on the basis of which the aforementioned payment order was issued by adding the phrase "cash amounts until the value of the check is cashed."

The defendant's lawyer, Attorney Inaam Haidar, drew the court's attention to the grave error, the contradiction in the descriptive registration, the lax reporting, the maliciousness and fabrication of the accusation, while confirming the unreasonableness of portraying the incident as per the statement of the victim's agent.

Drug addicts try to run over cops at checkpoint in attempt to flee

Bedoun accuses neighbor, juvenile son of harassment, threats

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: In a proactive move, the vigilant patrol officers of the Ahmadi Security Directorate intercepted two individuals in a vehicle along Umm Al-Hayman Road during the early hours of yesterday. These individuals, identified as drug users, attempted to evade inspection and even resorted to endangering the lives of security men by attempting to run them over, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to reports, the swift response of the police thwarted the reckless attempt, leading to the apprehension of the suspects. Upon inspection, a cache of illicit substances, including hashish, marijuana, and chemical pills, along with drug paraphernalia, was discovered in their possession.

The individuals, along with the confiscated narcotics, were promptly handed over to the General Administration for Narcotics Control for further processing and legal action.

In a separate incident later in the evening, officers from the Jahra Security Directorate apprehended a citizen on Al-Salmi Road, who was found to have a history of drug-related offenses. Suspicion arose when authorities noticed a parked vehicle, leading to a precautionary search which yielded a significant quantity of hashish, shabu, chemical substances, narcotic pills, and related paraphernalia.

The individual, along with the seized contraband, was promptly transported to the General Administration for Drug Control for necessary procedures and legal proceedings.

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Expat woman acquitted: An investigation by the criminal security sector, specifically the Maidaan Hawalli Investigations team, has exonerated an expatriate woman who was accused by her husband's son of neglecting her responsibilities towards his juvenile brother, resulting in the brother's involvement in four criminal cases and subsequent imprisonment for three years, reports Al-Anba daily.

The expatriate woman, born in 1987, was reported by her husband's

son upon his return to Kuwait from Saudi Arabia.

He alleged that his brother, under the care of his stepmother, had been neglected, leading to his involvement in kidnapping, indecent assault, drug use, and substance abuse cases, for which he received a three-year sentence in a juvenile detention center.

The informant lodged his complaint at the Maidaan Hawalli police station, citing negligence in the care of a minor.

However, upon investigation, it was revealed that the accused stepmother had not neglected her duties towards the juvenile. Instead, it was found that the juvenile had been leaving the house without her knowledge or consent, engaging in illicit activities that led to his criminal involvement. The accused stepmother maintained that she had been diligent in her care for the children and regularly visited her son in prison.

Further inquiries into the background of the informant, the juvenile's brother, uncovered that he had a history of leaving the country and had multiple criminal cases against him.

The investigation concluded that the juvenile's behavior, rather than any negligence on the part of the accused stepmother, was the root cause of his criminal activities. The expatriate woman was therefore acquitted of the charges against her.

□ □ □

Bedoun says abused: Abdullah Qunais, an undocumented resident (bedoun) born in 1991, lodged a formal complaint with the Jaber Al-Ahmad police station. He reported an incident that occurred at eleven o'clock last night, involving a citizen and his underage son. Qunais alleged that the neighbor's son not only verbally abused him but also threatened him with severe harm. Additionally, both the father and son vandalized the door of Qunais's residence, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to a security source, directives were issued to summon the accused citizen, who cooperatively appeared before authorities. When questioned about his son's involvement, he claimed ignorance about his whereabouts, stating that the son had left immediately after the altercation and hadn't returned. The motive behind the insults, threats, and property damage remains unclear.

The case has been forwarded to the General Administration for Juvenile Protection for further investigation.



Drug pills and other items seized from the drug addicts.

Victim shifts blame

Man facing 15 years in kidnap bid 'acquitted'

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: A citizen accused of kidnapping has been acquitted by the Court of Appeals, overturning a previous sentence of 15 years imprisonment.

The case revolved around allegations made by a girl who claimed she was deceived into being kidnapped, reports Al-Anba daily.

Representing the accused, lawyer Jarrah Al-Sharika pointed out the inconsistencies in the victim's statements during the investigation, as well as the lack of substantial technical evidence supporting her claims.

Al-Sharika emphasized that his client had no involvement in the incident whatsoever, asserting that the accusation was fabricated and driven by malice. Crucially, the victim herself denied in court that the accused was responsible for the alleged kidnapping.



Al-Sharika



A Municipality inspector is writing a citation.

Stores, markets targeted in Municipality campaign

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The Emergency and Rapid Intervention Team in Hawalli recently conducted an on-site inspection to ensure that local stores and markets are complying with municipal regulations and standards. During the inspection, a total of 9 violations were discovered, reports Al-Rai daily.

Ibrahim Al-Sabaan, the head of the emergency and rapid intervention team in the governorate, elaborated on the nature of the violations. They ranged from failure to renew advertising licenses for stores to the unauthorized display of goods outside of establishments prior to obtaining proper licensing. Additionally, warnings were issued for encroaching on state property, with imminent measures for removal.

Al-Sabaan emphasized the importance of adherence to regulations among shop owners to avoid violations and subsequent fines, which could potentially result in administrative closure. He urged business proprietors to uphold the law diligently to maintain a smooth operation within the municipality.

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Severely disabled exempted: CSC

'Fingerprint attendance is must'

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The Civil Service Commission (CSC) stressed that there is no exemption from fingerprint attendance system for government employees except for those with severe or moderate disabilities, reports Al-Qabas daily.

In a letter the CSC has confirmed that employees with severe or moderate disabilities must submit to their respective workplaces a letter issued by the Public

Authority for Disabled Affairs stating that "their disability does not enable them to have a fingerprint to prove attendance, in implementation of Civil Service Council Resolution No. 8 of the year 2017.

A source revealed told the daily that there is no retreat from the commitment to fingerprint attendance as a means of proving attendance for all employees of government institutions and agencies.

Third phase of ongoing initiative

Gulf Bank launches environmental sustainability initiative in partnership with Mishref Cooperative

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: Following the specified timeline, Gulf Bank has launched the "A Step Towards Change" environmental sustainability initiative, aimed at shifting societal habits by promoting the use of reusable bags, in partnership with Mishref Cooperative Society. Over the course of a week, the initiative involves distributing around 20,000 reusable bags at Mishref Co-op, accompanied by various informative events.

Gulf Bank had earlier revealed the timetable for executing the initiative within the participating co-ops, which include Al-Dahiya and Al-Mansouriah, Al-Shamiya and Al-Shuwaikh, Al-Rawda and Hawally, Kaifan, and Mishref. This disclosure took place in the presence of bank officials, representatives from the Environment Public Authority, and the Committee for Environmental, Food, and Water Security in the National Assembly.

On this occasion, Mr. Fahad Al-Sharah, Assistant Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, stated: "We are pleased at Gulf Bank to have partnered with Mishref Co-op for the third phase of our environmental sustainability initiative, 'A Step Towards Change,' following the participation of Al-Dahiya and Al-Mansouriah Co-op, and Al-Shamiya and Al-Shuwaikh Co-op."

He continued, saying: "Our primary objective is to instigate a change in behavior within society, and we are working closely with Mishref Co-op to achieve this. Through the distribution of reusable bags and encouraging customers to reduce their plastic consumption, we hope to make significant progress."

Al-Sharah conveyed optimism that this initiative would actively contribute to shaping government decisions and laws, compelling both institutions and individuals to minimize plastic usage. Ultimately, this effort is expected to contribute significantly to the protection of Kuwait's environment from the significant harm caused by plastic bags.

He further emphasized that this initiative is part of Gulf Bank's annual commitment to implement various in-



Gulf Bank Corporate Communications poses in a group photo with Mishref Cooperative Society officials.

itiatives aimed at reinforcing the principles of environmental sustainability within the community. Gulf Bank believes that the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, and they found it fitting to initiate this program with selected major co-ops in Kuwait. Around 100,000 reusable bags will be distributed to the selected co-ops, marking the first step towards changing behavior, and becoming an integral part of their daily lives.

He added, "This initiative is rooted in Gulf Bank's 2025 strategy, with the goal of establishing principles of environmental, social, and governance sustainability. It aligns with the country's environmental strategy under the vision of 'New Kuwait 2035,' as well as legislation related to the environment, laws safeguarding the environment, resource conservation, pollution reduction, environmental safety, ecosystem rehabilitation, biodiversity protection, waste management efficiency improvement, utilization of renewable energy, and building and developing national capabilities in environmental work."

Mr. Abdullah Adel Al-Qallaf, Board Member of Mishref Co-op, expressed satisfaction with the partnership with Gulf Bank in the "A Step Towards

Change" initiative, highlighting their commitment to driving societal progress towards decreased plastic consumption. Furthermore, he stressed the introduction of a "Fast Track" service by the co-op for shareholders who utilize reusable bags, with the aim of promoting their ongoing use.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

'Parents cannot choose their 11-grade children's sections'

'Ensure firms don't evade payment to KFAS'

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: Parents of eleventh-grade students will no longer be able to intervene in choosing scientific and humanity sections, as the guidance report that was distributed to students in the tenth grade of secondary school to determine their academic interest included the opinion of two teachers of the scientific subjects (science and mathematics) and the literary subjects (humanities, languages, social sciences, and Islamic Education).

This is aimed at directing students to educational paths consistent with their academic achievement levels, in addition to the opinion of the psychological researcher.

According to educational sources, most students suffer from pressure and conflict in choosing between science and humanities due to the interference of their parents if their children's desires differ from their desire to choose the quality of their education and how to direct their academic future.

Some students are forced to change their orientation as a result of their low achievement in academic subjects, or sometimes in one subject, which pushes them towards changing their academic path, but the pressures from their parents push them to choose a path that does not suit their abilities.

The sources stated that the Minis-

Eid Al-Fitr holidays

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: This year's Eid Al-Fitr holiday will be six days if the holy month of Ramadan completes 30 days, reports Al-Anba daily quoting sources.

Sources disclosed that based on the above, April 9 is the last day of Ramadan; so Eid Al-Fitr will be three days from April 10-12 (Wednesday, Thursday and Friday), in addition to April 14 (Sunday) which will be declared a rest day in lieu of Friday (April 12) and this needs Cabinet approval. If approved, the Eid holiday will be six days.

However, if the holy month does not complete 30 days; the Eid holiday will be three days only — from April 9-11 (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday), sources added.

try of Education directed each student to sign a declaration to choose the division that suits their inclinations, starting from the second semester of the tenth grade.

They explained that a successful student in the tenth grade of secondary school from the scientific or humanities section can move to the other section within a period of two weeks from the start of the academic year in the eleventh grade, upon a written request from the student's guardian if he finds it difficult to study the scientific or humanities' subjects.

In another development, following the discovery of several companies evading payment to the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement

of Sciences, auditors of joint-stock companies have been tasked with preventing such evasion in the future. These companies were found to have failed in paying their obligations, which typically amount to about 1 percent of their net profits, reports Al-Jarida daily.

In response to this issue, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has officially instructed all corporate auditors to include a clarification in the notes of the annual budget, indicating any company's non-compliance with payment to the scientific advancement fund.

Specialization

This decision applies to all joint-stock companies, irrespective of their type or specialization, starting from the annual report for the fiscal year 2023. Most companies are still in the process of preparing their financial statements and have yet to hold their general assemblies.

According to sources, this initial step is expected to be followed by further measures in the future. These measures may include penalties such as disqualification from competing for government tenders and non-approval by the General Assembly. Additional procedures will be studied and implemented if the current observation recording process fails to yield the desired results.

The sources clarified that only a small percentage of companies are non-compliant, while the majority fulfill their obligations annually. Moreover, the allocated percentage, which is 1 percent of net profits, is considered minimal and does not impose a significant burden on the companies. In contrast, other countries impose taxes at much higher rates, sometimes up to 20 times the "scientific progress" share.

Al-Woqian's literary contributions hailed

29th Qurain Cultural Festival honors veteran Kuwaiti poet

By Shahd Kamal

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19, (KUNA): The 29th Qurain Cultural Festival honored Dr. Khalifa Al-Woqian - a celebrated Kuwaiti poet and a co-founder of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL), in recognition of his literary contributions to the Kuwaiti cultural movement.

Dr. Al-Woqian spoke about his literary and poetic journey at a symposium organized by NCCAL to honor him at the Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait on Saturday evening in collaboration with Al-Manar Center.

He thanked the organizers of the festival for selecting him as personality of this year's edition of the event.

On his part, NCCAL Secretary-General Dr. Mohammad Al-Jassar said the Council is proud of its annual tradition of honoring literary trailblazers such as Dr. Al-Woqian who had outstanding contributions to the cultural movement in Kuwait and the Arab world.

"NCCAL is keen on handing down the trailblazing experiments of veteran literary celebrities to the younger generation to instigate the progress of the cultural movement," Dr. Al-Jassar said in statements to KUNA.

Dr. Salem Khaddadeh, professor of Arabic literature, said in similar statements to KUNA, that Dr. Al-Woqian, an old friend of him, deserved the honoring for the numerous poetic and literary collections he



Dr. Khalifa Al-Woqian being honored.

has authored over the past 40 years.

Born in Kuwait City, on October 10, 1941, Dr. Al-Woqian got his BA in Arabic from Kuwait University in 1970, MA in Arabic poetry in 1974, and PhD from Egypt's Ain Shams University in 1980.

Opened on Sunday, February 11, at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center under auspices of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, the 29th Qurain Cultural Festival lasts until February 22.

MoH eyes ten ambulance centers this year

By Marwa Al-Bahravi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: Assistant Undersecretary for Allied Medical Services Affairs at the Ministry of Health Dr. Abdullah Al-Faras announced that the ministry will launch ten ambulance centers this year, which will bring the total number of ambulance centers and ambulances in the country to 86 centers and 200 ambulances respectively.

In a speech delivered during the launch of the conference titled "Emergency Medical Services... Current Reality and Future Aspirations" on behalf of the conference sponsor Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi, Dr. Al-Faras affirmed the keenness of the ministry to support the medical emergency system by refining the skills of technical and medical personnel and the services provided to the public.

He indicated that 100 new ambulances were received this year, keeping pace with the latest global technological developments, which includes the latest developments in automatic linking technology that comes in the context of this support.

Dr. Al-Faras said the ministry pays special attention to this vital and important specialty, stressing its keenness to support and develop emergency medical services and launch a new fleet of ambulances, through the government's 100-day work program.

He explained that the annual medical emergency conference includes 40 scientific papers, ten sessions and three workshops on emergency medical services with regard to air or sea ambulance services and how to deal with disasters and crises, either through preparedness or tracking and reviewing models for dealing with major accidents.

The conference embodies the ministry's keenness and constant commitment to keep pace with the latest technologies and scien-

tific developments related to medical emergencies, sharing experiences and exchanging future visions, and enhancing scientific and professional cooperation between specialists in this field.

It emulates the conference's slogan by emphasizing quality and accreditation, crisis management, sustainability of training, preparedness for disasters and emergencies of all kinds, and keeping pace with new technologies, equipment, and ambulances.

Dr. Al-Faras affirmed that the ministry will not be stingy in supporting medical emergency personnel to make their profession attractive, highlighting their role in the relief bridge for the people of Gaza and their soon-awaited mission to accompany and receive the wounded in Gaza.

In addition, the Chairman of the conference and the Director of the Medical Emergency Department Dr. Ahmad Al-Shatti explained that the total number of urgent reports in the year 2023 reached 126,000. The total number of cases transported by ambulances was 128,000, and the response rate was ten minutes. He expressed his optimism that the new ambulances will contribute to reducing this time.

Dr. Al-Shatti revealed that the number of road accident victims transported by ambulances was 8,757 cases, while 808 victims were transported by air ambulance, 91 were evacuated to and from Kuwait, and 6,662 cases of coverage of various events, adding that the number of mock exercises held increased from nine in 2021 to 92, which is equivalent to seven times.

