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ANDREW NIXON AP

Sean de Guzman (right), manager of snow surveys and water-supply forecasting for the state Department of Water Resources, and engineer Anthony Burdock examine the aluminum snow depth survey pole in Phillips Station on Tuesday.

BEIRUT BLAST KILLS HAMAS LEADER

U.S. and Lebanon attribute attack to Israeli forces

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Hamas on Tuesday accused Israel of killing Saleh Arouri, a top leader of the group, along with two commanders from its armed wing, the Qassam Brigades. Arouri is the most senior Hamas figure to be killed since Israel vowed to destroy the organization and eliminate its leadership after a deadly Hamas-led attack on Oct. 7.

Arouri was assassinated in an explosion in a suburb of Beirut, Lebanon's capital, marking the first such assassination of a top Hamas official outside the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in recent years. It comes as officials across the region are worried about the war in Gaza igniting a wider conflagration.

Israeli officials would not comment on whether their forces had targeted Arouri, but officials from Lebanon and the United States ascribed the attack to Israel. A senior U.S. official said it was most likely the first of many strikes that Israel would carry out against Hamas operatives connected to the Oct. 7 assault.

"No one is safe if they had any hand in planning, raising money for or carrying out these attacks," said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive internal discussions. Citing Israel's vow to hunt down the perpetrators of the Oct. 7 attack wherever they are, the official added, "This is just the beginning, and it'll go on for years."

The explosion shattered the tense calm that had prevailed in Beirut ever since Hezbollah, a powerful Lebanese militant group that is a Hamas ally, began clashing with Israeli forces in the wake of the Oct. 7 attack. Unlike southern Lebanon, which has been engulfed by the fighting and has seen tens of thousands of people displaced, Beirut had not

SEE HAMAS • A6

STATE'S JAN. SNOWPACK AT LOWEST LEVEL IN 10 YEARS

California reservoirs in good shape thanks to last winter's storms

BY PAUL ROGERS

California's statewide Sierra Nevada snowpack — the source of nearly one-third of the state's water supply — is at its lowest level in a decade, a major turnaround from last year when huge storms ended a three-year drought and buried ski resorts in massive amounts of snow.

On Tuesday, the snowpack was just 25 percent of its historical average for Jan. 2. A year ago on the same date, it was a staggering 185 percent of normal. The last time there was less snow at the beginning of a new year was 2014 when it stood at just 19 percent.

The lack of snow so far this year is due to fewer big storms hitting the state than normal. And when storms have come, they have been warmer, depositing snow mostly at higher elevations.

But the meager totals so far across California's pre-eminent



FRED GREAVES AP

Snow blankets a mountain peak near the meadow in Phillips Station in El Dorado County where the state's first snow survey of the year took place.

mountain range are not a cause to panic, experts say.

Not only are there three months left in the winter season, which typically ends in early April, but last year's soaking winter filled reservoirs across the state. That "money

in the bank" means chances are low that there will be significant urban water restrictions in the state this summer, even if the winter ends with below-average snow and rain.

"The reservoirs are in great shape," said Jay Lund, vice director

"We are seeing a shortening of the (snow) season from either end and a lot more rain in the winter."

Andrew Schwartz • UC Berkeley Central Sierra Snow Laboratory

of the Center for Watershed Sciences at UC Davis. "Almost every reservoir in the state is near or well above its historical average for this time of year. We can sleep better knowing there is water in the reservoirs."

On Monday, Shasta Lake, California's largest reservoir, was 69 percent full, or 116 percent of its historical average for New Year's Day. Similarly, Oroville in Butte County, the state's second-largest reservoir, was 68 percent full, or 130 percent of its historical average. Diamond Valley in Riverside County was 93 percent

SEE SNOW • A5

PEDWEST TO REOPEN ALONG WITH OTHER BORDER CROSSINGS

U-T STAFF & NEWS SERVICES

Biden administration officials said Tuesday they will reopen several southern border crossings this week — including San Ysidro's PedWest — that have been closed as a result of the record number of migrants arriving to the United States.

The officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity under ground rules set by the White House, said tighter enforcement by Mexico and a holiday lull led to lower numbers of illegal entries over the past several days, after weeks of acute

strains.

The PedWest border crossing, which had been shuttered to pedestrian traffic for the second time since September, will resume limited operations — both northbound and southbound — on Thursday, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Northbound operations will open seven days a week from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. and southbound operations from 3 p.m. to 11 p.m.

The announcement comes on the eve of a visit to the southern border by dozens

SEE BORDER • A5

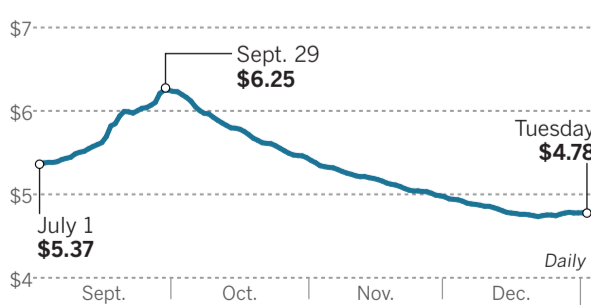


ALEJANDRO TAMAYO U-T FILE

Ivan Granados from Tijuana fills up at the Mobil station on Bonita Road in Chula Vista in November. A recent decline in gas prices appears over.

Bottoming out

After rising as high as \$6.25 per gallon in late September, the average price for a gallon of gas in the San Diego area went on a steady decline that lasted almost three months. But prices have since leveled off.



Source: AAA of Southern California MICHELLE GUERRERO U-T

LOOKS LIKE RECENT DROP IN COUNTY GAS PRICES HAS HIT HALT

Refinery woes cited; website sees 2024 costs better than '23

BY ROB NIKOLEWSKI

Well, it was a nice run while it lasted.

After the average price for a gallon of regular in the San Diego area soared to \$6.249 on Sept. 29, gasoline prices started falling on practically a daily basis. But the three-month retreat seems to have bottomed out.

Three days before Christmas, the average price fell to \$4.733, according to AAA, and has ticked up slightly. The average price at gas stations around the region stood at \$4.776 on Tuesday.

"It looks like prices have reversed course," said Marie Montgomery, spokesperson for the Auto Club of Southern California. "They're going up, but not very quickly."

A couple of refinery issues in the Los Angeles area, fuel analysts say, led to prices leveling off. The Wilmington section of Marathon Petroleum's refinery on Dec. 16 reported an "unplanned flare event," as did the Chevron refinery in El Segundo on Dec. 26.

And while it's the beginning of January on the calendar, refineries in California next month will start transitioning to summer-blended gasoline that then gets distributed to gas stations across the state starting in February.

To reduce smog, the summer blend is about 20 to 25 cents per gallon more expensive than winter blends because of the oxygenates required in the fuel, and refineries have to briefly shut down before processing it.

Plus, refineries typically start their facility maintenance schedule in the first quarter of the year, which reduces output. Times vary by

SEE GASOLINE • A5

LOCAL

PIER CLOSURE LIKELY EXTENDED

■ B1 • Additional structural damage to the Ocean Beach Pier from recent high surf all but ensures that the nearly 2,000-foot wharf will not reopen until at least spring.

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U-T INDEX

Business	A7	Dear Abby	B9	Lottery	A4	Stocks	A8
Comics	B7	Editorial	B3	Obituaries	B4	Television	E5
Crossword	B9	Horoscope	B9	Scores	D5	Weather	A10

