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Page 15

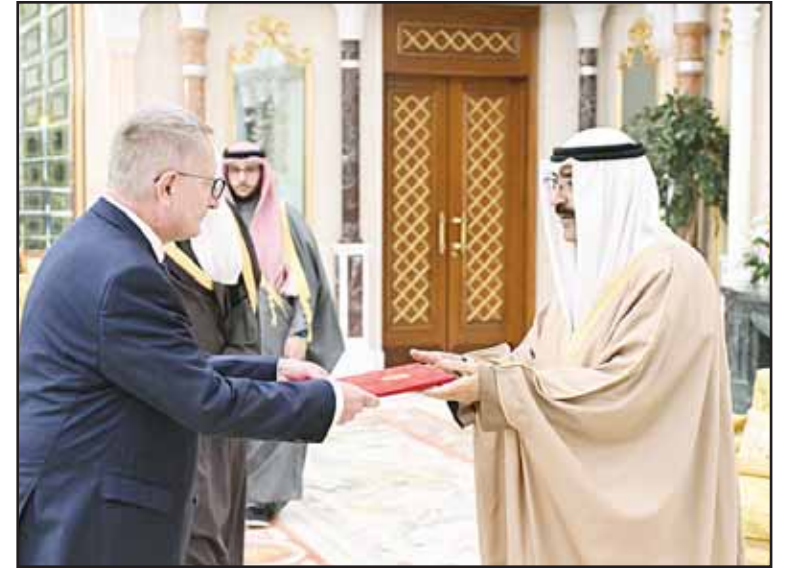
Merry Christmas to all



His Highness the Amir receives credentials of newly-appointed Lesotho ambassador.



His Highness the Amir receives credentials of newly-appointed Japanese ambassador.



His Highness the Amir receives credentials of newly-appointed Austrian ambassador.

Kuwait Amir receives credentials of new foreign ambassadors

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Tuesday credentials of newly appointed ambassadors to the country.

The Ambassadors – Austria's Ambassador Ulrich Frank, Peru's Ambassador Carlos Enrique Tomas Jimenez

Gil-Fortoul, Ambassador of Cuba Alain Perez Torres, Ambassador of Japan Mokai Kenchiro and Lesotho's Ambassador Manthabiseng Phohleli, all presented their credentials during a ceremony at Bayan Palace.

Attending the ceremony were senior state officials. (KUNA)



Opinion

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

Iran must admit that game's over

QUIETLY, away from the resonant slogans once championed by the Iranian regime and its supporters, we say the dramatic changes in Syria and the situation with Tehran's Lebanese ally Hezbollah should serve as a lesson for those who persist on reshaping the region by exporting the Iranian revolution, replacing sectarian beliefs, and seeking to rule the Arab world on sectarian grounds, all while dreaming of reviving the "Persian glory" that was dismantled by the force of pure Islamic righteousness, untainted by sectarianism.

When some Iranian officials boasted about ruling four Arab capitals, they failed to recognize that the systematic oppression and financial support they provided to militias and factions in the Arab world were backfiring on them in Iran itself. They did not see that the realities on the ground were far removed from their illusions. They could not understand that the billions spent on sectarian groups have not benefited them; instead, they led to defeats, losses, international isolation, and growing internal resentment.

The Syrian revolution has shown that, in accordance with the vision outlined by the leader of the transitional state Ahmed al-Sharaa, the religious beliefs of the Syrian people cannot be altered by any external force.

Continued on Page 5

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Kuwait issues alert on fake traffic fine scams

Kuwaitis can obtain driving licenses via Sahel



Catholic faithful gather at the Holy Family Co-Cathedral in Kuwait City on December 24, 2024, to attend the Christmas Eve mass, celebrating the holiday season with joy and devotion.

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Ministry of Interior has issued a warning against fake messages and fraudulent websites impersonating the institution, particularly those claiming to require payment for traffic violations.