He said that the conference has a special status, because it comes ten years after the organization of the last medical emergency conference, in addition to the fact that it coincides with the country's celebrations of national holidays, and with the Kuwait Ambulance Day that falls on February 20 this year.



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Harvard program honoring ceremony.

CBK honors graduates of 15th Harvard Business School's executive development program

Under the patronage of the Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Institute of Banking Studies (KIBS), Basel A. Al-Haroon, CBK honored the graduates of the annual executive education program delivered by Harvard Business School, titled "Navigating the Future: Leading Financial Institutions in an Era of Innovation and Transformation". This program aims to develop executives

in the banking and financial sector and is a part of the "Kafa'a" initiative to develop national cadres which was launched by CBK in cooperation with Kuwaiti banks and managed by KIBS.

The ceremony was held on Monday, 19 February, with representatives from Kuwaiti banks, companies from inside and outside of Kuwait, CBK, KIBS as well as the graduates in attendance.

CBK congratulated the graduates and

called on them to continue learning to keep pace with the ever-changing developments in the banking and financial industry and its various changes including customers' behavior and needs. CBK added, that the Bank, in cooperation with local banks and KIBS, will continue to support education and training to grow the talent pipeline to the benefit of the national economy, through the various KIBS programs and the Kafa'a initiative.

The relationship between KIBS and Harvard Business School was highlighted as it spans a period of fifteen years. The two entities worked to develop diverse and distinguished programs and contributed to the development and qualification of many executives and middle management in the State of Kuwait and the Gulf region. In addition, KIBS underlined the great support it receives from the CBK and Kuwaiti banks in terms of developing these programs and

partnerships.

A number of participants in the program spoke about the valuable experience and knowledge they received through the program and their gratitude for the support of CBK, KIBS and their employers for investing in them.

In closing, the certificates were distributed to the participants and they were wished further success, progress and prosperity.

Message from Indian Ambassador

THE Ambassador of India to Kuwait HE Dr Adarsh Swaika in his message said, "I extend my warm greetings to the leadership, the Government, and the people of the friendly State of Kuwait on the happy occasion of National Day and Liberation Day of Kuwait.



Dr Swaika

"On behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of India," he said, "particularly the Indian community in Kuwait, I take this opportunity to convey my best wishes for the continued good health and personal well-being of His

Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

"Our excellent bilateral relationship extends beyond the centuries-old historical and cultural linkages that encompass political, trade, economic and vibrant people-to-people ties. The relationship is evolving into a multi-faceted partnership.

"India remains committed to working closely with Kuwait in enhancing our bilateral cooperation in all spheres. I thank our Kuwaiti friends for all the love, warmth and care they extend to the Indian community in Kuwait. Let the joyous occasions of National and Liberation Days of Kuwait be a harbinger of continued peace, progress and prosperity of the people of the State of Kuwait," the message added.

Abolish slavery

Continued from Page 1

Your Highness the Prime Minister, as an economist you understand what it means to depend on migrant workers. You know their vital contributions to the national economy, and how this ensures prosperity for the state.

Therefore, solving this problem requires working in a creative manner, similar to what other Gulf countries have done, which today occupy the highest ranks in international development indicators, and have removed their name from human trafficking reports.

Your Highness the Prime Minister, humanitarian work is not limited to sending aid abroad, but rather the most important thing is to unify the Kuwaiti personality in this field, and get rid of the disconnect between humanity and human trafficking.

Airfare costs

Continued from Page 1

and Paris, with some travelers opting to extend their vacations. Meanwhile, nearby destinations like Dubai and Jeddah remain popular due to the brevity of the holiday.

To manage the anticipated influx of passengers effectively, airport authorities have devised a comprehensive plan in collaboration with operating agencies. This includes continuous monitoring, the deployment of round-the-clock teams, and ensuring operational readiness to minimize congestion and facilitate smooth travel experiences for passengers.

In addition to popular nearby destinations like Dubai and Cairo, distant cities such as London, Rome, and Paris also witness significant travel demand during this holiday period.

Meanwhile, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said on Monday that the total of passengers that traveled through to and from Kuwait International Airport last January reached 1,427,684 passengers.

In a statement to KUNA, DGCA's Acting Director-General Emad Al-Jalawi noted that Kuwait's International Airport witnessed a rise in passenger traffic by 5 percent and in flights by 10 pct. Whereas air shipping increased by 34 pct compared to the year prior.

He affirmed that last January, the number of arrivals reached 719,092 and the departures reached 708,592.

He explained that the number of flights operated from and to Kuwait International Airport reached 11,063 flights compared to 10,098 in 2023.

Al-Jalawi revealed the cargo traffic amounted to a total of 19 million kgs, where the volume of inbound cargo reached 15.2 million kgs and the outbound cargo reached 3.8 million kgs.

He stated that the most popular destinations during last January were Dubai, Cairo, Jeddah, Istanbul, and Doha.

Amir's state

Continued from Page 1

Ambassador Al-Mahmoud stressed in a statement to KUNA the depth of the Kuwaiti-Qatari relations due to a common history and a shared future between the two nations.

He added that the two wise leaders were keen on taking those relations further to explore new horizons on all levels, including political, economic and enhancing joint cooperation, in addition to exchanging frequent visits.

The Ambassador stressed that under the directives of Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Amir of Qatar, the relations with Kuwait is a top priority for Qatar and that he feels home in Kuwait and its people who respect and appreciate his homeland.

He praised the cooperation and coordination between the two countries' governments on all issues of common interests for the prosperity and progress of the two countries under His Highness the Amir of Kuwait and the Amir of Qatar.

On the economic side, Ambassador Al-Mahmoud said that Kuwait and Qatar signed in January 2020 a 15 years sale and purchase agreement to annually supply Kuwait three million tons of liquefied natural gas.

He added that this agreement contributed to strengthening the bilateral relations between Kuwait and Qatar and reflected the commitment to develop the partnerships and strengthen the solid bonds and that he looks forward for more cooperation opportunities and investments in all sectors.

On the relations regarding culture, society, art, science, sports and other fields, the ambassador said that it was witnessing remarkable developments as Qatar organized many local, regional and international events, including the "International Horticultural Expo 2023 Doha" from October 2, 2023 to March 28, 2024 in which Kuwait participated with a distinguished pavilion that witnessed a big turnout of visitors.

He also pointed out to the social communication between the Qataris and Kuwaitis, which confirms the deep-rooted ties between the people of the two countries.

Ambassador Al-Mahmoud stressed that Qatar was awaiting the visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah which benefited the two countries and all Gulf countries regarding regional relations and international partnerships with the aim of achieving more accomplishments through joint Gulf action.

The upcoming visit by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Qatar would add to the strength of the decades-long ties and boost the level of cooperation between the leaderships and people of both countries.

After the independence of Qatar in 1971, Kuwait recognized the fellow Gulf country, extending diplomatic ties and exchanging Ambassadors.

In 1972, then Amir of Qatar Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al-Thani sent a number of Qatari diplomats to train in

the banking and financial sector and is a part of the "Kafa'a" initiative to develop national cadres which was launched by CBK in cooperation with Kuwaiti banks and managed by KIBS.

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A number of participants in the program spoke about the valuable experience and knowledge they received through the program and their gratitude for the support of CBK, KIBS and their employers for investing in them.

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Program aims to drive a more sustainable future for Kuwait

Program being delivered through recorded e-learning

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The Federation of Investment Companies has announced a collaboration with The Conference Board (TCB) EMEA to launch an innovative training program titled "Introduction to Sustainable Development for Business Leaders," reports Al-Seyassah daily.

This program, delivered through recorded e-learning aims to equip individuals and institutions in Kuwait with the knowledge and tools necessary to contribute to a more sustainable future.

Fadwa Darwish, Secretary General of the Federation of Investment Companies, expressed pride in this initiative, highlighting the federation's expertise in education. She emphasized that the collaboration with TCB and UIC will ensure the program's significant impact in enhancing awareness and action for sustainability in Kuwait.

The program will be accessible through an interactive online platform, offering video lectures, case studies, quizzes, and discussion forums.

Darwish emphasized the importance of this training program in shaping a sustainable future for Kuwait, its financial services industry, and beyond, stating that the initiative aligns with the federation's commitment to sustainability.

Lome Michael Cousins, Director of the ESG Center EMEA at TCB, emphasized the importance of sustainability for both the planet and economies. He highlighted the aim of empowering national cadres in Kuwait's financial services industry with the necessary knowledge to integrate sustainability principles into their personal and professional lives.

By providing a strong understanding of sustainability matters within their roles, the program aims to drive a more sustainable future for Kuwait and its financial services industry.

Mol request Ok'd

By Inass Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: Kuwait Municipality approved the Ministry of Interior's request to allocate surface parking of an area of 725 square meters in the front yard of Rawda Police Station within Block 2, with an entrance to the parking on the Essa Abdul Jalil Street side (formerly Rawda Street) and an exit on the Ali Suleiman Abu Kuhail Street side, according to the plan attached to the transaction.

The technical opinion for the transaction approved by the Director General of the municipality Saud Al-Dabbous stipulated adherence to the requirements contained in the responses of the members of the sub-committee on public services during its meeting on September 26, 2023, and coordination with them before implementation.

The administration was authorized to move and modify the dimensions and area of the site to no more than the designated areas, in the event that it conflicts with any existing infrastructure services or any regulatory reasons during installation.



KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: Kuwait Science Club won the silver medal Sunday at the Egypt International Science and Technology Exhibition (ESTEF 2024) in the field of environmental engineering.

'Environmental engineering'

Kuwait Science Club wins Silver medal in Int'l Science Fair in Egypt

CAIRO, Feb 19, (KUNA): Kuwait Science Club won the silver medal Sunday at the Egypt International Science and Technology Exhibition (ESTEF 2024) in the field of environmental engineering.

In a statement to KUNA, the head of the development and competitive programs sector at the Science Club and the head of the club delegation participating in the exhibition, Dr. Mohammad Al-Saffar, expressed his joy in the successive achievements made by the Kuwaiti Science Club in various fields and international forums.

Al-Saffar praised the achievement made by the Kuwaiti Science Club delegation at the exhibition, pointing out that the Science Club won the silver medal in

the field of environmental engineering for the "Helmet Plus" project by Kuwaiti student Kawthar Nasrallah.

Al-Saffar confirmed that other Kuwaiti projects won special awards from the exhibition's jury, including the project on the possibility of getting rid of carbon dioxide gas using "silica gel" in the field of chemistry by the student Yosif Mishal, and the project "Your Car Drinks Coffee" in the field of chemical energy by the student Sawwan Abdelrasol.

Al-Saffar noted the projects competing for the exhibition prizes for this year's edition, which amounted to 244 projects that were filtered out of 7,732 projects submitted by 425 male and female students.

Scientific research conference opens

Kuwait University strives for raising scientific and research level: official

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19, (KUNA): Acting Chairman of Kuwait University (KU) Meshari Al-Harbi said on Monday that the university strived in raising its scientific and research level with efforts from relevant sectors in their search for everything new.

KU's scientific research conference (Kuwait Vision 2035... Technology, Creativity and Innovation) inaugurated on Monday for two days in the cultural center Sabah Al-Salem University city.

Al-Harbi added that according to Article 3 of the Public Universities bylaws, the university must adhere to the values of the Arab, Islamic and human values, encourage freedom of speech and research, and support scientific research. Kuwait University had translated this by motivating researchers through annual competitions and awards.

Al-Harbi affirmed that during the next stage, the university seeks to organize meetings between university staff and the country's officials to present their initiatives on solving societal problems.

The KU's Vice President of Research

Othman Al-Khuder expressed in a speech that the number of participants in the Scientific Posters day exceeded 322 posters, which is a record number that is approximately 20 percent more than last year's participation, thanking the research sector and all the contributors to the Scientific research conference of 2024.

Al-Khuder mentioned that the participating posters touched on contemporary scientific, social, and national issues, which reflects the interests of the participating academics.

Head of the conference Haneen Al-Ghabra said that Kuwait University is responsible for supporting research interest and achieving progress to raise the research level in accordance with Vision 2035.

Al-Ghabra added that the winning posters were evaluated by a specialized jury to select the outstanding posters in terms of scientific content, research methodology, presentation, and research outputs.

Researchers from Kuwait's Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), visiting professors from outside Kuwait, the General Presidency of the National Guard, Kuwait Oil Company (KOC), Environment Public Authority, members of the academic staff and students from various colleges at Kuwait University participated in the conference.



Al-Harbi

World News Roundup

Europe

Mayors face violence

Navalny widow vows to continue his 'fight'

MOSCOW, Feb 19, (AP): The widow of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny vowed on Monday to continue his fight against the Kremlin while authorities denied his mother access to a morgue where his body is believed to be held after his death last week at an Arctic penal colony.

Fighting back tears, **Yulia Navalnaya** accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of killing her husband in the remote prison and vowed to punish him and other alleged perpetrators.

She also slammed the authorities, saying they were refusing to hand over the body to Navalny's mother to cover-up his alleged killing, and referred to his alleged earlier poisoning with a Soviet-era Novichok nerve agent.



Navalnaya

Russian authorities said that the cause for Navalny's death Friday at age 47 is still unknown. He had been jailed since January 2021, when he returned to Moscow after recuoperating in Germany from poisoning with a Novichok-type nerve agent that he blamed on the Kremlin. He received three prison terms since his arrest, on a number of charges he has rejected as politically motivated.

"They are cowardly and meanly hiding his body, refusing to give it to his mother and lying miserably while waiting for the trace of another Putin's Novichok to disappear," Navalnaya said.

She urged Russians to rally behind her "to share not only the grief and endless pain that has enveloped and gripped us, but also my rage."

"Rage, anger, hatred for those who dared to kill our future," she said. "I address you with the words of Alexey, in which I really believe: It's not a shame to do little, it's a shame to do nothing. It's a shame to let yourself be intimidated."

Navalnaya urged all those who mourn Navalny to unite to fulfill his dream of a "beautiful Russia of the future" so that "the unimaginable sacrifice" he made would not have been in vain.

Russian forces complete Avdiivka takeover: Russian forces have completed their takeover of Avdiivka by eliminating the last pocket of resistance at the eastern Ukraine city's huge coke plant, the Russian military said Monday, after the sheer weight of its troop numbers and greater firepower drove out Kyiv's forces.

Moscow officials announced Saturday said they had taken control of Avdiivka. Ukrainian forces confirmed pulling out of the bombed-out city in what amounted to a triumph for the Kremlin even though the four-month battle was costly.

The victory was a morale boost for Russia, days ahead of the two-year anniversary of its full-scale invasion of its neighbor on Feb. 24 2022. For Ukraine, the loss underscored its reliance on the supply of Western weapons and ammunition, as hold-ups have left it short of provisions and handicapped in the fight.

However, some Western military analysts believe that Ukraine could counter Russia's attempt to build up on its Avdiivka success by trying to erect new defense lines in that immediate area and deploying fresh units to hold back Kremlin's forces.

Assange may be near end of his long fight:

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange's fight to avoid facing spying charges in the United States may be nearing an end following a protracted legal saga in the U.K. that included seven years of self-exile inside a foreign embassy and five years in prison.

Assange faces what could be his final court hearing in London starting Tuesday as he tries to stop his extradition to the U.S. The High Court has scheduled two days of arguments over whether Assange can ask an appeals court to block his transfer. If the court doesn't allow the appeal to go forward, he could be sent across the Atlantic.

His wife says the decision is a matter of life and death for Assange, whose health has deteriorated during his time in custody.

French mayors face violence, intimidation:

The mayor of a small resort town on the Atlantic coast of France resigned, closed his medical practice and moved away after his house and two cars were set on fire. The arson followed months of death threats over plans to relocate a refugee center near a school.

More than 150 miles (240 kilometers) to the north, trouble visited another mayor when he decided to take in a handful of refugee families. The aim was to fill job vacancies in the village; instead, he received a torrent of abuse.

