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HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

Kuwait marks Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad's first year as Amir

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16, (KUNA): The State of Kuwait marks, Monday, His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah first anniversary of being named as the Amir, taking the helm after a long line of predecessors and achievements, and succeeding late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

On December 16, 2023, the Cabinet met announcing the passing of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad and proclaiming His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, then Crown Prince, as the Amir according to the Constitution and article four of the law concerning Succession.

On December 20, His Highness the Amir took the constitutional oath at a special National Assembly session becoming the state's 17th Amir, as per stipulations of article 60 of the constitution.

Prior to becoming Amir, His Highness' six-de-

cade career was marked by high-ranking security and military titles in both the Interior Ministry and National Guard, after which he became the Crown Prince.

His Highness the Amir had accompanied late Amirs on many official trips and represented the leadership in many more.

Sheikh Meshal, born in Kuwait 1940, is the seventh son of Kuwait's 10th Ruler Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah who governed the country between 1921 and 1950.

In his early childhood, he was taught reading and writing by his parents and some seniors in the family before joining Al-Mubarakiya School, the first private school in Kuwait at the time.

He continued higher-level studies in the UK where he graduated from Hendon Police College in 1960.

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Kuwaiti-Bahraini ties deep-rooted

Kuwait Amir congratulates Bahrain's King on nat'l day

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has sent a cable of congratulations to the King of Bahrain Hamad bin Issa bin Salman Al-Khalifa on his country's 53rd national day and the 25th anniversary of his accession to power.

His Highness the Amir lauded the significant achievements and development during the era of King Hamad and commended the strong ties linking the State of Kuwait with the Kingdom of Bahrain.

He affirmed both countries' commitment to bolster relations and cooperation in various sectors, expressed good wishes to King Hamad as well as to his country so it may witness further progress and development under the Monarch's wise leadership.

Similarly, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulations to the King of Bahrain Hamad bin Issa bin Salman Al-Khalifa on his country's 53rd national day and the 25th anniversary of his accession to power.

His Highness the Crown Prince wished the Bahraini Monarch good health and his country most progress and prosperity under his sagacious leadership.

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Kuwait dips to -3°C arctic chill

Frost risk in desert until Thursday

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16, (KUNA): The Meteorological Department forecasted on Monday that cold weather would continue, with temperatures remaining cool during the day and cold to very cold at night, with a chance of frost in agricultural and desert areas until Thursday.

Director of the Meteorological Department Dherar Al-Ali told KUNA that the country would remain under the influence of a high-pressure system, bringing cold and dry air, along with cooling in the upper atmosphere and light to moderate northwesterly winds.

Al-Ali added that weather stations recorded low temperatures, reaching -3 degrees Celsius in Salmi, -2 degrees Celsius in Abdali, and six degrees Celsius at

Kuwait International Airport.

With these temperatures, the cold weather and the possibility of frost would continue until Thursday, he noted.

Starting Friday evening, the high-pressure system will weaken, allowing a low-pressure system to move in, shifting the winds to the southeast, bringing warmer weather during the day and a chance of light, scattered rain in some areas, he mentioned.

Bid to bolster economy

Kuwait mandates national goods in relief operations

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Housing, Abdul Latif Al-Mishari, has implemented a decision by the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers requiring that all aid and in-kind assistance provided by the Red Crescent Society, public benefit societies and government bodies be sourced exclusively from Kuwaiti factories and bear the state logo.

This directive, issued earlier follows high-level instructions aimed at strengthening Kuwait's humanitarian role while supporting local industries.

By ensuring aid is made from national products, the initiative seeks to enhance the global perception of Kuwait's humanitarian efforts and deliver

a positive impression to recipients of the assistance.

The decision is also expected to bolster Kuwait's economy, particularly in the food and other industrial sectors, by increasing the demand for locally produced goods.

To achieve the intended outcomes, the Council of Ministers emphasized the importance of conducting comprehensive legal and financial reviews before implementation.

Additionally, an oversight mechanism will be established to ensure compliance and effective execution.

This move is seen as a strategic step in activating the national industrial sector and reinforcing its contribution to the country's economy, aligning with Kuwait's broader vision for sustainable economic growth.



Amiri Diwan photo

His Highness the Amir receives the Minister of Foreign Affairs and new heads of diplomatic and consular missions.

Amir receives Kuwait FM, new diplomats

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya at Bayan Palace Monday morning.

During the meeting, the Minister introduced to His Highness the Amir the new ambassadors and consuls of Kuwait: Ambassador to Roma-

nia Abdullah Abdulrahman Al-Shatti, Ambassador to France Abdullah Suleiman Al-Shahin, Ambassador to Poland Saad Abdulaziz Al-Mehaini, Ambassador to Bangladesh Ali Thunayn Hamada, Ambassador to Mongolia Mutlaq Abdullah Al-Thuwamer, Consul General to the UAE in Dubai and the Northern Emirates Khaled

Abdullah Al-Zaabi, Ambassador to New Zealand Sheikh Sabah Nasser Hamoud Al-Malik Al-Sabah, and Consul General to Saudi Arabia in Jeddah Yousef Abdullah Al-Tunaib.

They took their oaths of office before His Highness the Amir, with senior state officials in attendance. (KUNA)

Assistant FM hails Kuwait-Iran joint committee results

TEHRAN, Dec 16, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Assistant Foreign Minister for Consular Affairs Ambassador Aziz Al-Daihani commended Monday outcomes of the sixth joint Kuwaiti-Iranian consular committee meeting.

Al-Daihani, who headed the Kuwaiti delegation

to Tehran, told KUNA that the meeting handled a slew of issues, found compatibility in perspectives and agreed on several points.

The Kuwaiti senior diplomat also praised the speed of achievement, saying that it is a testament

to both parties' willingness, adding that the discussions were a reflection to the depth of relations, dating back to 1961. Acting Charge d'affaires at the Kuwaiti Embassy in Tehran, Meshari Al-Muzaini attended the meeting.

Day by Day

TO the new leaders of the Levant,

You must be aware of the Syrian cartoonist who was stealing money, claiming it was for the ousted Assad, his brother Maher and Bushra Al-Assad. His statements are well-known and his name and the documents are in front of you to take adequate action.

This conman carried out his scams in Kuwait, Dubai and Oman, and his name appears on the list of the regime's collaborators with Assad.

He stole money, cars and real estate in the Levant and from the Gulf and Saudi families, after claiming to be a partner of Assad and his brother Maher.

... Yet tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar

Death toll in Gaza tops 45,000

Kuwait slams Israel's Golan expansion plan

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16, (Agencies): The State of Kuwait strongly condemned the Israeli occupation's decision to expand territory in the occupied Golan Heights, saying that it went against the UN charter, interna-

tional law, and UNSC resolutions, said a statement by the Foreign Ministry, Monday.

In the statement, the Ministry indicated that the State of Kuwait called on the international community to condemn

the continuous Israeli occupation's violations, which threatened the security and stability of Syria and the Middle East region.

Continued on Page 5

Kuwaiti-Palestinian relations exemplary

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16, (KUNA): Chief of the Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah affirmed on Monday the strength of Kuwaiti-Palestinian relations, deeming it as exemplary.

A statement by the KNG said that this affirmation came during the chief's meeting with Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboub.

Ambassador Tahboub, who congratulated Sheikh Mubarak Al-Humoud's on attain his new post, commended the brotherly sentiments and relations linking Kuwait and Palestine.



KUNA photo

Chief of the Kuwait National Guard receives Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait.



Newswatch

BRUSSELS: EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy **Kaja Kallas** announced on Monday that a top European diplomatic envoy will visit **Damascus** to engage with the new authorities in **Syria**.

In a press conference before the start of the EU Foreign Ministers' meeting in Brussels, Kallas said that the diplomat would travel to Syria today.

She added that today's Foreign Ministers' meeting will discuss how to engage with the new leadership in Syria and at what level this engagement should take place. (KUNA)

MOSCOW: Russia has evacuated some of its diplomats out of the Syrian capital **Damascus** while its embassy continues to function, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Sunday.

The diplomats were transported by a Russian Aerospace Forces flight from the Khmeimim Air Base in **Syria** to Moscow, the ministry said in a statement.

The flight also carried diplomats from Belarus and the Democratic People's Republic of **Korea**, it added. (Xinhua)

DOHA: Qatar announced on Sunday that it will resume operations at its embassy in **Syria**, effective Tuesday, with **Khalifa Abdullah Al Mahmoud Al Sharif** appointed as the charge d'affaires.

In a statement, Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that this move marks the restoration of diplomatic relations with **Syria** after a 13-year hiatus.

The ministry emphasized that the reopening of the embassy will enhance Qatar's ongoing humanitarian efforts, including its airlift of relief supplies to support the Syrian people during the transitional phase and address urgent humanitarian needs. (Xinhua)

ADEN: The Houthi military authorities said on Sunday that the U.S. and British aircraft have conducted "a new aggression" against targets in **Hodeida**, a strategic province in western **Yemen** along the Red Sea coast.

According to the report, the allied forces targeted the **At-Tuhayta** district in the southern part of **Hodeidah**, though specific details about the aerial bombardment were not immediately disclosed. (Xinhua)

2 'We must keep doors open to bridge gaps, promote peace'

4 Kuwait marks first anniversary of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad passing



8 KIPCO marks graduation of 2nd cohort of its ENBAT work readiness program



9 NBK hosts a masterclass titled 'Leading in an Age of Uncertainty' for its employees

Prayer Timings

Fajr	05:10	Asr	14:33
Sunrise	06:35	Maghrib	16:52
Zohr	11:43	Isha	18:14

Local

Expected Weather for the next 24 hrs

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

By Night: Cold to very cold with light to moderate northwesterly wind, with speed

Weather

of 12-38 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear with a chance for frost forming over agricultural and desert areas.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	15	07
Kuwait Airport	16	06
Abdaly	16	02

Bubyan	14	03
Jahra	16	06
Falaka Island	16	07
Salmiyah	15	10
Ahmadi	14	03
Jal Aliyah	15	03
Nuwaisib	17	06



Crown Prince Diwan photo

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives son of the Sultan of the Bohra Dr. Husain Mufaddal Burhanuddin on the occasion of his visit to the country.

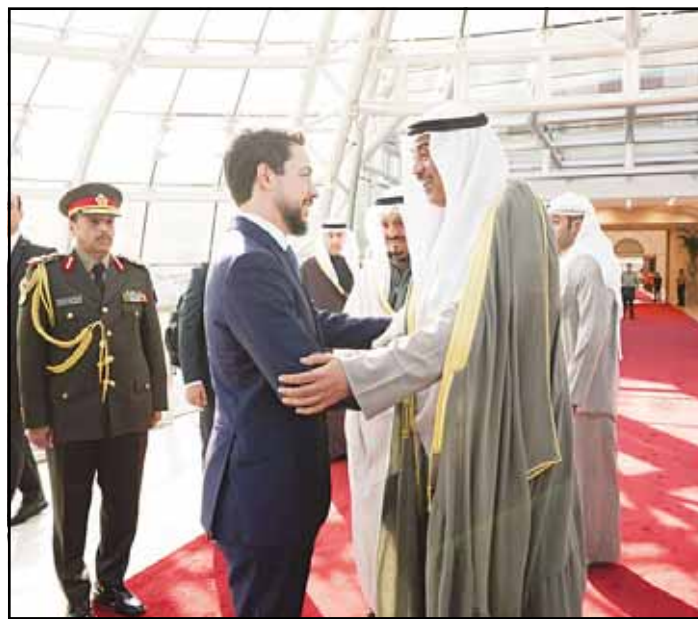
Kuwait Crown Prince receives visiting son of Sultan of Bohra

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16, (KUNA): His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace, Monday, the son of the Sultan of the Bohra Dr. Husain Mufaddal Bur-

nuddin and the accompanying delegation.

Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs at the Crown Prince Diwan Mazen Al-Issa was present at the meeting.

Jordan Crown Prince, team leave Kuwait after official visit



The Crown Prince of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Prince Hussein bin Abdullah is seen off at the Kuwait International Airport by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and senior government officials.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16, (KUNA): The Crown Prince of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Prince Hussein bin Abdullah and the Jordanian delegation left Kuwait on Monday after an official visit to the country.

Prince Hussein bin Abdullah was bid farewell at the airport by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Chief of the National Guard Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of In-

terior Sheikh Fahad Yusuf Al-Sabah, and other officials.

Meanwhile, earlier, the Jordanian Crown Prince and his accompanying delegation paid on Sunday a visit to Al-Salam Palace Museum. The museum's supervisor Sheikh Mona Al-Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah received Prince Hussein who toured inside the facility, which contains historic documents and possessions, and significant aspects about Kuwait.

In addition, Prince Hussein visited main museums at Al-Salam Palace about the history of Kuwait, and Al-Salam Palace and cultures that existed in Kuwait. Prince

Hussein's visit to Al-Salam Palace is paramount as his grandfather, King Hussein bin Talal, was the first visitor after the museum's inauguration in 1964. Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governor Sheikh Sabah Bader Al-Salem Al-Sabah, the head of honor mission, accompanied Prince Hussein.

Prince Hussein bin Abdullah II also received Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya at Bayan Palace on Sunday as part of the Crown Prince's official visit to the State of Kuwait.

Bilateral ties and means to bolster them were discussed during the meeting, a ministry statement said.

'National Supervisor' system to ensure exams integrity

Strict check across gov't, private schools

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: In a significant move to enhance supervision and maintain the integrity of first-semester final exams, Minister of Education, Eng. Sayed Jalal Al-Tabtabaei, has introduced the "National Supervisor" system, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

This initiative aims to oversee the general exams for intermediate and secondary levels across government and private schools. The system will function under the direct supervision of the Ministry's Inspection and Audit Office, following strict guidelines.

In a statement issued yesterday, the Ministry outlined the responsibilities of the national supervisors. These include monitoring the test

process, ensuring compliance with regulations, being present in exam committees and control rooms, overseeing operations at secret printing presses, preparing daily reports for the Inspection and Audit Office and reviewing special committee decisions.

To ensure smooth coordination, the Ministry emphasized that all departments involved in exam administration -- such as exam committees, school controls, general controls and secret printing presses -- must cooperate with the national supervisors within the framework of existing laws and regulations.

The Ministry specified that national supervisors would be selected from experienced Kuwaiti Ministry of Education staff with at least five years of expertise.

Eligible candidates include school principals, assistant principals, technical supervisors, heads of subject departments and teachers, with

a key restriction: teachers of subjects included in the exam schedule cannot supervise those exams.

A total of 16 administrative supervisors and 215 national monitors have undergone a specialized training program conducted by experts.

This training aims to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to perform their roles with professionalism, ensuring exams are conducted to the highest standards of integrity and transparency.

Additionally, every national supervisor is required to sign a neutrality declaration, pledging to adhere strictly to the regulations, avoid conflicts of interest and uphold the integrity of the educational process.

The Ministry highlighted that the "National Supervisor" system represents a qualitative leap in promoting fairness and enhancing trust in Kuwait's educational framework.

Muslim League World leader visits 'Attimis'

'We must keep doors open to bridge gaps, work for peace'



Dr. Sheikh Mohammad Al-Issa is flanked by Priest Adel Nasr and Haleem Nasr

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: In a deeply symbolic and significant moment, Dr. Sheikh Mohammad Al-Issa, Secretary-General of the Muslim World League (MWL) and a prominent advocate for moderate Islam, met with the nuns at the cloistered Santa Chiara monastery in Attimis, Italy.

This encounter, facilitated by honey produced by the monastery's bees, symbolized the unity and shared values of peace between different faiths.

Al-Issa, who travels the world promoting interfaith dialogue, emphasized the importance of opening doors to one another and fostering friendship, echoing the message of peace upheld by Pope Francis.

This meeting marked a profound step in building bridges of understanding between Islam and Christianity, recalling the historic meeting between Saint Francis of Assisi and the Sultan of Egypt.

Like prayer, bees transcend boundaries, serving as silent and tireless ambassadors of peace. On one special day, the bees of the Santa Chiara apiary at the small cloistered monastery of Attimis, nestled in the hills of Friuli, became exactly that: their honey brought together two worlds that, though seemingly distant, share an undeniable closeness.

In this special place, where about thirty nuns embrace the world with prayer and intercession, they hosted Al-Issa, leader of moderate Islam.

He came from Makkah to meet them but also the bees that

brought them together thanks to the honey received as a gift from a mutual friend, the Lebanese priest Adel Nasr, who founded the monastery with his mother superior Anna Chiara.

After the end of the private and exclusive meeting, Al-Issa says it was unforgettable, about which, he promises to speak to the Pope, whom he is expected to see in the next few days in Rome, in the wake of the commitment to dialogue and peace that he tirelessly carries forward with his non-governmental organization that represents Muslims in the world.

Harmony

He says, "We are happy because this place and this meeting reflect the message of peace that they represent in harmony with the message of peace of Pope Francis."

In this border land that knows well what war is, as the Pope did in Trieste, he invites us to always keep the doors of dialogue open: "We came here because it is precisely a door, an opening of friendship that is what Pope Francis meant because we must continue to open ourselves to one another"

"This is a new but already very deep and fraternal friendship, of which we are proud," he says, promising to return soon.

The visit of the sheikh of the East to Attimis almost seems like the



Dr. Sheikh Mohammad Al-Issa visits the nuns

restitution of the meeting of Saint Francis of Assisi with the Sultan of Egypt who after 800 years still questions us: "This represents a dialogue that builds bridges that we cross to spread peace in the world".

Dr. Al-Issa is a prominent global advocate for moderate Islam, focusing on promoting empathy, understanding and cooperation among diverse communities and faiths.

As Secretary-General of the Muslim World League (MWL), he has been a key figure in fostering interfaith dialogue and building partnerships worldwide.

His notable efforts include visiting Auschwitz in 2020, meeting Pope Francis to forge a historic agreement in 2017 and leading peace initiatives with representatives of the Abrahamic religions.

Dr. Al-Issa's leadership has earned praise for advancing moderate Islam, countering extremism and promoting coexistence.

He has also spearheaded agreements with major Jewish and Christian institutions and continues to advocate for dialogue and education to combat hate and extremism.

Over the last three years, Dr. Al-Issa has travelled extensively throughout the United States, Europe, Africa and Asia, meeting with dignitaries and parliamentarians from the fields of justice, law and human rights and major faith-based and community leaders.

Source: TGR News (Italian national TV service)

diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Bahrain marks National Day as the winter of festivities brings Gulf family closer

“THE Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) once said, ‘Winter is the spring of the believer: its short days are for fasting and its long nights are for prayer.’ Winter, with its rain of blessings, joy and familial gatherings, evokes a warmth and human connection often absent in other seasons,” columnist **Sheikha Hessa Al-Hamoud Al-Sabah** wrote for **Al-Anba** daily.

“For me, however, this season brings a unique kind of happiness — its association with Gulf national celebrations. Truly, winter is a season of festivities, joy and unity, drawing the Gulf family closer around the hearth of shared identity, human connection and mutual celebration.

“As I pen these words, my heart is filled with affection for my second homeland, the Kingdom of Bahrain, which celebrates its National Day on December 16 each year. This date marks the anniversary of Bahrain’s independence from the British Empire and the coronation of the late Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa as the first ruler of Bahrain after independence.

“On this cherished occasion, I extend my heartfelt congratulations and best wishes to His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, may God protect him and to the brotherly people of Bahrain.

“The profound bond between His Majesty the King and the people of Bahrain is a source of admiration, pride and respect for all.

“His Majesty exemplifies wisdom, grace and humanity, which is evident in his thoughtful addresses to his citizens. I have heard him speak with the insight of a seasoned leader and the compassion of a father, advising his people with sincerity: ‘We should never present anything but a good image of our country. If we share an incomplete image, it will only distort our nation’s reputation further. Those with rights will find no one more just or compassionate than us to ensure fairness. We will never exploit or use you as tools but will address your concerns with dignity.’

“This transparency and sincerity have strengthened the bond between the Bahraini people and His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. It brings to mind the words of Abu Hayyan Al-Tawhidi: ‘If the speaker is not genuinely moved by what they say, the listener will not be moved by what they hear. A heart speaks to another heart.’

“Truly, what emanates from the heart reaches other hearts directly. His Majesty’s commitment to human values and his advocacy for peace and security



Sheikha Hessa

worldwide have deeply influenced the Bahraini people’s ethos.

“The Bahraini community, known for its tolerance and unity, has resisted every attempt to sow division among its citizens. Mutual honesty, loyalty and devotion between a leader and his people are the ultimate safeguards for any nation and social harmony is the cornerstone of progress and prosperity.

“History has proven that Bahrain, with its leadership and people, is a continuation of a rich and ancient civilization.

“The kingdom’s heritage reflects the depth of its past, the vibrancy of its present and the aspirations for a promising future under His Majesty’s wise leadership.

“In conclusion, I once again extend my warmest congratulations to His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, may God preserve him, to His Royal Highness Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, may God protect him and to all our brothers and sisters in the Kingdom of Bahrain on this joyous National Day.

“I pray to God Almighty to bless Bahrain with continued prosperity, safety and peace and to keep the kingdom as it has always been — a land of humanity and a beacon of love.”

Also:

“‘Shaleemhen’ is a colloquial Iraqi term that gained prominence after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. It encapsulates the challenge of removing the pervasive remnants of Saddam’s rule: pictures, statues, slogans and grandiose titles that adorned every street, building and institution in Iraq,” columnist **Suad Fahd Al-Moajel** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

“While Saddam’s fall and the subsequent dismantling of these symbols marked an end to his reign, Iraq soon plunged into a cycle of sectarian and ethnic strife, compounded by rampant corruption and oppressive practices masquerading as freedom, democracy and equality.

“The Iraqi people quickly realized that toppling the dictator and his statues was merely the beginning of the struggle, not its conclusion.

“Today, with the fall of Bashar al-Assad’s statue in Syria and the removal of his father Hafez al-Assad’s monuments, the Syrians echo the sentiments of their Iraqi counterparts.

“The term ‘Shaleemhen’ now resonates in Syria, symbolizing the deep-rooted difficulty of erasing the legacy and repercussions of authoritarian rule.

“The question that emerged after Saddam’s fall arises once more: What comes after the statues fall? While removing physical symbols of tyranny is the

straightforward part, rebuilding and healing from the devastation inflicted by such regimes is the true challenge.

“‘Shaleemhen’ serves as a poignant reminder that true progress requires uprooting the conditions that enable tyranny in the first place. Without addressing these foundations, history is doomed to repeat itself, allowing future despots to emerge.

“Across much of the Arab world, corruption, dictatorship, oppression and the suppression of freedoms remain rampant. Military dominance, the unchecked power of elites and systemic ignorance continue to undermine democracy and peaceful pluralism.

“These issues create fertile ground for authoritarianism and foreign exploitation of resources and wealth.

“The vast personal fortunes of some Arab leaders, amassed at the expense of their people, are glaring symbols of this corruption.

“While citizens endure poverty and oppression, these leaders secure billions in offshore accounts, safeguarding their wealth from the day their statues inevitably fall. The opulence of their palaces and treasures contrasts sharply with the squalid underground cells used to imprison dissidents and ‘enemies of the state.’

“History consistently teaches us that oppression, while effective in the short term, cannot last indefinitely. Physics reminds us that prolonged repression inevitably leads to an explosion.

“The only safeguard against the rise of future tyrants is the establishment of freedoms, justice, equality, democracy and pluralism. These values ensure stability and prevent the construction of new statues that will one day fall, as they always do in the natural cycle of history.

“With the fall of statues in multiple Arab capitals, the region faces an existential challenge. Arabs must seize this moment to confront the root causes of their political and social failures.

“It is time to dismantle the legacy of oppression and build a new foundation grounded in freedom, equality and justice for all, regardless of race, religion, or minority status.

“Without such a transformation, the cycle will inevitably repeat and new tyrants will emerge from the ashes to rebuild the statues and restart the cycle of oppression.

“The Arab world has one final opportunity to rewrite its future. Failure to act will leave us shouting the same slogan again: ‘Shaleemhen!’”

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes

Other Voices

Challenges to fiscal stability

By Ahmad alsarraf

In December 2008, Oil Minister Mohammad Al-Aleem declared that the political climate in Kuwait was not conducive to advancing development projects. This statement marked a critical turning point for the Grand Dow Project, effectively sealing its fate.

Al-Aleem’s remarks came less than 24 hours after the Popular Action Bloc issued a stern ultimatum to Prime Minister Nasser Al-Mohammed: cancel the Dow deal or face interrogation.

The minister further clarified that media reports on the project’s penalty clause were inaccurate, emphasizing that the \$2.5 billion fine represented the maximum amount a court could impose and would likely be reduced.

Al-Aleem, associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, expressed frustration over the involvement of the Salafist Party, led by Khaled Al-Sultan and his allies, who also called for the deal’s cancellation and threatened interrogation if their demands were not met.

These developments highlighted the minister’s inability to rally his political bloc or secure support from independent MPs and the government’s usual backers to advance the project. Al-Aleem also failed to negotiate a reduction in the financial penalties, leaving his stance on the project notably weak and unconstructive.