The ministry clarified that traffic violation payments should only be made through official channels, such as the ministry or Sahel applications.

It added that it does not send text messages from international phone numbers, and users are urged to verify the sender's identity and immediately report any suspicious activity through the 'Aman' service in the Sahel application.

Meanwhile, Director of the Public Relations and Security Media General Department at the Ministry of Interior Colonel Othman Al-Gharib has urged citizens, residents and visitors to purchase tickets for the Gulf Cup tournament matches only through the official platform 'Hayakum' or authorized sales outlets operated by the event's organizing committee to avoid falling victim to online fraud.

Continued on Page 5

NewsWatch

RABAT: The Executive Council of the Arab Civil Aviation Organization (CAAO) held its 71st session in Rabat on Tuesday, with the delegations of member states, including the State of Kuwait, participating.

Speaking to KUNA while partaking in the meeting, Chairman of Kuwait Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) **Sheikh Humoud Mubarak Al-Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah**, the head of the Kuwaiti delegation, said today's meeting comes in an Arab, regional and international context that requires serious efforts and hard work. (KUNA)

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwait's eighth air bridge relief plane arrived in Lebanon, Tuesday, carrying aid to alleviate the humanitarian crisis dealt by Israeli occupation aggression.

Kuwait Embassy's First Secretary **Abdullah Al-Dyein** told KUNA that the aid will be received by Lebanese Red Cross relief coordinator **Youssef Boutros**. The plane is carrying 30 tons of aid, including food and medicine by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) to the Lebanese people, Al-Dyein noted. (KUNA)

DGCA rolls out KISR shines at 4th in Arab access permits SCImago's rankings 2024

By Mohammed Al-Enezi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has announced the commencement of the distribution of annual permits for access to restricted areas at Kuwait International Airport for the year 2025, covering terminal buildings T4, T3, T1, and T5.

In a circular sent to various airlines and airport operators, the DGCA explained that the delivery and receipt process began on December 22 based on the attached schedule.

Continued on Page 5

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) ranked fourth in the Arab world in the third edition (2024) of the SCImago Foundation's ranking for research centers in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), which was released on Monday.

This marks a significant improvement, as KISR advanced six places compared to its position in the 2023 edition.

The classification, initiated by the Union

of Arab Scientific Research Councils, covered 322 independent and affiliated research institutions and centers from 22 Arab countries.

The ranking is based on three main criteria, each with its own weighted indicators as follows:

40 percent on scientific research outputs, including performance indicators, productivity, openness and collaboration with others;

40 percent on innovation and technical impact;

Continued on Page 5

Symbolic shift

New flag hoisted at Syria embassy

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Syrian embassy in Kuwait has undergone a significant change as the new Syrian flag, associated with the revolution, was raised on its building. This development comes after collaborative efforts between official parties and members of the Syrian community in Kuwait, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Continued on Page 5



Photos by Samer Shiqr

Combo photos capture the significant moment as the new Syrian flag is raised at the Syrian embassy in Kuwait, symbolizing a fresh start and hope for the community.



Fans and supporters from Iraq, Yemen, and GCC countries gather in the heritage area of Al Mubarakiya, passionately cheering for their teams during Gulf Cup 26. - See Page 5



5 Editor-in-Chief Ahmed Al-Jarallah meets President of Yemen Football Association



8 NBK celebrates KOC's 90th anniversary



9 KFH celebrates graduates of Building Leadership Excellence program

Prayer Timings

Fajr 05:14 Asr 14:37
 Sunrise .. 06:39 Maghrib .. 16:55
 Zohr 11:47 Isha 18:17

Local

Expected weather for the next

24 hours:
By Day: Mild with light variable wind to light to moderate northerly wind, with speed of 06-26 km/h.