These were not isolated incidents. Mayors, normally among the most appreciated elected officials in France, are under attack as never before.

Hungary declines offer to meet US senators:

A bipartisan delegation of US senators made an official visit to Hungary's capital Sunday and called on the nationalist government to immediately approve Sweden's request to join NATO.

Hungary is the only one of NATO's 31 existing members not to have ratified Sweden's bid. The Hungarian government faces mounting pressure to act after delaying the move for more than 18 months since admitting a new country to the military alliance requires unanimous approval.

The visiting senators announced they would submit a joint resolution to Congress condemning alleged democratic backsliding in Hungary and urging the government of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to lift its block on Sweden's trans-Atlantic integration.

Man admits to attacking tourists: An American man on Monday admitted to charges of murder and rape after he allegedly pushed two US women down a ravine, fatally injuring one of them near Germany's Neuschwanstein castle last year.

The 31-year-old defendant admitted to the charges during the start of his trial, the German news agency dpa reported. Defendants in the German legal system do not formally enter pleas to charges.

"The defendant has committed an unfathomable crime," defense lawyer Philip Mueller said in a statement.

The defendant, whose name hasn't been released in line with German privacy rules, confirmed that his lawyer's statement was correct but did not answer any questions.



US Senator Thom Tillis, co-chair of the Senate NATO Observer Group speaks, during a press conference, in Budapest on Feb 18. Two US senators will submit a bipartisan resolution to Congress condemning democratic backsliding in Hungary and urging its nationalist government to lift its block on Sweden's accession into the NATO military alliance. (AP)

Politics

Will it resonate with swing state voters?

Saving democracy central to Biden campaign

WASHINGTON, Feb 19, (AP): Just blocks from the shuttered Bethlehem Steel plant, the Hispanic Center Lehigh Valley was bustling on a recent day with scores of older people eating lunch. Downstairs, out of sight, a constant stream of visitors was shopping in its massive food pantry.

Over the past seven months, the number of visitors to the pantry has risen by more than a third. The center's executive director, Raymond Santiago, sees that as a stark sign of something he has felt over the past couple years: Many in the area's Latino community are struggling to meet their basic needs.

Rebuild

Northampton County, which includes Bethlehem, is a traditional bellwether for Pennsylvania, one of the most important presidential swing states, and Latinos are a key part of the coalition that President Joe Biden is trying to rebuild as he embarks on his campaign for a second term. In doing so, the Democrat might have challenges selling a crucial part of his reelection strategy.

One of the messages he has delivered in previous visits to Pennsylvania is that former President Donald Trump, the front-runner for the GOP nomination, is a danger to American democracy. Biden is hoping that message energizes the same voters who turned out four years ago, when Northampton County narrowly flipped to him after supporting Trump by a thin margin in 2016.

Based on his interactions with visitors to the Hispanic center, Santiago isn't so sure. It's the price of groceries and lack of affordable housing that dominate conversations there.

"I think so many people are already immune to that messaging, it won't land as cleanly this election as it did in 2020," he said. "If he keeps pushing that message, it might turn voters away."

Biden chose a location near Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, with its deep symbolism for the country's struggle for freedom, for his initial campaign event for 2024, portraying Trump as

Scott doesn't want to talk about vice president's role in certifying election

REHOBOTH BEACH, Del., Feb 19, (AP): US Sen Tim Scott, a potential running mate if Donald Trump becomes the Republican presidential nominee, is treading carefully on questions about whether he would have certified the 2020 election had he been vice president at that time.

On Jan 6, 2021, about two months after Trump lost the White House, then-Vice President Mike Pence defied his boss and refused to use his largely ceremonial role in overseeing the election certification process to block Democrat Joe Biden's victory. Pence went forward with ratification of the Electoral College even after a violent mob of Trump supporters, some of whom chanted "Hang Mike Pence," swarmed the U.S. Capitol, interrupting the con-

gressional proceedings and forcing Pence, his family and staff into hiding in the complex.

Scott, a Trump rival in the 2024 race who dropped out and later endorsed the former president, declined to say in two Sunday news show interviews whether he would have acted differently as vice president.

"I'm not going to answer hypothetical questions, No. 1," said Scott, R-S.C. He added: "You're asking a hypothetical question that you know can never happen again."

Scott voted in favor of certifying the 2020 results when the Senate got back to work after the siege. He also said during a presidential debate last year that Pence did the right thing when he certified the election.

presidency will shred constitutional norms and destroy democratic institutions is not one that, alone, will motivate them and get them out to vote.

Like people across much of the rest of the country, most of those interviewed would prefer avoiding a rematch of the 2020 contest, and several suggested they would seriously consider a serious third-party candidate with a strong message and a chance of winning.

Evelyn Fermin, 74, who regularly visits the Lehigh Hispanic center, has lived in the county for two years after spending most of her life in New Jersey. Her opinion about Trump has been set since Jan. 6, 2021, when the former president's supporters stormed the US Capitol in a violent bid to stop Congress from certifying Biden's win. But she doesn't think reminders of that day will be sufficient to persuade voters in November.

For the daughter of parents who immigrated from the Dominican Republic, her concerns are border security and spending abroad.

does as the system moves south over the next few days.

Gusts topped 30 mph (48 kph) in Oakland and San Jose as a mild cold front

late Saturday gave way to a more powerful storm on Sunday, said meteorologist Brayden Murdock with the National Weather Service office in San Francisco.



Law enforcement vehicles are parked near the scene where two police officers and a first responder were shot and killed on Feb 18 in Burnsville, Minn. A suburban Minneapolis community was in mourning on Feb 19 after authorities said two police officers and a firefighter were killed by a heavily armed man who shot at them from inside a home that was filled with children. (AP)



Britain's King Charles III, (left) and Queen Camilla attend a Sunday church service at St Mary Magdalene Church in Sandringham, Norfolk, England on Feb 18. (AP)



Evans



Newsom

America

Waffle House shooting kills 1:

A shooting at a Waffle House restaurant in Indianapolis early Monday morning killed a woman and wounded five other victims, police said.

Officers responded to a report of a shooting at the restaurant on Lynhurst Drive around 12:30 am, the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department said in a statement.

Police found five victims with gunshot wounds who were transported to a hospital, including a woman who was in critical condition and died at the hospital.

The wounded victims included a woman and three men, who all were listed in stable condition.

A sixth man traveled separately to a hospital with a gunshot wound from the shooting and was listed in critical condition, police said. (AP)

3 dead at scene of domestic call:

A suburban Minneapolis community was in mourning on Monday after authorities said two police officers and a firefighter were killed by a heavily armed man who shot at them from inside a home that was filled with children.

The shooting on Sunday in a tree-lined neighborhood of Burnsville, Minnesota, left a third officer wounded. The suspect, who officials said had multiple guns and large amounts of ammunition, also died.

Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension Superintendent **Drew Evans** said there was an exchange of gunfire, and authorities were still piecing together details of what he described as a "terrible day."

The firefighter, who also works as a paramedic, was shot while providing aid to an injured officer, Evans said. He told reporters the paramedic was a part of a SWAT team that had been called to a domestic situation at the home.

Inside, an armed man had barricaded himself with his family, including seven children ranging in age from 2 to 15, Evans said. (AP)

Calif braces for flooding:

The latest in a series of wet winter storms gained strength in California early Monday, with forecasters warning of possible flooding, hail, strong winds and even brief torna-

"The winds are here and getting stronger, and the rains will follow quickly," he said Sunday afternoon. California's governor is **Gavin Newsom**.

California's central coast is at risk of "significant flooding," with up to 5 inches (12 cm) of rain predicted for many areas, according to the weather service. Isolated rain totals of 10 inches (25 cm) are possible in the Santa Lucia and Santa Ynez mountain ranges as the storm heads toward greater Los Angeles. (AP)

2 arrested for murder: Two people have been arrested on charges of murder and abuse of a corpse after the discovery of a girl's body encased in concrete and a boy's remains in a suitcase in Colorado, according to police and public jail records.

The City of Pueblo Police Department announced the arrest of Corena Rose Minjarez, 36, on Friday, and county jail records show the second suspect, Jesus Dominguez, 35, also was in custody as of Sunday.

Police found the girl's remains in a metal container filled with concrete in a storage unit last month, according to authorities. The unit was being cleared out after the rent wasn't paid. As part of the investigation, police began searching for two children last seen in the summer of 2018, Jesus Dominguez Jr and Yesenia Dominguez. (AP)

Lat/Am

Families reunited

Tens of thousands rail against Mexico's prez

MEXICO CITY, Feb 19, (AP): Tens of thousands of demonstrators cloaked in pink marched through cities in Mexico and abroad on Sunday in what they called a "march for democracy" targeting the country's ruling party in advance of the country's June 2 elections.

The demonstrations called by Mexico's opposition parties advocated for free and fair elections in the Latin American nation and railed against corruption the same day presidential front-runner Claudia Sheinbaum registered as a candidate for ruling party Morena. Approximately 90,000 people turned out to rail against the leader, according to government figures.

Sheinbaum is largely seen as a continuation candidate of Mexico's popular populist leader **Andrés Manuel López Obrador**. He's adored by many voters who say he bucked the country's elite parties from power in 2018 and represents the working class.

But the 70-year-old president has also been accused of making moves that endanger the country's democracy. Last year, the leader slashed funding for the country's electoral agency, the National Electoral Institute, and weakened oversight of campaign spending, something INE's head said could "wind up poisoning democracy itself." The agency's color, pink, has been used as a symbol by demonstrators.

López Obrador has also attacked journalists in hours-long press briefings, has frequently attacked Mexico's judiciary and claimed judges are part of a conservative conspiracy against his administration.

In Mexico City on Sunday, thousands of people dressed in pink flocked to the city's main plaza roaring "get López out." Others carried signs reading "the power of the people is greater than the people in power."

Gabriela Ozuna, 61, said she and her family came from Baja California state, and were participating in the march not just to support democratic institution, but also to protest attacks on candidates by drug cartels, especially in local elections.

Defending

"We know our democracy is in danger. What we want to do is defend it and keep defending it," Ozuna said.

Among the opposition organizations marching were National Civic Front, Yes for Mexico, Citizen Power, Civil Society Mexico, UNE Mexico and United for Mexico.

"Democracy doesn't solve lack of water, it doesn't solve hunger, it doesn't solve a lot of things. But without democracy you can't solve anything," said Enrique de la Madrid Cordero, a prominent politician from the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, in a video posted to social media calling for people to join the protests.

The PRI held uninterrupted power in Mexico for more than 70 years.

Marches were organized in a hundred cities across the country, and in other cities in the United States and Spain.

Still, the president remains highly popular and opinion polls indicate his ally Sheinbaum appears set to coast easily into the presidency.

López Obrador repeatedly dismissed the protests, telling reporters Friday that his critics don't care about democracy and are organizing the march to return the corrupt to power.

Following the massive demonstration, the leader continued to rail on critics, and said there would be no electoral fraud in the election and that he had not intervened in democratic processes.

"It's their democracy ... the democracy of the corrupt. What we want is there to be democracy of the people. We don't want power without the people. They're the one's that establish an anti-democracy with electoral fraud," López Obrador.

Also:

SANTIAGO: Romina Cortés couldn't pronounce her sister's last name. She didn't know what she smells like, what her favorite food is, or what she likes to do in her free time.

Cortés, 43, waited impatiently Sunday at the airport in Santiago, Chile, where she would soon meet her sister, Maria, whose existence Cortés learned of just a month ago.

That's because Cortés' sister, **María Hastings**, was one of thousands of Chilean children trafficked or illegally put up for adoption over the last 60 years or so, most during the dictatorship of **Augusto Pinochet** from 1973-1990.

"I am overwhelmed, so happy to meet my biological family," Hastings said as soon as she stepped off the plane from Tampa, Florida. "I'm going to reconnect with them, learn who they really are and let them know who I am."

The illegal adoptions - 20,000 of which are being investigated by Chilean justice officials and other social groups - extend back to the 1960s. Largely poor, young and indigenous women in vulnerable situations were either forced to give up their children or were told they died shortly after childbirth.

Now, families like the Cortés' are finally reuniting after decades.

Cortés' mother, a woman from the countryside, came to work in the city "without knowing how to read or write." Without any support, her mom ended up on the street and was coerced into putting her baby up for adoption after she was born in 1987.

"They forced her to sign a document that she didn't know what it was, since she was illiterate," Cortés said. "For some reason, because of the pain she was carrying she didn't tell me before."

But last month, to the hairstylist's surprise, she added a sister and a nephew to her life. "When I saw her on Zoom I said, 'She looks like me. She has my same eyes and my same nose,'" said Cortés.

Eyes fixed on the terminal doors Sunday, Cortés felt a rollercoaster of emotions. Eager to hug her sister, she said she is trying to learn English to better communicate with her, but that all she knows how to say is "yes."

Hastings was told as a child that she was adopted, but a few months ago discovered she was part of a child abduction network with branches around the world, including the United States, France, the Netherlands and Sweden.

On Sunday she wrapped her arms around five members of her new family, among them her crying mother, who preferred to remain anonymous but said she knew this day would come.

Hastings said she is learning Spanish to connect with a part of herself that remained dormant all this time.



Obrador



Ukraine's Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, (third left), meets with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, (third right), as a part of the Japan-Ukraine Conference for Promotion of Economic Growth and Reconstruction at Kishida's official residence in Tokyo, Japan on Feb 19. (AP)



South African sympathisers of the Democratic Alliance opposition party gather in Pretoria, South Africa on Feb 17 for their national manifesto launch in anticipation of the 2024 general elections. (AP)



Jama



Guterres

Africa

Somalian Army kills 4 militants: The Somali Army announced, Monday, the killing of four Khawarij militia members as they tried to attack in Ceel Dheer district in Galguduud state.

Somali National News Agency (SONNA) reported that according to information surrounding the terrorist group's imminent attack, commander of the 24th Battalion of the Somali Army, Lieutenant-Colonel Mohammad Tagwini was able to intercept them in Ceel Dheer district.

Tagwini added the Khawarij militia had amassed great losses, which indicates the Somali Army's work in seizing future terrorist attacks. (KUNA)

'Condemn territorial expansion': Somali Deputy Prime Minister, **Salah Jama** called the African Union (AU) on Sunday to condemn Ethiopia's territorial expansion which he described as usurpation.

The Somali National News Agency (SONNA) reported that during the 37th AU summit, Jama stressed that the Somali government would never accept compromising the unity and independence of its territory by land, air and sea.

The Somali government has achieved great success in the security field and liberated many areas from the control of terrorists, Jama said.

He also noted the completion of the first and second phase of the withdrawal of the African forces (ATMIS) from Somalia and the readiness of national forces to take over the security of the country.

Jama explained that this measure was taken after Somali forces made progress in achieving security, the fight against terrorism and taking more steps towards progress and prosperity. (KUNA)

Summit kicks off in Ethiopia: The 37th African Union (AU) Summit kick-started Saturday in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa, in light of growing challenges and crises.

The two-day summit attracts heads of state and premiers of AU members, in addition to UN Secretary General **António Guterres**, Arab League Secretary-General **Ahmad Abul-Gheit**, Brazilian President **Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva** and Palestinian Prime Minister **Mohammad Shtayeh**.

In an inaugural speech at the summit, Chairperson of the African Union Commission **Moussa Faki** affirmed the solidarity of the African countries with Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip.

Asia

Kishida vows to keep supporting Kyiv

Japan hosts Ukraine reconstruction confab

TOKYO, Feb 19, (AP): Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Monday pledged his country's long-term engagement in Ukraine's reconstruction, calling it a future investment, as Japan stressed its commitment to supporting the war-torn country ahead of the two-year anniversary of Russia's invasion.

In his keynote speech at a conference Japan co-organized with the Ukrainian government and business organizations, Kishida said Japanese public and private cooperation will be a long-term partnership based on inclusivity, humanitarianism as well as technology and knowledge.