Similar political challenges surfaced with Rashid Al-Amiri, a former oil minister also linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. During the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Al-Amiri announced that Kuwait would adhere to its OPEC production quota only until September, a move interpreted as a veiled intention to exceed the quota. This declaration

fueled Saddam Hussein’s claims that Kuwait was harming Iraq by overproducing oil.

Al-Amiri faced criticism again after liberation when he prematurely announced that oil workers had begun defusing explosives planted by retreating Iraqi forces. This prompted some Iraqi units to return and re-mine the oil wells.

In later interviews, Al-Amiri took undue credit for the rapid extinguishment of Kuwait’s burning oil wells. In truth, this accomplishment belonged to the Kuwaiti firefighting team led by Issa Bouyabes and Sarah Akbar, with crucial assistance from American authorities, who facilitated the entry of international teams from countries like Iran and Canada.

Al-Amiri’s exaggerated accusations against Western companies during a press conference, coupled with vague references to conspiracies, lacked substance and credibility, especially decades after the events.

In September 2011, another Oil Minister, Mohammad Al-Busairi — also affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood — approved a controversial and unprecedented salary increase for oil sector workers to avert a union strike.

This decision, described as a major administrative misstep, promised that the raises would not burden public finances, claiming they would be covered by the Petroleum Corporation’s funds.

Al-Busairi’s decision had far-reaching consequences, triggering widespread discontent among other government employees and leading to a cascade of demands for pay adjustments across various sectors.

While some demands were met, the broader issue escalated, posing a lasting strain on public finances. Although subsequent governments took a firm stance to contain the fallout, the problem remains unresolved since 2011, with its financial and social repercussions continuing to challenge Kuwait’s fiscal stability.

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15 & 4 years jail upheld for two men in arson case after appeal

Royal, aide acquitted in intent to harm judge

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: The Court of Appeal, led by Counselor Hani Al-Hamdan, upheld the verdict of the lower court which had found two men guilty of setting fire to the house of Counselor Sultan Buresli, as well as possessing drugs and a firearm, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

One defendant was sentenced to 15 years in prison, while the other received a 4-year sentence. The court also upheld the acquittal of Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Mubarak and another individual.

The defendants were arrested by the Crimi-

nal Security Sector, of the Capital Investigations Department and the Financial Crimes Combating Department, at a barn in Kabd.

The accused had intentionally set fire to one of Counselor Buresli’s vehicles and his house.

The investigations revealed that the defendants, who are believed to be bedoun, reportedly are criminals and have a history of drug addiction.

The motorcycle they used to commit the crime has been impounded by the authorities. It has been reported to avoid detection, they had changed the color of the motorcycle from red to black.

Ex-MPs hearing Jan 13: The Criminal Court has set January 13, 2025, to look into the case of 12 former MPs who are accused of spreading false news about the former MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri who they said was banned from entering the county.

The hearing has been rescheduled to allow for pleading, following the court’s decision to reject the defense team’s request to summon the officer involved in the case.

The defendants are Musallam Al-Barrak, Shuaib Shaaban, Osama Al-Zaid, Saud Al-Asfour, Falah Dahi, Hamad Al-Mudlaj, Mohammad Jowhar Hayat, Khaled Al-Munayes, Badr Al-Dahoum, Mohammad Haif, Mohammad Al-Raqeb and Mohammad Al-Dosari.

Mol rejects assaulting woman during investigation

European-Arab jailed 10 yrs for spreading ISIS ideologies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: The Criminal Court sentenced a European resident of Arab origin to ten-year imprisonment with hard labor for violating the State Security Crimes Law by using social media platforms, such as Telegram and TikTok, to call people to join the banned terrorist group ISIS, and spread its ideologies with the aim of destabilizing the country’s basic systems, reports Al-Anba daily.

The individual was also accused of purchasing unregistered phone lines under his

name and providing them to others to use the Telegram app for communicating with ISIS members. He was also charged with posting videos on TikTok under the name “Abu Idris”, in which he insulted the leaders of Arab and Gulf countries, an act considered to jeopardize political relations with friendly nations.

Mol rejects accusation: The Ministry of Interior (MoI) firmly denied reports circulating in the media and on social media platforms

claiming that a woman was assaulted during an investigation, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The Ministry emphasized that all investigative procedures are conducted strictly in accordance with the law, ensuring full respect for human rights and the dignity of individuals.

In its statement, the Ministry urged the public to exercise caution and avoid spreading rumors intended to incite public opinion. It called on everyone to rely solely on official sources for accurate information.

Many women fall victim to charms of fake ‘royal’

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: An illegal resident (Bedoun) in the country was arrested for fraud after defrauding a woman out of KD 15,000 by impersonating a ruling family member and manipulating her into handing over large sums of money and gifts, reports Al-Anba daily. It was discovered later by police that he had swindled many other women too.

The man used his charm and false identity to deceive his victim over the course of several months.

The woman, born in 1996, met him in May 2023 at a famous upscale complex. He introduced himself as “Sheikh M.Kh.” and showed her pictures of himself participating in high-profile events, claiming that he was part of the ruling family. Their relationship continued to develop over the following months.

He told her he owned a property in Mangaf and had purchased another in Abdullah Al-Salem, but that he was currently facing financial difficulties due to defaults on the properties. Claiming that he urgently needed KD 7,500 to resolve the issue, he convinced her to lend him the money, promising to repay her later. She handed him the money in the parking lot of a well-known hotel.

However, this was just the beginning. Over the next year, he continued to ask her for money, convincing her that it was needed for his property dealings. In July 2023, he asked for another KD 2,500 to help with the property in Mangaf, which she gave him. In August, he requested an additional KD 500, claiming it was for financial issues related to the same property. Again, she complied.

As time went on, his demands continued. In November 2023, he asked for KD 1,500, followed by KD 500 in December. In January and May of 2024, he asked her for KD 1,000 on both occasions, always assuring her that he would compensate her once they married. Throughout this time, he continued to tell her that he was committed to marrying her, which led her to believe that he would repay her once their relationship progressed.

In September 2024, his requests escalated when he asked her for an iPhone 16 as a gift. Once again, she complied, purchasing the phone and handing it over to him.

However, the woman’s world was turned upside down in October 2024 when she received an unexpected call from the Andalous Police Station. She was asked to visit, as the police had identified her as one of the man’s victims. Shocked, she arrived at the station to discover that the man she had trusted was not a ruling family member, as he had claimed, but an illegal resident in the country.

Support eyed for 600 foster children

Kids driving sans license top occupants in welfare homes

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: Assistant Undersecretary for Social Welfare Affairs at the Ministry of Social Affairs Dr. Jassim Al-Kandari revealed that the most dangerous cases handled by the Juvenile Welfare Department are juveniles who were involved in joining banned terrorist groups, drug abuse, violence, and theft, reports Al-Rai daily.

In an interview, he also revealed that the most common cause for placing juveniles in welfare homes is driving without a license, with more than 200 juveniles placed in the home since the beginning of this year.

Dr. Al-Kandari indicated that they are working on developing a treatment plan for intellectual issues in collaboration with relevant authorities.

He highlighted some of the challenges facing the sector, such as a shortage of technical staff, an insufficient budget for implementing programs and activities, the lack of

documentation for children in family custody who are “of unknown parents”, and the reluctance of specialized staff to work in the sector for various reasons.

Dr. Al-Kandari also indicated that some laws require amendment to keep pace with recent developments.

He stressed that the sector is working on several projects to support over 600 foster children of unknown parents, with key initiatives including fostering programs, the “alternative mother and father” project, and the “friendly family” program.

Dr. Al-Kandari revealed the appointment of six new experts to attend juvenile court sessions, all of whom are Kuwaiti professionals.

Meanwhile, Dr. Al-Kandari explained that Kuwait provides exceptional services for the elderly. Approximately 2,210 elderly men and women have benefited from supplies distribution, and over 35,000 citizens take advantage of the priority card services. Also, more than 6,400 citizens benefit from the elderly parking service, and 17 elderly residents receive care in residential facilities, with the remaining elderly supported through the sector’s mobile services.



Dr. Al-Kandari



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Kuwait marks first anniversary of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad passing

A legacy of strength and stability

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16, (KUNA): On the first anniversary of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's passing, which falls on the 16th of December, Kuwait recalls his wise leadership which lasted three years.

During his rule, he was keen to promote development, stability, and elevate Kuwait's status regionally and globally, and while December 16th 2023 marked his loss, his legacy and accomplishments will be remembered in Kuwait's history.

Over nearly six decades, the late Amir made a lasting impact on the institutions he led, focusing on their growth, workforce development, and enhanced roles in strengthening Kuwait's presence at regional and global levels.

He assumed leadership on September 29, 2020, succeeding his brother, the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, becoming Kuwait's 16th ruler in accordance with the Constitution.

Born on June 25, 1937, he was the sixth son of the late Amir Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Kuwait's 10th ruler.

Sheikh Nawaf pursued his education at various schools in Kuwait, including Sharq and Al-Mubarakiya, well known for his respect for his teachers and mentors.

Following Kuwait's independence, the late Amir began his political journey in 1962, when the late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah appointed him as the governor of Hawally.

On March 19th 1978, Sheikh Nawaf was named Minister of Interior, where his primary focus was maintaining national security and stability.

Sheikh Nawaf took the role of Minister of Defense in January 1988, during this time, he worked to modernize the military, equip the Kuwaiti army with the latest technology from various countries, and strengthen its combat capabilities.

When Kuwait came under the Iraqi invasion and occupation in 1990-91, he played a critical role in leading the resistance, and ensuring the safe relocation of Kuwait's Amir to Saudi Arabia, while also commanding the army.



First anniversary of late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's passing.

After Kuwait's liberation in 1991, Sheikh Nawaf was appointed Minister of Social Affairs, and on October 17th 1992, he became Deputy Chief of the National Guard.

Nearly nine years later, on July 13, 2003, Sheikh Nawaf returned as Minister of Interior, and later on October 16th an Amiri decree named him First Deputy Prime Minister and

Minister of Interior. Before becoming the Amir of Kuwait in 2020, Sheikh Nawaf served as Crown Prince following an Amiri decree issued by the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on February 7, 2006.

For 14 years, he contributed to the country's development and stability through key decisions and policies.

KRCS reaffirms solidarity with Lebanon amid crisis

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16, (KUNA): Chairman of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Ambassador Khaled Al-Maghames voiced backing for the Lebanese people in such tough conditions facing the Arab country.

The State of Kuwait, led by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, is monitoring, with great interest, the humanitarian situation in Lebanon, Al-Maghames told KUNA in a statement following his meeting with Lebanese Embassy's charge d'affaires Ahmad Arafah.

His Highness the Amir's continued directives urge exerting further efforts to enhance humanitarian KRCS response and stand side by side with peoples facing tough humanitarian conditions, Al-Maghames said.

Meanwhile, Arafah extolled Kuwait's supportive positions to his country and help the Lebanese face destruction caused by the Israeli occupation forces' aggression.



KUNA photo Chairman of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, Ambassador Khaled Al-Maghames with Lebanese Embassy's charge d'affaires Ahmad Arafah.

Co-op launches Al-Hazm Festival to celebrate HH the Amir first 'versary

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: Mohammed Zaid Shamroukh Al-Mutairi, the Chairman of the Abdullah Al-Mubarak Cooperative Society, announced the launch of the Al-Hazm Festival, the largest food and consumer marketing event in the society's history, set to take place from Friday until Wednesday, Dec 25 at the central markets, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The festival is held to celebrate the first anniversary of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad assuming power.

The festival will feature raffles for 2025 model cars and a motorcycle, as well as the distribution of scarves, Kuwaiti flags and badges bearing the Amir's image

to shareholders and residents. Over 700 items will be available at discounts of up to 70 percent.

Al-Mutairi emphasized the board's commitment to participating in national occasions and expressed appreciation for the efforts of the executive management and the participation of major food and consumer companies in the event.

The festival's launch will coincide with a small celebration at the central market, including a parade, competitions and instant prizes, in cooperation with Al-Sidawi Company.

He encouraged all shareholders to obtain the electronic family card through a designated link to benefit from the festival's promotions and offerings.

PADA launches 'We care for them to blossom' awareness campaign

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: The Public Authority for the Disabilities Affairs (PADA) launched the 'We care for them to blossom' awareness campaign at the Avenues Mall under the patronage of Dr. Anthal Al-Huwailah, Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood Affairs, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The campaign is represented by the Early Intervention Center for Children with Disabilities, based at the South Al-Sabahiya Complex.

Wafaa Al-Mahna, PADA Acting Director emphasized the collaboration with the Kuwait Fire Force to ensure that educational institutions serving children with

disabilities meet all necessary safety and security requirements to protect the students.

Additionally, Al-Mahna said the Authority is working to launch a case study unit for people with disabilities as part of its strategic initiatives under the 2020/2025 development plan.

This unit will assess the social, psychological, economic, and therapeutic needs of individuals with disabilities, helping create personalized treatment programs.

The campaign aims to raise awareness among families and communities about the needs of children with disabilities.



Group photo during the awarding ceremony.

Reem Mohammed wins 1st place

KU hosts 17th Japanese Speech contest

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: Under the patronage and in the presence of the Vice President for Academic Support Services for Community Service and Libraries Dr. Hamed Sulaiman Al-Furaih, the Community Service and Continuing Education Center at Kuwait University, in collaboration with the Japanese Embassy and the Japan Society in Kuwait, organized the 17th Japanese Language Speech Competition on Wednesday, December 11 at the University Administration Building in Sabah Al-Salem University City.

According to a press release issued by Kuwait University, the event was attended by the Acting Director of the Community Service and Continuing Education Center Itimad Al-Kandari, the Japanese Ambassador to Kuwait Mukai Kenichiro, the Cultural Attaché of the Japanese Embassy Rie Kurihara, representatives from the Japanese Embassy in Kuwait, members of the Japanese community, and several male and female students from Kuwait University.

The competition aimed to strengthen the academic and cultural ties between Kuwait and Japan by providing a platform for participants to showcase their abilities and creativity, and fostering cultural exchange between the two nations.

At the beginning of the event, Vice President for Academic Support Services for Community Service and Libraries at Kuwait University Dr. Hamed Sulaiman Al-Furaih expressed his pleasure at the participation of the Japanese Embassy, the Cultural Attaché, and members of the Japanese community in the 17th Japanese Language Speech Competition.

He highlighted that the event reflects Kuwait University's commitment to expanding cooperation and exchanging linguistic experiences with Japanese society.

Dr. Al-Furaih affirmed that the university's focus on teaching and learning Japanese is part of a cultural exchange between Kuwait University students and Japan.

He expressed hope for continued future collaboration between the two countries in both academic and cultural fields.

Meanwhile, the Japanese Ambassador to Kuwait Mukai Kenichiro affirmed that Kuwait University, through the Community Service and Continuing Education Center, has played a pivotal role in promoting Japanese culture since 1996, with the cooperation of the Japan Society in Kuwait.

He expressed the Japanese Embassy's sincere desire to deepen academic and cultural relations between the two countries.

Ambassador Kenichiro explained that the Speech Competition is not just a language contest, but a platform for exchanging experiences and cultures through learning Japanese for enhancing cooperation and friendship between Kuwait and Japan.

A total of 12 contestants competed by presenting various topics in Japanese. This reflects the efforts of the Community Service and Continuing Education Center at Kuwait University in supporting students and promoting cultural exchange through Japanese language education.

The jury evaluated the 12 contestants based on the content of their speeches, fluency, language comprehension, and expression. The winners were announced as follows:

1. First place: Reem Mohammed, and the title of her speech was "Future Plans."

2. Second place: Hanin Al-Dulaimi, with the speech titled "The Power of the Subconscious Mind."

3. Third place: Amal Al-Fayli, with the speech titled "My Journey with Japan So Far."

On the sidelines of the competition, two students, Bader Al-Shawaf and Ibrahim Al-Hulail, who had previously studied in Japan, gave a visual presentation about their experiences in Japan. They spoke about how studying in Japan and learning the Japanese language impacted their academic and professional lives.

The Japanese Karate Organization team in Kuwait also presented a live demonstration of Japanese martial arts (karate), which was warmly received by the audience.



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LOCAL

Kuwait, Egypt explore media collaboration opportunities

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16, (KUNA): Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdurrahman Al-Mutairi met with the Chairman of Egypt's National Media Authority (NMA) Ahmad Al-Maslamany to explore ways of enhancing media cooperation.

A ministry statement said on Sunday that the meeting also focused on strengthening ties and achieving mutual goals.

Both officials discussed several media-related topics of shared interests, emphasizing the importance of exchanging visits to coordinate efforts and share expertise in this field.



KUNA photo
Minister Abdurrahman Al-Mutairi with the Chairman of Egypt's National Media Authority Ahmad Al-Maslamany.

Global firms vying for key projects

PAHW reviews 33 bids for key infrastructure tenders

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: Audit and examination work is ongoing at the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW), where 33 financial and technical offers submitted by both local and international companies are being reviewed for the implementation of three major tenders to develop the infrastructure in the suburbs of South Saad Al-Abdullah City, reports Al-Anba daily.

These projects, which extend over a period of 36 months, represent a major step in preparing the area to accommodate thousands of Kuwaiti families as part of a comprehensive development vision.

The first tender includes 13 offers, with the lowest bid being KD 77.246 million. The second tender contains ten offers, with the lowest bid being KD 94.882 million, and the third tender also includes ten offers, with the lowest bid at KD 88.998 million.

According to informed sources, PAHW is giving the utmost attention to the careful study of all offers, ensuring full compliance with all technical and financial specifications to guarantee the projects' successful implementation with the required quality.

It is worth noting that the three tenders involve the implementation of infrastructure for 23,551 plots, including the marking of plot boundaries, the construction of two layers of asphalt on all roads, rainwater drainage systems, sewage, irrigation, treated and fresh water networks, civil works for telephone networks, road lighting, traffic works, construction of electrical cable culverts, irrigation tanks, and civil works for substations.

In addition, the conditions for selecting the winning company require it to be registered with the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) and with a

capital or assets of no less than KD 10 million for ensuring that only qualified companies are eligible to execute these vital projects.

In this regard, the sources explained that when the infrastructure works, which will take three years from the start of implementation, are completed, PAHW will launch new tenders for the construction of public service buildings in the area. This is aimed at meeting the needs of residents in the new residential zone, ensuring the completion of the entire infrastructure, and reinforcing PAHW's commitment to sustainability and improving the standard of living for residents.

PAHW now faces a crucial task of selecting the winning companies. The results are expected to be announced in the near future, following the completion of the bid evaluations. Once finalized, the implementation of these major infrastructure projects will commence.

The selection process goes beyond considering the lowest bids. It affirms the importance of meeting the required quality standards to ensure adherence to timelines and successful project delivery as per the plan.

With the participation of international companies, these tenders reflect the significance of the Kuwaiti market as a hub for large-scale infrastructure investments.

The sources highlighted that these projects constitute a key milestone in PAHW's plan to develop Saad Al-Abdullah City, which is the second-largest project in terms of area after Al-Mutlaa City, adding that the goal is to transform Saad Al-Abdullah City into a model for modern cities that combine integrated services and advanced infrastructure.

Kuwait charts path to inclusion with new disability access code

Municipal Council leads special session to enhance integration

By Inaas Awadh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: The Municipal Council, with the cooperation of the Kuwait Society for the Follow-up of Disabled Issues held a special session titled "Built Environment to Empower People with Disabilities to Integrate into Society", chaired by Abdullah Al-Mahri.

During the session, it was recommended that both public and private sectors ensure the application of the access code for people with disabilities in all buildings of both sectors.

Chairman of the Municipal Council Abdullah Al-Mahri affirmed that Kuwait has made great progress in empowering people with disabilities, thanks to the efforts of government agencies in collaboration with civil society institutions.

He stressed that these efforts have successfully broken down social barriers and improved access to essential services and public facilities.

The session was attended by several prominent figures with disabilities, and representatives from seven government agencies: the Ministry of Public Works, Kuwait Municipality, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, the Public Authority for Housing Welfare, and the Public Authority for Disabled Affairs.

They approved the new Kuwaiti building code for ensuring easy access to buildings and facilities, and stressed the need to work diligently toward enacting a new law for people with disabilities that will strengthen their rights and guarantee their equality and integration into society.

Al-Mahri highlighted that the for-



The special session for people with disabilities by the Municipal Council.



Honorary President of the Kuwait Disabled Sports Club Sheikhha Shaikha Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah and Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Affairs Ambassador Sheikhha Jawaher Al-Sabah during the Municipal Council's special session.

malization of a temporary five-member committee dedicated for the affairs of people with disabilities reflects the Municipal Council's strong commitment to addressing issues relevant to this community.

He emphasized that the council aims to enhance cooperation with all relevant parties in order to serve the best interests of people with disabilities.

Al-Mahri stressed the need to develop the rights of people with disabilities, meet their needs without discrimination, increase their protection, and ensure their suggestions and complaints are heard and addressed promptly.

Meanwhile, Head of the Committee for People with Disabilities in the Municipal Council Farah Al-Roumi explained that the council's approval of the Kuwait Code for Accessibility, in line with the general design, is one of the

key achievements of the New Kuwait 2035 vision's project for people with disabilities. The code aims to transform the built environment from engineering and construction designs into a qualified and supportive environment for people with disabilities, and enhance their opportunities to integrate into various life and community activities.

Furthermore, a member of the Committee for People with Disabilities Munira Al-Amir explained that Kuwait has a clear vision when it comes to supporting people with special needs. This vision reflects the humanitarian values inherent in Kuwaiti society, shaped by its cultural and social backgrounds, and is evident in the official stance of the country.

The Municipal Council is fully aware of the needs of people with disabilities and is continuously striving to provide

solutions to support them within its available powers. One key priority is listening to the concerns of individuals with special needs and working towards sustainable solutions that serve their interests.

In this regard, the Municipal Council member Fahd Al-Abdul Jader expressed his appreciation for the efforts and proposals presented by representatives from governmental and civil organizations during the special session on people with disabilities.

He praised their opinions on activating the implementation of the new building code for people with disabilities, noting that this will enhance the services provided to this group in buildings and facilitate their integration into society.

Also, the Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Affairs Ambassador Sheikhha Jawaher Al-Sabah affirmed the State of Kuwait's commitment to develop the rights of people with disabilities.

She highlighted Kuwait's ratification and accession to the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on February 14, 2013, a move driven by Kuwait's dedication to ensuring the full participation of people with disabilities in both social and political life.

Ambassador Sheikhha Jawaher explained that Kuwait had already demonstrated its commitment in 2010 by enacting a national law for people with disabilities, three years prior to ratifying the International Convention. Furthermore, Kuwait established an independent body dedicated to managing the affairs of people with disabilities, and ensuring their rights and well-being.

Meanwhile, the honorary president of the Kuwait Disabled Sports Club Sheikhha Shaikha Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah called for increased attention to the disabled community, stressing the importance of further integrating them into society.

She commended the remarkable achievements of individuals with disabilities in sports and the arts, which have significantly contributed to Kuwait's global recognition.



Prominent personalities in attendance during the special session for people with disabilities held by the Municipal Council.



Photos by Rezk Tawfiq

Center promotes Gulf heritage, regional cooperation

Diwan Al-Khaleej: A cultural hub to celebrate unity during Gulf Cup 26

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: Under the patronage of the Minister of Information and Culture, and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdurrahman Al-Mutairi, the "Diwan Al-Khaleej" cultural and educational center will be inaugurated from December 20 to January 2, coinciding with the Gulf Cup 26, which will be held in Kuwait during the same period, reports Al-Anba daily.

Organized in collaboration with the Public Authority for Youth and the Public Authority for Sports, Diwan Al-Khaleej center aims to be a cultural and educational hub with a sporting media character that will enrich the Gulf Cup 26 experience by creating an

intellectual and cultural environment that promotes unity and cooperation among Gulf countries.

The center, which will be located at the stadium of the Girls' College of Basic Education near Jaber Stadium, seeks to create an environment for communication and cultural exchange and serve as a platform connecting Gulf countries with the rest of the world.

Through seminars, exhibitions, and performances, it will showcase the rich cultural and artistic heritage of the Gulf, strengthen Gulf identity, and establish long-term partnerships between artists and intellectuals to promote regional integration. The center will

also offer an exceptional experience that allows participants to explore Gulf heritage, encourages youth participation in cultural activities, and provides opportunities to learn from experts to develop their skills.

In partnership with the Public Authority for Youth and the Public Authority for Sports, the Diwan Al-Khaleej Center will host a variety of activities, including cultural performances, sports activities, youth engagement programs, diplomatic receptions, art and photography exhibitions, workshops, training sessions, discussion panels, cultural film screenings, and roundtable discussions.

Kuwait marks

Continued from Page 1

After returning home, he joined the freshly-established Ministry of Interior.

In 1987, he was appointed public inspection chief with a colonel's rank and remained in the department for up to 20 years occupying diverse posts.

On April 17, 2004, Sheikh Meshal was appointed according to an Amiri Decree the Deputy Chief of the National Guards with a Minister's Degree, where he contributed to overhauling this sensitive security apparatus and enhanced its role in maintaining the national security.