By Night: Cold and with light

Weather

variable wind, with speed of 06-26 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

Station

Kuwait City 19 09
 Kuwait Airport 21 06
 Abdaly 21 05

Max Exp

Min Rec

Bubyan	20	07
Jahra	20	08
Failaka Island	21	09
Salmiyah	18	13
Ahmadi	21	06
Jal Aliyah	20	06
Nuwaisib	21	07



Crown Prince Diwan photo
 His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives Pakistan's Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, along with his accompanying delegation.

Crown Prince, Pakistan Army official meet

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace on Tuesday First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah and Pakistan's Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, along with his accompany-

ing delegation.

Attending the meeting were Chief of His Highness the Crown Prince's office, Retired Lieutenant General Jamal Al-Thayab, Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs at the Crown Prince's Diwan Mazen Al-Essa and Deputy Chief of Staff Sheikh Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. (KUNA)

GCC ponders ways to shape future of jobs in government

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Kuwait has launched the third phase of the "Future of Work in Government for the Gulf States" program, a key initiative aimed at shaping the future of government work in the GCC, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The event was inaugurated by Dr. Issam Al-Rubaian, President of the Civil Service Commission, on behalf of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sherida Al-Maousherji.

In his opening remarks, Al-Rubaian highlighted the program's alignment with the ministerial decisions and strategic directives of Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

He emphasized that the event serves as a vital platform for exchanging ideas, experiences, and exploring ways to build more flexible and efficient governments that are prepared for future challenges in the workforce.

Al-Rubaian expressed hope that the outcomes would spur sustainable development and foster innovation in governmental work, ultimately benefiting future generations.

The Director of the Program, Sulaiman Al-Mahrouqi, further elaborated on the program's objectives, noting that it offers middle-level government leaders essential knowledge, skills, and tools needed to im-

plement strategic goals.

The program, which began in September, includes various components hosted in different Gulf states, with Kuwait serving as the location for the third in-person component.

Al-Mahrouqi emphasized that the program would focus on leadership change, team-building, and adapting to the digital economy, equipping participants with the tools to lead in a rapidly evolving environment.

In addition to this program, the Civil Service Bureau announced a new development for government job candidates.

The Bureau introduced an online system that allows candidates to submit their appointment justifications electronically through its official website, streamlining the process and enhancing efficiency.

This new mechanism reduces the administrative burden and speeds up transaction processing, marking a significant step toward digital transformation in Kuwait's civil service.

The program is set to conclude tomorrow, with workshops aimed at facilitating the exchange of expertise between participants and addressing future challenges in public sector leadership.



KUNA photo
 Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi visits a stall at the forum.

'Al-Khaleej Diwan' forum vital to boost unity in Gulf's youth'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24, (KUNA): The Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi said on Monday that "Al-Khaleej Diwan" forum was an important platform for communication, cooperation, and experience for Gulf youth.

Minister Al-Mutairi thanked at the end of the four-day forum for the Khaleej Zain 26 Cup the 120 speakers from Gulf states that

participated in workshops and seminars, all of which support the youth.

Al-Mutairi praised the efforts of 'Harvard Diwan' on co-organizing the event.

He appreciated greatly the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Registration open for 36th student training course for Jan 19-30: KISR

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) has announced the opening of registration for the 36th spring student training course for intermediate school students (grades 8 and 9), which will be held from January 19 to January 30, reports Al-Anba daily.

In a press release, Director of the Manpower Development Department at KISR Mona Al-Fulaijawi explained that the course will include several scientific programs, including a journey into the world of creativity, young scientists, the world of waves, basics of robotics, programming and control, and developing mobile phone applications.

Registration is open for Kuwaiti students in both public and private schools who are interested in joining the course. To be eligible, students must have an overall ac-

ademic average of at least 75 percent for the 2023/2024 academic year and must pass a personal interview conducted by a specialized committee.

The final date for registration is January 11, 2025, and the last date for personal interviews will be January 12th of next year. Applications can be submitted through the website <https://apps.kisr.edu.kw/StudentsTraining> or via the QR Code.

Al-Fulaijawi indicated that submitting an application does not guarantee acceptance into the program.