Ensuring

Kishida stressed the importance of investment across industries for the future of that country's development and ensuring that the support caters to Ukraine's needs. More than 50 cooperation deals were signed by Japanese and Ukrainian government agencies and companies, and Kishida announced an opening of a new government trade office in Kyiv.

Among the deals was Japan's pledge of 15.8 billion yen (\$105 million) in new aid for Ukraine to fund demining and other urgently needed reconstruction projects in the energy and transportation sectors, the Foreign Ministry said.

Support for Ukraine's reconstruction is about "investing in the future," Kishida said. "The war in Ukraine is still going on at this very moment and the situation is not easy. The promotion of economic reconstruction, however, is not only an investment for the future of Ukraine but also investing in Japan and the whole globe."

Japan hopes to build momentum for global support for Ukraine as the war drags on and attention has diverted to the conflict in Gaza. Japan's focus on reconstruction - in part due to its legal restraints on providing lethal weapons - contrasts with many Western countries, whose largely military support faces increasing scrutiny over costs. A new U.S. aid package to Ukraine is stalled in the Congress.

Ukraine's Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, who led his country's delegation of more than 100 people, expressed thanks for the encouragement and said that "today is the new start of cooperation between the two countries."

"By combining our powers ... we can change this challenge into an opportunity for future growth and prosperity," he said. "Japan's experiences in reconstruction (from World War II) and its economic miracle provide us with inspiration."

All eyes are on Ukraine, and "dictators and potential invaders" are also turning their eyes to see how Russia's violation of the international law is seen and how the world will react to it. Shmyhal said Ukraine's reconstruction goes far beyond removal of landmines and debris. He emphasized his country's strength in farming, rich natural resources and ambition to be a digital hub of Europe with its information and cybersecurity expertise. He also urged Japanese automakers to open factories in Ukraine.

About 300 people and 80 companies were to attend from the two countries,

PNG tribal violence kills 26 combatants and unconfirmed number of bystanders

MELBOURNE, Australia, Feb 19, (AP): At least 26 combatants and an unconfirmed number of bystanders were killed in a gunbattle between warring tribes in Papua New Guinea, police said Monday.

A tribe, their allies and mercenaries were on their way to attack a neighboring tribe when they were ambushed Sunday in Enga province in the South Pacific nation's remote highlands, Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary Acting Superintendent **George Kakas** said.

Police Commissioner **David Manning** later described the clash as a "gunbattle between warring tribes." An unconfirmed number of villagers also were killed. Police reinforcements were sent to the scene of the battle, Manning said.

"At this point, it's not clear exactly how far we have moved into the conflict there," Manning told Australian Broadcasting Corp. "But the intent is to regain control or have a significant presence in that conflict area and then work ... our way through our procedures in dealing with this type of incident."

Kakas initially said 53 combatants had died. But security forces later revised the death toll down to 26.

Japanese officials have said. The Japan-Ukraine Conference for Promotion of Economic Growth and Reconstruction is co-organized by the Japanese and Ukrainian governments, Japan's powerful business organization Keidanren, and Japan External Trade Organization, or JETRO.

In a joint communique, the two sides stated Japan's long-term support in helping Ukraine achieve economic stability. The two countries also noted the importance of maintaining tough sanctions against Russia. Japan announced the start of talks toward revising a bilateral investment pact and easing of travel restrictions for Japanese business visitors to Ukraine.

The conference is largely about reconstruction and investment in Ukraine, but it's also about Japan's national security.

Bodies were collected from the battlefield, roads and the riverside, then loaded onto police trucks and taken to the hospital. Authorities were still counting "those who were shot, injured and ran off into the bushes," Kakas said.

Papua New Guinea Prime Minister **James Marape** said he had "great concern" about the violence in Enga and urged the warring tribes to lay down their weapons.

Also:

CAGAYAN DE ORO, Philippines: Philippine troops clashed with Muslim militants in a gunbattle that left at least seven soldiers and two rebels dead in a fog-shrouded hinterland in the south, military officials said Monday.

Military chief Gen. **Romeo Brawner Jr.** said four other soldiers were wounded in the army offensive Sunday against fighters of the Dawlah Islamiyah, a small armed group aligned with the Islamic State group, near **Munai town in Lanao del Norte province**.

Troops were hunting a still-unknown number of militants, who withdrew from the scene of the battle, military officials said. Brawner vowed to get justice for the slain and wounded soldiers.



Demonstrators carry an effigy portraying Mexican President **Andrés Manuel López Obrador** and presidential candidate **Claudia Sheinbaum** during a march organized by citizen organizations demanding that electoral autonomy be respected in the upcoming general elections, in Mexico City on Feb 18. General elections in which voters will elect a new president and legislators are scheduled for June 2. (AP)

He stressed the necessity of empowering Palestinians to get their freedom and establish their sovereign and independent state, the website of the AU quoted Faki as saying.

He deplored the Israeli occupation aggression on Gaza, describing it as "unprecedented" and calling for stopping it.

Meanwhile, Mauritania's President **Mohamed Ould Ghazouani** said that one of the largest challenges in Africa is the spread of tension and armed conflicts between "terrorist" groups that threaten the entities of countries.

The Sahel region is one of the most vulnerable to these risks, he said while receiving the AU rotating presidency, referring to growing "military coups" and constitutional changes in Africa.

He underlined the importance of the 2063 agenda which shows Africa Continent's aspirations towards peace and prosperity.

The summit discusses a number of issues related to peace and security, and regional integration and development as well as others in the continent. (KUNA)

Rwanda rejects US calls: Authorities in Rwanda on Monday rejected US calls for the withdrawal of troops and missile systems from eastern Congo, saying they are defending Rwandan territory as Congo carries out a "dramatic military build-up" near the border.

Rwanda's Foreign Ministry in a statement spoke of threats to Rwandan national security stemming from the presence in Congo of an armed group whose members include alleged perpetrators of the 1994 genocide.

The rebel group, known by its initials **FDLR**, "is fully integrated into" the Congolese army, the statement said.

Although Rwanda has long cited a threat posed by FDLR, authorities there had never admitted to a military presence in eastern Congo, whose authorities accuse the tiny central African country of actively supporting the violent armed group known as **M23**. (AP)

		Change	Closing pts			Change	Closing pts
SAUDI	- Tadawul	+92.57	12,594.57	JAPAN	- Nikkei	-16.86	38,470.38
UAE	- DFM	+14.18	4,272.96	PHILIPPINES	- PSEI	-74.62	6,798.61
EGYPT	- EGX 30	+326.83	29,452.40				
PAKISTAN	- KSE 100	+703.40	60,504.38				

Business

Rates - February 18th, 2024

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month Forward
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	
EUR	1.0768	1.0730	1.0787	1.0774	1.0725	1.0900	1.0810
GBP	1.2599	1.2548	1.2624	1.2598	1.2530	1.2690	1.2600
JPY	149.92	149.81	150.64	150.21	148.80	151.90	148.15
CHF	0.8794	0.8793	0.8839	0.8805	0.8615	0.8935	0.8720

General index dips 0.3%

Boursa concludes with mixed performance

By Mahmoud Shendi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff
KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The Kuwait Stock Exchange concluded its trading session with a mixed performance, as reflected by various indices.

The general index experienced a slight decrease of 0.3 percent, dropping by 28.4 points to settle at 7,305 points. A total of 220.7 million shares were traded through 12,816 cash transactions, amounting to approximately 52.1 million dinars (approximately 159 million dollars).

Despite the semi-annual review of the FTSE Russell index, which resulted in the inclusion and exclusion of several companies, the stock market overall showed resilience.

The market value, however, declined by 171 million dinars, reaching 43.85 billion dinars compared to the previous session's 44 billion dinars.

The main market index saw a modest increase of 0.1 percent, rising by 6.2 points to reach 6,013 points. Trading activity in this segment involved 108.3 million shares through 7,109 cash transactions, with a total value of 15.9 million dinars (approximately 48.4 million dollars).

Conversely, the Premier Market Index experienced a slight decrease of 0.4 percent, dropping by 39.7 points to reach 7,999 points. Trading in this seg-

KNPC aims 800K barrels per day 'output' in 2024

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The Kuwait National Petroleum Company aims to raise the production capacity of the Al-Ahmadi and Mina Abdullah refineries to no less than 800 thousand barrels per day during 2024, especially since most of the operating units in the two refineries are now operating at high capacity and with the highest levels of efficiency, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Oil sources indicated that the estimated production of the two refineries during 2025 will not be less than 45 million metric tons, saying the meetings that include the Board of Directors of the KNPC with the management of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation always discuss the necessity of raising the efficiency of the Al-Ah-

madi and Mina Abdullah refineries in light of the increasing global demand of refined petroleum products.

The sources revealed that the KNPC will announce the completion of replacing the 9 old electrical power substations of the Al-Ahmadi Refinery with the new electrical stations by the end of 2024, pointing out that the goal of this replacement is the need of the Al-Ahmadi Refinery for high-capacity electrical stations that will help it speed up permanent operation and in a way that guarantees and enhances all aspects of security and safety.

It includes explosion-proof buildings, in addition to its importance in the electrical control system, which enhances the loads in the event of a power outage.

ment amounted to 112.4 million shares through 5,707 transactions, valued at 36.1 million dinars (approximately 110.2 million dollars).

Meanwhile, the Main 50 index saw a marginal decrease of 0.03 percent,

declining by 4.7 points to settle at 5,931 points. Trading activity in this index involved 79.4 million shares through 4,918 cash deals, totaling 13.1 million dinars (approximately 40.2 million dollars).

Kuwaiti banks' profits surge by 28.5% in '23

Eight local banks experience significant profit growth

By Mahmoud Shendi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: In the fiscal year 2023, eight local banks in Kuwait experienced significant profit growth, collectively increasing their profits by 28.5 percent, totaling 1.447 billion dinars compared to 1.126 billion dinars in 2022.

The Kuwait Finance House led the sector with a remarkable 63.4 percent profit growth, reaching 584.5 million dinars. National Bank of Kuwait followed with profits of 560.6 million dinars, marking a 10.1 percent in-

crease, while Boubyan Bank secured the third position with profits of 80.4 million dinars, a growth of 39.2 percent.

The Gulf Bank and Ahli United Bank achieved profits of approximately 71.2 million dinars and 45.1 million dinars respectively, showing growth rates of 15.2 percent and 39.9 percent, while the Warba Bank recorded profits of 19.6 million dinars, growing by 1.9 percent, while Burgan Bank witnessed a decline in profits to 43.5 million dinars from 52.1 million dinars in 2022.

The surge in bank profits correlates with an improved operating environment in fiscal year 2023 compared to 2022, influenced by multiple interest rate hikes by the Central Bank of Ku-

wait to align with the US Federal Reserve, ensuring the competitiveness of the Kuwaiti dinar against the dollar.

Additionally, the growth in profits was supported by an increase in total cash credit facilities provided by banks, totaling 53.581 billion dinars by the end of December 2023. While new credit facilities declined by 2.75 percent to 22.431 billion dinars, personal facilities decreased by 43.1 percent to 3.621 billion dinars, and consumer loans dropped by 7.3 percent to 915.6 million dinars.

Despite these fluctuations, the total assets of local banks grew by 3.7 percent to 87.666 billion dinars, and net foreign assets increased by 17.9 percent to 12.21 billion dinars. Shareholders' equity slightly rose by 0.12 percent to 14.39 billion dinars.

Bank's culture prioritizes customer satisfaction, says Al-Nusif

NBK partners with Almosafer to provide outstanding travel offers for customers

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: Seeking to enhance customer banking experience with top-notch services and offers according to the lifestyles of their different segments and ages, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has announced a new exclusive partnership with Almosafer, to provide NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Cardholders with exclusive offers that meet their expectations.

This new partnership will give NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Cardholders access to a world of tailored offers that meet their travel needs, including airline tickets and hotel bookings.

Under the partnership, cardholders will get 10% NBK KWT Points when using their KWT Card to pay for airline tickets and hotel bookings at Almosafer stores or via its app or website.

As this offer will continue going forward, cardholders will be able to avail it, as part of KWT Card product benefits.

Commenting on this partnership, Mr. Hisham Al-Nusif – Deputy Head, Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait said, "We always seek to enhance our customers banking experience, and with the beginning of the new year, we wanted to provide exclusive offers tailored to their needs and expectations. We

also work tirelessly and around the clock to keep pace with their changing needs and live up to their growing expectations."

"NBK maintains solid relationships with leading institutions across different sectors, and we are glad to partner with Almosafer, being one of the most trusted travel agents for customers. We aim to leverage this partnership to enhance customers' banking experience by delivering top-notch offers, discounts and benefits for an unmatched banking experience" he added.

"Customer satisfaction and top-notch banking experience are embedded in NBK's culture. Thanks to our extensive experience gained over long decades, we are able to understand customers' needs, evaluate their goals, and even exceed their expectations," he noted.

Muzzammil Ahussain, CEO of Almosafer, added: "We are happy to partner with the National Bank of Kuwait, an industry leader in the banking sector in the Gulf region, to offer Almosafer's exclusive travel deals to the bank's esteemed customers. Kuwait is a key market for us and by extending our special offers, discounts and benefits we hope to leverage our expertise in the industry and provide tailor-made-travel solutions for NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Cardholders.

Our digital-first, seamless experience, powered by data driven solutions, will aid Kuwait's premier national bank to provide their clients with value-added benefits. Together we hope to raise the bar on exceeding

client expectations by going one step further to deliver top-notch quality services that is bound to distinguish us from the rest of the market."

A Card Like No Other
NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Card is the most popular credit card in Kuwait, as it offers customers a unique lifestyle with exceptional rewards, benefits and offers tailored to meet customers' needs and expectations, and cashback up to KD 1,000 in NBK KWT Points every month.

The card combines an exclusive package of exceptional rewards with a design inspiring national pride, making it a card like no other, and gives customers the flexibility to choose the way they want to earn rewards based on their lifestyle; either the "Spends Tier" or "Merchant Category" option.

When choosing the "Merchant Category", customers can earn NBK KWT Points on all payments made using NBK KWT Visa Infinite Credit Card at the selected categories, with 10% on dining and telecom, 5% on fitness and beauty and 3% on clothing, grocery and education.

Meanwhile, when choosing the "Spends Tier" earning option, based on their monthly spends, with up to 5% on digital payments, up to 5% on international POS and up to 3% on all other spends.

China's CPI drops 0.8% YoY

US inflation sticky as Japan & UK enter technical recession

By National Bank of Kuwait

United States

US Consumer Price Index
Higher than expected inflation data in the US drives significant movements in currencies, equities, and bonds across the board. Where the consumer price index report showed a higher-than-expected figure for January, at a 0.4% month-over-month beating expectations of 0.3%. Meanwhile the year-over-year figure was up 3.1%, down from 3.4% in December, while remaining higher than the 2.9% expected figure. The report release was followed by a drop in major equities with the Dow Jones index dropping 1.35% and the S&P 500 dropping 1.37%. Meanwhile the 10-year bond yield reached 4.3104% up from 4.1514%. Expectations for rate cuts in 2024 were pushed down, with expectations for a rate cut in March dropping to 8.5%, as sticky inflation and a robust labor market is not going to add to Fed confidence that inflation is going to move sustainably towards 2% with looser monetary policy.

US Core Retail Sales
US retail sales in January dropped the most in 10 months coming in at -0.8% and the so-called core retail sales which excludes automobiles, gasoline, building materials and food services decreased 0.4% in January. The plunge more likely reflects seasonal adjustments and freezing weather. In addition, the strong job market and wage growth suggests consumer spending will remain healthy, supporting the overall economy. January's 0.8% sales decline was surprising, exceeding forecasts and marking the biggest drop since March 2023. However, economists point out the drop was driven by factors like a 4.1% drop in home improvement and a 1.7% plunge in auto sales, exceeded expectations due to larger-than-anticipated seasonal adjustments. The still-solid labor market and rising wages indicate ongoing consumer spending power, which should keep the economy expanding. Despite these weaknesses, signs point towards slowing goods price deflation and sustained economic growth. Import prices climbed in January, suggesting inflation pressures might persist, but a strong labor market and wage growth indicate consumer spending should remain a pillar of the US economy.