On October 7, 2020, Sheikh Meshal was proclaimed as the State Crown Prince during a special session of the National Assembly, where he took the constitutional oath in front of the MPs after a swearing-in ceremony in front of the late Amir, according to the Emirate Succession Law and Kuwait Constitution.

Prioritizing local issues and events, His Highness the Amir was present on many occasions including attending the official inauguration of Abdullah Al-Salem University, visiting Kuwait Sports Club for Deaf, Kuwait Blind Association, Poets Diwaniya and the Disabled Sports Society.

He also attended honoring ceremonies for exemplary teachers and for Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Informatics Award.

The Amir inaugurated Sabah Al-Salem University City and honored top graduates, and in December patronized and attended the KFAS awards' ceremony.

On May tenth, 2024, His Highness the Amir dissolved parliament and suspended some articles of the con-

stitution for a period no more than four years in order to reevaluate the democratic process in the country and ensure the greater good for the country.

As for his efforts in cementing Gulf unity, His Highness the Amir went on several official state visits beginning with Saudi Arabia, followed by Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, and then the United Arab Emirates.

Kuwait hosted in December 1, 2024 the Gulf Cooperation Council Summit, as an embodiment of the unity and strength of relations between Gulf nations.

The Summit focused on bolstering joint Gulf work, keeping pace with rapid regional and international developments, as well as expanding cooperation avenues to meet the aspirations of Gulf nations.

On the pan-Arab front, the Amir is continuing down path of cooperation to resolve Arab issues, namely the Palestinian situation and protection of the territorial integrity of Arab lands, their independence, and sovereignty.

His Highness the Amir visited both Jordan and Egypt back in April and delved into issues of common interest and the latest updates.

Kuwait slams

Continued from Page 1

It stressed the need to respect Syria's sovereignty and unity of its lands, affirming that the Golan Heights was part of occupied Syrian and Arab lands and that the Israeli occupation had no legal or administrative rights over it in accordance with international law.

Meanwhile, the death toll in the Gaza Strip from the 14-month war between Israel and Hamas militants

has topped 45,000 people, Palestinian health officials said Monday, with 52 dead arriving at hospitals across the bombed-out strip over the past 24 hours.

The Gaza Health Ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its count, but it has said that more than half of the fatalities are women and children. The Israeli military says it has killed more than 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

With the death toll mounting ever higher, efforts to reach a ceasefire have picked up in recent weeks after repeatedly faltering. Qatar, Egypt and the United States have renewed their efforts to broker a deal at senior levels in recent days. Mediators have said there appears to be more willingness from both sides to conclude a ceasefire.

The Health Ministry said 45,028 people have been killed and 106,962 have been wounded since the start of the war. It has said the real toll is higher because thousands of bodies are still buried under rubble or in areas that medics cannot access. The latest war has been by far the deadliest round of fighting between Israel and Hamas, with the death toll now amounting to roughly 2% of Gaza's entire prewar population of about 2.3 million.

Among the dead reported in the overall toll were 10 people, including a family of four, who were killed in an overnight Israeli strike in Gaza City, Palestinian medics said.

Kuwait Amir

Continued from Page 1

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah also sent a cable of congratulations on Monday to the King

Omar leads innovation

KISR secures patent for vertical tuber planter and harvester

By Abdulrahman Al-Shimmari
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: The Environment and Life Sciences Research Center at the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research has secured a new patent for a 'Vertical Tuber Planter and Harvester'.

The innovation, led by Dr. Samira El-Sayed Omar, aims to enhance the cultivation and harvesting of tubers such as potatoes, beets and sweet potatoes.

The device is a portable vertical system designed to minimize loss or damage during planting and harvesting.

It can be used in various settings, including buildings, homes, gardens, and farms, depending on the required pro-



Dr. Samira Omar

duction volume.

This system is particularly beneficial for planting smaller varieties of tubers in a more efficient and controlled manner.

KU hosts designer Sharaf to discuss Kuwait's official logo

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: Under the patronage and in the presence of the acting Dean of the College of Architecture at Kuwait University Dr. Adel Al-Momen, the college hosted designer Mohammad Sharaf to discuss the visual identity initiative for the State of Ku-

wait's logo.

According to a press release issued by Kuwait University, Sharaf explained that the initiative began as a student project aimed at creating an official source such as a website and a published book featuring a unified logo for the state. Over time, the project evolved into an official project adopted by the state through the Ministry of Information.

The announced visual identity involves refining the current logo by redrawing it to meet modern professional standards, making it accessible to everyone, as well as documenting the information related to the state logo.

Sharaf expressed his pleasure in interacting with students and faculty members during the lecture. He expressed hope that the project to unify the visual identity would continue, moving beyond individual attempts that may be inconsistent or flawed.



Photo from the event.

Chancellor's ruling coalition collapse paves way for early polls

Germany's Scholz faces confidence vote, election expected in Feb

BERLIN, Dec 16, (AP): Chancellor Olaf Scholz faces a confidence vote in the German parliament on Monday that he's expected to lose, paving the way for the European Union's most populous member and biggest economy to hold an early election in February.

Scholz's notoriously rancorous three-party government collapsed on Nov. 6 when the chancellor fired his finance minister in a long-running dispute over how to revitalize Germany's stagnant economy, and the minister's pro-business party quit the coalition. That left the remaining two center-left partners without a majority in parliament.

Leaders of several major parties then agreed that a parliamentary election should be held on Feb. 23, seven months earlier than originally planned. Post-World War II Germany's constitution doesn't allow parliament's

lower house, or Bundestag, to dissolve itself - so a confidence vote is needed to set in motion the early election.

Scholz's Social Democrats hold 207 seats in the Bundestag and are expected to vote for the chancellor. Their remaining coalition partners, the environmentalist Greens, have 117 and plan to abstain. That should mean Scholz gets nowhere near the majority of 367 in the 733-seat chamber needed to win the confidence vote.

If Scholz loses, it will up to up to President Frank-Walter Steinmeier to decide whether to dissolve the Bundestag. Steinmeier, who said last month that "this country needs stable majorities and a government that is capable of acting," has 21 days to make that decision. Once parliament is dissolved, the election must be held within 60 days.

In practice, the campaign is already well underway.



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz makes a statement after formally asking for a vote of confidence in parliament, to set the path for an early election in spring 2025, at the chancellery in Berlin, Germany, Wednesday, Dec. 11, 2024. (AP)

As he formally requested the confidence vote on Wednesday, Scholz said that voters will "decide in the election how we answer the big questions that we face."

Those, he said, include whether Germany decides to "invest strongly in our future," secure jobs and modernize its industry, keep pension levels stable and "come closer to a just peace in Ukraine without Germany being drawn into the war." Germany has become Ukraine's biggest military supplier in Europe, but Scholz also has refused to supply long-range Taurus cruise missiles over concerns of escalating the war with Russia.

Center-right challenger Friedrich Merz on Saturday predicted "one of the hardest election campaigns" in modern German history, as Scholz's Social Democrats "have their backs to the wall." He said that it's crucial to make the economy more competi-

tive, because "the competitiveness of our economy is the precondition for everything else."

Polls show Scholz's party trailing behind Merz's main opposition Union bloc. Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck, whose Greens are further back, is also bidding for the top job.

The far-right Alternative for Germany, which is polling strongly, has nominated Alice Weidel as its candidate for chancellor but has no chance of taking the job because other parties refuse to work with it.

Confidence votes are rare in Germany, a country of 83 million people that prizes stability. This is only the sixth time in its postwar history that a chancellor has called one.

The last was in 2005, when then-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder engineered an early election that was narrowly won by center-right challenger Angela Merkel.



Vice President Kamala Harris, left, speaks with President Joe Biden at the Democratic National Committee's Holiday Reception at Willard Hotel in Washington, Sunday, Dec. 15, 2024. (AP)

Party urged to stay engaged after tough loss to Trump

Biden, Harris thank Democratic donors

WASHINGTON, Dec 16, (AP): President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris on Sunday thanked deep-pocketed Democratic donors who raised record sums in last month's election loss to President-elect Donald Trump and urged them not to lose hope and to remain politically engaged.

Biden and Harris, along with their spouses, in remarks at the Democratic National Committee holiday reception sought to buck up key donors who the Democratic Party needs to stay committed as it tries to pick up the pieces. Republicans scored a decisive victory taking the White House and Senate while maintaining control of the House in an election where donors of all political stripes spent about \$4.7 billion.

"We all get knocked down. My dad would say when you get knocked down, you just got to get up," Biden said. "The measure of a person or a party is how fast they get back up."

Harris, who stepped in as the party's presidential nominee after Biden ended his campaign in July following his disastrous debate performance, praised donors for putting their time - and checkbooks - into backing her and Democrats that they believed in.

Democrats, their allied super PACs and other groups raised about \$2.9 billion, compared to about \$1.8 billion for the Republicans. Harris noted that Democrats raised a whopping \$700 million over just 700 events organized by the Democratic finance committee.

"You rallied, you opened your homes, you reached out to your friends and your family," said Harris, who will soon begin weighing in earnest her own future and whether to make another White House run. "You put your personal capital - and by that I mean your relationships - at stake to talk with people because you care so deeply, and you connected with people and took the time to remind them of what is at stake and what was at stake."

While Biden acknowledged the sting that Democrats continue to feel about last month's loss, he said they should take pride in what they accomplished.

The administration's signature achievements include a \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill, the 2022 CHIPS and Science Act to boost semiconductor manufacturing in the U.S., and a surge in federal environmental spending through the Inflation Reduction Act, which Biden signed into law in 2022 after it cleared Congress solely with Democratic votes.

"We could never have gotten as much done as we did without you," Biden said. "You not only contributed to the campaign, but you did something. I think, even more impor-

tant. You were willing to lend your names, your reputation, your character to the effort."

Biden said that he intended to remain engaged with party politics once he leaves office on Jan. 20. He also predicted that he expected Harris would remain a central character in the party's future.

"You're not going anywhere kid. We aren't letting you," Biden said to Harris.

Meanwhile, President Biden will sign a proclamation Monday establishing a national monument honoring the late FDR-era Labor Secretary Frances Perkins, the first woman appointed to serve in a presidential Cabinet and a driving force behind the New Deal, according to the White House.

Biden is expected to visit the Labor Department on Monday to formally make the announcement and sign the proclamation that will establish the monument in Newcastle, Maine, the White House said.

As labor secretary, Perkins helped President Franklin D. Roosevelt formulate policies behind the 1930s New Deal and create safeguards in the national economy following the Great Depression.

During her 12 years as Roosevelt's labor secretary, she is credited with helping establish the Social Security Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act, and the National Labor Relations Act that established workers' rights to organize and collective bargaining.

"Frances Perkins accepted the position as the first female Cabinet member only after President Franklin D. Roosevelt agreed to support her goals to improve working conditions for all people," Interior Secretary Deb Haaland said in a statement. "She worked tirelessly to see them to fruition, and she set a standard of excellence that is a beacon for all of us who serve."

The proclamation calls for the establishment of the national monument in Newcastle, Maine, where Perkins and her family had deep roots and where she was buried after her death in 1965. The monument would be established on her family homestead and managed by the National Park Service.

Biden is expected to be joined by Haaland, acting Labor Secretary Julie Su, other Cabinet members as well as labor and women's right leaders for the signing.

The proclamation announcing the establishment of the monument comes with just over five weeks left in Biden's presidency and as he seeks to burnish his legacy as a champion of women and labor rights.

Ukrainian drone hits Russia's Chechnya

Kyiv claims North Korean troops were killed fighting alongside Russian forces

KYIV, Ukraine, Dec 16, (AP): Ukraine's military intelligence agency claimed Monday that around 30 North Korean troops were killed or wounded in fighting against the Ukrainian army at the weekend in Russia's Kursk border region.

This is the first reported casualties since the Pentagon and Ukraine announced North Korea has sent about 10,000 troops to Russia to help it in the almost 3-year war.

The casualties occurred around three villages in Kursk, where Russia has for four months been trying to quash a Ukrainian incursion, the agency, known by its acronym GUR, said in a public post on the Telegram messaging app.

At least three North Korean servicemen went missing around another Kursk village, GUR said. It was not possible to independently verify the Ukrainian claims. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov referred related questions to the Russian Defense Ministry, which didn't immediately comment.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has pledged unwavering support for Russia's full-scale invasion of its neighbor under a mutual defense pact.

The alliance gave a jolt to international relations, and Russian President Vladimir Putin said Monday that the planned deployment of U.S. intermediate-range missiles to Europe and Asia has brought new threats.

"In view of rising geopolitical tensions, we must take additional measures to ensure the security of Russia and our allies," Putin told a meeting with top military brass. "We are doing it accurately and in a balanced way to avoid being drawn into a full-scale arms race."

However, military analysts say the language barrier has bedeviled combat coordination between Russian and North Korean troops.



A serviceman of the 13th Brigade of the National Guard of Ukraine fires Giatsint-B gun towards Russian positions near Kharkiv, Ukraine, on Nov. 6, 2024. (AP)

"The poor integration and ongoing communication problems between Russian and North Korean forces will likely continue to cause friction in Russian military operations in Kursk ... in the near term," the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington think tank, said late Sunday.

Meanwhile, a Ukrainian drone struck a campus belonging to Russia's National Guard Sunday in the Russian region of Chechnya, as Kyiv continues to strike back after a mass air attack from Moscow.

Footage on social media showed a drone swooping low over the Chechen capital, Grozny, some 800 kilometers (500 miles) southeast of the front line in Ukraine, before exploding. No casualties were reported.

Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov confirmed that the drone had hit a site belonging to the Akhmat Grozny riot police battalion, and said that two other drones had been shot down by air defenses.

Kadyrov pledged revenge on Ukrainian forces and said he had ordered a missile strike against military facilities in Kharkiv in retaliation for the attack. The claim could not be independently verified.

Russia's Defense Ministry said Sunday that it had shot down 15 Ukrainian drones overnight in the country's Kursk and Belgorod regions, as well as over the Black Sea. It did not mention the Grozny attack.

An official in Ukraine's security service also told the AP on Sunday that Ukrainian intelligence services had conducted a special operation to sever Russia's logistic fuel supply routes from Ukraine's annexed Crimea to occupied Zaporizhzhia.

The operation, which took place Saturday, destroyed a locomotive and 40 tanker cars, the security official said. A sabotage operation reportedly blew up railway tracks while the train was moving, before HIMARS rocket launch systems joined the attack.

Prosecutors summon Kosovo's prime minister

PRISTINA, Kosovo, Dec 16, (AP): Kosovo's Special Prosecutor's Office has summoned Prime Minister Albin Kurti Monday to testify in a case that remains unclear, with his supporters saying it's a politically driven move as the country gears up for election.

According to Liridona Kozmaqi, the spokeswoman for the prosecutor's office, Kurti was on a trip abroad and that another date would be set for the summons.

She declined to give details on the nature of the case.

However, Kurti's spokesman, Perparim Kryeziu, said in a Facebook post last week the premier was called to testify in a case under Article 414 of the Criminal Code, which regulates offenses related to "abuse of official post or authority."

Kryeziu accused the summons of being politically motivated and "an attempt to influence the outcome of the 2025 elections."

Kosovo will hold a parliamentary election on Feb. 9, a vote expected to be a key test for Kurti whose governing left-wing Self-Determination Movement Party won by a

landslide in 2021.

The main contenders for the coming election are the Democratic Party of Kosovo, whose main leaders are at The Hague tribunal accused of war crimes, and the Democratic League of Kosovo, the oldest party in the country that has lost much support after the death of its leader Ibrahim Rugova.

Local polls show that Kurti's party is the front-runner.

The main issue overshadowing the election remains the stalled normalization talks with Serbia, which the European Union has facilitated since 2011, but with little progress. The talks are decisive toward the two countries' membership in the bloc.

Kosovo was a former Serbian province until a 78-day NATO bombing campaign in 1999 ended a war between Serbian government forces and ethnic Albanian separatists in Kosovo, which left about 13,000 dead, mainly ethnic Albanians, and pushed Serbian forces out. Serbia does not recognize Kosovo's independence, proclaimed in 2008.



Emergency services attend a rescue operation to free Ottavia Piana, an expert spelunker who was trapped while exploring the cave of Bueno Fonteno, near Bergamo, Italy, Sunday, Dec. 15, 2024. (AP)

Rescuers working to free cave explorer trapped underground

MILAN, Dec 16, (AP): A major rescue operation was underway Monday northeast of the Italian city of Bergamo to free a woman considered an expert spelunker who was trapped while exploring a cave with eight others.

Ottavia Piana is blocked in a deep inside the Bueno Fonteno cave, where the temperatures were ranging from 7 degrees Celsius to 8 degrees Celsius (44-46 degrees Fahrenheit) in high humidity. Piana was injured after falling

some 5 meters (16 feet) Saturday evening during an expedition to map a kilometer (half a mile) of an uncharted branch of the cave, but rescuers said she is alert and responsive.

Rescuers reached her late Sunday and have used small explosives in an attempt to breach the last 100 meters (yards) to get to her.

A spokesman for rescue operation, Mauro Guiducci, said it was impossible to foresee how long it would take to free Piana.

Second top Church of England cleric facing calls to resign over handling of abuse claims

LONDON, Dec 16, (AP): The senior clergyman who is due to take temporary charge of the Church of England faced calls to resign on Monday over his handling of the case of a priest accused of sexual misconduct.

The BBC reported that Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell let a priest remain in his post despite knowing he had been barred by the church from being alone with children and had paid compensation to one of his accusers.

The case occurred when Cottrell was bishop of Chelmsford in eastern England. He is now the second-most senior bishop in the Church of England. He is due to take over next month as the church's spiritual head from Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, who resigned in November over the way he handled separate sexual abuse claims.

Cottrell said in a statement that he had faced a "horrible and intolerable" situation over the priest, David Tudor.

"I suspended David Tudor from office at the first opportunity, when a new victim came forward to the police in 2019," he said. "Up until 2019, there were no legal grounds to take alterna-



Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell, left, welcomes Britain King Charles III and the Queen Consort, right, as they arrive at York Minster to attend a short service for the unveiling of a statue of Queen Elizabeth II, in the City of York, England, on Nov. 9, 2022. (AP)

tion action."

Tudor was eventually fired by the church and barred for life from the ministry in October after acknowledging he had sexual relationships with

two teenage girls, aged 15 and 16, in the 1980s.

"I am deeply sorry that we were not able to take action earlier, but that was the situation I inherited," Cottrell said.

"It is extremely disappointing that this story is being reported as if it was an abuser being ignored or even protected. Actually, nothing could be further from the truth."

Bishop of Newcastle Helen-Ann Hartley, one of the few bishops to publicly criticize the way the church has handled abuse allegations, said she felt "incredibly" at the latest claims.

"I said Cottrell lacked the 'credibility or moral authority' to be the church's figurehead."

"My personal view is that the evidence before us makes it impossible for Stephen Cottrell to be that person in which we have confidence and trust to drive the change that is needed," she told the BBC.

The archbishop of Canterbury is spiritual leader of the global Anglican Communion, which has 85 million adherents in 165 countries. It has been riven by sharply divergent views on issues such as gay rights and the place of women in the church.

The latest allegations are likely to add to soul-searching and anger about a lack of accountability at the highest reaches of the church.



Filipino death row inmate Mary Jane Veloso gestures to the media as she leaves Yogyakarta Women's Prison for her transfer to the capital city of Jakarta in preparation for her repatriation to the Philippines, in Gunung Kidul, Indonesia, Sunday, Dec. 15, 2024. (AP)

'Miracle when all hope lost'

Filipina spared execution in Indonesia to fly home

YOGYAKARTA, Indonesia, Dec 16, (AP): A Filipina who was on death row in Indonesia and was nearly executed by firing squad in 2015 will return home this week under an arrangement between the countries, officials said Monday.

Mary Jane Veloso, who spent almost 15 years in an Indonesian prison for drug trafficking, won a last-minute reprieve that led to her testimony exposing how a criminal syndicate duped her into being an unwitting accomplice and drug courier.

Veloso was moved late Sunday to a female prison in Indonesia's capital, from where she will be flown back to the Philippines early Wednesday. Nyoman Gede Surya Mataram, an official at the Ministry of Immigration and Corrections, told a news conference.

Her repatriation was made possible by a "practical arrangement" signed between the two countries on Dec. 6, after a decade of pleading from Manila.

In a tearful interview with The Associated Press last week, Veloso described her return home as being "like a miracle when I have lost all

hope."

"For almost 15 years I was separated from my children and parents, and I could not see my children grow up," she said. "I wish to be given an opportunity to take care of my children and to be close to my parents."

Veloso, who will turn 40 next month, was arrested in 2010 at an airport in the Indonesian city of Yogyakarta, where officials discovered about 2.6 kilograms (5.7 pounds) of heroin hidden in her luggage. The single mother of two sons was convicted and sentenced to death.

Her case caused a public outcry in the Philippines. She traveled to Indonesia in 2010, where her recruiter, Maria Kristina Sergio, reportedly told her a job as a domestic worker awaited her. Sergio also allegedly provided the suitcase where the drugs were found.

In 2015, Indonesia moved Veloso to an island prison where she and eight other drug convicts were scheduled to be executed by firing squad despite objections from their home countries Australia, Brazil, France, Ghana and Nigeria.

Constitutional Court begins meeting to determine Yoon's fate

South Korea's impeached leader avoids investigators

SEOUL, Dec 16, (AP): South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol dodged requests by investigative agencies to appear for questioning over his short-lived martial law decree, as the Constitutional Court began its first meeting Monday on Yoon's case to determine whether to formally unseat or reinstate him.

A joint investigative team involving police, an anti-corruption agency and the Defense Ministry said it wants to question Yoon on charges of rebellion and abuse of power in connection with his ill-conceived power grab.

The team on Monday tried to convey a request to officials at Yoon's office or residence but they refused to accept it, according to the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials.

Agency investigator Son Yeong-jo cited presidential secretarial staff at Yoon's office as claiming they were unsure whether conveying the request to the impeached president was part of their duties. Son said his team had also mailed the request to Yoon, but declined to provide specifics when asked how investigators would respond if Yoon refuses to appear.

Yoon was impeached by the opposition-controlled National Assembly on Saturday over his Dec. 3 martial law decree. His presidential powers have been subsequently suspended, and the Constitutional Court is to determine whether to formally remove him from office or reinstate him. If Yoon is dismissed, a national election to choose his successor must be held within 60 days.

Yoon has justified his martial law enforcement as a necessary act of governance against the main liberal opposition Democratic Party that he described as "anti-state forces" bogging down his agendas and vowed to "fight to the end" against efforts to remove him from office. Hundreds of thousands of protesters have poured out on the streets of the country's capital, Seoul, in recent days, calling for Yoon's ouster and arrest.

It remains unclear whether Yoon will grant the request by investigators for an interview. South Korean prosecutors, who are pushing a separate investigation into the incident, also



Lee Jin, spokeswoman of the South Korean Constitutional Court, speaks during a press conference at the court in Seoul, South Korea, Monday, Dec. 16, 2024. (AP)

reportedly asked Yoon to appear at a prosecution office for questioning on Sunday but he refused to do so. Repeated calls to a prosecutors' office in Seoul were unanswered.

Yoon's presidential security service has also resisted a police attempt to search Yoon's office for evidence.

The Constitutional Court on Monday met for the first time to discuss the case. The court has up to 180 days to rule. But observers say a ruling could come faster.

In the case of parliamentary impeachments of past presidents - Roh Moo-hyun in 2004 and Park Geun-hye in 2016 - the court spent 63 days and 91 days respectively before determining to reinstate Roh and dismiss Park.

Kim Hyungdu, a court justice, told reporters earlier Monday that the court will "swiftly and fairly" make a decision in the case. He said Monday's court meeting was meant to discuss preparatory procedures and how to arrange arguments at formal trials.

Court spokesperson Lee Jean later said the court's first pretrial hearing is set for Dec. 27.

Upholding Yoon's impeachments needs support from at least six out of the court's nine justices, but three seats are vacant now. This means a unanimous ruling by the court's current six justices in favor of Yoon's impeachment is required to formally end his presidency. Kim said he expected the three vacant seats to be filled by the end of this month.

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, who became the country's acting leader after Yoon's impeachment, and other government officials have sought to reassure allies and markets after Yoon's surprise stunt paralyzed politics, halted high-level diplomacy and complicated efforts to revive a faltering economy.

Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung urged the Constitutional Court to rule swiftly on Yoon's impeachment and proposed a special council for policy cooperation between the government and parliament. Yoon's conservative People Power Party criticized Lee's proposal for the special council, saying that it's "not right" for the opposition party to act like the rul-

ing party.

Lee, a firebrand lawmaker who drove a political offensive against Yoon's government, is seen as the frontrunner to replace him. He lost the 2022 presidential election to Yoon by a razor-thin margin.

Yoon's impeachment, which was endorsed in parliament by some of his ruling party lawmakers, has created a deep rift within the party between Yoon's loyalists and his opponents. On Monday, PPP chair Han Dong-hun, a strong critic of Yoon's martial law, announced his resignation.