She stressed that KISR's commitment to organizing such courses aligns with the Amiri decree issued regarding the institute, which calls for encouraging Kuwaitis to engage in scientific research and building a research-oriented mindset among the younger generation.

Embassy announces scholarships for Kuwaiti teachers

Kuwait, Japan agree on inclusive partnership

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24, (KUNA): Kuwait and Japan held on Monday the fourth round of political negotiations, at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs' H.Q., and agreed on establishing a comprehensive partnership in all fields that will be announced during a high-level visit soon. Assistant Foreign Minister for Asia Affairs Ambassador Samih Hayat chaired the Kuwaiti side in the talks, while the Japanese delegation was led by Assistant Minister and Director-General of Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau Ambassador Ando Toshihide.

During the talks, the two sides affirmed that they look forward to expanding outstanding economic partnership between the two countries to cover the domains of food security, cybersecurity, renewable energy, oil, petrochemicals, health, culture, agriculture and education.

In addition, they focused on international and regional issues of mutual concern, underlining the significance of boosting coordination and consultation between the two ministries to bolster collaboration at international arenas.

The talks coincides with the 63rd anniversary of establishing Kuwait-Japan diplomatic ties, and both sides reiterated keenness of the leadership in the two countries on boosting bonds and collaboration.

The meeting was attended by Kuwait's Ambassador to Japan Sami Al-Zamanan, Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for Asia

Affairs Minister Plenipotentiary Khaled Al-Yassin, and Japanese Ambassador to Kuwait, Mukai Kenichiro as well as other senior officials from the two sides.

Meanwhile, the Japanese embassy in Kuwait announced on Tuesday the launch of its government scholarship (MEXT 2025 Teacher Training Program), which allows Kuwaiti teachers to conduct research at designated Japanese Universities.

According to a press release by the embassy, the government of Japan was offering a scholarship for Kuwaiti teachers who wish to conduct research on school education at designated Japanese Universities.

On the qualifications and eligibilities, the embassy revealed that Kuwaiti citizens applicants must be born on or after April 2, 1990.

The embassy went on to say that "Applicants must be graduates of universities or teacher training schools and have worked as teachers at elementary, middle, or secondary schools in Kuwait for at least five years. In-service faculty members in higher education institutions are not eligible."

"Applicants should be physically fit to participate in the program... must be interested in Japan and be willing to deepen their understanding of Japan after arriving there. Applicants must also have the ability to do research in Japan and adapt to living there,"

added the embassy.



KUNA photo
 Assistant Foreign Minister for Asia Affairs Ambassador Samih Hayat exchanges commemorative shields with Japanese Foreign Ministry official.



PM Diwan photo
 His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet meeting.

'Nurses skills honed by intense training, global experts' co-op'

Minister opens 'Innovation in Nursing Care' confab

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi highlighted the ministry's deep commitment to the nursing profession, evident from its inclusion in the government's work initiatives for the first time, in recognition of the profession's vital role in promoting social health, in line with the state's strategic goals.

In his speech at the inauguration of the "Innovation in Nursing Care 2024 Conference", Dr. Al-Awadhi revealed that nursing professionals make up about 40 percent of the total workforce in the health sector.

He explained that the skills of nurses have been significantly developed through specialized courses



Photo by Rizk Taufiq
 Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi poses for a picture with senior Health Ministry officials.

conducted in collaboration with international universities and institutions, as well as training programs for national cadres. These initiatives have helped raise the professional competence of nurses, which has positively impacted the quality of healthcare services.

The role of the Nursing Services Department goes beyond training, with active involvement in commu-

nity initiatives, including awareness campaigns aimed at improving public health awareness.

He went on to explain that the conference reflects an ambitious vision for the future with the aim of enhancing innovation and integration within the nursing sector. It seeks to explore the latest developments in the nursing profession and showcase best global practices in

healthcare, with the participation of a distinguished group of experts and specialists.