Unemployment Claims
The US labor market showed few signs of cooling last week. New claims for unemployment benefits fell to 212,000, below economists' expectations of 220,000. However, the 4-week average rose to 218,500, and claims for continued benefits reached 1.895 million. Overall, the US job market remains tight, with new claims for unemployment benefits falling below expectations of last week. However, the four-week moving average of claims rose, and claims for continued benefits remained elevated. This suggests that the labor market is not cooling as quickly as some economists had expected.

US Producer Price Index
Wholesale prices jumped unexpectedly in January, dealing another blow to hopes of easing inflation. The producer price index rose 0.3%, exceeding predictions of a 0.1% increase and marking the biggest jump since August. Meanwhile, the core PPI which excludes volatile food and energy came in at 0.5%, surpassing expectations of 0.1%. This hotter-than-expected inflation at the wholesale level suggests potential continued inflation pressures for consumers down the line.

The greenback traded sideways over the past week, closing at 104.296.

United Kingdom

UK Consumer Price Index y/y
Inflation in the UK held steady at 4.0% in January, lower than expectations of 4.1%. Core inflation also remained unchanged at 5.1%, while services inflation rose to 6.5%, up from 6.4% the previous month. The data release came as a relief for the Bank of England, as markets anticipate a rate cut in the near future since inflation seems to be moving towards the 2% target. On the contrary, wage growth rose by 6.2% annually, double the pace that the BOE views as consistent with getting inflation back at 2%.

UK GDP q/q
UK's economy dipped into a technical recession in late 2023, dealing a blow to PM Sunak's growth promises before key elections. GDP figures show a 0.3% contraction in the last quarter compared to a 0.1% decline previously. This puts Britain alongside Japan in a technical recession, though it's likely mild. Investors expect interest rate cuts, businesses want government aid, and voters face falling living standards. On the contrary, The Bank of England is

- US Consumer Price Index came in at 0.4% vs expectations of 0.3%.
- US Retail Sales came in at -0.8% vs expectations of -0.2%.
- US Unemployment Claims came in at 212K vs expectations of 219K.
- UK Consumer Price Index y/y came in at 4.0% vs expectations of 4.0%.
- UK GDP q/q came in at -0.3% vs expectations of -0.1%.
- The Reserve Bank of Australia held its policy interest rate steady at 4.35%.

expecting signs of an upturn in the economy, with Governor Andrew Bailey stating that forecasts of a "somewhat stronger growth story" is expected ahead.

The Sterling underperformed over the past week, last seen at 1.2598.

Asia-Pacific

Japan Producer Price Index

Japan's economy unexpectedly entered a recession in Q4 2023, shrinking 0.4% after a previous 3.3% decline, allowing Germany to now become the world's third biggest economy. This technical recession comes with doubts about the central bank's ability to exit its ultra-loose monetary policy. Weak domestic demand, including sluggish consumption and investment, are major concerns. Additionally, rising costs and labor shortages add pressure, while external demand offers some limited support. The Bank of Japan faces a tricky balancing act, considering global trends and potential risks. Opinions vary on the timing of potential policy shifts by the Bank of Japan as some see tight labor markets and corporate spending plans as reasons for optimism, while others warn of lingering risks and the need for caution despite signs of improvement in global growth forecasts.

The Yen over performed over the week, closing at 150.21

China's Consumer Price Index

Consumer prices in China slid deeper into deflationary territory last month, suffering the biggest drop since the global recession in 2009. The country's Consumer Price Index dropped by 0.8% y/y in January, marking the steepest fall since September 2009 and marks fourth consecutive month of decline. The National Bureau of Statistics attributes the weak figure to the strong demand in January 2023 for the Lunar New Year when CPI rose 2.1%. This year the Lunar New Years falls in February, causing distortions to the base. Beijing is currently struggling to revive both consumer and investor confidence as it faces many challenges, including a real estate slump, stock market meltdown and weaker exports. Nevertheless, many analysts believe consumer prices are likely to rise from February onwards.

The USD/CNY currency pair traded sideways over the week, last trading at 7.1929.

The Reserve Bank of Australia

The Reserve Bank of Australia held its policy interest rate steady at 4.35% in a widely anticipated decision which followed 13 consecutive rate hikes since 2022. It noted that goods inflation was lower than forecast, but that services inflation remained high, with overall inflation at 4.1%. RBA Governor Michelle Bullock held a press conference after the meeting stating that the country was on track to get inflation within the bank's 2% to 3% target band by 2025, and to reach the midpoint of that range by 2026. Bullock added that while there were "encouraging signs," the RBA remains "vigilant" to upside risks that would make it difficult to achieve its target. In its statement announcing its decision, the RBA said it didn't exclude further rises. "We're not ruling in or out anything," Bullock said. "We are focused on bringing inflation down. We still think the risks are balanced but, as you would know, the further out we go with our forecasts, the more uncertainty there is around them".

The AUD/USD currency pair traded sideways over the week, last trading at 0.6531.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti Dinar
USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30800.



NBK announces partnership with Almosafer to provide outstanding travel offers for customers.

merchants, or points exchange with most preferred airlines. NBK Visa Credit Cards offer the best payment method for the convenience and benefits they provide to customers, especially when using them in shopping including NBK Rewards Program as well as Purchase Protection and Extended Warranty.



KUNA photo

The KPC chief during his visit to the Jurassic production facilities.

KPC chief pays visit to Jurassic 4 and 5 production projects

CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Sabah, along with several members from the Board of Directors, visited the Jurassic 4 and 5 production projects, spearheaded by Kuwait Oil Company in Al-Rawdatain and Umm Naqa fields in northern Kuwait, reports Al-Seyassah daily. Welcomed by Kuwait Oil Company CEO Ahmed Jaber Al-Eidan

and other officials, the delegation received updates on the project's progress, vital for Kuwait's strategic objectives, aiming to augment free gas production and supply quality products globally.

Despite formidable challenges posed by the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, escalating material prices, and logistical hurdles due to COVID-19 disruptions in China, Kuwait

Oil Company achieved timely completion of construction without significant incidents or contract modifications. Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Sabah commended the workforce's dedication amid adversity, expressing confidence in their capabilities and highlighting the invaluable contributions of Kuwaiti youth.

CEO Ahmed Jaber Al-Eidan extended gratitude to the Board of

Directors for their unwavering support, emphasizing the pivotal role of collective efforts in realizing project success, facilitated by senior management's backing and trust in oil sector personnel. These projects promise substantial economic returns, offering new market opportunities for Kuwaiti light oil and fostering employment prospects for local youth.

The inauguration of Jurassic production stations, JPF 4 and JPF 5, heralds an increase in associated gas and light oil production, paving the way for enhanced capacity in the near future. Kuwait expertise has been instrumental throughout the project lifecycle, from initial studies to operational commencement.

Leveraging modern technology

in gas desalination and sulfur extraction underscores Kuwait Oil Company's commitment to efficient operations.

Despite ongoing challenges, the relentless dedication of oil sector leadership and personnel ensures steadfast progress and operational excellence, reflecting their unwavering resolve to fulfill Kuwait's energy aspirations without compromise.

Modest recovery expected in the Eurozone and UK

Major economies struggle for momentum in '24 with US in the lead

By National Bank of Kuwait

In this note we set out short summaries of the outlooks for some of the world's key economies over the coming year. The global environment remains challenging amid high interest rates, adverse geopolitics, and subdued global trade growth. Among major economies, only the US seems poised for solid growth in 2024 as resilient household spending and a still-tight labor market support activity. The Eurozone and UK are flirting with or in recession, but growth could pick up slightly from last year's weak base as inflation and the energy shock recede, and amid optimism about interest rate cuts. Despite Japan's slow growth due to anemic global demand and falling real wages, above-target inflation means that a central bank policy U-turn towards monetary tightening is possible sometime this year. China, who's post-Covid rebound disappointed in 2023, faces continued headwinds from muted domestic consumption and property sector weakness, amplifying calls for a more compelling policy response.

US: Resilient job market and slowing inflation boost hopes of a soft landing

The US economy has continued to positively surprise over the last several months, which prompted the IMF to uprate its growth forecast for 2024 to 2.1% (still down from 2.5% in 2023) from 1% projected six months back. GDP grew by an above-trend 3.3% in Q4 2023, and recent PMI and consumer surveys point to momentum being sustained over the coming months. (Chart 1.) Thus far, consumer spending has been resilient to elevated interest rates, underpinned by generally slowing inflation (3.1% in January), strong job gains (+350K in January, a 12-month high), and wage growth accelerating to 4.5% y/y. Moreover, household wealth has been boosted by rising equity and home prices. Although the delayed impact of high interest rates could erode support from these areas in coming quarters, the big drop in inflation is fueling market hopes that the Fed can cut interest rates pre-emptively by 75-100 bps this year, helping the economy avoid a hard landing and even setting the stage for a reacceleration in growth in 2025. Ahead of the presidential elections in November, additional fiscal stimulus could also be forthcoming. This 'Goldilocks' scenario of slower inflation and robust economic growth with durable labor markets, while not implausible, is still exposed to various risks, such as fresh supply-chain shocks amid deteriorating geopolitics, and renewed inflation that delays interest rate cuts. A further downside risk to growth involves the moribund commercial real estate sector, with signs of distress highlighted in some recent corporate results.

Eurozone and UK: Modest recovery expected versus last year's weak base

The Eurozone has been hovering close to recession, having narrowly avoided two straight quarters of negative growth (-0.1% q/q and 0%, respectively in Q3 and Q4 2023). (Chart 2.) The bloc's two largest economies, France, and Germany, continue to struggle with weak external demand (mainly on account of China) and soft domestic consumption (due to price and interest rate rises). The IMF recently cut its 2024 growth forecast for the Eurozone from 1.2% last October to 0.9%, though still improving from 0.5% in 2023, as aftershocks from energy price rises subside and household consumption gradually recovers. Amid muted economic growth and sharply lower inflation (down to 2.8% as of January), the consensus view is that the ECB will reduce policy rates by 75-100 bps this year, with the ongoing resilience of the labor market providing the main reason to delay. The UK could see a similar recovery in growth to 0.6%, albeit from a low base of 0.1% in 2023, based on the IMF's projections. Wage growth at 6.2% y/y is now running well ahead of inflation at 4.0%, which will provide the basis for an easing in cost-of-living pressures this year and improve the

outlook for consumer spending. But at the same time, this might slow the pace of interest rate cuts by the Bank of England, with markets looking for rates to drop by around 75 bps by end-2024. The government's budget in March could unveil a package of tax cuts to boost growth ahead of a general election later in the year, but room for maneuver is limited by a fiscal deficit projected at nearly 5% of GDP this year. After a sizeable correction in 2022-23, the housing market looks set to be more stable. As in the US, risks surrounding the outlook for Europe include the inability of central banks to lower interest rates if inflation proves persistent, especially given the already feeble growth outlook. Uncertain energy prices, geopolitics and supply-chain issues linked to Red Sea shipping route disruption also present risks.

Japan: GDP to expand in FY2024-25 though at a slower pace

The Bank of Japan (BoJ) recently lowered its economic growth estimates for FY2023-24 (ending March 2024) to 1.8% due to slowing activity overseas and cooling consumer sentiment amid elevated inflation. However, the tightening labor market, rising nominal wages, and somewhat easing price pressures should support private consumption going forward, while inbound tourism should continue to recover from the pandemic. As a result, the BoJ raised its growth forecast for FY2024-25 by 0.2% to 1.2%, which although softer than this year is still above long-run trend growth. Meanwhile, the bank revised down its inflation forecast to 2.4% from 2.8% on declining energy prices, then a below-target 1.8% in FY2025-26. Despite currently above-target inflation, the BoJ has maintained its ultra-loose monetary policy until now, keeping short-term interest rates at -0.1%, worried that upward price pressures are temporary driven by cost factors. (Chart 3.) At its latest meeting, the bank sent early signals of a shift towards policy tightening, though did not provide any indication on the timing or pace of the change. A complete withdrawal from negative interest rate policy hinges on a broad economic recovery including more robust household consumption growth and stronger overseas demand.

China: Lackluster consumption calls for more forceful government support

China's economy grew 5.2% in 2023, but the key headwinds that dampened growth have persisted. Due to the ongoing drag from the property sector, weak domestic consumption, a declining labor force and a soft external demand outlook, output growth could remain in a prolonged slowdown. Recent indicators such as PMI surveys, CPI prints, retail sales, bank credit and trade data, have signaled uneven momentum in early 2024 and the IMF sees GDP growth decelerating to 4.6% in 2024. China's economic model, which relied heavily on debt-fueled infrastructure and property investment in the past, has faltered with investment as a share of GDP now trending well below pre-Covid levels. (Chart 4.) Indeed, a significant buildup in public debt, especially amongst fiscally-constrained local governments, has put the central government on the back foot. Policymakers have mullied boosting infrastructure spending, but that could stoke debt accumulation concerns, given the diminishing returns on investment. Volatile Sino-US relations and other geopolitical developments have compounded the challenges for the authorities. Nonetheless, the government has pledged fresh support to improve domestic consumption, while maintaining growth measures for exports of high-value-added green energy products. The authorities have also tried to prop up financial markets by imposing short-selling restrictions and injecting funds through state-owned enterprises, which could help stem capital outflows and support a weakening yuan. Still, recent measures to rejuvenate economic activity have yet to restore consumer and investor confidence.

US rivalry with China 'expands' to biotech

Lawmakers see a failure to compete

WASHINGTON, Feb 19, (AP): U.S. lawmakers are raising alarms about what they see as America's failure to compete with China in biotechnology, warning of the risks to U.S. national security and commercial interests. But as the two countries' rivalry expands into the biotech industry, some say that shutting out Chinese companies would only hurt the U.S.

Biotechnology promises to revolutionize everyday life, with scientists and researchers using it to make rapid advances in medical treatment, genetic engineering in agriculture and novel biomaterials. Because of its potential, it has caught the attention of both the Chinese and U.S. governments.

Bills have been introduced in the House and Senate to bar "foreign adversary biotech companies of concern" from doing business with federally funded medical providers. The bills name four Chinese-owned companies. The Chinese Embassy said those behind the bills have an "ideological bias" and seek to suppress Chinese companies "under false pretenses." It demanded that Chinese companies be given "open, just, and non-discriminatory treatment."

The debate over biotechnology is taking place as the Biden administration tries to stabilize the volatile U.S.-China relationship, which has been battered by a range of issues, including a trade war, the COVID-19 pandemic, cybersecurity and militarization in the South China Sea.

Critics of the legislation warn that restrictions on Chinese companies would impede advances that could bring a greater good.

"In biotech, one cannot maintain competitiveness by walling off others," said Abigail Coplin, an assistant professor at Vassar College who specializes in China's biotech industry. She said she was worried that U.S. policymakers would get too obsessed with the technology's military applications at the cost of hindering efforts to cure disease and feed the world's population.



Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait officials pose with Best Corporate Governance Bank award.

ABK bags Best Corporate Governance Bank award

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is proud to announce its achievement at the Global Business Outlook Awards where the Bank was honored with the title of 'Best Corporate Governance Bank. The awards ceremony, held at Jumeirah Emirates Tower, celebrated ABK's excellence and innovation in the banking and financial sector.