"If martial law had not been lifted that night, a bloody incident could have erupted that morning between the citizens who would have taken to the streets and our young soldiers," Han told a news conference.

Yoon's Dec. 3 imposition of martial law, the first of its kind in more than four decades, harkened back to an era of authoritarian leaders the country has not seen since the 1980s. Yoon was forced to lift his decree hours later after parliament unanimously voted to overturn it.

'Hondurans, Guatemalans, Salvadorans need to be very, very nervous'

Central America braces for migrant influx amid Trump deportation push

SAN PEDRO SULA, Honduras, Dec 16, (AP): As dozens of deported migrants pack into a sweltering airport facility in San Pedro Sula, Norma sits under fluorescent lights clutching a foam cup of coffee and a small plate of eggs - all that was waiting for her in Honduras.

The 69-year-old Honduran mother had never imagined leaving her Central American country. But then came the anonymous death threats to her and her children and the armed men who showed up at her doorstep threatening to kill her, just like they had killed one of her relatives days earlier.

Norma, who requested anonymity out of concern for her safety, spent her life savings of \$10,000 on a one-way trip north at the end of October with her daughter and granddaughter.

But after her asylum petitions to the U.S. were rejected, they were loaded onto a deportation flight. Now, she's back in Honduras within reach of the same gang, stuck in a cycle of violence and economic precarity that haunts deportees like her.

"They can find us in every corner of Honduras," she said in the migrant processing facility. "We're praying for God's protection, because we don't expect anything from the government."

Now, as U.S. President-elect Donald Trump is set to take office in January with a promise of carrying out mass deportations, Honduras and other Central



Honduran migrants who were deported from the U.S. sit on a bus after arriving at Ramon Villeda Morales Airport, in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, Wednesday, Dec. 4, 2024. (AP)

American countries people have fled for generations are bracing for a potential influx of vulnerable migrants - a situation they are ill-prepared to handle.

Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, which have the largest number of people living illegally in the U.S., after

Mexico, could be among the first and most heavily impacted by mass deportations, said Jason Houser, former Immigration & Customs Enforcement chief of staff in the Biden administration.

Because countries like Venezuela re-

fuse to accept deportation flights from the U.S., Houser suggests that the Trump administration may prioritize the deportation of "the most vulnerable" migrants from those countries who have removal orders but no criminal record, in an effort to rapidly increase deportation numbers.

"Hondurans, Guatemalans, Salvadorans need to be very, very nervous because (Trump officials) are going to press the bounds of the law," said Houser.

Migrants and networks aiding deportees in those Northern Triangle countries worry their return could thrust them into even deeper economic and humanitarian crises, fueling migration down the line.

"We don't have the capacity" to take so many people, said Antonio Garcia, Honduras' deputy foreign minister. "There's very little here for deportees." People who return, he said, "are the last to be taken care of."

Since 2015, Honduras has received around half a million deportees. They climb down from planes and buses to be greeted with coffee, small plates of food and bags of toothpaste and deodorant. While some breathe a sigh of relief, free from harsh conditions in U.S. detention facilities, others cry, gripped with panic.

"We don't know what we'll do, what comes next," said one woman in a cluster of deportees waiting for their names to be called by a man clacking at a keyboard.

Approximately 560,000 Hondurans, about 5% of the country's population, live in the U.S. without legal status, according to U.S. government figures. Of those, migration experts estimate about 150,000 can be tracked down

and rapidly expelled.

While Garcia said the government offers services to help returnees, most are released with little aid into a country gripped by gangs. They have few options for work to pay off crippling debts. Others like Norma have nowhere to go, unable to return home because of the gang members circling her home.

Norma said she's unsure of why they were targeted, but she believes it was because the relative who was killed had problems with a gang.

Despite the crackdown, Garcia estimates up to 40% of Honduran deportees make their way back to the U.S.

Larissa Martinez, 31, is among those who have struggled to reintegrate into Honduran society after being deported from the U.S. in 2021 with her three children. Driven by economic desperation and the absence of her husband, who had migrated and left her for another woman, the single mother sought a better life in the U.S.

Since her return to Honduras, Martinez has spent the past three years searching for a job, not just to support her kids, but also to pay off the \$5,000 she owes to relatives for the trip north.

Her efforts have been unsuccessful. She built a wobbly wooden home tucked away in the hilly fringes of San Pedro Sula, where she sells meat and cheese to get by, but sales have been slim and tropical rains have eaten away at the flimsy walls where they sleep.

France rushes help to Mayotte, where hundreds or possibly thousands died in Cyclone Chido

CAPE TOWN, Dec 16, (AP): France was rushing help by ship and military aircraft to its poor overseas territory of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean on Monday after the island was shattered by its worst storm in nearly a century.

Authorities in Mayotte fear hundreds and possibly thousands of people have died in Cyclone Chido, although the official death toll on Monday morning stood at 14. Rescue teams and medical personnel have been sent to the island off the east coast of Africa from France and from the nearby French territory of Reunion, as well as tons of supplies.

French television station TF1 reported Monday morning that Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau had arrived in Mamoudzou, the capital of Mayotte. "It will take days and days to establish the human toll," he told French media.

French authorities said more than 800 more personnel were expected to arrive in the coming days as rescuers comb through the devastation caused by Chido when it hit the densely populated archipelago of around 300,000 people on Saturday.

Mayotte Prefect Francois-Xavier Bieuville, the top French government official in Mayotte, told local TV station Mayotte la lere on Sunday that the death toll was several hundred people and could even be in the thousands.

He said Mayotte's poor slums of metal shacks and other informal structures had suffered terrible damage and authorities were struggling to get an

accurate count of the dead and injured after the worst cyclone to hit Mayotte since the 1930s.

Entire neighborhoods have been flattened, while public infrastructure like the main airport and hospital have been badly damaged and the electricity supply has been knocked out, French authorities said. The damage to the airport control tower means only military aircraft can fly into Mayotte, complicating the response.

Mayotte is France's poorest depart-

ment and is regarded as the poorest territory in the European Union, but it is a target for economic migration from even poorer countries like nearby Comoros and even Somalia because of a better standard of living and the French welfare system.

Bieuville, the Mayotte prefect, said it would be extremely hard to count all the dead and many might never be recorded, partly due to the Muslim tradition of burying people within 24 hours of their deaths and also because

of many undocumented migrants living on the island.

Chido ripped through the southwestern Indian Ocean on Friday and Saturday, also affecting the nearby islands of Comoros and Madagascar. Mayotte was directly in the cyclone's path, though, and took the brunt. Chido brought winds in excess of 220 kph (136 mph), according to the French weather service, making it a category 4 cyclone, the second strongest on the scale.

It made landfall in Mozambique on the African mainland late Sunday, where authorities and aid agencies have said more than 2 million people may be impacted in another poor country where health facilities are already limited. Mozambique media reported three people had died in the north of the country where the cyclone made landfall, but said that was a very early toll.

Further inland, Malawi and Zimbabwe have also made preparations for possible evacuations because of flooding as Chido continues its eastern trajectory, although the cyclone has weakened as it passes over land.

December through to March is cyclone season in the southwestern Indian Ocean and southern Africa has been pummeled by a series of strong ones in recent years. Cyclone Idai in 2019 killed more than 1,300 people, mostly in Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe. Cyclone Freddy left more than 1,000 dead across several countries in the Indian Ocean and southern Africa last year.

Subcontinent

Assassination draws ire: The murder of Khalil Rahman Haqqani, the Afghan caretaker government's acting minister for refugees and repatriation, in his office on Wednesday has drawn widespread condemnations both domestically and internationally.

A key figure in the administration, Haqqani was the first cabinet member killed in a terror attack since the Afghan caretaker government assumed

power in 2021, following the withdrawal of U.S.-led forces in mid-August 2021.

The terror group Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the attack. In the deadly attack, four people, including Haqqani, were killed and four others, including his guards, critically injured.

Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai, in a message posted on social media, strongly condemned the attack on Haqqani and offered sympathies to his family. (Xinhua)

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Blast claims 137 since 2024:

A total of 137 people lost their lives and more than 330 others sustained injuries following the blasts of unexploded ordnances, remnants of past wars, across Afghanistan since the beginning of 2024, local media reported Sunday.

"As of the start of 2024, approximately 240 separate incidents have taken place in Afghanistan, resulting

in a total of 470 fatalities, including 386 children who have been either martyred or injured," TOLONews quoted Nooruddin Rustamkhalil, head of the directorate of mine action coordination, as saying.. (Xinhua)

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35 trapped under rubble: About 35 miners were trapped under the rubble of a coal mine in northern Afghanistan's Samangan province on Saturday, local officials said on Sunday.

The provincial health director Sayed Usman Hamidi counted 35 miners under the debris, saying rescue teams and health personnel have been dispatched to the area to rescue the trapped miners.

"Preliminary reports indicate that a number of miners were busy in a coal mine in Dara-i-Sufi Payin district of Samangan province yesterday, but part of the mine caved in, and resultantly several miners were trapped under rubble," a statement from the provincial police office released on Sunday said. (Xinhua)

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Tamil Nadu fire kills 7: At least seven people, including a toddler, were killed after a fire broke out at a private hospital in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, police said Friday.

The fire broke out Thursday night in the hospital in Trichy Road in Dindigul district, about 430 km west of Chennai, the capital city of Tamil Nadu. "Last night a fire broke out in the reception area of City Hospital, an orthopaedic care hospital and immediately engulfed the whole building. In the blaze, seven people, including a child, were killed due to suffocation," a police officer said. "The fire possibly triggered by a short circuit spread to all four floors." (Xinhua)

	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts		
SAUDI	- TASI	+0.31	12,096.73	JAPAN	- Nikkei 225	-0.03	39,457.49
PAKISTAN	- KSE 100	+1.32	116,176.31	PHILIPPINES	- PSEI	-0.02	6,615.16
UAE	- DFMGI	+4.51	5,047.54				
EGYPT	- EGX 30	+0.08	30,799.43				

Business

Oil sector has witnessed tremendous successes during the era of HH Sheikh Meshal Al-Sabah

HH the Amir inaugurated the Duqm Refinery in the Sultanate of Oman

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: From the time His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Sabah assumed power on December 17, 2023, the oil sector has witnessed tremendous achievements, which further cement its role as the backbone of the national economy.

Some of the most notable accomplishments are as follows:

■ January 18, 2024: The Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) announced its success in providing stable, secure, and continuous supplies of low-sulfur fuel oil to all stations of the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy.

■ February 7, 2024: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah inaugurated the Duqm Refinery in the Sultanate of Oman.

■ March 16, 2024: Kuwait Petroleum International's Italy branch announced the signing of an agreement to purchase a 50 percent stake in the Italian company Ecofox.

■ May 1, 2024: Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy for a project to produce one gigawatt of electricity from solar energy.

■ May 29, 2024: The official celebration of the full operation of the Al-Zour Refinery took place.

■ June 26, 2024: Kuwait Petroleum International announced the completion of procedures to acquire a 50 percent stake in the Italian company EcoFox.

■ Mid-July 2024: KOC announced the discovery of huge commercial quantities of light oil and associated gas in the Al-Nukhdha offshore field located east of

Failaka Island in Kuwaiti economic waters.

■ September 8, 2024: The Mina Abdullah Refinery, affiliated with the Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC), achieved first place globally in risk management engineering, based on a field survey conducted by the American company Marsh, which specializes in risk management and insurance coverage.

■ September 12, 2024: The Kuwait Foreign Petroleum Exploration Company (KUFPEC) announced that its subsidiary, KUFPEC Indonesia, acquired two major sectors during the first direct bidding round of 2024 in Indonesia.

■ October 10, 2024: Kuwait Petroleum International won the Best Gulf Partnership Award for 2024. Also, the Mina Al-Ahmad Refinery achieved an exceptional global milestone in risk and safety management.

These accomplishments reflect the continued growth and global recognition of Kuwait's oil sector under His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Sabah's leadership.



Mr Samer Khanachet with ENBAT graduates & trainers.

'The foundation you've built through ENBAT has set you up for success'

KIPCO marks graduation of 2nd cohort of its ENBAT work readiness program

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: KIPCO – Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) – celebrated the graduation of the second cohort of its ENBAT work readiness program. Running for eight weeks from October to December, the KIPCO program offered new college graduates a space to foster skills that employers believe are key competencies that new hires need to have.

The graduation was hosted by KIPCO's Deputy Group Chief Executive Officer, Mr Samer Khanachet. The event celebrated the success of the ENBAT graduates and their trainers, and also recognized the efforts of KIPCO's partners: en.v for designing the program curriculum; and the American University of Kuwait (AUK) and the American United School (AUS) for hosting the training sessions.

Speaking at the event, Ms Eman Al Awadhi, KIPCO's Group Senior Vice President – Corporate Communications and Investor Relations, said:

"The ENBAT program was created with a clear purpose: to bridge the gap between academic learning and the real-world demands of the workplace. As



Ms Eman Al Awadhi giving her speech.

graduates of the ENBAT program, you are now armed with the tools to thrive in the workplace. But remember, this achievement is not an endpoint. It is, in fact, the beginning of a new phase—a phase where you can apply all that you've learned and continue to grow professionally. The world of work is evolving rapidly, and there will always be new challenges, new opportunities, and new skills



ENBAT graduates.

to learn. But we have every confidence that the foundation you've built through ENBAT has set you up for success."

Reflecting on her experiences during the program, Hessa Al Waalansaid: "On the very first day of ENBAT, I discovered things about myself I never knew before. And that's when I realized ENBAT is more than a program designed to prepare graduates for the workplace;

it has been a transformative experience, a journey of self-discovery and personal growth. Just as important as the lessons we've learnt are the bonds we built and the connections we created with one another. Over these weeks, we've grown from a group of strangers into a team, supporting and challenging each other every step of the way. These connections are a reminder that our success is not just about what



Recognition of en.v

we learn but also about the people we surround ourselves with."

The program was designed in collaboration with en.v which has worked on a number of successful programs, all of which focus on bringing together people representing different parts of the community and facilitate the process of building bridges, collaboration and connections. Of the 150 applicants to the program, 30

were selected to take part. The eight facilitators of the program all have private sector experience and have been trained by en.v to help the participants build the core skills needed to become effective leaders and collaborators. The program includes four modules: Self, Systems, and Critical Thinking; Cross Cultural Communication; Design Thinking; and Work Culture & Applying Skills.

Announcement: CBK Bonds and related Tawarruq

The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK Bonds and re-

lated Tawarruq at a total value of KWD 240 million for 3 months with Rate of Return 4.125%.

Bursa Kuwait closes lower amid selling pressure & awaited key reviews

By Mahmoud Shendi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: Bursa Kuwait ended Monday's trading session with mixed results across its indices. The general index declined by 17.49 points, or 0.24 percent, closing at 7,293.99 points. Trading volume was substantial, with 376 million shares exchanged through 16,646 cash transactions, valued at KWD 75.5 million (USD 230.2 million).

The main market index showed positive movement, rising 17.44 points, or 0.26 percent, to reach 6,684.44 points. This index saw 246.17 million shares traded through 9,769 transactions, worth KWD 30.2 million (USD 92.11 million).

In contrast, the premier market index experienced a decline of 27.60 points, or 0.35 percent, settling at 7,807.76 points. It recorded 129.8 million shares traded through 6,877 transactions, with a total value of KWD 45.3 million (USD 138.16 million). The Main 50 index showed a slight increase, gaining 3.98 points, or 0.06 percent, to close at 6,548.51 points. This index saw 158.7 million shares traded through 5,054 cash transactions, worth KWD 20.6 million (approximately USD 62.8 million).

On Sunday, Bursa Kuwait closed lower with its general index declining by 19.5 points, or 0.27 percent, reaching 7,311.4 points.

A total of 433.5 million shares were traded in 17,941 transactions, valued at 77.3 million dinars (approximately \$235.7 million).

The market value decreased by 84 million dinars, falling to 43.265 billion dinars from 43.349 billion dinars in the previous session. This decline was driven by selling pressures and profit-taking on stocks that had gained significantly in earlier sessions.

Investors are awaiting two key events: the final review of the FTSE Russell index on Thursday, December

21, which marks the last review of the year and the Standard & Poor's (S&P) review on Dec 22.

There is anticipation that purchasing momentum will continue due to strong third-quarter financial results and expectations for positive performance into the year's end.

Additionally, the US Federal Reserve is expected to announce a potential interest rate reduction of 25 basis points on Dec 18, which is anticipated to positively affect market performance. The Main Market Index dropped by 5.1 points (or 0.08 percent) to 6,667 points, with 293 million shares traded in 12,112 transactions valued at 36.3 million dinars.

Among the sectors, the Technology sector led the declines, falling 3.43 percent, while the Consumer Goods sector gained 1.85 percent. The Healthcare sector remained stable. Osool saw the largest decline among stocks, down 13.37 percent, following the sale of 1.08 million shares by the Chairman.

On the other hand, Wathaq rose by 12.32 percent. Kuwait Real Estate led volume activity, rising by 3.66 percent, with 38.31 million shares traded, amounting to 9.55 million dinars.

In corporate news, Al-Enmaa Real Estate announced a capital reduction of 10 million dinars, equivalent to 100 million shares.

The company reported a 334.41 percent increase in profits for Q4 2024, driven by higher revenues, profits from property sales and reduced financing costs. The reduction will require approval from the regulatory authorities and the Extraordinary General Assembly.

Meanwhile, Alafco Aviation Finance and Lease Company will hold its General Assembly on January 8, 2025, to discuss cash dividend distribution for FY 2024, as well as capital reduction and amendments to its Articles of Association. The proposed cash dividend for the fiscal year ending September 30 is 305.318 percent per share, totaling 30.53 million dinars.

'Governance and environmental sustainability: Effective methods and practices'

stc sponsors Kuwait Transparency Society's sustainability forum

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its strategic sponsorship of the sustainability forum organized by the Kuwait Transparency Society. The forum, bearing the slogan, "Governance and environmental sustainability: Effective methods and practices", was held at the National Library Theater under the patronage of H.E. Dr. Amthal Al-Huwaila, Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs. Ahmed Al-Nuwaibet, Manager of Public Relations and Social Media at stc, addressed the attendees during the opening of the forum, where he pointed out in his speech the importance of these forums in increasing community awareness about the concept of sustainability.

stc's sponsorship comes as part of a series of initiatives organized under its sustainability program, titled "Small Move, Big Impact". Through this program, the Company aims to raise awareness on various issues, while adopting long-term sustainable practices that leave a positive impact on the community and future generations.

The forum, attended by members from stc's team, highlighted the objectives achieved by companies within the private sector across environmental, social and c governance (ESG) initiatives. It also explored the sector's contributions towards achieving a green economy by promoting climate action and sustainable energy.

Additionally, the forum featured several panel discussions with representatives from various organizations, including Danah AlJasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, titled, "The successes of the private sector in adopting the concept of

sustainability and its impact on the local economy". AlJasem emphasized the importance of adopting sustainable practices through long-term initiatives aimed at creating added value for stakeholders, including customers, employees, shareholders, investors, as well as the communities that organizations engage with on a daily basis.

AlJasem said, "At stc, sustainability is a core pillar of our strategy, which comes deeply integrated into the foundation of our operations to drive long-term success and create lasting value for our stakeholders. In alignment with this commitment, the Board of Directors and Executive Management have established a comprehensive framework for sustainable practices, ensuring its effective implementation across the organization. This approach reflects our dedication to fostering a sustainable and impactful future for our Company and all stakeholders."

In her response to one of the discussion points, AlJasem explained that stc has worked closely with government institutions and regulators to ensure compliance with the highest standards of corporate governance, while promoting transparency, accountability, and ethical business practices across the organization. Through this comprehensive approach, stc aims to integrate sustainability into its business, creating a lasting positive impact on society and the environment. This vision aligns closely with the objectives defined under the new Kuwait Vision 2035.

AlJasem added, "We are proud to participate in this distinguished event, which brings together experts and specialists within the sustainability field. Our ongoing collaborations with both the public and private sectors have driven meaningful and impactful change across the community and we aim to continue these successful relationships. Our commitment

to sustainable development is a fundamental part of our corporate values, as we believe that through collective efforts, we can make a significant and lasting contribution for future generations. When it comes to implementing such standards internally, stc has integrated sustainable practices within its operation, strategy, and environmental practices in alignment with the Company's vision."

Majed Al Mutairi, President of the Kuwait Transparency Society, said, "The annual sustainability forum organized by the Kuwait Transparency Society aims to shed light on critical national issues that significantly contribute to the country's development and progress. This year's forum focused on 'Governance and environmental sustainability', a vital topic that is directly linked to managing and preserving our natural resources responsibility."

Al Mutairi added, "We are pleased with the participation and support of stc in this forum, which aims to provide a comprehensive analysis for decision makers on the importance of applying governance principles across all government institutions. In line with this strategic approach, the forum showcased different local and international case studies that could lead this shift by example."

The forum emphasized the necessary institutional developments that would enhance the public sector's capacity in advancing sustainable development plans and practices that would engage with the younger generation. Through this event, the Kuwait Transparency Society aims to offer valuable insights and successful experiences to assist decision makers in formulating an ambitious and effective national environmental strategy that aligns with international standards.



The company's team with the representative of the Minister of Social Affairs and the President of the Transparency Association.



Danah AlJasem during her intervention in the dialogue session entitled 'The private sector's successes in adopting the concept of sustainability and its impact on the local economy'.

Event reflects bank's belief in the importance of investing in human capital and increasing employees' efficiency

NBK hosts a masterclass titled 'Leading in an Age of Uncertainty' for its employees

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: Underscoring its belief in the importance of investing in the human capital and increasing employees' efficiency, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) hosted a masterclass titled "Leading in an Age of Uncertainty" by Prof. Jill W. Paine, faculty member of IE Business School, IE University, which was attended by employees from different departments.

In the Masterclass, Paine shared with participants practical strategies that leaders can utilize to enhance engagement and productivity within work teams during periods of change and uncertainty, and the importance of organizational change as a pivotal factor in any global organization.

The masterclass addressed how leaders can enable organizational change and motivate the team, especially in an increasingly dynamic environment, through practical experiences using various techniques such as analysis, group discussions, simulations, and exercises.

It also highlighted the radical shifts in business models due to the changing environment as a result of fast-paced technological development and changes in consumer behavior, in addition to the geopolitical tensions and the climate crisis, and organizations' plans to adapt to all these changes at all levels.

Paine shared insights on effective change leadership to motivate employees. The class also included interactive discussions to encourage employees to exchange ideas and experiences on how to apply the concepts presented in the work environment.

These masterclasses reflect NBK's dedication to developing the capabilities



Mr. Imad Al-Ablani and Jill Paine with the bank team.

of its employees, which helps improve organizational performance and create a positive work environment that fosters innovation and development.

Speaking on this, Najla Al-Sager, Head of Talent Management and Learning, Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait, said, "We firmly believe that investing in our

employees is a key strategic pillar to achieve sustainable growth and maintain our excellence and leadership. Therefore, we are always striving to provide the best training opportunities in innovative ways to meet the changing market dynamics, thus building an agile and dynamic workforce that can meet the challenges in the future."

"All programs and courses delivered

to employees are designed within an integrated training plan developed according to methodological and scientific standards to meet the needs of all relevant departments, in cooperation with prominent banking experts and reputable international training agencies," she noted.

"NBK enjoys a unique work environment offering distinguished train-



Najlaa Al-Sager

ing and development programs to employees to help them build a thriving and sustainable career. We harness all our capabilities to develop employees and always seek to unlock their creativity and innovation, which positively reflects on their performance, and help maintain our leadership position, both locally and regionally," she added.

Jill earned a Ph.D. and master's degree in Social-Organizational Psychology from Columbia University, a bachelor's degree (magna cum laude) in English literature from the University of Colorado, Boulder in the US and has also obtained a GPCL from Harvard Business School.

She has extensive experience including working as a Visiting Scholar, University of Maryland, Robert H. Smith School of Business, and a

Najla Al-Sager:

- Investing in our employees is a strategic pillar to maintain our excellence and leadership
- NBK enjoys a unique work environment promoting a sustainable career
- We always seek to provide the best training opportunities in innovative ways to meet the changing market dynamics.

Teaching Assistant for courses including Organizational Change, Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management, Columbia University.

Professor Paine has more than 23 years of experience working with firms in multiple industries including legal and financial services, technology, manufacturing and public relations. Her partners, clients and former employers include Pfizer, General Electric, Schrodgers, Omnicom Media Group, Bryan Cave, LLP, and venture-backed technology start-ups.

Founded in 1973, IE Business School is considered one of the leading and top ranked business schools in the world according to international magazines and newspapers including Forbes, The Economist, Financial Times and Bloomberg.

Kuwait's hosting energy events boosts joint Arab action – Saudi Min

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16, (KUNA): Kuwait has been hosting many events that contributed to bolstering joint Arab action, Saudi Minister of Energy Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said.

Speaking at a news conference on the sidelines of the 113th meeting of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), Prince Abdulaziz recalled the oil embargo decision taken in 1973 by the bloc in Kuwait.

Prince Abdulaziz added that the global energy spectrum has changed in a manner that requires keeping pace with.