Meanwhile, Chair of the conference Dr. Iman Al-Awadhi affirmed the important role of nursing professionals in the healthcare system and their responsibility in ensuring comprehensive care.

She revealed that the nursing workforce comprises approximately 23,000 male and female nurses, with 1,074 of them being Kuwaiti.

Dr. Al-Awadhi highlighted the launch of a training program for nurses in primary care centers to train them on handling emergency cases. The program began in May 2023, and is still ongoing, with 502 nurses from various primary care centers trained in hospital emergency departments.

She explained that the administration is committed to continuously developing and qualifying the nursing staff through specialized courses held in collaboration with international universities and health institutions. These courses have benefited 231 nurses from various hospitals and primary care centers. Also, 68 trainers underwent courses for trainers, and they went on to train over 2,456 nurses at their respective workplaces.

Woman gets jail term, fine for inciting people to 'immorality'

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Criminal Court sentenced a woman to three-year imprisonment and imposed a fine of KD 3,000 on her after she was convicted of inciting others to "prostitution" in Mahboula and posting pornographic pictures on Snapchat.

The Public Prosecution charged the woman with intentionally insulting others via phone by sending indecent photos and a text message containing explicit content, and encouraging debauchery and immorality through Snapchat. These actions were confirmed by investigations conducted by detectives from the Anti-Cybercrime Department, and the accused's admission to committing the crimes.

From 15 years to acquittal: The Court of Cassation overturned the verdict issued by a lower court, which sentenced a Kuwaiti citi-

zen to 15 years in prison. It instead acquitted him of the charges of kidnapping, assaulting, and harming an expatriate.

According to the case details, while the victim was standing outside his residence on the day of the incident, the accused stopped his vehicle in front of him and asked him to get in. When the victim refused, the accused exited the vehicle holding a knife, chased the victim, and eventually forced him into the car. The accused then took the victim to another location against his will and assaulted him with a knife, causing injuries as described in the forensic report.

During the trial, the accused, who was brought from prison and represented by his legal counsel Lawyer Naam Haidar, denied the charges. Lawyer Haidar argued that the elements of the crime attributed to her client were absent. She submitted a supplementary defense memorandum, and requested the acquittal of her client, as well as asked the court, as a precaution, to refrain from pronouncing punishment against him.

Gov't mulls plan to give wives 'blue passports'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: According to government sources, within the framework of humanitarian facilities for the wives of Kuwaiti citizens whose nationalities were stripped, work is underway to study the necessary procedures to address their situations in a way that does not lead to any obstacles in various fields, reports Al-Rai daily.

They explained that the wife of a Kuwaiti whose nationality was stripped under Article 8 is likely to be granted a passport identical to the blue Kuwaiti passport. However, the nationality box will include a description such as "wife of a Kuwaiti citizen", "widow of a Kuwaiti citizen", or "divorcee of a Kuwaiti citizen".

Granting this passport requires international accreditation procedures to ensure that the Kuwaiti passport retains its classification and strength. This initiative aligns with the humanitarian facilities for the wives of Kuwaitis.

diwaniya

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

'Education cornerstone of Kuwait prosperous future'

"ACCORDING to Al-Qabas publication on Thursday, December 5, the results of the TIMSS international tests revealed alarming underperformance among Kuwait's fourth and eighth-grade students in mathematics and science," columnist **Asrar Jowhar Hayat** wrote for Al-Qabas daily.



Asrar J. Hayat

"Kuwait ranked last in the Gulf in fourth-grade mathematics and science, despite the Ministry of Education's substantial budget exceeding two billion dinars (over \$6 billion) annually. This considerable spending -- primarily directed toward teachers' salaries -- has yet to translate into meaningful improvements in educational outcomes.

"While the state is not neglecting investment in education, an official report highlighted that Kuwait allocated 12.6 percent of its 2024 budget to the sector. Yet, the performance of the Ministry of Education remains far below expectations.

"High school graduates reportedly possess academic levels years behind their designated grade levels, as admitted by government sources.