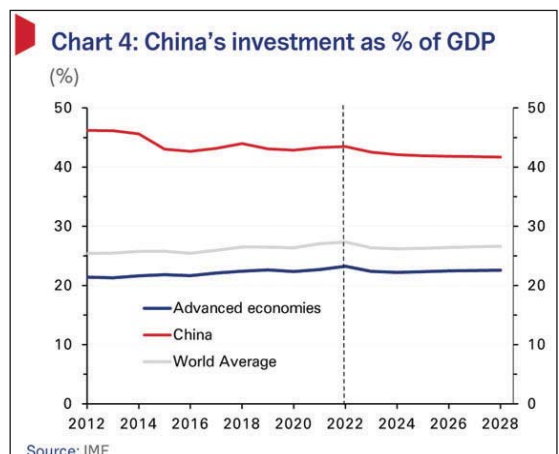
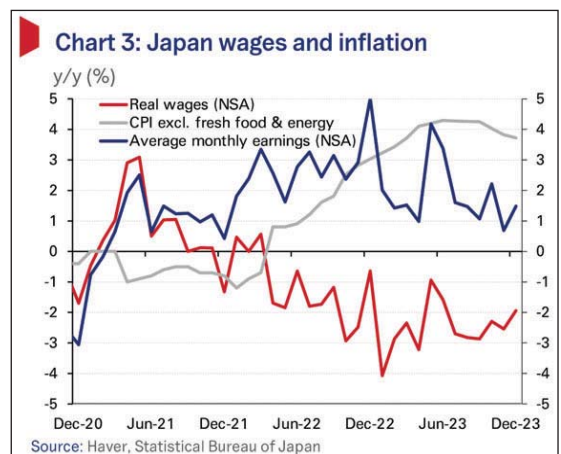
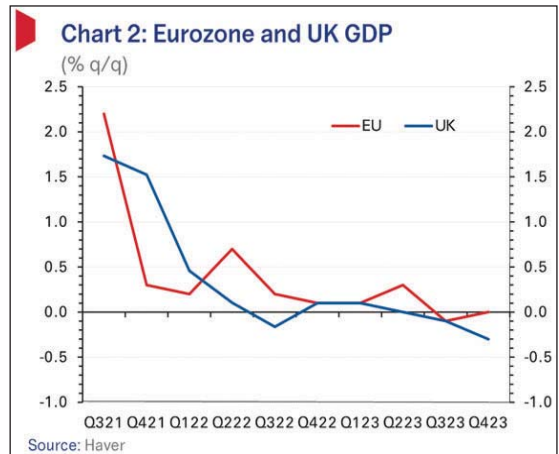
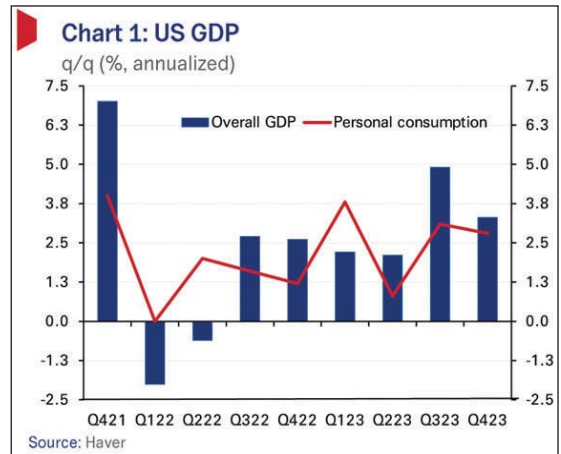
Receiving this accolade is a testament to ABK's unwavering commitment to upholding the highest standards of corporate governance in the banking sector. Commenting on this achievement, Sana Al Saqabi, Acting Chief Compliance Officer and Corporate Governance at ABK, said, "We are pleased to receive this recognition which reflects our dedication to maintaining sound corporate governance frameworks and instilling the integrity, transparency, and responsibility values in our culture so as to reinforce the Bank's position as a leading financial institution."

This award affirms ABK's continuous efforts in ensuring the highest standards of professional conduct in all its transactions. The Bank seeks to adhere to the instructions of the Central Bank of Kuwait regarding the

rules and regulations of corporate governance in Kuwaiti banks and adopt them as an institutional culture, and not just as regulatory instructions. Al-Saqabi continued, "It underscores the Bank's commitment to safeguarding shareholders, investors, and stakeholders' interests and fostering long-term sustainability as part of our ongoing pursuit of excellence in governance."

This award is one of many accomplishments and accolades that ABK has received this year, adding to the Bank's impressive track record of years of achievements. In the past year alone, ABK has been recognized for its outstanding performance, innovation, and commitment to excellence in the banking industry across human resources, retail, governance, and corporate banking.

This accomplishment reinforces ABK's position as a leader in promoting good governance practices within the financial industry. Al-Saqabi concluded, "By setting an exemplary benchmark, ABK aims to inspire and influence its peers and the wider financial community to prioritize and elevate governance standards, thereby contributing to the overall health and stability of the financial sector."



Eng. Alharbi resigns from stc Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, announced the resignation of Eng. Maziad Alharbi from his position as CEO of the Company, after 5 years of leading the executive management team at stc Kuwait. Alharbi submitted his resignation to the Company's Board of Directors during the board meeting held on Thursday, 15 February 2024, where the resignation was officially accepted by the board and disclosed on Bursa Kuwait thereafter. It has also been announced that Eng. Muataz Abdullah AlDharrab will take on the role of CEO.

In this regard, Dr. Mahmoud Ahmad Abdulrahman, Chairman of the Company's board, stated: "Alharbi played a key role since he led the executive management team at stc Kuwait in 2019. Under his guidance, the Company transitioned from offering traditional telecom services to expanding into business solutions and digital services. This strategic shift was exemplified by successful acquisitions, including QualityNet in 2019



Eng. Maziad Alharbi

and e-Portal Holding Company in 2022, where Alharbi also served as Chairman. Additionally, he oversaw the rebranding of "VIVA" to "stc," aligning the Company with a unified brand identity across Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain."

stc achieved strong financial results under Alharbi's tenure as CEO by leveraging the Company's technical

and human capabilities to align with the objectives of the Company's customers and shareholders. As part of this strategy, stc expanded its business model and focused on delivering integrated digital solutions to businesses in various sectors, ultimately having one of the largest contributions to stc's success. Since Alharbi took over, the Company's revenues increased by 22% despite the challenges and difficulties witnessed in Kuwait's market. By end of 2023, stc achieved its highest revenues since establishment, with total revenues reaching KD 351.4 million.

The digital transformation strategy initiated and led by Alharbi has been an instrumental factor in stc's success and contribution to the local economy, government initiatives, and the rising demand for digital and IT solutions. stc played a significant role in fostering relationships with investors and the investment community, upholding the highest standards of transparency and best global practices in shareholder communication.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Business Plus



Experts share tips on navigating job insecurity and layoffs effectively

Crisis to comeback: How to weather job loss



An exterior view of Cisco Systems Inc. headquarters, May 9, 2012, in Santa Clara, Calif. On Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2024, internet networking pioneer Cisco Systems announced that more than 4,000 employees are being laid off, joining the parade of technology companies in a trend that has helped boost their profits and stock prices while serving as a sobering reminder job insecurity in the dawning age of artificial intelligence. (AP)

‘I’ve been trying not to focus too much on the negative feelings about it, because I know that getting upset isn’t going to make it any easier for me to make a fresh start.’

NEW YORK, Feb 19, (AP): Recent mass layoffs from technology and media companies, including eBay, Riot Games and the Los Angeles Times, might have you thinking about your job security.

If you’re worried you could be laid off - or if you’ve lost your job - personal finance professionals and career advisers have recommendations for how to cope. They range from preparing an emergency fund to understanding your severance package.

Start saving
It’s crucial to start building an emergency fund even when you feel secure at your job, but especially if you think you might lose it.

You might not be able to save enough to cover the whole time you’ll be out of work, but even a small amount can reduce your stress.

When you start thinking about saving, Jesse Mecham, founder of the money management app YNAB, recommends you ask yourself this question: What do I want my money to do?

Maybe a year ago, you wanted to save for a trip abroad, while now you want to have money in case you are out of work for six months.

If you are aggressively paying off

debt and it’s affecting your ability to save, Mecham recommends slowing down payments. You should still make at least the minimum payment, but you might want to consider temporarily using any money you’ve been paying over that to build an extra cash cushion so you have money available should you need it. It’s also crucial to avoid getting into further debt, Mecham said.

Update your resume
It’s always a good idea to keep your resume up to date but, but you should also keep it customizable for several jobs, said Scott Dobroski, career trends expert for Indeed. You can do this by leaving space in your resume to include keywords that are specific to the job you are applying for.

Jobs might require slightly different skills if you are planning to stay in the same industry, or completely different skills if you move to another field. If you keep your resume updated and customizable, it could make things easier when you need to move on.

Etienne Lepine, 46, a software engineer at Keysight, was recently notified that she will be laid off by the end of the month. Soon after hearing the news, she decided to work on updating her resume and LinkedIn page.

Lepine had worked at the company almost eight years and, while the news affected her, she felt a sense of empowerment when she was updating her resume.

“I can’t control losing my job but I can try to present myself in the best possible way,” said Lepine, a resident of Lafayette, Colorado.

Activate your network
Tapping into connections in your industry now is a good idea, said career coach Marlo Lyons. Talking with your friends about possible job openings elsewhere could give you a head start.

Add to your skill set
Gaining new skills and adding certifications or courses to your resume can be a good way to move up in your current job. If you think you might have to go somewhere else, look for the skills that will make you a stronger candidate, Lyons said. Whether it’s taking a free online course or signing up to get a specific license, adding to the skills listed on your resume will have benefits whether you stay in your current job or have to look for another one.

Websites including Coursera and edX offer courses and certifications from universities around the U.S.

They offer some of the courses for free.

Prioritize your mental health
Your mental health can be heavily affected after a job loss. Take a breath and let yourself feel the emotions. Prioritizing your mental health will allow you to approach your job search in a better way, Dobroski said.

For Lepine, putting her mental health first means focusing on the positive aspects of a new chapter in her life, rather than dwelling on how hard it will be to leave a job she loves.

“I’ve been trying not to focus too much on the negative feelings about it, because I know that getting upset isn’t going to make it any easier for me to make a fresh start,” Lepine said.

Maintain a routine
Keeping some structure in your day will help you with your mental health and with the right cadence of applying to jobs, Mecham said.

Planning your days so they include eating at your usual time, working out or going for a walk, and applying for jobs for a certain number of hours will keep you grounded, he said. Lyons recommends designating a time during the day to start and end applying for jobs.

“Do not over-exhaust yourself with

applying to jobs,” Lyons said. “Take time to do activities that make you feel good.”

Lepine has been leaning into her hobbies to feel better. Her regular activities include baking, cooking and going to her curling club.

“I’m not stress eating, I’m stress baking because I just keep cooking things like, ‘Oh, what’s this new recipe that’ll make me feel better?’,” Lepine said.

Check your benefits
It’s crucial that you understand your compensation package and save any documentation that you need to understand your benefits after you’ve been laid off. Some especially important things to know are your health insurance and dental benefits, Dobroski said.

In the last couple of weeks of employment, Lepine has been making sure that she has enough of her prescriptions for a couple of months, as she has Type 1 diabetes.

“I don’t want to get myself into a situation where I don’t have enough insulin or contact lenses or things to keep living in a healthy way while I’m in this transitional period,” Lepine said.

Network
Reaching out to your professional and personal network can be helpful, and it’s useful to give some direction to friends and colleagues who want to help, Lyons said.

Examples include asking them to write you recommendations on LinkedIn, recommend you for a job or invite you to a conference for free.

Share your experience
It can be hard to talk about losing your job, and you should only share if you feel comfortable. But sharing can help by allowing you to lean on your support system.

When Lepine found out that she was laid off, she was texting with a good friend of hers who quickly made her feel better by understanding her way of coping with hard things: humor.

Apply for unemployment
Applying for unemployment is an option that everyone should utilize, Lyons said. While the amount you get for unemployment might not be as much as your salary, it can help you to stay afloat for some time.

“Companies you worked for are required to pay state and federal tax which provide unemployment benefits,” Lyons said. “Don’t be shy about collecting it.”

The Labor Department has tips on applying for unemployment.

Consider a temporary job
A temporary job is a good option if you can’t afford to be out of work, Dobroski said. Lyons also recommends temporary jobs and says you should include them in your resume if they showcase skills that match your desired full-time job, such as leadership or organizational skills.

“It shows that you have grit, that you’re willing to work hard and take care of your responsibilities,” she said.

Breaking down 40-hour workweek conundrum

Why is free time still so elusive?

By Gary Cross
Penn State

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

There have been massive gains in productivity over the past century. So why are people still working so hard for so long?

Output per worker increased by almost 300% between 1950 and 2018 in the U.S. The standard American workweek, meanwhile, has remained unchanged, at about 40 hours.

This paradox is especially notable in the U.S., where the average work year is 1,767 hours compared with 1,354 in Germany, a difference largely due to Americans’ lack of vacation time.

Some might argue that Americans are just more hardworking. But shouldn’t more productive work be rewarded with more time free from work?

This is the central theme of my new book, “Free Time: The History of an Elusive Ideal.”

Many economists see the status quo mostly as a choice: People would simply rather have more money. So they prioritize work over free time.

However, in the past, many economists assumed that people’s need for more stuff would eventually be met. At that point, they would choose more free time.

In fact, one of the most famous economists of the 20th century, John

Maynard Keynes, confidently predicted in 1930 that within a century, the normal workweek would decrease to 15 hours. Yet Americans in their prime working age are still on the job 41.7 hours per week.

Why was Keynes wrong? Obviously, people’s needs or wants were not fully met. In the first half of the 20th century, advertising shifted in ways that emphasized emotions over utility, making consumers feel like they needed to buy more stuff; planned obsolescence shortened how long products remained functional or fashionable, spurring more frequent purchases; and new, exciting - but costly - goods and services kept consumerism churning.

So workers continued to labor for long hours to earn enough money to spend.

Furthermore, as wages rose, the opportunity cost of time spent away from work also grew. This made more free time less economically appealing. In a consumption-saturated society, time spent neither producing nor consuming goods increasingly appeared as wasted time.

Interest in slower, cheaper activities - reading a book, meeting a friend to catch up over coffee - started to seem less important than buying a pickup truck or spending an hour at the casino, pursuits that demand disposable income.

It’s still important to consider whether there’s even any choice to be made.

Almost everyone who works 40 hours a week or more does so because

they have to. There are bills to pay, health insurance coverage to maintain and retirement to squirrel away money for. Some jobs are more precarious than others, and many workers even forego earned vacation time for fear of losing promotions.

This hardly makes for a free choice. But the 40-hour week isn’t the result of a personal calculation of costs and benefits. Rather, it’s the result of a hard-fought political battle that culminated in the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which established the standard 40-hour workweek, along with a minimum wage.

Pressed by a labor movement that was far more powerful than today’s, the government implemented a range of progressive economic policies during the 1930s to help the nation emerge from the Great Depression.

Many government officials viewed setting a standard workweek as a way to curtail exploitation and unfair competition among employers, who would otherwise be motivated to push their employees to work for as long as possible. It was an emergency measure, not a choice of more time over more personal income. Nor was it a step toward the progressive reduction of hours worked, as Keynes had envisioned.

In fact, it was hardly a radical measure.

Labor leaders had initially proposed a 30-hour week, which government officials resoundingly rejected. Even New Deal liberals saw a shortening of working hours as a potential threat to economic growth.

So the 40-hour week ended up as

the compromise, and the standard hasn’t been updated since.

For most Americans, this was an acceptable trade-off. They might be working long hours, but they could afford television sets, cars and homes in the suburbs. Many families could live on the wages of the full-time work of the father, making the 40-hour week seem reasonable, since the mother had time to care for the family and home.

But this consensus has long since been undermined. Since the 1970s, inflation-adjusted wages haven’t risen with economic growth. In many households that include married or partnered couples, a single wage earner has been replaced by two earners, both of whom find themselves working at least 40 hours per week.

It’s almost as if the 40-hour week had been replaced by an 80-hour week - at least in terms of hours worked per household.

Who has time to raise kids? Who can afford them? It’s no wonder the birth rate has declined.