The Organization is keen to be a producer/exporter of all sources of energy, he said, noting that it also seeks to be an "example for responsible exploitation of natural resources, including renewable energy."

He further pointed to the importance of investing in new and alternative energy sources like hydrogen, stressing the need of dealing effectively with climate change and taking required initiatives in this regard.

During the meeting held earlier in the day, the OAPEC decided to re-brand its name into Arab Energy Organization (AEO).

Two major IPOs ready for launch in 2025

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: The economic and investment circles are eagerly awaiting the launch of two major Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) next year -- the Dhaman Hospitals and Umm Al-Hayman Company, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Both companies are ready to be offered, and the timing of these IPOs is expected to have significant positive effects, particularly on the banking sector. As the primary source of liquidity, the banking sector will play a crucial role in financing these IPOs.

According to banking sources, the available credit requests are expected to be two to three times greater than the expected slowdown in consumer and personal loans. This slowdown could result in more scrutiny and longer waiting periods for such loans, which may impact growth levels.

The shift in market dynamics suggests a reduction in the targeting of individual consumers, with a greater focus on large institutional entities that are not tied to individuals.

Optimistic banking estimates highlight several key observations regarding the IPOs and other financial activities such as: -- The upcoming IPOs of Dhaman Hospitals and Umm Al-Hayman Company are expected to provide significant

financing opportunities. Both companies have government partnerships and contributions and are nearing their offering stage -- There is a growing number of requests from listed companies seeking restructuring and extensions of their financing terms.

-- Many investors are seeking short-term facilities tied to the distribution phase and annual results announcements, which typically lead to increased market activity.

-- Real estate companies are expanding their activities, particularly in constructing commercial and entertainment centers in both the local and Gulf markets, absorbing large amounts of liquidity.

-- Foreign companies are entering the local market, with others coming through local agents and partners.

-- Companies involved in tenders, particularly those that have won large contracts such as the recent Kuwait Oil Company contract worth more than \$90 million, are gaining prominence in the market, especially in sectors related to environmental activities rather than just oil.

-- The Gulf investors and companies are increasing their interaction with the local banking sector, either directly or through branches in Gulf capitals.

Kuwait payments revenue projected to reach \$3.18b by '28, reflecting strong sector growth

Transaction volumes in Kuwait are expected to increase by 121%

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: Kuwait's payments industry is set for robust growth, with total revenues anticipated to reach \$3.2 billion by 2028, according to the latest Global Payments Report 2024 from Boston Consulting Group (BCG). Amid a global slowdown in growth rates, Kuwait is strategically leveraging digital transformation and fintech innovation to remain competitive within the GCC region.

The Global Payments Report 2024 marks BCG's 22nd annual analysis of the global payments industry. Aptly titled Fortune Favors the Bold, the report emphasizes the importance of meeting shifting customer expectations, addressing heightened regulatory scrutiny, and leveraging technological advancements. While growth is decelerating globally, Kuwait's ongoing commitment to digital transformation positions it to capitalize on regional opportunities and adapt to market demands.

Globally, payments revenue growth is projected to slow significantly, with CAGR halving to 5% through 2028, resulting in a global payments revenue pool of \$2.3 trillion. This marks a sharp decline from the 9% CAGR observed over the previous five years, which pushed the global revenue pool to \$1.8 trillion in 2023. North America and Europe are expected to experience the most significant slowdowns, with projected annual revenue increases of just 3%. In contrast, regions like the Middle East, Latin America, and Asia-Pacific are forecasted to see higher growth, with the Middle East projected to grow at a 7% CAGR, driven by accelerating digital payments in emerging markets.

Kuwait Payments Sector Positioned for Digital Evolution
Kuwait's payments sector has experienced



Lukasz Rey



Nabil Saadallah

consistent growth, with revenues increasing from \$1.75 billion in 2018 to \$2.48 billion in 2023, marking a CAGR of 7.1%. By 2028, Kuwait's revenue pool is expected to grow by another 28%, reaching \$3.18 billion.

Transaction volumes in Kuwait are projected to grow significantly, from 960 million in 2023 to over 2.12 billion by 2028—a 121% increase. This rapid expansion is fueled by Kuwait's strategic push towards digital transformation, enhanced fintech adoption, and initiatives to increase financial inclusivity.

According to Lukasz Rey, Managing Director and Partner, Head of Middle East Financial Institutions Practice at BCG, "Kuwait's payments sector is at a turning point, where sustainable growth demands resilient, adaptable business models. Kuwaiti firms should prioritize modernization through cloud-native, modular architectures that reduce tech debt and streamline operations to stay competitive. Integrating advanced technologies like generative AI and real-time payments will enable personalized customer interactions and enhanced fraud prevention, essential for delivering a sophisticated digital experience. Leveraging API-driven frameworks and data analytics, companies can improve interoperability, optimize unit economics, and swiftly respond to market shifts. As regulatory expectations evolve, organizations embedding robust risk and compliance protocols into their tech stack will secure their standing, ensuring they can meet both market and consumer demands in

the years ahead."

New Strategies Needed as Payments Industry Faces Transformation

The global payments industry faces a transformative phase, requiring companies to transition from rapid growth to a focus on sustainable profitability. Digital payments are nearing maturity in key markets such as the U.S. and U.K., where cash now accounts for less than 10% of transactions. The approach to shareholder value has also evolved, with dividends and buybacks contributing over one-third of total returns as profitability becomes a priority. Real-time payments have become the norm in more than 60 countries, and central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) are expected to bring further efficiencies and programmable capabilities to the payment ecosystem. Generative AI, embraced by early adopters, has already reduced operational costs by up to 70%, emphasizing the need for modernization to remain competitive.

Future-Proofing Kuwait's Payments Industry for Sustainable Success

As technologies like generative AI, real-time payments, and digital currencies continue to reshape the global payments landscape, Kuwait's payments sector is poised for continued progress through innovation and strategic investment.

Reflecting on Kuwait's ambitious growth trajectory, with transaction volumes expected to increase by 121% by 2028, Nabil Saadallah, Managing Director & Partner at BCG, remarked: "Kuwait's payments sector is poised for significant expansion, presenting both opportunities and challenges. Firms must transition from traditional practices to open, API-driven infrastructures that support seamless integration with digital ecosystems, laying the groundwork for scalable, high-margin growth. Companies can manage tech debt effectively by focusing on agile methodologies and DevOps-driven automation while adjusting to evolving regulatory and consumer demands. Kuwaiti firms that strategically align their tech investments with advanced risk management practices will drive profitability and position Kuwait as a leader within the regional payments landscape, establishing a robust foundation for sustained growth."

Oil edges up on China optimism, increasing sanctions

Kuwait crude prices drop slightly despite global oil market gains

By KAMCO Invest

Crude oil prices witnessed consecutive gains last week backed by optimism on the demand front coupled with indications of increasing sanctions on key oil producers. A number of key events resulted in the positive trend in prices including announcement of a shift in China's monetary policy stance, an almost certain 25 bps interest rate cut in the US in the December-2024 meeting after the recent inflation report, regional geopolitical situation as well as reports of imposition of more sanctions on Russia and Iran by the US and the European Union. An extension to OPEC+ output cuts by an additional three months until April-2024 also supported prices earlier during the month, while the recent strength in the USD against a basket of currencies partially offset the overall growth in prices. On the geopolitical front, the sudden developments in Syria only had a minimal impact on oil prices as market watchers wait to ascertain the impact and repercussions of the change in guard in the country. In a significant development, China's government announced that it would adopt a moderately loose monetary policy strategy next year. The new strategy is seen as a counter to the expected trade war between China and the US after the new government takes over in the US next month. The policy aims to stabilize property market in China and boost confidence in the economy by ways that could include lower rates and fiscal expansion as well as weaker Yuan as the country braces for higher tariffs from the US starting next year. The news once again reignited speculations that a stronger Chinese economy would support oil demand in the near term. Meanwhile, monetary predictions for the US gained

further ground with consensus almost certain about the cut expected next week. This follows the recent release of inflation data that showed second consecutive month of growth and the steepest gains in the seven months to reach an annual rate of 2.7% during November-2024, in line with consensus estimates, while core inflation logged an increase of 3.3%. On a monthly basis, inflation, including core inflation, was up 0.3%. Even the ECB implemented a 25 bps cut last week highlighting tepid growth in some of the key economies in the region. The likelihood of lower interest rates gave a boost to sentiments and was reflected in both equity and commodity markets, including crude oil. On the supply side, oil production in the US reached another record high during the week ended 6-Dec-2024 at 13.63 mb/d mainly led by steadily increasing oil output in the Permian basin. Moreover, companies like Exxon have also announced plans to increase capital expenditure and increase oil and gas production by 18% over the next five years. Oil production by the OPEC producers also increased for the second consecutive month during November-2024 once again mainly led by higher production in Libya.

Oil Prices

Oil prices remained steady last week after consecutive gains pushed prices over USD 74.0/b mark. The gains were led by news on both demand and supply fronts indicating lesser worsening oil supply glut next year. Supplies from the OPEC+ countries increased during November-2024; however, the extension to the OPEC+ cuts until the end of April-2024 prompted producers to lower OSPs for sales in the coming month. This included Saudi Arabia that lowered OSPs

for January-2025 for Asian buyers while Iraq lowered the OSP for Basrah Medium and Heavy to all buyers. In terms of WTI/Brent, the spread narrowed to the lowest in at least a month as volatility fell to the lowest level since July-2024. Indicators from the options market also showed weakness with Brent put option volumes exceeding call option volumes the most since September-2024 last week, according to a report from Bloomberg. Meanwhile, refined product prices in the US dropped during the week ended 6-December-2024 mainly led by higher inventories. The EIA report showed an increase of 5.1 million barrels in gasoline inventories and 3.2 million barrels of distillates stocks, higher than consensus estimates, while crude oil inventory showed a decline for the third consecutive week to reach 422 million barrels. In terms of monthly price trend, prices of almost all crude grades reported declines during November-2024 as compared to the average prices in October-2024. Average spot Brent crude oil price declined by 1.8% to reach USD 74.3/b during November-2024 as compared to an average of USD 75.6/b during October-2024. On the other hand, OPEC reference basket price dropped slightly more by 2.0% to reach USD 73.0/b while Kuwait export grade crude prices witnessed the smallest drop of 1.7% to average at USD 73.6/b during November-2024. Meanwhile, the consensus estimate for Brent crude once again showed downward revision for prices over the next six quarters. The consensus forecast for Q4-2024 was once again lowered by USD 1.4/b to USD 75.6/b, according to data from Bloomberg, while the forecast for Q1-2025 was lowered by USD 2.5/b to USD 75.0/b.

World Oil Demand

The OPEC once again lowered its world oil demand growth forecast for 2024 for the fifth consecutive month in its latest December-2024 report. The group lowered demand growth forecast for the year by 210 tb/d as compared to last month and now expects demand to grow by 1.61 million barrels this year to reach 103.8 mb/d during the year. The downward revision reflects actual data for the first three quarters of the year with the bulk of the revision made to data for Q3-2024. The report showed demand in the OECD countries is expected to grow by 0.11 mb/d this year as compared to previous expectation of 0.16 mb/d to reach 45.76 mb/d. Non-OECD demand is expected to grow by 1.5 mb/d as compared to previous forecast of 1.66 mb/d. Data at the regional level showed that the downward revision to demand data for the OECD Americas and OECD Asia Pacific as well as other Eurasia were partly offset by an upward revision to data for China, India, other Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Comparatively, data from the IEA showed demand expected to grow at a much smaller pace of 840 tb/d this year as compared to the agency's previous forecast of 920 tb/d. In terms of products, the IEA said that the demand growth for this year as well as next year would be mainly led by petrochemical feedstocks while the growth for transportation fuels will be constrained by behavioral and technological progress. The IEA expects emerging Asia to lead in terms of demand growth this year as well as in 2025 while China would likely show slow demand. Meanwhile, data for November-2024 showed oil imports in China rebounding to show first annual growth in seven months. The increase

was mainly led by lower Middle East prices and stockpiling demand. Government data showed imports increasing by 14.3% y-o-y during the month to reach 11.8 mb/d. For 2025, world oil demand growth forecast was lowered by OPEC by 90 tb/d to a growth of 1.45 mb/d with demand expected to reach 105.27 mb/d during the year. The downward revision reflected lowered forecasts mainly for data for Q3-2025 amid a generally lower demand growth for the year. Contrastingly, the IEA upgraded its demand forecast for 2025 to a growth of 1.1 mb/d with demand expected to reach 103.9 mb/d.

World Oil Supply

World oil supply showed consistent increase during November-2024, in line with previous months, registering a growth of 130 tb/d to reach 103.4 mb/d, according to data from IEA's monthly report. The increase in supplies was mainly led by continued recovery in oil output in Libya and Kazakhstan. For the full year 2024, OPEC forecasts showed an upward revision to non-DoC liquids supply. The agency now expects nonDoC supply to increase by 1.28 mb/d in 2024 as compared to the previous forecast of 1.23 mb/d. The revision showed higher supplies from OECD Americas and Africa that were partially offset by downward revision to supply data for Latin America and OECD Asia Pacific. In terms of refined products, a report from Bloomberg showed that diesel exports from the US Gulf Coast surged to a record seasonal high for this time of the year reaching 1.5 mb/d during the first two weeks of December-2024 or a y-o-y increase of 26% as strong demand from Europe offsets weak domestic consumption highlighting trucking recession. This

could also mean a relief for US refiners as the distillate fuel oil inventory rose to the highest in almost three months while gasoline stocks rise by the most since the start of the year. The increase in demand from Europe also reflected sanctions on Russian refined fuels. Another report highlighted that the North Sea crude market has witnessed the largest trading in at least 16 years. For 2025, non-DoC supply growth forecast was kept unchanged by the OPEC at 1.11 mb/d with supplies from the group expected to reach 54.23 mb/d during the year. A report from the IEA showed lowered expectations for US crude output next year to 13.52 mb/d vs. 13.53 mb/d in its previous forecast. Data on world oil supply from the IEA showed an increase of 630 tb/d in 2024 to reach 102.9 mb/d during the year.

Supply next year is expected to increase by 1.9 mb/d to reach 104.8 mb/d, despite the delayed unwinding of output from the OPEC+ countries.

OPEC Oil Production & Spare Capacity

During the month, OPEC+ producers once again extended the deadline to gradually unwind the additional output cuts of 2.2 mb/d. The producer delayed raising the output by an additional three months and now expect to start unwinding the output from April-2025, the group extended the full unwinding of cuts by a year until the end of 2026 led by weak demand and significant growth in production outside the group. Oil production in Libya recovered to over 1.2 mb/d in November-2024, as per data from OPEC secondary sources, following a monthly increase of 141 tb/d.

To be continued

Value-added industrial output expanded 5.4% year-on-year in November

China's economic recovery gains momentum amid sustained policy support

BEIJING, Dec 16, (Xinhua): China's economic recovery gained momentum in November, fueled by a series of recent pro-growth policies that have contributed to an accumulation of positive factors.

In November, the impact of combined policy measures continued to unfold, yielding excellent results in key economic indicators such as industrial output, investment, consumption and services for the past month, said the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

"Boosted by a raft of policy measures, the Chinese economy has achieved generally stable growth while making progress, with positive factors

further accumulating," NBS spokesperson Fu Linghui told a press conference Monday.

The NBS spokesperson said that value-added industrial output, an important economic indicator, expanded 5.4 percent year on year in November, showing steady growth, driven by the large-scale equipment upgrades and consumer goods trade-in programs.

The equipment manufacturing sector's output climbed 7.6 percent from a year ago in November, 1 percentage point higher than the previous month, contributing nearly half of the overall industrial output growth, the NBS data showed.

The purchasing managers' index

for the manufacturing sector came in at 50.3 last month, up 0.2 percentage points from the previous month and surpassing the boom-or-bust line of 50 for the second time since it returned to expansion in October after five consecutive months of contraction.

Fu highlighted the increased demands in terms of investment and consumption. The country's fixed-asset investment rose 3.3 percent year on year in the first 11 months of 2024, to 46.5839 trillion yuan (about 6.48 trillion U.S. dollars).

In November, China's retail sales of consumer goods went up 3 percent year on year to hit 4.38 trillion yuan in November, Fu said, adding that with

the nation's consumer goods trade-in program continuing to take effect, the retail sales of household appliances and audiovisual equipment, furniture, automobiles, and construction and decoration materials increased 22.2 percent, 10.5 percent, 6.6 percent and 2.9 percent, respectively.

China's service production index increased by 6.1 percent year on year in November, the NBS data showed. In a breakdown of the figures, the sub-index on information transmission, software and IT services reported robust growth of 9.3 percent year on year. This was matched by a 9.3 percent increase in leasing and business services, followed by an

8.8 percent growth in the financial sector.

The spokesperson also noted that the quality of China's economic growth continues to improve. In the first 11 months, the output of the high-tech manufacturing industry went up 9 percent year on year. The pace of growth outstripped overall industrial output by 3.2 percentage points during the same period.

In November alone, the country's production of new energy vehicles, industrial robots, and integrated circuit products surged 51.1 percent, 29.3 percent, and 8.7 percent year on year, respectively, serving as major bright spots of the country's all-round green

transition. However, Fu also mentioned that the international environment remains complicated and challenging.

For the next stage, various policies must be implemented sufficiently and effectively to further boost recovery, optimize structure, and promote high-quality economic development.

On Monday, the Chinese government issued a document that outlines measures to modernize the nation's retail industry over the next five years, seeking to initially form a modern retail system that features enriched supplies and high-quality services, and that is smart, convenient and green by 2029.



People stand in front of an electronic stock board showing Japan's Nikkei index at a securities firm Monday, Dec. 16, 2024, in Tokyo. (AP)

Bitcoin hits new highs

Asia shares retreat as China logs lackluster performance

BANGKOK, Dec 16, (AP): Shares retreated Monday in Asia after China reported lackluster economic indicators for November, while bitcoin surged to fresh highs, topping \$106,000.

Oil prices fell and U.S. futures were little changed.

Bitcoin was trading at \$104,742 early Monday, up 3.4% but down from an earlier high of \$106,495.

The price of the cryptocurrency has surged since the election in November given U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's bitcoin-friendly stance. Trump signaled a lighter regulatory approach to digital currencies with his choice of crypto advocate Paul Atkins to be the next chair of the Securities and Exchange Commission. Bitcoin was trading below \$70,000 before the Nov. 5 election.

A report Monday showed Chinese retail sales slowed in November, while growth in factory output was flat and home sales declined. The report said the economy and employment were stable, but noted a complicated "external environment," reflecting unease over the outlook in coming months once U.S. President-elect Donald Trump takes office, potentially delivering on promises to sharply hike tariffs on imports from China.

Japan's Nikkei 225 index was almost unchanged at 39,457.49, while the Hang Seng in Hong Kong lost 0.9% to 19,795.49.

The Shanghai Composite index slipped 0.2% to 3,383.33.

South Korea's Kospi lost 0.2% to 2,488.97 as South Korean law enforcement authorities were pushing to summon impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol for questioning over his short-lived martial law decree and the Constitutional Court met to discuss whether to remove him from office or reinstate him.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 shed 0.6% to 8,249.50.

Taiwan's Taiex edged 0.1% higher, while the Sensex in India fell 0.5%.

Thailand's SET dropped 0.9%.

On Friday, major stock indexes on Wall Street drifted to a mixed finish Friday, capping a rare bumpy week for the market.

The S&P 500 ended essentially flat, down less than 0.1% at 6,051.09. The benchmark index posted a loss for the week, its first after three straight weekly gains.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average slipped 0.2% to 43,828.06, while the Nasdaq composite rose 0.1% to 19,926.72, ending just below the record high it set on Wednesday.

There were more than twice as many decliners than gainers on the New York Stock Exchange.

Gains in technology stocks helped temper losses in communication services, financials and other sectors of the market.

But some tech stocks were a drag on the market. Nvidia fell 2.2%, Meta Platforms dropped 1.7% and Google parent Alphabet slid 1.1%.

Wall Street's rally stalled last week amid mixed economic reports and ahead of the Federal Reserve's last meeting of the year. The central bank is widely expected to cut interest rates for a third time since September when it meets this week.

Expectations of a series of rate cuts has driven the S&P 500 to 57 all-time highs so far this year.

The Fed has been lowering its benchmark interest rate after aggressively hiking rates to tame inflation. It raised rates from near-zero in early 2022 to a two-decade high by the middle of 2023. Inflation eased under pressure from higher interest rates, nearly to the central bank's 2% target.

The economy, including consumer spending and employment, held strong despite the squeeze from inflation and high borrowing costs. A slowing job market, though, has helped push a long-awaited reversal of the Fed's policy.

Fed likely to slow rate cuts with inflation pressures up

Households, businesses face loan rates

WASHINGTON, Dec 16, (AP): Americans hoping for lower borrowing costs for homes, credit cards and cars may be disappointed after this week's Federal Reserve meeting. The Fed's policymakers are likely to signal fewer interest rate cuts next year than were previously expected.

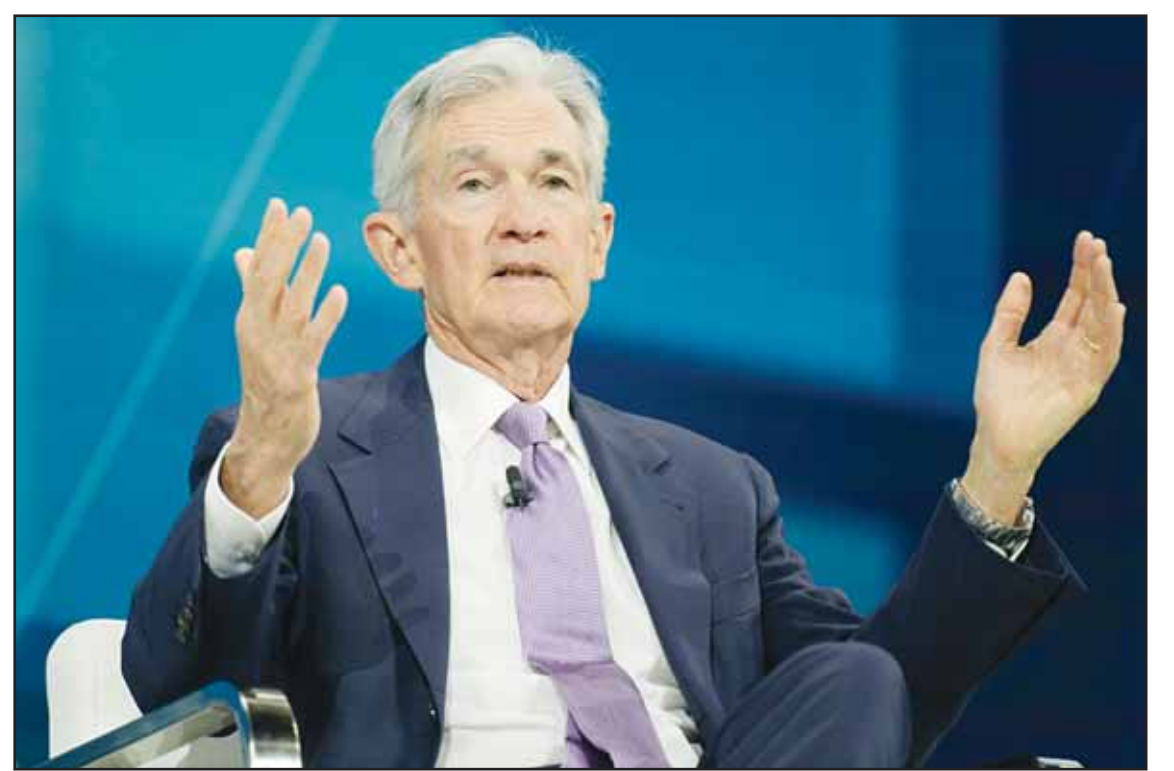
The officials are set to reduce their benchmark rate, which affects many consumer and business loans, by a quarter-point to about 4.3% when their meeting ends Wednesday. At that level, the rate would be a full point below the four-decade high it reached in July 2023. The policymakers had kept their key rate at its peak for more than a year to try to quell inflation, until slashing the rate by a half-point in September and a quarter-point last month.

The problem is that while inflation has dropped far below its peak of 9.1% in mid-2022, it remains stubbornly above the Fed's 2% target. As a result, the Fed, led by Chair Jerome Powell, is expected Wednesday to signal a shift to a more gradual approach to rate cuts in 2025. Economists say that after cutting rates for three straight meetings, the central bank will likely do so at every other gathering, or possibly even less often than that.

"We're on the cusp of a transition to them not cutting every meeting," said David Wilcox, a former senior Fed official who is an economist with Bloomberg Economics and the Peterson Institute for International Economics. "They're going to slow the tempo of cuts."

The economy has fared better than officials expected it would as recently as September. And inflation pressures have proved more persistent. The presidential election added a wild card, too: President-elect Donald Trump has promised to enact policies - from much higher taxes on imports to mass deportations of people living illegally in the United States - that most economists say threaten to accelerate inflation.

"Growth is definitely stronger than we thought, and inflation is coming in a little higher," Powell said recently. "So the good news is, we can afford to



Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell speaks at the DealBook Summit in New York, on Dec. 4, 2024. (AP)

be a little more cautious" as the Fed's officials seek to lower rates to what they consider a "neutral" level - one that neither spurs nor restricts growth.

On Wednesday, the policymakers will also issue their quarterly projections for growth, inflation, unemployment and their benchmark interest rate over the next three years. In September, they had collectively envisioned that they'd cut rates four times next year. Economists now expect just two or three Fed rate cuts in 2025. Wall Street traders foresee even fewer: Just two cuts, according to futures prices.

Fewer rate cuts by the Fed would mean that households and businesses would continue to face loan rates, notably for home mortgages, that would far exceed their levels before inflation began surging more than three years ago.

Some economists question whether the Fed even needs to cut this week. Inflation, excluding volatile food and energy costs, has been stuck at an annual rate of about 2.8% since March. A year ago, the policymakers had forecast that that figure would have fallen to 2.4% by now and that they'd have cut their key rate by three-quarters of a point.

Instead, inflation has become stuck at a higher level, yet the Fed has lowered its benchmark rate by a full point.

Fed officials, including Powell, have said they still foresee inflation heading lower, however slowly, while their key rate is still high enough to restrain growth. As a result, reducing rates this week is more akin to letting up on a brake than stepping on an accelerator.

The potential for major changes to tax, spending and immigration policies under Trump is another reason for the Fed to take a more cautious approach. Former Fed economists say the central bank's staff has likely begun factoring the effects of Trump's proposed corporate tax cuts into their economic analyses, but not his proposed tariffs or deportations, because those two policies are too difficult to assess without details.

Tara Sinclair, an economist at George Washington University who is a former Treasury Department official, suggested that the uncertainty surrounding whether Trump's policy changes will keep inflation elevated - and necessitating higher rates - could also lead the Fed to cut rates more gradually, if at all.

"It seems easier to explain not cutting than to find themselves in a position where they would have to raise rates in this political environment," Sinclair said.

Powell has said the Fed is seeking to lower its rate to the so-called "neutral" level. Yet there is wide disagreement among the policymakers about how high that rate is. Many economists peg it at 3% to 3.5%. Some economists think it could be higher.

And Richard Clarida, a former vice chair of the Fed who is a managing director at PIMCO, said that if inflation becomes stuck above the Fed's target level, then the policymakers will likely keep rates above the neutral level.

During the July-September quarter, the economy expanded at a solid 2.8% annual rate. On Tuesday, the government will report the November retail sales figures, which are expected to show healthy consumer demand.

"There doesn't seem to be any sign of weakness emerging overall," said David Beckworth, a senior fellow at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University. "I don't see in my mind the justification for rate cuts."

Listening with empathy, without interrupting, goes a long way

When holidays present rude customers, taking breaks and high road preserve peace

NEW YORK, Dec 16, (AP): The December holidays are supposed to be a time of joyful celebration, but the season can be especially grueling for the millions of people who work in retail stores, staff airline counters and field complaints coming into call centers.

Instead of compassion or good cheer, service sector workers often encounter rude behavior from frazzled shoppers, irate customers demanding instant satisfaction and travelers fuming about flight delays and cancellations. And they must do their jobs to the mind-numbing soundtrack of nonstop Christmas music.

"Something happens around November and people just forget their manners," Kathryn Harper, senior bookseller at New York bookstore McNally Jackson, said. "Please and thank you go a huge way. Being rude to us or snippy to us is not going to make us go any faster. It's not going to make the thing that's out of stock magically appear."

Harper joined other members of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union last month for a virtual news conference where they made a plea for the public's patience and self-control during the hectic weeks ahead.

"There's a lot of disgruntled attitudes flying around this time of the year," Cynthia Russo, who has worked at Bloomingdale's in Manhattan for nearly two decades, said. "I try to kill them with kindness, but yet I take a firm stand with not being abused verbally, because that can

happen and it's sad. My favorite line is, 'Let's start over.'"

Dealing with a difficult person is never easy. These are other strategies that veteran workers use to defuse tense situations and to preserve their own peace of mind.

Taking a break for five or 10 minutes can help a worker who got yelled at to reset emotionally. If long lines or other duties don't allow for stepping away in the moment, the rattled employee could ask a colleague to take over temporarily or inform a manager of a need for a brief respite.

Fitting exercise into the day is hard in any line of work, but retail workers put in long hours during the holidays, making it even more challenging. Russo tries to power walk around each floor of Bloomingdale's twice a day.

"I know I look crazy, probably, but I think my coworkers are used to seeing me do it," she said.

At Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, Nicole Ray escorts passengers who need wheelchair assistance safely make it to their planes and back. She feels panicky when there aren't enough wheelchairs or attendants to get the job done during busy periods.

The travelers she helps are kind for the most part, Ray says, but someone treats her with disrespect at least once a day. Such interactions often leave her in tears, she says. With two sons at home and extra side jobs to pay the bills, she has few opportunities to decompress.

If there's time between airport passengers, Ray escapes to a parking



A person shops at Serendipity, Wednesday, Dec. 11, 2024, in Philadelphia. (AP)

garage to breathe and listen to music. She copes with the unpleasant attitudes she comes across by expressing gratitude to friendly patrons, telling them "I really appreciate you being such a joy to be around and not being so hard on me."

Staying calm in the face of an irrational customer can be challenging, but remembering that another person's unreasonable demands are not a reflection of you makes it easier to react skillfully.

"You have to understand that if people are impatient or they're not in a good mood, obviously it has nothing to do with you," Tina Minshall, who is general manager at the Bridal and Formal shop in Cincinnati, said. "If you can respond in a pleasant

way, it tends to de-escalate whatever is going on around you."

Instead of reciprocating someone's misplaced anger, try to be the one who remains composed, said Justin Robbins, founder of Metric Sherpa, a research and advisory firm that coaches businesses on training front-line employees.

You can say, "I'm here to help you resolve this," or "I want to help you, but we need to keep this conversation respectful," he said.

Maintaining an even keel can be especially difficult in customer call centers, where the pace of incoming complaints during the holidays is relentless and agents are often treated like punching bags. Listening with empathy, without

interrupting, goes a long way, said Melissa Copeland, founder and principal of Illinois-based Blue Orbit Consulting, which helps companies improve their customer service experience. After listening, repeat back what you've heard and explain the process you'll follow. Commit to what you can control, she said.

Smiling during tense interactions can make a difference. "It relaxes your face, and if you try and say something angry or be obnoxious while you're smiling, it's hard to do," Copeland said. "It just helps with a quick reset."

A sense of humor is a professional skill to cultivate during the holidays, said Carol Price, who has sold books, clothes and vitamins at shops in Fort Smith, Arkansas, for decades while holding down a full-time job at the local water agency. When the Christmas music in the stores where she works feels relentless and grates on her nerves, she sings along, sometimes changing the lyrics to "meow".

Some customers hug Price when she helps them find what they need. By contrast, a man once threw books at her. She chooses to focus on the former.

"There's nothing better than a kid asking for a book, and finding that book and handing it to them and seeing that look on their face," Price said.

Supervisors can help lighten the emotional burden that comes with customer relations by giving employees to small treats, according to Harper, the New York bookseller.

"You can't pizza party your way up to worker protections, but it helps during holidays," she said.

Stephen Yalof, CEO of shopping center operator Tanger, said managers also can work to reduce the stress on shoppers. Managers at Tanger's outlet malls and open-air centers use \$25 gift cards to surprise customers or placate disgruntled ones.

"You'd be shocked what a gift card does to defuse a potential issue really quickly," Yalof said.

If working conditions are unbearable, employees can band together to request improvements. Laura Kelly, an unaccompanied minor escort and wheelchair attendant with Prospect Airport Services, earns \$12.50 an hour working at Charlotte Douglas International Airport and lives in a hotel with her two adult children.

During the holidays, there are more passengers to help but fewer workers because many quit or call in sick, Kelly said. She recently participated in a one-day Thanksgiving week strike to protest low wages.

"I'm just trying to help people get to where they need to go and just to keep a roof over my kids' heads and food in their belly," Kelly said. "I don't even have a way to relieve stress besides making sure that my kids are taken care of."

Her advice to customers is to remember that service workers are human too.

"Just be loving and caring and put yourself in our place," Kelly said. "Just imagine if we were the passenger and you were pushing us around."

Obituary

Tabla maestro leaves behind an unparalleled legacy

Zakir Hussain, Indian classical music icon, passes away at 73

NEW DELHI, Dec 16, (AP): Zakir Hussain, one of India's most accomplished classical musicians who defied genres and introduced tabla to global audiences, died on Sunday. He was 73.

The Indian classical music icon died from idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, a chronic lung disease, at a hospital in San Francisco, his family said in a statement.

"His prolific work as a teacher, mentor and educator has left an indelible mark on countless musicians. He hoped to inspire the next generation to go further.

He leaves behind an unparalleled legacy as a cultural ambassador and one of the greatest musicians of all time," the statement read.

Hussain was the most recognizable exponent of tabla, a pair of hand drums that is the main per-

cussion instrument in Indian classical music.

Considered the greatest tabla player of his generation, Hussain had a career that spanned six decades in which he collaborated with the likes of singer-songwriter George Harrison, jazz saxophonist Charles Lloyd, drummer Mickey Hart and cellist Yo-Yo Ma.

The son of legendary tabla artist Alla Rakha, Hussain was born in 1951 in Mumbai and was taught how to play the instrument by his father at the age of 7. A child prodigy, he was touring by age 12 and performing alongside India's classical music legends during his teens.

In an interview that was shared widely on social media in India, Hussain says his father welcomed him into the world after he was

born by speaking tabla rhythms into his ears.

"I was brought home, handed over to my dad in his arms. The tradition was that the father is supposed to recite a prayer in the baby's ear ... So he takes me in his arms, puts his lips to my ear and recites the tabla rhythms into my ears," Hussain says in the interview, verbally imitating the rhythmic pattern of the instrument.

Both Alla Rakha and Hussain were given the honorific "Ustad," an Urdu word that means master.

In 1973, Hussain formed the Indian jazz fusion band "Shakti" with jazz guitarist John McLaughlin. The band played acoustic fusion music that combined Indian music with elements of jazz, introducing a new



Indian drum maestro Zakir Hussain performs at the 'Living Dream Concert' in New Delhi, India, on Feb. 16, 2009. (AP)

sound to Western audiences.

In 2024, Hussain became the first musician from India to win

three Grammy awards in the same year.

Hussain's "Shakti" won Best

Global Music Album, and his collaboration with Edgar Meyer, Béla Fleck and flutist Rakesh Chaurasia won Best Global Music Performance and Best Contemporary Instrumental Album.

He had earlier won a Grammy in 2009.

In 2023, Hussain received the Padma Vibhushan, India's second-highest civilian award.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi called Hussain a "true genius who revolutionized the world of Indian classical music" and "an icon of cultural unity."

"He also brought the tabla to the global stage, captivating millions with his unparalleled rhythm," Modi wrote in a post on social platform X.

Hussain is survived by his wife and two daughters.

Variety

LOS ANGELES: The Spider-Man spinoff "Kraven the Hunter" got off to a disastrous start in North American theaters this weekend.

The movie starring Aaron Taylor-Johnson earned only \$11 million, according to studio estimates Sunday, making it one of the worst openings for a Marvel-adjacent property. Its box office take was even less than the film "Madame Web."

The weekend's other major studio release was Warner Bros.' animated "The Lord of the Rings: The War of the Rohirrim," which made \$4.6 million. Made for about \$30 million, the movie is set 183 years before the events of "The Lord of the Rings" films and was

fast-tracked to ensure New Line did not lose the rights to Tolkien's novels. Peter Jackson, Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens have been working on future live-action films for the franchise.

Meanwhile, the top of the charts again belonged to "Moana 2" and "Wicked."

"Moana" added \$26.6 million to its domestic total in its third weekend and \$57.2 million internationally, bringing its global tally to \$717 million. It's now the fourth highest grossing film of the year, surpassing "Dune: Part Two."

"Wicked," which is in its fourth weekend, brought in another \$22.5 million to take second place. The Universal musical has made over \$359 million domestically and over \$500 million worldwide.

"Gladiator II" also made \$7.8 million, bringing its domestic total to \$145.9 million in four weeks.

"Kraven the Hunter" is the latest misfire from Sony in its attempt to mine the Spider-Man universe for spin-off franchises without the lucrative web slinger himself. "Kraven" joins "Madame Web" and "Morbius" in franchise additions that fell flat with both audiences and critics. The one exception on this rollercoaster journey has been the "Venom" trilogy, which has made over \$1.8 billion worldwide.

The R-rated "Kraven the Hunter" was directed by J.C. Chandor and faced a number of delays, partly due to the Hollywood strikes. It was shot nearly three years ago and originally slated to hit theaters in January 2023. The film cost a reported \$110 million to produce and was co-financed by TSG. Internationally, it made \$15 million, but its potential for longevity appears limited: It currently carries a 15% "fresh" rating on Rotten Tomatoes and got a C grade on CinemaScore from opening weekend audiences.

"It's not always a guarantee that you'll be able to connect with audiences when you have a spinoff character," said Paul Dergarabedian, the senior media analyst for Comscore. "General audiences seem to want to know exactly what they're getting."

Several awards contenders opened in limited release over the weekend, including Paramount's "September 5" about ABC's coverage of the Munich Olympics hostage crisis. Amazon MGM and Orion's "Nickel Boys," based on Colson Whitehead's Pulitzer-winner about an abusive reform school in Florida, opened in two theaters in New York. It averaged \$30,422 per screen and will be expanding to Los Angeles before going nationwide in the coming weeks.

Some big hitters are on the way in the home stretch of the 2024 box office. "Mufasa" and "Sonic the Hedgehog 3" will hit in the coming weeks along with a bevy of arthouse and adult releases like "Babygirl," "Nosferatu" and "A Complete Unknown." (AP)

Film



This image released by Amazon/MGM shows Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor in a promotional photo for the film 'Nickel Boys.' (AP)

Ross delivers one of the most powerful films of the year

'Nickel Boys' is a cinematic knockout

LOS ANGELES, Dec 16, (AP): A movie shot in first person sounds like a gimmick. Part of the magic of filmed storytelling is accepting that something can be from someone's point of view and yet also from a distance. Using the camera as a character's actual eyes is the domain of university students and niche experimental filmmakers. In a commercial film, it's to be deployed only in very limited doses.

And yet, with "Nickel Boys," filmmaker RaMell Ross not only commits to the idea but delivers one of the most powerful films of the year in the process - a lyrical, heartbreaking and haunting journey into the darkness of a brutal reform school in the Jim Crow South.

Ross and co-writer Joslyn Barnes weren't working from scratch, but Colson Whitehead's Pulitzer-winning novel about two teenage boys, Elwood and Turner, who become friends while wards of a juvenile reform school in Florida. It's called the Nickel Academy in the novel and the film, which is fiction, but based on the horrific abuses at the very real Dozier School for Boys, in the Florida panhandle, where boys were beaten, raped and killed. Some of the bodies were shipped back to their homes. Others were buried in unmarked graves that only have recently come to light.

The haunting truth of the broader picture, the all-too-recent displays of inhumanity and racism, looms over every frame. "Nickel Boys" is not exploitation porn, however. In fact, when one brutal beating does happen, Ross directs his gaze elsewhere: A wall, a shoe, a nervous hand, the corner of a bible. The sounds from the other room, the cracking of the whip and the grunts are undeniable. As in "The Zone of Interest," we don't need to see it to feel its impact.

This is more of a memory piece than anything else, a reconciling

of unspeakable traumas and human resilience through the eyes of two boys. Elwood (Ethan Herisse) is our way in. We see his youth in Tallahassee, growing up with his grandmother Hattie (an especially impactful Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor) who is as playful as she is protective of this young boy who has only her. He's smart and attuned to the civil rights movement at large, listening in on the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches and impressing his teachers, one of whom recommends him for classes at a

technical college. He hitches a ride on his way with a man in a slick suit and car, not knowing that it was stolen. When the man is caught Elwood, the innocent, gets sent to Nickel.

Punishment

"You're lucky to be in Nickel," a younger white employee (Fred Hechinger) says to Elwood early on. He's just received his draft notice and might even really believe it. While he seems like perhaps he's more friend than jailor, his truest nature will be revealed down the line. Others are more sniveling and obvious, like Hamish Linklater as the school's administrator who is more than ready to dole out violent punishments with his own hands.

It's not all Black kids in Nickel, but there's a segregated hierarchy with the students, one that's neatly tucked away when inspectors come to the grounds as the employees and administrators scurry to present a good face. Even they knew that their practices are something to be ashamed of.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the first-person camera is its attention to details. It's not acting like a camera, but a person who doesn't always see everything "important." Sometimes it's one's own hand, sometimes shoes, tattered shirts, darkness, or a puff of smoke.

And while we'd gotten glimps-

es of Elwood before, in a camera booth with a girlfriend, the first time we really see him is through Turner (Brandon Wilson) one fateful day in the cafeteria. Turner is laid back and a little world weary, an orphan and a realist counterpart to Elwood's hopeful idealism. Though opposite in sensibility, these two stick together, finding light and joy even in their hellish surroundings. The camera even starts to shift between them - when they're looking at one another, they're also looking through the lens, at us. There are also flashes forward to a man at a computer (Daved Diggs), seen mostly from behind, reading about the discoveries of unmarked graves on the grounds.

The threads do come together, but it requires a bit of patience and giving yourself over to the film, which is both formally and emotionally eye-opening. Adapting great literature can sometimes send filmmakers running towards the conventional; Thank goodness Ross charted his own path instead. "Nickel Boys," an Amazon MGM and Orion release in limited theaters Friday, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America for "violent content, some strong language, racial slurs, smoking, racism and thematic material." Running time: 140 minutes. Four stars out of four.



Ethan Herisse, (left), RaMell Ross, and Brandon Wilson pose for a portrait to promote the film 'Nickel Boys' on Sept. 29, 2024, in New York. (AP)

Police investigating Mr. Chow incident

Jamie Foxx gets stitches after a glass thrown at him

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif., Dec 16, (AP): Jamie Foxx required stitches after getting hit in the face with a glass while celebrating his birthday at a restaurant in Beverly Hills, California, a representative for the actor told the Los Angeles Times.

It wasn't immediately clear what prompted the incident Friday night at the celebrity hotspot Mr. Chow.

"Someone from another table threw a glass that hit him in the mouth," a spokesperson for the actor said in a statement to

the newspaper. "He had to get stitches and is recovering. The police were called and the matter is now in law enforcement's hands."

The Beverly Hills Police Department said it responded around 10 p.m. Friday to a reported assault with a deadly weapon and determined it was unfounded.

"Instead, the incident involved a physical altercation between parties," said a department statement. "The BHPD conducted a preliminary investigation and

completed a report documenting the battery. No arrests were made."

A telephone message seeking details was left Sunday at Mr. Chow.

In an Instagram post Sunday morning, Foxx thanked those who had checked in on him.

Apparently referring to the Mr. Chow incident, he wrote, "The devil is busy ... but I'm too blessed to be stressed."

Foxx, who won an Academy Award for his portrayal of Ray Charles in 2004's "Ray," turned 57 on Friday.



Jamie Foxx smiles during an NBA basketball game between the Washington Wizards and Dallas Mavericks in Dallas, Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021. (AP)

Music



Sir Paul McCartney performs at Co-op Live during his Got Back tour, Saturday Dec. 14, 2024, in Manchester, England. (AP)

Actor earns early praise for 'A Complete Unknown'

How Chalamet transformed into Dylan

NEW YORK, Dec 16, (AP): How many roads must a man walk down to play Bob Dylan?

Quite a few, at least, if you're Timothee Chalamet. Off and on for some six years, Chalamet has been obsessively working toward his performance in "A Complete Unknown." He has visited Dylan's childhood home, learned how to play the guitar (and the harmonica) and immersed himself in the early '60s New York that Dylan emerged out of — even if much of it has faded with history by now.

"Cafe Wha? was funny because they have Jimi Hendrix and Bob Dylan painted along the staircase and everything but now it's just, like, Aerosmith covers," Chalamet says, chuckling. "I was like: I don't think this is what it was like when Bob was here."

Chalamet has been building his Bob Dylan for so long that he's been seen playing Dylan songs while in costume as Willy Wonka and on the set of "Dune." His "Dune" co-star, Oscar Isaac, said, "My first thought, it sounded like a really bad idea."

Isaac certainly wasn't the only one to doubt whether Chalamet, or anyone, could tackle someone as iconic and enigmatic as Dylan. But Chalamet's performance — complete with singing and guitar playing — in the James Mangold-directed film, which opens in theaters Dec. 25, has drawn near-universal praise. Chalamet has been nominated for a Golden Globe; if he were to be nominated and win at the Academy Awards, the 28-year-old would be the youngest best actor winner ever.

Even Dylan, who gave Mangold notes on the film, has said: "Timmy's a brilliant actor so I'm sure he's going to be completely believable as me. Or a younger me. Or some other me."

The Dylan in question in "A Complete Unknown," loosely based on Elijah Wald's 2015 book, "Dylan Goes Electric! Newport, Seeger, Dylan, and the Night That Split the Sixties," is a young, just-starting-out Dylan. By the end of the film, which culminates in the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, he's gone from folk messiah to Judas.

Chalamet recently spoke to The Associated Press about how he navigated the biggest acting challenge of his career.

AP: There might not be a much more daunting undertaking for an actor than playing Dylan. How did you decide you wanted to do it?

Chalamet: I like how you framed the question initially, that it's an undertaking. Bob Dylan is not only someone whose behaviorism and whose presence as a cultural figure is iconic, but,

more importantly, as a thinker, as an artist, as a shaper of American culture through the last 60, 70 years, he's The Guy in a lot of ways. I obviously felt like you can't go near that if you're not ready to do it. Equally, I had five years to work on this, or six, so there was no truncated process at any point. If you play any real-life figure, it's sort of a gift. There's the reality of how it happened. But with a musician, your education becomes twofold, or tenfold, because there's not only the record of what he went through in his work, but the feeling he can give you as a person — which for me, with Bob's music, was exponential. It was indescribable — like many people, maybe yourself. And I wouldn't even try to describe it because he wouldn't.

AP: Where did you begin?

Chalamet: Weirdly, it was the press conferences. This came to me in an email in 2018. Bob Dylan, to me, was limited to the good friend of my father's in New York, growing up, who had a striking black-and-white portrait of Dylan on his apartment wall. I didn't know much of his music. You know, stuff like "Blowing in the Wind" or "Time's They Are a-Changin'" are so enwoven in American culture that, of course, I knew those.

I just went up YouTube and before songs popped up, the San Francisco press conference popped up in '65. I was just so fascinated to see an artist who was a definitive figure of the '60s, but who clearly was as much a thinker as a forward-facing entertainer. It's really, really rare to find the people that are deep thinkers and lyricists and artists that as much forward-facing entertainers. So when these artists pop up,

like Bob Dylan, or I think in today's culture, Frank Ocean, we all have a responsibility to champion these artists. Usually, the sensitive nature or whatever you want to call it, would encourage someone with a deep brain like that to not put themselves out there like that — that's my theory.

AP: Were any of the documentaries helpful?

Chalamet: It was really D.A. Pennebaker's "Don't Look Back." That was a Bible to me on this. I love, love, love that film. I love music documentaries. There's a Lil' Wayne documentary called "The Carter" that's all these moments. It's just so special when you can get your camera on these music artists when they're at a moment like Bob was in "Don't Look Back." Lil' Wayne in "The Carter" is the same thing where they're learning to turn their back in some way, but they haven't done it yet.

AP: What'd you get from "Don't Look Back"?

Chalamet: The great thing about "Don't Look Back" is it's just really raw. There aren't the talking heads. It's what's great about Suze Rotolo's book. It's really raw. It's more raw than a lot of the other books about Bob Dylan. It's very clear-sighted about the young relationship she had with Bob. With an artist of such reverence, it's important as an actor not to simply revere him. Then you'll do justice to the people that already revere him, but to everyone else in the room, they won't get it.

AP: When did you first pick up a guitar?

Chalamet: I picked up a guitar on "Call Me By Your Name" because I pluck out the chords of a song in that

film. So I had, like, a really rudimentary experience with that. I think sometime in 2018 I had my first lesson with this great guitar teacher named Larry Saltzman who at some point became less of a teacher and more a co-sanity artist through COVID. I think we were keeping each other sane. We would Zoom three, four times a week and doing songs that never made it into the movie.

AP: What songs did you gravitate toward?

Chalamet: All of it. I really liked all of it. I like the more intimate songs like "Girl From the North Country" or "Boots of Spanish Leather" or "One Too Many Mornings" or "Tomorrow Is a Long Time." But then I also liked "North Country Blues" and "Rocks and Gravel" or "Ballad of Hollis Brown" — things where you hear the iron ore in Bob's voice, the North Country in Minnesota, the Hibbing. The Hibbing that when I visited you really felt like you were on the edge of America, like the edge of the world. These factories that are covered in snow and the icy roads. That stuff, as a New Yorker, I just started to fall in love with.