For decades, the amount of work we do has been talked about as “just the way things are” - an inevitability, almost. It doesn’t seem possible for society to take a different tack and, like flipping a switch, work less.

To me, this resignation points to a need to reconsider the social contracts of the past. Most Americans will not abandon their work ethic and their insistence that most people work. Fair enough.

Many people prefer working over having vast stores of free time, and that’s OK. And there’s still immense

value in work that doesn’t produce a paycheck - caregiving and volunteering, for example.

But reducing the standard workweek, perhaps by transitioning to a four-day week, could ease stress for overworked families.

These changes require political action, not just individuals making the personal choice to arrive at a better work-life balance. And yet a national reduction in the standard workweek seems almost impossible. Congress can’t even pass legislation for paid family leave or guaranteed vacation time.

It doesn’t help that elected leaders continue to insist that well-being be measured mostly by economic growth, and when the U.S. media breathlessly reports quarterly economic growth data, with increases deemed “good” and decreases deemed “bad.”

Why shouldn’t free time and its benefits be included in the equation? Why aren’t figures on the social costs of unlimited growth publicized? Does it even matter that the Dow Jones Industrial Average has doubled in less than a decade when economic security is so fragile and so many people are overstressed?

The idea that stratospheric increases in productivity can allow for more time for life is not simply a romantic or sentimental idea. Keynes viewed it as entirely reasonable.

Opportunities like the one that led to the 40-hour workweek in the 1930s rarely appear. But some sort of paradigm shift is urgently needed.

Something has to give. (AP)

Women's Prize hopes to help change nonfiction book dominated by men

LONDON, Feb 19, (AP): Go into many bookstores, and the nonfiction shelves will be dominated by men.

The Women's Prize for Nonfiction hopes to change that. "Nonfiction is still perceived to some extent as a man's game," said British historian Suzannah Lipscomb, who is chairing the judging panel for the inaugural edition of the U.K.-based prize. The judges announced a list of 16 contenders for the 30,000 pound (\$38,000) award on Thursday.

An offshoot of the 28-year-old Women's Prize for Fiction, whose past winners include Zadie Smith, Tayari Jones and Barbara Kingsolver, the new prize is open to female English-language writers from any country in any nonfiction genre.

Lipscomb noted that in 2022, only 26.5% of nonfiction books reviewed in Britain's newspapers were by women, and male writers dominated established nonfiction writing prizes.

"In all the ways that we recognize expertise and authority - giving it exposure, giving it attention, sales, money earned by the authors - women were not featuring as highly as their male counterparts," she said. "So I think that we do still need to close what (journalist) Mary Ann Sieghart called the authority gap. And that's why this prize is needed."

The company Nielsen Book Research found in 2019 that women bought 59% of all the books sold in the U.K., but men accounted for just over half of adult nonfiction purchases.

Authors from the United States, Australia, Canada, India, Jamaica, the Philippines and the U.K. are on the prize longlist, chosen from 120

books submitted by publishers.

They include author-activist Naomi Klein's plunge into online misinformation, "Doppelganger," and journalist Patricia Evangelista's "Some People Need Killing," a searing investigation of the Philippines' drug war.

There are works by leading academics and books on science and technology, including Cat Bohannon's "Eve: How the Female Body Drove 200 Million Years of Human Evolution" and Madhumita Murgia's "Code-Dependent: Living in the Shadow of AI."

Genres

The list spans genres including travelogue (Alice Albinia's "The Britannias: An Island Quest"), history (Leah Redmond Chang's Renaissance study "Young Queens"), biography (Anna Funder's "Wifeedom: Mrs. Orwell's Invisible Life") and autobiography (Safiya Sinclair's "How to Say Babylon: A Jamaican Memoir").

Asked what unites the disparate roster, Lipscomb quotes a line from Funder's book: "The project of good writing is to reveal to us the world we thought we knew."

"There is a trend towards redressing wrongs, telling untold stories, exposing truths, revealing hypocrisies," she said. "That sense of making good comes out of them."

Six finalists for the nonfiction award will be announced on March 27, and the winner will be unveiled at a ceremony in London on June 13.

Also:

NEW YORK: Stephen Colbert's next book is very much about stirring the pot.

Celadon Books announced Thursday that "The Late Show" host and his wife, **Evie McGee Colbert**, have collaborated on the cookbook "Does This Taste Funny: Recipes Our Family Loves," to be published on Sept. 17.

"We are so excited to announce our new cookbook, which we have been working on together for two years," the Colberts said in a statement released through Celadon. "We hope everyone enjoys the recipes and stories. We made it with love ... and an enormous amount of butter."

The book includes more than 100 recipes, from "Stephen's Kindergarten Soup" to "The Colbert Bump Cocktail," with an emphasis on the Lowcountry cuisine of the Colberts' native **South Carolina**.

"Readers will also enjoy the banter, reminiscences and stories, and the gorgeous food photos and informal at-home pictures that fill the book, making readers feel like they are right there in the kitchen with Evie, Stephen, their children (and dog, Benny) and the extended family who are at the heart of the Colberts' lives," Celadon's announcement reads in part.

Stephen Colbert's previous books include "I Am America (And So Can You!)" and "America Again: Re-becoming the Greatness We Never Weren't."

Variety



Director Christopher Nolan, from left, producer Emma Thomas, and producer Charles Roven, winners of the best film award for 'Oppenheimer', pose for photographers at the 77th British Academy Film Awards, BAFTA's, in London, Sunday, Feb. 18, 2024. (AP)

Film

Atom bomb epic cementing front-runner status for Oscars

'Oppenheimer' wins 7 prizes at BAFTA

LONDON, Feb 19, (AP): Atom bomb epic "Oppenheimer" won seven prizes, including best picture, director and actor, at the 77th British Academy Film Awards on Sunday, cementing its front-runner status for the Oscars next month.

Gothic fantasia "Poor Things" took five prizes and Holocaust drama "The Zone of Interest" won three.

British-born filmmaker Christopher Nolan won his first best director BAFTA for "Oppenheimer," and Irish performer Cillian Murphy won the best actor prize for playing physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, the father of the atomic bomb.

Murphy said he was grateful to play such a "colossally knotty, complex character."

Nolan noted that nuclear weapons are "a nihilistic subject and the film inevitably reflects that," telling the movie's backers: "Thank you for taking on something dark."

Emma Stone was named best actress for playing the wild and spirited Bella Baxter in "Poor Things," a steampunk-style visual extravaganza that won prizes for visual effects, production design, makeup and hair and costume design.

"Oppenheimer" had a field-leading 13 nominations, but missed out on the record of nine trophies, set in 1971 by "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid."

It won the best film race against "Poor Things," "Killers of the Flower Moon," "Anatomy of a Fall" and "The Holdovers." "Oppenheimer" also scooped trophies for editing, cinematography and musical score, as well as the best supporting actor prize for Robert Downey Jr., who played Atomic Energy Commission head Lewis Strauss.

Da'Vine Joy Randolph was named best supporting actress for playing a boarding school cook in "The Holdovers" and said she felt a "responsibility I don't take lightly" to tell the stories of underrepresented people like her character Mary.

"Oppenheimer" faced stiff competition in what's widely considered a vintage year for cinema and an awards season energized by the end of actors' and writers' strikes that shut down Hollywood for months.

"The Zone of Interest," a British-produced film shot in Poland with a largely German cast, was named both

best British film and best film not in English - a first - and also took the prize for its sound, which has been described as the real star of the film.

Jonathan Glazer's unsettling drama takes place in a family home just outside the walls of the Auschwitz death camp, whose horrors are heard and hinted at, rather than seen.

"Walls aren't new from before or since the Holocaust, and it seems stark right now that we should care about innocent people being killed in Gaza or Yemen or Mariupol or Israel," producer James Wilson said. "Thank you for recognizing a film that asks us to think in those spaces."

Ukraine war documentary "20 Days in Mariupol," produced by The Associated Press and PBS "Frontline," won the prize for best documentary.

Reality of life

"This is not about us," said filmmaker Mstyslav Chernov, who captured the harrowing reality of life in the besieged city with an AP team. "This is about Ukraine, about the people of Mariupol."

Chernov said the story of the city and its fall into Russian occupation "is a symbol of struggle and a symbol of faith. Thank you for empowering our voice and let's just keep fighting."

The awards ceremony, hosted by "Doctor Who" star David Tennant - who entered wearing a kilt and sequined top while carrying a dog named Bark Ruffalo - was a glitzy, British-accented appetizer for Hollywood's Academy Awards, closely watched for hints about who might win at the Oscars on March 10.

The prize for original screenplay went to French courtroom drama "Anatomy of a Fall." The film about a woman on trial over the death of her husband was written by director Justine Triet and her partner, Arthur Harari.

"It's a fiction, and we are reasonably fine," Triet joked.

Cord Jefferson won the adapted screenplay prize for the satirical "American Fiction," about the struggles of an African American novelist.

Jefferson said he hoped the success of the movie "maybe changes the minds of the people who are in

charge of greenlighting films and TV shows, allows them to be less risk-averse."

Historical epic "Killers of the Flower Moon," Leonard Bernstein biopic "Maestro," grief-flecked love story "All of Us Strangers" and class-war dramedy "Saltburn" all won nothing despite multiple nominations.

"Barbie," one half of 2023's "Barbenheimer" box office juggernaut and the year's top-grossing film, also came up empty from five nominations. "Barbie" director Greta Gerwig failed to get a directing nomination for either the BAFTAs or the Oscars, in what was seen by many as a major snub.

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

The Rising Star award, the only category decided by public vote, went to Mia McKenna-Bruce, star of "How to Have Sex."

Before the ceremony, nominees, including Bradley Cooper, Carey Mulligan, Emily Blunt, Rosamund Pike, Ryan Gosling and Ayo Edebiri all walked the red carpet at London's Royal Festival Hall, along with presenters Andrew Scott, Cate Blanchett, Idris Elba and David Beckham.

Guest of honor was Prince William, in his role as president of the British Academy of Film and Television Arts. He arrived without his wife, Kate, who is recovering from abdominal surgery last month.

The ceremony included musical performances by "Ted Lasso" star Hannah Waddingham, singing "Time After Time," and Sophie Ellis-Bextor, singing her 2001 hit "Murder on the Dancefloor," which shot back up the charts after featuring in "Saltburn."

Film curator June Givanni, founder of the June Givanni PanAfrican Cinema Archive, was honored for outstanding British contribution to cinema, while actress Samantha Morton received the academy's highest honor, the BAFTA Fellowship.

Morton, who grew up in foster care and children's homes, said that "representation matters."

Features

ARABIC TIMES

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2024

Books

NEW YORK: Jennifer Lopez, Bad Bunny, Chris Hemsworth and Zendaya will join Vogue's Anna Wintour as co-chairs of this year's Met Gala, the magazine and the Metropolitan Museum of Art revealed Thursday.

And the dress code? "The Garden of Time," whatever that means in the imaginations of the star-studded crowd that will ascend the museum's grand steps on the first Monday in May at the splashy benefit.

The dress code ties into the theme of this year's May 6 gala, which aligns with the spring exhibition at the Met's Costume Institute. This year's theme is "Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion." The reference is not to the fairytale, though, but to treasured garments from the vast collection at the Costume Institute - some too fragile to hang upright. Museum curators will place them in glass cases, like Sleeping Beauty herself.

Curator **Andrew Bolton**, who masterminds the Met's blockbuster fashion exhibits, said at a preview in November that he was looking for a way to literally breathe life into a collection of 33,000 pieces, many of which are never seen. He's chosen about 250 of them, and will organize the show around themes of land, sea, and sky.

The gala is a fundraiser for the Costume Institute, bringing in the bulk of its annual budget. To date, the event has raised more than \$223.5 million, according to the Met.

The carpet beforehand is one of the biggest pop culture spectacles of the year with stars like **Lady Gaga, Kim Kardashian, Billy Porter** and **Rihanna** wearing outfits tailored to the night's theme. This is Bad Bunny's third year at the gala and the first for **Hemsworth, Lopez** has been on the guest list 13 times and **Zendaya** five.

Honorary chairs are Loewe creative director **Jonathan Anderson** and TikTok CEO **Shou Zi Chew**. TikTok is the gala's sponsor, with support from Loewe.

The exhibit will run May 10-Sept. 2, 2024. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Throughout her career, **Jennifer Lopez** has been

hailed as an epochal, prolific and hard-working artist. One adjective not often associated with the pop icon-turned-actor and movie producer, however, is self-deprecating.

But as she readies to drop her first studio album in a decade, Lopez is performing a kind of fictionalized mea culpa about her past romantic relation-



Lopez



Ben Affleck

ships in "This Is Me ... Now: A Love Story," hitting Prime Video Friday in tandem with the album's release. Live Nation also announced Thursday that Lopez will embark on a 30-plus city tour beginning June 26 in Orlando, **Florida**.

The 65-minute musical film, which she self-financed, follows a hopeless romantic in search

of love (Lopez) and the myriad ways she contends with repeated heartbreak, including visits to her therapist (played by Fat Joe) and sobbing through old romantic films. From a distance, a star-studded Zodiac council, played by **Jane Fonda, Post Malone, Keke Palmer, Sofia Vergara** and others, provide a sympathetic but mercilessly faultfinding com-

mentary on her desperation for love, failed marriages (Lopez is on her fourth) - and rebounding relationships.

At 54, Lopez said her ninth studio album and its accompanying film were the result of a sudden burst of inspiration, a large part of which she attributes to her rekindled romance with and marriage to **Ben Affleck**. (AP)

Balancing innovation

Some video game actors are letting AI clone their voices

LOS ANGELES, Feb 19, (AP): If you are battling a video game goblin who speaks with a Cockney accent, or asking a gruff Scottish blacksmith to forge a virtual sword, you might be hearing the voice of actor Andy Magee.

Except it's not quite Magee's voice. It's a synthetic voice clone generated by artificial intelligence.

As video game worlds get more expansive, some game studios are experimenting with AI tools to give voice to a potentially unlimited number of characters and conversations. It also saves time and money on the "vocal scratch" recordings game developers use as placeholders to test scenes and scripts.

The response from professional actors has been mixed. Some fear that AI voices could replace all but the most famous human actors if big studios have their way. Others, like Magee, have been willing to give it a try if they're fairly compensated and their voices aren't misused.

"I hadn't really anticipated AI voices to be my break into the industry, but, alas, I was offered paid voice work, and I was grateful for any experience I could get at the time," said Magee, who grew up in Northern Ireland and has previously worked as a craft brewery manager, delivery driver and farmer.

He now specializes in voicing a diverse range of characters from the British Isles, turning what he used to consider a party trick into a rewarding career.

AI voice clones don't have the best reputation, in part because they've been misused to create convincing deepfakes of real people - from U.S. President Joe Biden to the late Anthony Bourdain - saying things they never said. Some early attempts by independent developers to add them to video games have also been poorly received, both by gamers and actors - not all of whom consented to having their voices used in that way.

Most of the big studios haven't yet employed AI voices in a noticeable way and are still in ongoing negotiations on how to use them with Hollywood's actors union, which also represents game performers. Concerns about how movie studios will use AI helped fuel last year's strikes by the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists but when it comes to game studios, the union is showing signs that a deal is likely.

Sarah Elmaleh, who has played the Cube Queen in Fortnite and numerous other high-profile roles in blockbuster and indie games, said she has "always been one of the more conservative voices" on AI-generated voices but now considers herself more agnostic.

"We've seen some uses where the (game developer's) interest was a shortcut that was exploitative and was not done in consultation with the actor," said Elmaleh, who chairs SAG-AFTRA's negotiating committee for interactive media.

But in other cases, she said, the role of an AI voice is often invisible and used to clean up a recording in the later stages of production, or to make a character sound older or younger at a different stage of their virtual life.

"There are use cases that I would consider with the right developer, or that I simply feel that the developer should have the right to offer to an actor, and then an actor should have the right to consider that it can be done safely and fairly without exploiting them," Elmaleh said.