AP: So much of the movie is about the onset of fame for Dylan and his rejection of the expectations others have for him. Were you able to connect with that experience?

Chalamet: Yeah, absolutely, in ways that are more unspoken than I could be definitive about. I just do. I don't know how to use more words than that. And it was empowering to play someone that really just bucked off all pressure.

AP: I've heard you mention his infamous speech in 1963 accepting the Tom Paine award where he said "it is not an old peoples' world."

Chalamet: That is a young man saying: Why are the older people in this room the signifiers and those who determine who the young lights forward are? Maybe the way he said it — talking about hair loss for older people being representative of their old age (laughs) — wasn't the nicest way of putting it. But what he was saying, it has an element of truth. And at a time when media was more centralized or something, I think his attitude toward it was — I don't know, I don't want to speak for him.

AP: You haven't met Dylan, but have you thought about what you'd ask him if you did?

Chalamet: I think I'd just say thank you, really. Not thank you for the opportunity to meet, or thank you for the opportunity to play the role. Thank you for his music and his art and his work.

Lawsuits, intimidation

Journalists fear more hostility under Trump

NEW YORK, Dec 16, (AP): For the press heading into a second Trump administration, there's a balancing act between being prepared and being fearful.

The return to power of Donald Trump, who has called journalists enemies and talked about retribution against those he feels have wronged him, has news executives nervous. Perceived threats are numerous: lawsuits of every sort, efforts to unmask anonymous sources, physical danger and intimidation, attacks on public media and libel protections, day-to-day demonization.

In a closely-watched case settled over the weekend, ABC chose to settle a defamation lawsuit brought by the president-elect over an inaccurate statement made by George Stephanopoulos by agreeing to pay \$15 million toward Trump's presidential library.

"The news media is heading into this next administration with its eyes open," said Bruce Brown, executive director of the Reporters Committee for the Freedom of the Press.

"Some challenges to the free press may be overt, some may be more subtle," Brown said. "We'll need to be prepared for rapid response as well as long campaigns to protect our rights — and to remember that our most important audiences are the courts and the public."

One prominent editor warned against going on war footing with an administration that hasn't taken office yet. "There may be a moment to cry wolf here," said Stephen Engelberg, editor-in-chief of the nonprofit news outlet ProPublica. "But I don't think we've reached it."

Speaking to Fox News two weeks after his election, Trump said he owed it to the American people to be open and available to the press — if he's treated fairly.

"I am not looking for retribution, grandstanding or to destroy people who treated me very unfairly, or even badly beyond comprehension," he told Fox. "I am always looking to give a second or even a third chance, but never willing to give a fourth chance. That is where I hold the line."

News organizations are heading into the second Trump era weak both financially and in public esteem. To a large extent, Trump sidestepped legacy media outlets during his campaign in favor of podcasters, yet still had time for specific beefs against ABC, CBS and NBC.

Advantages

The Trump team knows that many of its followers despise a probing press, and stoking that fury has political advantages. Two examples in the campaign to install Trump nominee Pete Hegseth as defense secretary shows how routine reporting activities can be characterized as an attack.

When The New York Times was tipped to an email that Hegseth's mother once sent to him criticizing his treatment of women, it called her for comment. Penelope Hegseth later told Fox News that she perceived that as a threat, even though it enabled the newspaper to report that she had quickly apologized for sending the email and says she doesn't feel that way about him now.

Pete Hegseth also used social media to say that ProPublica — he called it a "Left Wing hack group" — was about to knowingly publish a false report that he hadn't been accepted into West Point decades ago. The news site had contacted him after officials at the military academy contradicted Hegseth's claim of acceptance. Hegseth provided proof that those officials were mistaken, and ProPublica never published a story.

"That's journalism," noted ProPublica's Jesse Eisinger. But a narrative had taken hold: "ProPublica's botched Pete Hegseth smear," the New York Post called it in a headline.

During the presidential campaign, Trump sued CBS News for the way it edited an interview with opponent Kamala Harris; suggested ABC News lose its broadcast license for fact-checking him during his lone debate with Harris; and successfully called for equal time on NBC after Harris appeared on "Saturday Night

Live." In the Stephanopoulos lawsuit, the ABC anchor said Trump had been "found liable for rape" in writer E. Jean Carroll's civil trial, when he had not.

Trump engages with the mainstream media — he gave a newsmaking interview to NBC's "Meet the Press" this month — but journalists have to be alert to how their work will be portrayed.

Trump's appointments, and what they've said about journalists, have raised alarms.

Kash Patel, Trump's choice to lead the FBI, said on a podcast last year that "we're going to come after people in the media who lied about American citizens." Two appointees who have expressed hostility toward the media will be in a position to impact the work of journalists: Brendan Carr as chairman of the Federal Communications Commission and Kari Lake as director of Voice of America.

Policy

News organizations are worried that a Justice Department policy that has generally prohibited prosecutors from seizing the records of journalists in order to investigate leaks will be reversed, and are already urging journalists to protect their work. "If you have something you don't want to share with a broader audience, don't put it on the cloud," ProPublica's Engelberg said.

During the first Trump administration, some journalists who covered immigration issues were pulled aside for screening and questioning. The Reporter's Committee wonders if this might happen again — and whether similar practices might extend toward reporting on expected deportations.

The literary and human rights organization PEN America is concerned about journalists facing physical danger and digital hostility. It may have seemed like a flippant remark to some of his supporters when Trump, months after an attempt on his life, said at a rally that he wouldn't mind if somebody had to "shoot through the fake news" to get to him. But it wasn't for people standing on media risers.

"It's important that the president act with responsibility to reduce physical violence against the press rather than encourage it," said Viktorya Vilks, PEN America's program director for digital safety and free expression.

Sen. John Kennedy of Louisiana recently introduced a bill that would end taxpayer funding for public radio and television, a longtime goal of many Republicans that may get momentum with the party back in power. Some US Supreme Court justices are eager to revisit a legal precedent that has made it difficult to prove defamation against news organizations.

It's apparent that the new administration will come after the press in every conceivable way, former Washington Post editor Martin Baron said recently on NPR. "I do think he will use every tool in his toolbox," Baron said, "and there are a lot of tools."

In their most pessimistic moments, advocates for the press look at what has happened in Hungary under the control of Prime Minister Viktor Orban. Since Orban took control in 2010, he and his supporters have taken control of most media and turned it into a propaganda arm.

Don't think that can't happen in the United States, warns Andras Petho, an investigative journalist in Hungary who left a news website when it was pressured to stifle his work, and started the investigative journalism center Direkt36.

Despite repression, there is still a market for independent journalism in Hungary, he said. Earlier this year, two Hungarian officials resigned following an outcry when it was revealed that they had pardoned a man who had forced children to retract sexual abuse claims made against the director of a government-run facility.

Petho said it is important for journalists not to portray themselves as any sort of resistance, because that makes it easier for the government to dismiss them. Instead, they should just do the work.

"To be honest, we all have to accept and admit that our power as media has declined," said Petho, who participated in the Nieman fellowship for journalists at Harvard University. "Our stories don't have the same impact that they had a decade ago. But I wouldn't underestimate the power of the news media, either."



Timothee Chalamet arrives at the premiere of 'A Complete Unknown' on Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2024, at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles. (AP)

Short walks can turn back 4 years of brain health

Light exercise can yield significant cognitive benefits: research

By Jonathan G. Hakun
Penn State

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

Everyday physical activity, like going for a short walk or playing with the kids, may provide short-term benefits for cognitive health, equivalent to reversing four years of cognitive aging. That was a key finding for my colleagues and me in our new study, which was published in the journal *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*.

Prior to enrollment into a study of diet and dementia risk, we asked a

diverse sample of 204 middle-aged adults to check in five times per day for a period of nine days, via a smartphone application.

Each check-in involved completing a brief survey that asked about their mood, dietary choices and whether they engaged in any physical activity in the roughly three and a half hours leading up to the survey. In addition, participants completed a few brief brain games - meaning performance-based cognitive assessments that lasted about one minute each - to assess mental speed and short-term memory.

My team found that performance on our measure of cognitive processing speed improved during check-

ins when participants reported being physically active in the time leading up to the survey. While we didn't see improvements in our measure of working memory, the time taken to complete the memory task mirrored what we saw for the measure of processing speed.

We observed these improvements in speed regardless of whether the activity was lighter intensity or moderate-to-vigorous intensity. This led us to conclude that movement, whether it took the form of intentional exercise or part of a daily routine, was the essential ingredient for achieving this benefit.

As a rule, we get slower, both physically and mentally, as we age. While

research on exercise and living a healthy lifestyle has demonstrated the long-term cognitive and brain health benefits of remaining physically active, much of this work has focused on the moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity - or what most of us think of as exercise - recommended by the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans.

Still, these guidelines and other experts recommend that adults move more and sit less.

My colleagues and I are interested in understanding how moving more can improve our cognitive health or reduce our risk of dementia as we age, at what timescale these benefits show up, and what types of movement qualify.

Our study relied on participants to report whether they had been physically active during the time between each check-in. Even though participants were provided training on how to think about the intensity levels, it's possible that each participant had a slightly different perception of their activities.

For example, a participant may not have believed their recent walk actually qualified as a moderate-intensity activity. Physical activity monitors that can dissociate time and intensity might help future research unravel these associations more clearly.

It isn't yet clear whether these short-term benefits accumulate over time to result in long-term improvements in brain health and dementia risk reduction.

Research efforts are underway by our team to better understand these associations over broader timescales.

My research involves data collection via smartphones and wearable devices to help us better understand how health-promoting behaviors and cognitive health interact as we age. This type of digital approach allows my team to pursue questions about how everyday behavior and experience influence cognition in daily life and represents a significant methodological advancement in the dementia risk and prevention research space.

Using these tools, we aim to better identify individuals at risk for negative cognitive outcomes and new targets for dementia prevention. (AP)

Tiny horses offer comfort amid struggles in Greece

Mini therapy horses bring healing touch to kids with special needs

ATHENS, Greece, Dec 16, (AP): Slowly, almost imperceptibly at first, a smile spreads across the little girl's face. Blinking behind her glasses, she inches her wheelchair forward and gently reaches out to stroke the tiny gray horse.

Soon, 9-year-old Jofina Topa Mazuch is beaming as she leads Ivi, a specially trained miniature horse, standing no taller than her pink wheelchair, through the school hallway.

"I really want them to come again," Jofina said of Ivi and a second miniature horse, Calypso, after a November morning visit to her Athens primary school for children with special needs. "They made me feel really happy."

Ivi and Calypso are two of nine tiny equines from Gentle Carousel Greece, a Greek offshoot of Florida-based charity Gentle Carousel Miniature Therapy Horses offering visits to hospitals, rehabilitation centers and care homes.

Trained over two years to work comfortably in confined environments and with vulnerable children and adults, the horses, which stand about 75 centimeters (30 inches) tall, provide a form of pet therapy that carers say offers valuable interactions and learning experiences, particularly to people confined to hospitals or care homes.

But the charity they are part of is struggling to make ends meet - run by one woman who funds the entire operation herself, with one assistant and no support team.

Operation

Started in 2014 by Mina Karagianni, an interior architect and designer, the Athens operation is the only one affiliated with the Florida-based charity outside the United States. Karagianni came across Gentle Carousel while scouring the internet for information on caring for an abandoned Shetland pony she had rescued.

When she saw photos of the charity's work in pediatric oncology wards, "I was touched and I was moved, and I said: 'OK, we have to bring this to Greece,'" she said.

It took months to track down and persuade the U.S. charity to work with her, and even longer to obtain the requisite permits and arrange transport to bring the horses over. But after incessant efforts, six already trained miniature horses stepped off a flight from Florida via Frankfurt in November 2013.

Entirely self-funded through her day job, Karagianni now has a total of nine equines - the six American miniature horses, one that was later born in Greece, and two rescued ponies - Billy the Shetland pony and Giselle who was rescued from the island of Santorini.

Karagianni transformed her family land in Rafina, a seaside area east of Athens, into Magic Garden, complete with stables, a paddock for the horses to run free every day, a small café and an area to host children's parties and baptisms.

At the time, she was open for visits every weekend, charging a small entrance fee to help cover running costs - specialized food for the horses, wood shavings for their bedding, grooming material, veterinarian visits and transportation to and from hospitals and care homes. She also began visiting schools and setting up an education program.

From 2014 when Gentle Carousel Greece first opened until the first COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020, Karagianni said her little equine team saw roughly 12,000 children.

But the lockdowns took their toll. Karagianni had to shut down the café and hasn't been able to re-open since.

With even the tiny income from the café drying up, and Karagianni herself facing a health issue that took her out for 1 1/2 years, "we fell apart," she said. Unable to meet utility bills, both the electricity and water companies cut off her supply, leaving her relying on neighbors for water for the horses.

"I'm just starting to get myself back together again now," she said. "With a lot of financial difficulties. But what can I do? I'm trying."

She's got the utilities running again, but still owes thousands of euros. Approaches to companies and institutions for funding have been unsuccessful so far. "Maybe I just don't know how to ask properly," Karagianni said.

Running Gentle Carousel single-handedly is taking its toll. "I'm making

super-human efforts," said Karagianni, who at 68 wonders for how long she can go on and is searching for someone to ensure the program's continuity.

"I'm doing what I can. But I can't do it alone," she said. "I can't do it without a team."

Despite her financial struggles, Karagianni said seeing the horses' effect, particularly on children, makes her determined to continue for as long as she can.

During a visit to the Athens special needs primary school, staff lined up children in wheelchairs so each could spend a few moments with the horses. Some reached out to stroke them; others bent their heads forward over the miniature horses for a kiss.

Reactions

"It's incredible, the reactions. It's like something awakens their senses," said special needs teacher Eleni Volikaki.

The state-run school, which shares facilities with a private charity for disabled children, ELEPAP, caters to children aged 6-14 with cognitive or mobility problems, or both. Anything that encourages the children to make even small hand gestures, such as reaching out to stroke a horse, "is very important for us. Especially when it's spontaneous and comes directly from the child and isn't instigated by us," Volikaki said.

"We saw things we didn't expect. We saw children with autism, or children who are generally afraid of animals, coming very close, letting the (horses) get close to them," Volikaki said. "And we saw ... spontaneous contact that under other circumstances we wouldn't see." The tiny horses don't just enchant children.



Founder of Gentle Carousel Greece Mina Karagianni, poses with Calypso, (right), and Ivi miniature horses used for therapy programs, in Athens, Greece, on Thursday, Nov. 21, 2024. (AP)

63 confirmed cases reported in 2024

Pakistan begins year-end anti-polio vaccination drive for 45m children

ISLAMABAD, Dec 16, (Agencies): Pakistan on Monday began its last nationwide vaccination campaign for the year to protect 45 million children from polio after a surge in new cases hampered efforts to stop the disease, officials said.

According to the World Health Organization, Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan remain the only two countries where the potentially fatal, paralyzing virus hasn't been stopped. Pakistan has reported 63 confirmed cases since January.

Ayesha Raza Farooq, the prime minister's adviser for the polio eradication program, said the anti-polio drive will continue until Dec. 22.

"As a mother, I am appealing to you to open your doors for health workers," she said.

Pakistan regularly launches such campaigns despite violence affecting medical personnel who oversee the vaccinations and security forces escorting them. Militants falsely claim that vaccination campaigns are a Western conspiracy to sterilize children.

Authorities deployed thousands of police officers to protect health workers following intelligence reports that insurgents could target them. However, gunmen opened fire Monday on police escorting polio workers in Karak, a city in the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, killing a police officer and wounding a health worker, local police official Ayaz Khan said.



A health worker administers a polio vaccine to a child at a health center in Peshawar, Pakistan, Monday, Dec. 16. (AP)

Also on Monday, a gunman riding on a motorcycle shot and wounded a police officer assigned to escort polio workers from a health facility in the northwestern city of Bannu, said local police chief Hamid Khan.

No one has claimed responsibility for the twin attacks. But more than 200 polio workers and police assigned for their protection have been killed since the 1990s, according to health officials and authorities.

The latest anti-polio drive campaign began a day after Prime Minister She-

hbaz Sharif met with medical staff and vowed that Pakistan would win the war against polio.

Afghanistan reported at least 23 confirmed cases in 2024, according to data from the World Health Organization.

In September, the Afghan Taliban suddenly stopped a door-to-door vaccination campaign in Afghanistan, a devastating setback for polio eradication as the virus is one of the world's most infectious and any unvaccinated groups of children where the virus is spreading could undo years of progress.

Experts reveal new antiviral mechanism

Study links air pollution to blood clots risk

LOS ANGELES, Dec 16, (Xinhua): A large study found that greater exposure to long-term air pollution was linked to increased risks for blood clots that can occur in deep veins, according to the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH).

If untreated, the condition can block blood flow and cause serious complications, even death, said NIH in a release on Thursday.

These findings came from a longitudinal study funded by NIH that included 6,651 U.S. adults who were followed for an average of 17 years between 2000 and 2018.

Participants lived in or near one of six major metropolitan areas in the United States: New York, Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Throughout the study, 248 adults, 3.7 percent of the study sample, developed blood clots in deep veins that

required hospital care.

The likelihood of this outcome was linked to anywhere from a 39 percent to a more than two-fold increased risk based on long-term exposure to three different types of air pollutants, according to NIH.

Blood clots in deep veins, collectively known as venous thromboembolism (VTE), include deep vein thrombosis, which occurs when a blood clot forms in a deep vein of the legs, arms, or an internal organ, and pulmonary embolism, which occurs when a blood clot breaks off from a deep vein and travels to the lungs.

Infection: Chinese scientists have recently discovered a new antiviral mechanism that allows bacteria to resist phage infection, providing a guide for the development of related drugs in the future, according to China Pharma-

ceutical University (CPU).

Phages are viruses that specifically target bacteria. In recent years, researchers globally have realized that bacteria, as single-celled organisms, have acquired diverse antiviral mechanisms to defend themselves against phages.

Previous research demonstrated that bacteria infected by phages would activate their type III CRISPR-Cas system, which can damage phage genetic material and thus impede their ability to reproduce and allow the bacteria to resist infection, according to Chen Meirong, associate professor with CPU.

The recent study, conducted by a research team led by professor Xiao Yibei from this university, was based on CRISPR-Cas9 gene-editing technology - which can serve as scissors to cut genetic material at specific locations.

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Fans hold the key to boosting Blues chances

Kuwaiti legends urge fans to back Khaleeji Zain 26



Hamad Harbi juggling with the ball.



A file photo of Waleed Ali battling for the ball.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: Some of the big names of Kuwaiti football have thrown their weight behind the upcoming Khaleeji Zain 26, praising its organisation and urging fans to buy tickets and pack out the stadiums from December 21-January 3.

Formerly known as the Arabian Gulf Cup, the Khaleeji Zain 26 will welcome the eight nations of the Gulf for one of the most eagerly anticipated editions of the tournament in its 54-year history. And with the organizers applying the finishing touches to what is sure to be a memorable sporting and cultural celebration, some of the former stars of Kuwaiti football have shared their views with only days to go until the Opening Ceremony at the Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

Kuwait are in Group A with Oman, Qatar and the UAE, and the past-players are confident that they can advance to the semi-finals following recent promising performances in the World Cup qualifiers.

"I am so happy to see the tournament back in Kuwait and

I am sure it will be organised to the highest of international standards," said Faraj Lahib, a key member of the 1998 Gulf Cup winning Kuwaiti side.

"I have been following progress in the media and on social media and it has been refreshing to see the new systems in place, particularly at the stadiums to manage the fans getting access, and the way that fans can purchase their tickets easily online."

Looking ahead to the action, the former striker of the Kuwait Club believes recent form shows that they have every chance of advancing into the knock-out stages.

"They are all equal in the group and if The Blues can show a consistent performance I believe they have just as much a chance as the other three teams," he said. "As an ex-player we know the fans expect a strong performance and, even though we didn't win, we showed how well we can perform in the World Cup qualifiers against South Korea and Jordan last month."

Walid Ali is remembered for scoring the winning goal for

Kuwait when they beat Saudi Arabia, 1-0, to clinch the 2010 Gulf Cup in Yemen, the last time that Kuwait picked up the prestigious biennial trophy.

He believes the class of 2024 can make an impact on home soil and is also impressed by the levels of professionalism behind the organising of the event.

The Gulf Cup is a very important tournament because it can change a player's life if they play well," the midfielder said. "I don't see why The Blues can't do well because we are playing on home soil and they showed what they are capable of against Jordan and South Korea."

"The fans will be motivated and will get behind the team as well. The organisers are providing all the information the fans need, especially being able to buy their tickets through the Hayakom application which means they can get their tickets wherever they are, at home or at work."

"We have just as good a chance as anyone to get through the group stage," Hamad Harbi was the Golden Boot winner for all Arab leagues in 2006, and says it is the Kuwaiti fans

who hold the key to boosting his nation's chances.

He has urged the supporters to buy their tickets and pack out the stadiums to become the team's 12th man ahead of the first match against Oman on December 21.

"Booking the tickets through the application has made it so much easier for fans to buy them and show their support, which will make a big difference for the team," said the former Blues striker from Al-Salmiya Club.

"The Khaleeji Zain 26 has taken our organisational professionalism to the next level, so I urge fans to buy tickets, attend the matches and make this a special event that will show Kuwait in a positive light."

While Kuwait will play Oman, UAE and Qatar in Group A, the second Group will consist of reigning champions Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Bahrain.

Tickets are on sale now through the 'Hayakom' application for matches that will be played at both the 57,000 capacity Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium and 15,000-seater Jaber Al-Mubarak International Stadium.

India 'shaking' at 51-4 but rain hampers Aussies push on Day 3

Hazlewood captures the prize wicket of Kohli

BRISBANE, Australia, Dec 16, (AP): Australia only got to bowl 17 overs at India on another rain affected day in the third cricket test but it was enough for its pace attack to dismantle India's top-order as it sunk to 51-4 and end the third day 394 runs behind the hosts.

After Australia's tail wagged with the bat for a little longer to reach 445 all out early on Monday, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood quickly had India in trouble with a devastating opening spell at the Gabba.

Starc (2-25) took the wickets of Yashasvi Jaiswal and Shubman Gill in his first two overs to set the tone, before Hazlewood (1-17) captured the prize wicket of Virat Kohli just before one of many passing rain showers brought on an early lunch with India at 22-3.

After removing Jaiswal (4) with the first ball of the innings in the second test at Adelaide, Starc needed just two balls at the Gabba to remove the tourist's opener.

The first ball was swiped through gully for a boundary by the 22-year-old but the second he chipped a simple catch to Mitch Marsh at mid-wicket for a soft dismissal.

In his next over, Starc struck again with Marsh diving acrobatically to take a two-handed catch at gully to remove Shubman Gill (1) and India was 7-2.

Hazlewood, back in the team after a side strain ruled him out of last week's second test, then rocked India further by teasing an edge from the veteran Kohli to have India three down as rain began to fall and prompted an early lunch.

On the resumption, skipper Pat Cummins (1-7) got his first wicket by removing Rishabh Pant caught behind to reduce India to 44-4.

Captain Rohit Sharma came out to join KL Rahul but there was only time for a superb cover dive boundary for the latter before another passing shower forced players from the field.

The rest of the afternoon saw the



India's captain Rohit Sharma bats during play on day three of the third cricket test between India and Australia at the Gabba in Brisbane, Australia. (AP)

weather look to clear but just as play appeared set to resume another passing rain shower would cross over the arena.

Play finally resumed at about 5:05 p.m. but only 17 more balls were bowled for three runs, before another passing shower and deteriorating light forced the end of the day's play.

Australia now has two days of play remaining, weather permitting, and it's path to a possible victory would seem to be contingent on bowling India out for 245 or less in the first innings and enforce the follow on.

"We've got six wickets to take first," Marsh said after play. "We know we have to take 20 wickets to try and win this test. All our conversations and planning will be how do we do that."

"Hopefully the weather holds off, and tomorrow is coming in, having a crack, and seeing where we get to."

The hosts had resumed Monday at 405-7 and some big hitting by Starc and Alex Carey lifted Austral-



Australia's captain Pat Cummins reacts after bowling a delivery during play on day three of the third cricket test between India and Australia at the Gabba in Brisbane, Australia. (AP)

ia to 445. Carey was the final wicket to fall, holing out in the deep for an enterprising 70 off 88 balls - his

ninth test half century.

Jasprit Bumrah added one more wicket to return figures of 6-76, having completed his 12th five-wicket haul in tests the day before to again shoulder the load for India's bowlers.

"We have 11 players, I don't look at it that I have to do extra," Bumrah said. "We are a new team, a lot of new players have come into the side and we have to look at it that they will learn from the experience."

On Sunday's Day 2, Travis Head made a sparkling 152 and Steven Smith completed a long overdue 101, as part of a 241-run stand, to lift Australia to 405-7 at the close after it was a precarious 75-3 earlier in the day.

Rain prevented all but 13.2 overs on the opening day Friday after India captain Rohit Sharma won the toss and elected to bowl on a green tinged Gabba wicket.

India won the first test by 295 runs at Perth, while Australia came back to win the second day-night test in Adelaide by 10 wickets.

Gut-Behrami finishes 2nd

Goggia wins World Cup super-G after receiving advice from Vonn

BEAVER CREEK, Colo., Dec 16, (AP): Italian ski racer Sofia Goggia found a fast line through the technical Birds of Prey course to win a women's super-G.

For that, Goggia gave a big assist to good friend and fellow Red Bull sponsor Lindsey Vonn.

The 40-year-old Vonn wasn't competing Sunday, but did serve as a forerunner and tested out the course before the racers. Vonn relayed a course report to the top of the hill for her American teammates - and to Goggia.

Goggia put Vonn's advice into action as she finished in 1 minute, 3.90 seconds on an overcast and windy day. She held off Swiss racer Lara Gut-Behrami by 0.48 seconds, with Ariane Raedler of Austria storming through the course from bib No. 20 to capture third.

"(Vonn) gave me tips and advice," said Goggia, who also took second in Saturday's downhill. "What she said was vital to me. She was right."

To celebrate, Goggia did a little dance in the finish area. She tried to replicate the samba dance that ski racer Lucas Pinheiro Braathen, who represents Brazil, broke out on the podium a week ago in Beaver Creek when he finished second in a giant slalom.

"It was a horrible copy," Goggia said with a laugh.

Goggia had an inkling she could be fast the day before when she was sent a video of the super-G setup. It just fit her style.

"I thought it could be mine," said the 32-year-old Goggia, who won her 25th career World Cup race. "But between thinking and doing things

there is the ocean. I had a really good inspection. I knew I had to stay a little bit careful, the first five gates, and then I could let my horses run."

Goggia has been on the comeback trail since a training crash last February in which she broke two bones in her right leg. She said she had a screw and plate inserted, which was giving her trouble. So much so she was contemplating retirement over the summer.

In September, she had the hardware removed.

"I felt so free both in my feet and also mentally," Goggia said. "I'm so grateful to put out my poles at the start gate and have the speed again, the chance. Because this is the best feeling."

On Saturday, Cornelia Huetter of Austria made history by winning the first-ever women's World Cup downhill held on the Birds of Prey course. She was fourth in the super-G, knocked off the podium by her Austria teammate Raedler, who earned a spot on a World Cup podium for the second time in her career. Gut-Behrami had a productive weekend, with a pair of podium finishes (third in the downhill). The top American was Lauren Macuga in 12th place. Macuga was fourth a day earlier in the downhill.

For Vonn, the next race will be the real thing - her first World Cup event in nearly six years. She will compete next weekend during a pair of World Cup super-G events in St. Moritz, Switzerland.

"I definitely felt it today. I was like, 'OK, I've got a race in a week,'" explained Vonn, who has 82 World Cup wins. "I'm in that mindset. I'm in the zone."



Italy's Sofia Goggia reacts after finishing a women's World Cup super-G ski race in Beaver Creek, Colo. (AP)

Change Name

I, Jerusha Da Cruz, holder of Indian passport number V6135035, having permanent address House No. 863T, Santimol, Raia, Salecte, Goa, 403720, INDIA, do hereby correct my name from Jerusha De Cruz to Jerusha Da Cruz. Hereafter, in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by the name Jerusha Da Cruz

Knapp and Tavatanakit win mixed team in Grant Thornton Invitational

NAPLES, Fla., Dec 16, (AP): Patty Tavatanakit holed a 25-foot birdie putt and Jake Knapp gave them the lead on the next hole with a tough pitch to set up birdie as the UCLA duo combined for a 7-under 65 on Sunday for a one-shot victory in the Grant Thornton Invitational.

They won on their respective tours on the same day this year - Knapp at the Mexico Open, Tavatanakit at the Honda LPGA Thailand - and were equally impressive as a team, especially down the stretch at Tiburon Golf Club.

Jeeno Thitikul, who won the LPGA finale at Tibu-

ron last month for the \$4 million prize, holed an 8-foot birdie putt on the final hole as she and Tom Kim shot 64 to finish alone in second.

Akshay Bhatia and Jennifer Kupcho made a mess of the 18th hole for their lone bogey in the modified fourballs format and finished third.

Lanto Griffin holed a 40-foot putt for eagle on his first hole that sent him to a 7-under 63 in the final round of Q-school on Sunday, the leader of six players who earned PGA Tour cards for next year. Griffin was the medalist at 9-under 271, but all that mattered was being among the top five and ties to get full

status as the PGA Tour goes through sharp changes that include smaller fields starting in 2025.

Hayden Buckley (67) and former world No. 1 amateur Takumi Kanaya of Japan (69) also made it through. Kanaya holed 8-foot par putts on his last two holes. They were followed at 4-under 276 by Alejandro Tosti of Argentina (66), Will Chandler (66) and Matthew Riedel (72).

Players who didn't earn cards will have various levels of status on the Korn Ferry Tour.

Shaun Norris of South Africa overcame a six-shot deficit Sunday and closed with a 5-under 67 for a

one-shot victory in the Alfred Dunhill Championship, his second European tour title.

Marcus Kinhult, who had a two-shot lead at the start, had two bogeys and a double bogey through seven holes at Leopard Creek and closed with a 74, tying for second with John Parry (69) and Ryan Van Velzen (72).

Norris had an early eagle offset by a double bogey on the par-3 seventh, but he was bogey-free the rest of the way and finished at 13-under 275. Van Velzen was tied for the lead until take bogey on the par-5 closing hole.

SPORTS

Volunteers committed and well-trained to deliver memorable Khaleeji Zain 26

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: Thousands of volunteers are looking forward to delivering a memorable Khaleeji Zain 26 that will be a sporting and cultural celebration from December 21-January 3.

Up to 5,000 citizens and residents have stepped forward to volunteer on the event in a variety of roles, and at a training session held at the Jaber Al-Mubarak International Stadium, the finishing touches were being made to ensure they provide a first-class welcome to the tens of thousands of fans expected to pour into Kuwait from across the Gulf.

Each volunteer is put through several training sessions which include classroom theoretical presentations mixed with on-the-job practical training at the venues.

Both stadiums have been fitted with the latest crowd-management technology to ensure a smooth flow of spectators from the outer perimeter fences to the stadium bowl and seats.

Tickets, which are available to buy through the Hayakom application, will be scanned for the first time at the outer perimeter, before a second scan at the entry turnstiles into the stadium.

Formerly known as the Arabian Gulf Cup, the Khaleeji Zain 26 will get underway on Saturday with a stunning Opening Ceremony, followed by the first match between hosts Kuwait and Oman at the Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.



The volunteers pose for a group photo after training.

Barcelona loses to Leganes

Atletico moves level on points at top of Spanish league

BARCELONA, Spain, Dec 16, (AP): Barcelona stayed top of the Spanish league despite a shock 1-0 home defeat to lowly Leganes, a team that had not won away all season.

Atletico Madrid beat Getafe 1-0 to leapfrog city rival Real Madrid and go second. Both Barcelona and Atletico have 38 points but Barcelona has a better goal difference.

Playing in the first of five La Liga matches on Sunday, Atletico won its sixth consecutive league game to move a point clear of Real, which could only draw 3-3 with Real Vallecano on Saturday.

The results set up a mouthwatering clash between the top two at Barcelona next Saturday.

The Madrid side will go into the match with the momentum after recording its 11th straight victory in all competitions on a chilly afternoon at the Wanda Metropolitano.

Visitor Getafe had taken just two points from its seven away games so far this season but it made life difficult for Diego Simeone's side. It took Atletico until the 70th minute to get the winner from Alexander Sorloth's header.

Barcelona then missed the chance to restore its three-point cushion when it lost to Leganes.

Leganes went ahead with Sergio González's header after four minutes and spent most of the match defending its lead.

Leganes keeper Marko Dmitrović was superb, especially in the first half, and Barcelona's front players were so ineffectual that coach Hansi Flick

withdrew Robert Lewandowski, Dani Olmo and Lamine Yamal in the final quarter.

His changes, however, had little effect and Leganes, promoted from the second tier in May, celebrated a win that lifts it into 15th, four points clear of the relegation zone.

"Taking the lead so early against teams like this is dangerous because they have so much potential," said Leganes defender Jorge Saez. "We were able to defend together and keep them away from our area. Dmitrovic made three saves that were life-saving for us." "It's only three points, but for us they're like gold. Things were getting tight and this gives us a little breathing room." Meanwhile, Alaves and Athletic Bilbao shared the points in a 1-1 Basque derby that snapped Athletic's six-game winning streak.

Alaves hadn't won since Nov. 1 and was knocked out of the Copa del Rey by lowly Deportivo Minera.

It was on the defensive for much of the match and went behind after 10 minutes when Unai Gómez hit the net after taking a nice pass from Iñaki Williams.

But Joan Jordán took advantage of a goalkeeping error midway through the second half to level the scores.

Athletic had chances to win - a late goal from Dani Vivian wasn't allowed because of an infringement - but the draw leaves it in fourth place, four points behind Real Madrid and five behind the top two.

"Winning today would have put us in a better

position, but coming here for a derby is always tough," Williams said. "In terms of effort, we can't be faulted, but we lacked clarity up front." "Overall, a draw is a fair result for both teams." Real Betis stretched its unbeaten run to four games with a 2-1 win at Villarreal but coach Manuel Pellegrini was angry at playing with 10 men for most of the game after Ezequiel Ávila saw red.

The Argentine forward was sent off for a cynical foul 11 minutes before halftime with Betis 1-0 up thanks to a goal from on-loan Barcelona striker Vitor Roque.

Giovani Lo Celso made it 2-0 a minute after the break with a superb free kick and, although Alex Baena got one back with a superbly taken volley, Betis left with all three points to take it to ninth place.

Pellegrini was angered that Ávila's foul, committed in the center of the pitch to stop a counterattack, was not reviewed by the video officials.

"Penalties, red cards, they should always be reviewed," Pellegrini said. "They unbalanced the match today unfairly. VAR reduces the chance of these eventualities. VAR should be an ally, not an enemy." Also, Real Sociedad failed to win for the first time in five matches with a 0-0 draw at home to Las Palmas.

Both sides had chances to win the match but poor finishing and good goalkeeping at both ends meant a share of the points.

Real Sociedad is in seventh, a point behind Villarreal, while Las Palmas is in 14th.

Atyab Al-Marshoud Show Jumping Championship returns with int'l flair

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: The Supreme Organizing Committee of the "Atyab Al-Marshoud" International Show Jumping Championship, organized annually by Waleed Al-Marshoud, has finalized preparations to host the upcoming event on January 8 at the Kuwait Equestrian Center in Subhan.

The championship will feature riders representing all local clubs and will be held under the supervision of the International Equestrian Federation.

In previous editions, the title was claimed by notable riders: Ali Al-Kharafi in the tenth edition, Abdulrahman Al-Fazaa in the ninth, and Abdullah Al-Awadhi in the eighth.

Waleed Suleiman Al-Marshoud, Chairman of the Supreme Organizing Committee and Director of the Championship, highlighted the significance of this year's event, stating, "The current edition of the championship is marked by significant international participation. It has become a staple in Kuwait's annual equestrian calendar."

He also praised the private sector's role in supporting local championships, which has inspired riders to com-



Waleed Al-Marshoud

pete fiercely for top positions.

Al-Marshoud emphasized the championship's reputation as an international competition that attracts riders eager to participate, expressing gratitude to the Kuwait Equestrian Federation and the management of the Kuwait Equestrian Center for their continued efforts in promoting the sport.

He noted the growing popularity of equestrianism, particularly among younger age groups.

This year's championship coincides with the centenary celebration of "Atyab Al-Marshoud," founded in 1925, adding a historical significance to the prestigious event.



Barcelona's Raphinha, left, and Leganes' Seydouba Cisse challenge for the ball during the Spanish La Liga soccer match between Barcelona and Leganes at the Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium in Barcelona, Spain. (AP)

Davis scores 40 points, James has 18 in return

Mavs, Warriors combine for NBA-record 48 3-pointers

SAN FRANCISCO, Dec 16, (AP): Luka Dončić had his 80th career triple-double with a season-high 45 points along with 13 assists and 11 rebounds, and the Dallas Mavericks beat Klay Thompson's former Golden State Warriors 143-133 on Sunday night in a second visit to Chase Center in just more than a month.

The teams combined for an NBA-record 48 3-pointers. Golden State hit 27 and Dallas made 21.

Thompson hit two late 3-pointers for seven total and finished with 29 points after the Mavericks lost 120-117 in his emotional return Nov. 12.

His former Splash Brother Stephen Curry had 26 points and 10 assists for Golden State in a game added to the schedule once the teams were eliminated from the NBA Cup. The Warriors lost by a point at Houston on Wednesday.

Anthony Davis had 40 points and 16 rebounds, LeBron James added



Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James (23) drives to the basket as Memphis Grizzlies guard Marcus Smart (36) watches during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Los Angeles. (AP)

18 points in his return and the Los Angeles Lakers beat the Memphis Grizzlies 116-110.

James also had eight rebounds, eight assists and five turnovers in 34 minutes after missing the previous two games because of a left foot injury. He was away from the team most of last week due to personal reasons.

Austin Reaves scored 19 points for Los Angeles. The Lakers never trailed and led by 23 points in the second half.

Pascal Siakam scored 22 points and Tyrese Haliburton added 21 points and 10 assists to lead the Indiana Pacers past the struggling New Orleans Pelicans 119-104 on Sunday.

Andrew Nembhard had 17 points, and Myles Turner finished with 14 points and four blocks as the Pacers won for the third time in four games.

Brandon Boston scored 20 points to lead five Pelicans players in dou-

ble figures. Dejounte Murray and Herbert Jones each scored 19 points while Murray had seven rebounds and seven assists.

New Orleans had 18 turnovers and was 10 of 33 from 3-point range in its fourth straight loss. The Pelicans have lost 13 of 14 since mid-November.

Jayson Tatum had 28 points and 12 rebounds and Boston cruised to a 112-98 victory over Washington.

Tatum had missed two of Boston's previous four games with a knee issue. He helped the Celtics win their seventh straight over the Wizards and third in Washington this season.

Payton Pritchard added 15 points on five 3-pointers, and Derrick White also had 15 points.

Jordan Poole led Washington with 21 points, and Bilal Coulibaly added 19. The Wizards have lost three in a row and 16 of 17.

Al-Qadsiya pips Kazma in thriller

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: Al-Qadsiya's first basketball team secured a thrilling victory over Kazma with a narrow 119-118 win in overtime after regular time ended in a 106-106 draw. The intense matchup, part of the sixth round of the league, took place at the Federation Hall in Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex. Another nail-biter in the same round saw Al-Arabi edge out Al-Sulaibikhat 88-87.

With these results, Al-Qadsiya climbed to the top of the league standings alongside Kuwait Club, both tied at 8 points. Kazma now holds 6 points, the same as Al-Nasr, followed by Al-Arabi and Al-Sulaibikhat with 5 points each. Al-Qurain sits at 4 points, with Al-Tadamon and Yarmouk at the bottom with 3 points each.

The showdown between Al-Qadsiya and Kazma began with a dominant 15-6 run by Al-Qadsiya, led by Abdulaziz Al-Hamidi's drives and Croatian Zubic's inside plays. However, Kazma quickly regrouped, exchanging leads with their rivals before Al-Qadsiya ended the first quarter ahead, 30-27.

The second quarter saw both teams trading leads again. Al-Qadsiya's Saad Al-Rifai and American player Green excelled with three-point shooting, while Kazma's French star Johnny Ber-

hanemeskel and Abdulrahman Al-Sahou kept its team in the game with sharp shooting and effective rebounding. The quarter ended with Al-Qadsiya holding a slim 67-62 lead.

The third quarter continued the back-and-forth battle. Kazma's Canadian star Johnny Johnson shined in the final two minutes, helping his team close the quarter with an 86-81 lead.

The fourth quarter delivered peak excitement as both teams excelled in scoring inside and outside the arc. Regular time concluded with a dramatic 106-106 tie, forcing five-minute overtime. In a heart-stopping finale, Al-Qadsiyah edged out Kazma by a single point, securing a 119-118 victory.

The clash between Al-Arabi and Al-Sulaibikhat mirrored the drama of the Al-Qadsiya-Kazma match. Al-Arabi started strong, winning the first quarter 22-16, but Al-Sulaibikhat fought back, claiming both the second (48-44) and third quarters (74-66). However, Al-Arabi mounted a fierce comeback in the final quarter, overturning the deficit to snatch a thrilling 88-87 victory.

Both matches showcased incredible skill and determination, leaving fans eagerly anticipating the next round of the league.



Players challenging for the ball.



China's Haiyang Qin in action to win the 50-meter breaststroke final at the World Short Course Swimming Championships in Budapest, Hungary. (AP)

Sports

Kuwait finalizes squad for Khaleeji Zain 26

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: Kuwait Argentine coach, Juan Antonio Pizzi, has announced the squad for the upcoming Khaleeji Zain 26, set to kick off in Kuwait this Saturday and run until January 3.

The squad comprises 26 players: Khaled Al-Rashidi, Salman Abdul Ghafoor, Abdulrahman Al-Fadhli, Hamad Harbi, Ahmed Al-Dhafiri, Mubarak Al-Fanini, Youssef Nasser,

Nasser Khader, Hassan Hamdan, Youssef Majed, Ali Khalaf, Khaled Ibrahim, Mashari Ghannam, Mohammed Daham, Sami Al-Sanea, Rashid Al-Dosari, Salman Al-Awadhi, Bandar Burseli, Moaz Al-Dhafiri, Faisal Zayed, Fahad Al-Hajri, Sultan Al-Enezi, Reda Hani, Eid Al-Rashidi, Moaz Al-Aseima, and Fawaz Ayed. Four players have been excluded from the final list: goalkeeper Saud Al-Hoshan, Mahdi Dashti, Montaser Abdul-salam, and Khaled Al-Kharqawi.

The team will hold a training session today

at 6:00 pm at Thamer Stadium, following its return from an external training camp in Doha, Qatar.

During the camp, the team played several friendly matches, including its most recent game against Lebanon two days ago, where it suffered a 2-0 defeat. As part of its final preparations, the "Blues" will enter an internal training camp tomorrow, which will continue until the tournament's opening day, culminating in a friendly match against the Omani team.



Kuwait Argentine coach, Juan Antonio Pizzi.

Kuwait wins double silver



The winning teams on the podium after the awarding ceremony.

UAE, Oman crowned padel Arabian Gulf Cup champions

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 16: The Kuwaiti national men's padel team claimed the silver medal after a 0-2 loss to the UAE in the final of the Arabian Gulf Cup for Men and Women, held at the Regency Hotel courts.

The Qatari team secured the bronze medal by defeating Bahrain 2-1 in the match for third place.

Reaching the final was a significant achievement for Kuwait, while the UAE men's team celebrated their second gold medal in the tournament's history. The Qatari team, champion of the second edition, finished third this year.

On the women's side, the Kuwaiti national team also earned silver after a 0-2 loss to Oman in the third and final round. Oman maintained

its dominance in the competition, securing its third consecutive championship title. The UAE women's team finished in third.

Following the finals, Kuwaiti head coach Omar Al-Zanki and the Gulf Cooperation Council's technical committee head, Mohammed Al-Saud, crowned the winning teams in both the men's and women's categories.

Speaking after the coronation ceremony, Al-Zanki commended the technical success of the championship, highlighting the impressive performances showcased by players throughout the event. He praised the Kuwaiti players' achievements, with both the men's and women's teams finishing as runners-up, noting this as evidence of the sport's growing development in Kuwait despite competing against professional teams that train year-round.

US wins 4x100m relay gold

Chinese swimmers finish strong on last day of short course worlds

BUDAPEST, Dec 16, (Xinhua): Chinese swimmers finished strong on the last day of the World Aquatics Swimming Championships (25m), earning top spots here.

In the men's 50m breaststroke final, Chinese swimmer Qin Haiyang took gold with a time of 25.42 seconds. Emre Sakci of Turkiye and Kirill Prigoda, a Russian swimmer competing as a neutral athlete, shared the silver, both finishing just 0.14 seconds behind Qin at 25.56.

Another Chinese breaststroke specialist, Tang Qianting, grabbed second place in the women's 50m breaststroke final, finishing 0.32 seconds behind Ruta Meilutyte of Lithuania, who claimed gold in 28.54. Lilly King of the United States secured the bronze.

In the women's 200m freestyle final, Siobhan Haughey of Hong Kong, China, took the gold medal in 1:50.62. Mary-Sophie Harvey of Canada claimed silver in 1:51.49, setting a new American record, and Claire Weinstein of the United States earned bronze with a time of 1:51.62, which set a new world junior record.

The women's 4x100m medley relay final saw Team USA, comprising Regan Smith, Lilly King, Gretchen Walsh and Kate Douglass, deliver a record-breaking performance, winning gold in 3:40.41 and setting a new world record. Britain claimed the silver medal in 3:47.84. China secured the bronze in 3:47.93, with Qian Xinnan, Tang Qianting, Chen Luying and Liu Shuhan.

In the women's 50m freestyle final, Gretchen Walsh of the United States claimed gold in 22.83, setting a new world record. Kate Douglass of the United States took silver, while Katarzyna Wasick of Poland earned the bronze. Eva Okaro of Britain, finishing fourth, set a new world junior record.

In the women's 200m backstroke final, Regan Smith of the United States captured gold with a time of 1:58.04, setting a new world record. Summer McIntosh of Canada claimed silver in 1:59.96, establishing a new world junior record, and Anastasiya Shkurda, a Belarusian swimmer competing as a neutral athlete, earned bronze.

In the men's 200m freestyle final, Luke Hobson of the United States claimed gold with a world-record time of 1:38.61. Maximilian Giuliani of Australia took silver, 1.75 seconds behind in 1:40.36, setting a new Oceania record, while Lucas Henveaux of Belgium secured bronze.



Athletes compete during Men's 200m Freestyle Heats on day six of the World Short Course Swimming Championships in Budapest, Hungary. (AP)



Canada's Summer McIntosh holds a trophy for the Athlete of the Year at the World Short Course Swimming Championships in Budapest, Hungary. (AP)

In the men's 200m backstroke final, Hubert Kos of Hungary delivered a stellar performance, winning gold in 1:45.65, setting a new European and championship record. Lorenzo Mora of Italy claimed the silver medal, finishing 3.31 seconds behind, while Mewen Tomac of France took bronze.

In the men's 50m freestyle final, Jordan Crooks of the Cayman Islands took gold in 20.19. Guilherme Santos of Brazil claimed silver, 0.38 seconds behind, and Jack Alexy of the United States earned bronze.

United boss coy over reason for leaving Rashford and Garnacho out of City clash

Guardiola says 'I'm not good enough' after latest derby loss

MANCHESTER, England, Dec 16, (AP): Pep Guardiola declared himself "not good enough" after Manchester City's season sunk to a new low after a 2-1 defeat to Manchester United.

The four-time defending Premier League champion has lost eight of its last 11 games in all competitions - winning just once in that run.

City is fifth in the standings and nine points behind leader Liverpool, having played a game more.

"I'm the boss, I'm the manager and I'm not good enough. It's as simple as that," Guardiola said after the latest loss. "I'm not doing well. That is the truth."

Guardiola has led City to unprecedented success, winning an unprecedented four Premier League titles in a row and six in the last seven seasons. He has won 15 major trophies at the club, including the Champions League.

But he is experiencing the worst run of form in his coaching career, which has seen him win 33 major trophies at Barcelona, Bayern Munich and City.

Guardiola signed a two-year

contract extension last month, but that has not sparked an upturn in his team's form.

City led 1-0 going into the 88th minute against United, but then conceded late goals to Bruno Fernandes and Amad Diallo - prompting boos from fans after the final whistle.

"I knew that it would be a tough season from the beginning. I said (that) many times, even when we were winning, but I didn't expect it was so hard like it is right now," Guardiola said.

Marcus Rashford and Alejandro Garnacho were surprise omissions from Manchester United's squad against Manchester City.

And United head coach Ruben Amorim was coy about the reason for leaving out two of his most high profile players.

"It was not a disciplinary thing - next week, next game, new life," Amorim said after the 2-1 win at the Etihad Stadium.

"They are fighting for the places, but for me it's important for me the performance in training, the performance in game, the way you dress, the way you eat, the way



Manchester City's Matheus Nunes, left, fouls Manchester United's Amad Diallo to concede a penalty during the English Premier League soccer match between Manchester City and Manchester United at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester. (AP)

you engage with the teammates, the way you push your teammates. Everything is important in our context in the beginning of changing a lot of things. When people in our club are losing their jobs, we have to put the standards really high."

It was Amorim's first Manchester derby since taking over as United's head coach last month. And the bold call paid off with his team staging a late comeback through goals from Bruno Fernandes and Amad Diallo to seal a memorable win.

Rashford was substituted after 56 minutes of United's Europa League match against Viktoria Plzen on Thursday and has scored three goals in six appearances under Amorim.

Garnacho, who scored in United's FA Cup final win against City in May, came on as a substitute against Plzen.

"If they train well with the talent they have, we will be so much better with both of them (Rashford and Garnacho). But they have to work hard," Amorim said. "Today, they train really hard, so it's a good thing."