SAG-AFTRA has already made a deal with one AI voice company, Replica Studios, announced last month at the CES gadget show in Las Vegas. The agreement - which SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher described as "a great example of AI being done right" - enables major studios to work with unionized actors to create and license a digital replica of their voice. It sets terms that also allow performers to opt out of having their voices used in perpetuity.

"Everyone says they're doing it with ethics in mind," but most are not and some are training their AI systems with voice data pulled off the internet without the speaker's permission, said Replica Studios CEO Shreyas Nivas.

Nivas said his company licenses characters for a period of time. To clone a voice, it will schedule a recording session and ask the actor to voice a script either in their regular voice or the voice of the character they are performing.

"They control whether they wish to go ahead with this," he said. "It's creating new revenue streams. We're not replacing actors."

It was Replica Studios that first reached out to Magee about a voice-over audio clip he had created demonstrating a Scottish accent. Working from his home studio in Vancouver, British Columbia, he's since created a number of AI replicas and pitched his own ideas for them. For each character he'll record lines with distinct emotions - some happy, some sad, some in battle duress. Each mood gets about 7,000 words, and the final audio data set amounts to several hours covering all of a character's styles.

Once cloned, a paid subscriber of Replica's text-to-speech tool can make that voice say pretty much anything - within certain guidelines.

Magee said the experience has opened doors to a range of acting experiences that don't involve AI - including a role in the upcoming strategy game Godsworn.

Voice actor Zeke Alton, whose credits include more than a dozen roles in the Call of Duty military action franchise, hasn't yet agreed to lending his voice to an AI replica. But he understands why studios might want them as they try to scale up game franchises such as Baldur's Gate and Starfield where players can explore vast, open worlds and encounter elves, warlocks or aliens at every corner.



Elmaleh

Children are 'expensive' not just for parents, but the environment

So how many is too many?

By Trevor Hedberg
University of Arizona

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



People born in the future stand to inherit a planet in the midst of a global ecological crisis. Natural habitats are being decimated, the world is growing hotter, and scien-

tists fear we are experiencing the sixth mass extinction event in Earth's history.

Under such circumstances, is it reasonable to bring a child into the world?

My philosophical research deals with environmental and procreative ethics - the ethics of choosing how many children to have or whether to have them at all. Recently, my work has explored questions where these two fields intersect, such as how climate change should affect decision-making about having a family.

Procreation is often viewed as a personal or private choice that should not be scrutinized. However, it is a choice that affects others: the parents, the children themselves and the people who will inhabit the world alongside those children in the future. Thus, it is an appropriate topic for moral reflection.

Let's start by thinking about why it might be wrong to have a large family.

Many people who care about the environment believe they are obligated to try to reduce their impact: driving fuel-efficient vehicles, recycling and purchasing food locally, for example.

But the decision to have a child - to create another person who will most likely adopt a similar lifestyle to your own - vastly outweighs the impact of these activities. Based on the average distance a car travels each year, people in developed countries can save the equivalent of 2.4 metric tons of CO2 emissions each year by living without a vehicle, according to one literature review. For comparison, having one fewer child saves 58.6 metric tons each year.

So, if you think you are obligated to do other activities to reduce your impact on the environment, you should limit your family size, too.

In response, however, some people may argue that adding a single person to a planet of 8 billion cannot make a meaningful difference. According to this argument, one new person would constitute such a tiny percentage of the overall contribution to climate change and other environmental problems that the impact would be morally negligible.

Environmental ethicists debate how to quantify an individual's impact on the environment, especially their lifetime carbon emissions.

For example, statistician Paul Murtaugh and scientist Michael Schlam attempted to estimate the "carbon legacy" tied to a couple's choice to procreate. They estimated the total lifetime emissions of individuals living in the world's most populous 11 countries. They also assumed a parent was responsible for all emissions tied to their genetic lineage: all of their own emissions, half their children's emissions, one-quarter of their grandchildren's emissions, and so on.

If emissions stayed similar to 2005 levels for several generations, an American couple having one fewer child would save 9,441 metric tons of CO2-equivalent, according to their calculations. Driving a more fuel-efficient car, on the other hand - getting 10 more miles to the gallon - would save only 148 metric tons of CO2-equivalent.

Philosopher John Nolt has attempted to estimate how much harm the average American causes over their lifetime in terms of greenhouse gas emissions. He found that the average American contributes roughly one two-billionth of the total greenhouse gases that cause climate change. But since climate change may harm billions of people over the next millennium, this person may be responsible for the severe suffering, or even death, of one or two future people.

Such estimates are, at best, imprecise. Nevertheless, even if one assumes that each individual child's impact on the environment is relatively insignificant on the global scale, that does not necessarily mean that procreators are off the moral hook.

One common thought in ethics is that people should avoid participating in enterprises that involve collective wrongdoing. In other words, we should avoid contributing to institutions and practices that cause bad outcomes, even if our own individual contribution to that outcome is tiny. (AP)



Public health workers spray insecticide during a fumigation campaign against dengue-promoting mosquitoes, in the Ceilandia neighborhood of Brasilia, Brazil, on Feb. 16, 2024. (AP)

Hot city susceptible to outbreaks

Brazil's health workers scour junkyards for mosquitos to fight dengue outbreaks

RIO DE JANEIRO, Feb 19, (AP): The small team of state public health workers slalomed between auto parts strewn across a Rio de Janeiro junkyard, looking for standing water where mosquitoes might have laid their eggs.

They were part of nationwide efforts to curtail a surge in Brazil of the mosquito-borne illness of dengue fever during the country's key tourist season that runs through the end of February.

Paulo Cesar Gomes, a 56-year-old entomologist, found some mosquito larvae swimming in shallow rainwater inside a car bumper.

"We call this type of location a strategic point" because of the high turnover in items converging from all over, he said. "It's difficult not to have mosquitoes here."

Earlier in the month, just days before Rio kicked off its world-famous Carnival festivities, the city joined several states and the country's capital in declaring a public health epidemic over this year's greater-than-normal number of cases of dengue.

"We had more cases in January than any other January," Ethel Maciel, head of health surveillance at Brazil's Health Ministry, said in an interview with The Associated Press.

So far this year, Brazil has recorded 512,000 cases nationwide, including both confirmed and likely cases - nearly four times more than those registered in the same period a year ago.

There have been 425 deaths under investigation for dengue so far this year, with 75 confirmed, as compared with just over 1,000 for all of 2023.

Dengue is a viral infection transmitted to humans through the bite of infected mosquitoes. Frequent rains and high temperatures, which accelerate the hatching of mosquito eggs and the development of larvae, make the famously hot city of Rio especially susceptible to outbreaks.

Many who are infected never develop symptoms, but dengue can cause high fever, headache, body aches, nausea and a rash, according to the World Health Organization. While most get better after a week or so, some develop a severe form that requires hospitalization and can be fatal.

Health workers like Gomes, equipped with masks and plastic gloves, meticulously combed the junkyard on a hot morning, gently kicking and shaking piled up auto parts looking for any trace of the Aedes aegypti mosquito that can spread dengue.

Whenever he saw standing water Gomes grabbed a hand pipette out of his bag and looked for larvae, which he collected in a white plastic container. Captured mosquitos and larvae are kept alive and brought to a city laboratory to be tested for dengue.

At locations with positive tests, health agents spray the walls with a product that kills mosquitos and then monitor the location for weeks.

Maciel, from the Health Ministry, said

the first warning about a possible epidemic came in September.

Brazil's leading research institute, the state-funded Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, or Fiocruz, came up with several scenarios indicating that Brazil could have as many as 4.2 million cases this year, up from 1.6 million in 2023.

Maciel said the surge is due to excessive heat and intense rain, both possible effects of climate change or El Niño, a natural, temporary and occasional warming of part of the Pacific that shifts weather patterns across the globe.

Maciel also cited the circulation of four dengue virus serotypes at the same time, one of which authorities had not seen in 15 years.

In Rio, more than 80% of mosquito breeding sites are located in residential properties, health officials say. So, efforts to combat dengue must start in homes, and raising awareness is key, said Mário Sérgio Ribeiro, a health surveillance official for Rio de Janeiro state.

State officials launched a "10 minutes that save lives" initiative to encourage residents to inspect their homes, offices and places of worship for any standing water.

Health workers and volunteers went door to door, pacing up and down the narrow streets of Rio's Tabajara working-class neighborhood, or favela, to spread the word. They distributed leaflets and climbed on rooftops, looking for containers with rainwater.

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Milan's Olivier Giroud (right), scores a goal during the Serie A soccer match between Monza and Milan at Stadio U-Power Stadium in Monza, Italy. Monza won 4-2. (AP) — See Page 15

Sports

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Kuwait Ice Hockey League champions Warriors.

Warriors claim first title in Kuwait Ice Hockey League

The Warriors clinched victory in the Kuwait Ice Hockey League for men during the (2023-2024) season, securing their first championship title by defeating the Stars with a com-

manding 10-5 score. The culmination of the season occurred after a well-executed series of 20 matches organized by the Kuwait Winter Games Club, featur-

ing the spirited participation of six formidable teams. Vice President of the Kuwait Olympic Committee, Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah, expressed the commit-

tee's commitment to supporting winter Olympic games, underscoring their significance equivalent to that of summer Olympic games. Captain Abdullah Al-Maraghy,

leading the Warriors, acknowledged the intensity of the competition throughout the season, emphasizing its positive impact on the team's preparation for upcoming

international tournaments. He expressed immense joy and pride in the team's achievement of securing the league title for the first time. (KUNA)

Kuwaiti squash 'sensation' Hani clinches French Junior Open title

PARIS, Feb 19, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Squash prodigy Abdullah Hani secured the top spot in the French Junior Open Squash tournament (Under 15 years), emerging victorious over English contender George Griffith in a thrilling final.



KUNA photo Kuwaiti squash 'sensation' Hani.

SQUASH

The fiercely contested match concluded with Hani claiming 32 points against Griffith's 17, as the two athletes engaged in a challenging battle spanning five closely contested games: 11-5, 11-7, 6-11, and 17-15. The tournament, which commenced last Thursday in Lille, France, showcased exceptional talent with the participation of 300 players from across the globe, adding to the international flavor of the event.

New Zealand qualify for Paris Oly

WELLINGTON, New Zealand, Feb 19, (AP): New Zealand will compete in the women's football tournament at the Paris Olympic Games after beating the Solomon Islands 11-1 in the final of the Oceania qualifying tournament Monday in Apia, Samoa. Hannah Wilkinson, who scored the first goal of the Women's World Cup in New Zealand and Australia last year, was one of four players to score twice for New Zealand. The others were Grace Jale, Indah-Paige Riley and Katie Kitching. New Zealand led 5-0 at halftime.

The final saw New Zealand continue its dominance of a tournament in which it scored 32 goals and conceded two in five matches. New Zealand is the sixth team to qualify for the Olympic women's tournament after host France, Canada, United States, Brazil and Colombia. Australia and Japan are expected to qualify for the 12-team tournament later this month. New Zealand has played in the Olympic tournament on four previous occasions but has won only two matches, against Cameroon in 2012 and Colombia in 2016.

All-Star Game points records fall with the East 'dominating' West

Lillard sweeps All-Star weekend by adding MVP Award to 3-point title

INDIANAPOLIS, Feb 19, (AP): The NBA wanted more competition. It got more points instead - more than ever before.

And once again, the All-Star Game was all offense. All-Star MVP Damian Lillard of the Milwaukee Bucks scored 39 points and the Eastern Conference beat the Western Conference 211-186 on Sunday night, with the winners putting up the most points in the game's 73-year history. The previous mark: 196 by the West in 2016. "We had fun," East captain Giannis Antetokounmpo of the Bucks said. It was a flurry of records: The total points of 397 smashed the record of 374 set in 2017, while the East made 42 3-pointers to break the mark of 35 set by Team LeBron in 2019. The sides combined for 193 points in the first half to break the any-half record of 191 set last year, and the East tied an any-half record by scoring 104 by intermission. Jaylen Brown of the Boston Celtics had 36 and Tyrese Haliburton from the hometown Indiana Pacers finished with 32 for the East, while Antetokounmpo had 23 and Jayson Tatum finished with 20. "To be able to have this kind of accomplishment, it's special," Lillard said. Perhaps unnoticed: Karl-Anthony Towns of the Minnesota Timberwolves scored 50 points for the West in just 28



Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James (23) drives past Miami Heat center Bam Adebayo during the first half of an NBA All-Star basketball game in Indianapolis. (AP)

The West scored a ton of points, too: At 186, it had the fourth-most by any team in All-Star history. And obviously, the most ever in a loss. Among the other records: - The East tried 97 3-pointers; the previous record was 90 by Team LeBron in 2019. - The teams combined for 66 3s made and 168 3s attempted (previous records were 62 and 167 in 2019).

BASKETBALL

- The teams combined for 163 field goals made and 289 attempted (previous records were 162 in 2017 and 286 in 2016). "Obviously, it wasn't high intensity, at all," Haliburton said. Lillard made some history, too. He defended his 3-point shootout title on Saturday night - then won MVP on Sunday night. The only other player to win a Saturday event and All-Star MVP in the same weekend was Michael Jordan in 1988, when he won the dunk contest as well as the MVP trophy. "Dame put on a show," Tatum said, "and I was happy for him." The highlights were from everywhere. Lillard pulled up from halfcourt in the third quarter - swish. Luka Doncic tried a shot from about 70 feet late in the first half; it hit near the top of the backboard. Towns even threw an alley-oop to Stephen Curry; the Warriors star is much more of a shooter than a dunker, so he simply laid it in instead. The only drama in the fourth was about the record - and really, that wasn't in doubt. The East had 160 points through three quarters, only needing 37 more to set the team All-Star record. Brown's 3-pointer with 1:54 left broke the mark, giving the East 197. Haliburton made the shot that sent a scoreboard to the 200-point mark for the first time in any sort of official NBA history, connecting from deep with 1:27 left. Lillard said the East wanted the record. "Everybody was asking what the record was," Lillard said. "We found out and went after it." And Lillard ended it in style - a 44-footer to close the scoring. He made 11 3-pointers on the night, with the official distance of those recorded at 347 feet. A typical NBA 3-pointer is 24 or 25 feet; Lillard averaged 31 1/2 feet on his 3s Sunday night.

Fostering sportsmanship

School Sports Federation's 'Handball Family' festival exceeds expectation

By Khaled El Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff KUWAIT CITY, Feb 19: The Handball Federation, in collaboration with the School Sports Federation, successfully hosted the third edition of the "Handball Family" children's festival at the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex. Fourteen clubs, along with teams from the School Sports Federation, participated in the event, earning praise from attendees, including game managers from various clubs and officials from the "hand and school" federations. The festival surpassed expectations and was deemed a success by all standards, as confirmed by Walid Ayesh, the Vice President of the School Sports Federation.

Ayesh highlighted the positive interaction from the clubs, each fielding around 40 players who joined forces with school union players. Emphasizing inclusivity, Ayesh mentioned that top positions were eliminated, and every participating player received a medal. This approach aimed to foster sportsmanship, instill a healthy perspective on winning and losing, and create a comfortable environment for all participants.

HANDBALL

The Vice President of the School Sports Federation emphasized that the festival serves as a platform to identify and nurture talents from an early age, employing advanced

scientific methods to develop future generations of handball stars.

These emerging talents are expected to form the core of both club

and national teams. Ayesh commended the presence of club handball managers and parents at the festival, acknowledging their significant role in providing moral support to the young players, boosting their motivation during the festival matches. Meanwhile, the third round of the General Handball League is set to kick off today at the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex. At five in the evening, Al-Kuwait will face Sulaibikhat, followed by Al-Fahaheel's clash with Al-Salmiya at seven in the evening. The current team standings are led by Al-Kuwait, Al-Fahaheel, Al-Salmiya, and Kazma, each with 4 points from the previous two rounds, shaping up for an exciting and competitive league season.



Some of the future stars in action.