"This situation underscores the need for a comprehensive overhaul of the education system -- requiring more than incremental fixes, but rather a bold, systemic transformation. The following steps could serve as the foundation for such reform:

"The Ministry of Education must recognize that outdated curricula and teaching techniques fail to meet the needs of today's students.

"The solution lies in adopting modern, interactive teaching methods and revamping curricula to align with the skills and knowledge demanded by the contemporary world. Education must evolve to inspire students and equip them with critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.

"Teacher development is a cornerstone of educational reform. The Ministry must go beyond implementing teacher licensing systems by investing in the continuous professional growth of educators.

"This includes enhancing teacher preparation programs within the College of Education at Kuwait University and the College of Basic Education under the Public Authority for Applied Education. These institutions should focus on equipping future teachers with modern pedagogical skills alongside subject knowledge.

"Additionally, the Ministry should reevaluate the recruitment of foreign teachers, shifting focus toward sourcing talent from regions with proven excellence in education. Competitive incentives should be introduced to attract and retain the most qualified professionals.

"Education is the cornerstone of a prosperous future. The state must treat it as a strategic investment, providing young people with robust educational opportunities to unlock their potential and enable them to lead in an increasingly complex world.

"In conclusion, addressing these educational challenges is not just a necessity but a responsibility. By embracing meaningful reform, Kuwait can empower its youth with the knowledge and skills they need to secure a brighter future for themselves and the nation. Education is the tool that will pave the way for sustainable progress and development."

"Final note: On the same day of December 5, when Al-Qabas published the news of our failure in the TIMSS exams, the Ministry of Education did not comment at all. Rather, the Minister of Education, Sayed Jalal Al-Tabtabaei, announced a solution to the cleaning contracts crisis in schools!

"While we are fully aware that the crisis is deep-rooted and dates back to previous years, we hope that Minister Al-Tabtabaei, with his remarkable activity, will begin the steps for a solution."

Also:

"I was planning to continue writing about the topic of withdrawing citizenship. However, a decree has been issued amending the citizenship law, and I believe it is more important and necessary to comment on it now. Therefore, I will postpone discussing the topic of withdrawing citizenship for another day," columnist **Abdul Latif Al-Du'aj** wrote for Al-Qabas daily.

"The amendment to Article Seven states: 'a foreigner's acquisition of Kuwaiti nationality does not result in his wife becoming Kuwaiti.' Similarly, Article Eight now declares: 'a foreign woman's marriage to a Kuwaiti man does not result in her becoming Kuwaiti.'

"What did we understand from this? The amendment to Article 8 is general and comprehensive, effectively filling the gap in Article 7. It prevents the foreign wife of any Kuwaiti, whether 'established' or 'naturalized,' from acquiring Kuwaiti citizenship.

"This is a logical and acceptable amendment, perhaps even necessary in the current circumstances. It aligns with the constitution and citizenship rights, applying equally to all Kuwaitis.

"Furthermore, it reflects the government's commitment to addressing any tampering with Kuwaiti citizenship, leaving no room for objection or further inquiry.

"However, the amendment to Article 7 contains flaws. It explicitly states that 'the provisions of the previous article shall apply to the children -- the children of a naturalized foreigner.'

"To clarify, the previous article states that a foreigner's acquisition of Kuwaiti citizenship does not make his wife Kuwaiti. As a result, this new stipulation implies that the children and even grandchildren of a naturalized foreigner will not have the right to naturalize their wives.

"But wait a minute. Didn't Article 8 already deprive all Kuwaitis, whether 'established' or 'naturalized,' from granting citizenship to their wives? Why, then, this additional and excessive focus on depriving naturalized foreigners and their offspring?"

"This amendment perpetuates discrimination, reinforcing an unconstitutional and undemocratic distinction between 'citizens by establishment' and 'naturalized foreigners.'

"Moreover, why is a Kuwaiti individual described in the amendment to Article 7 as a 'foreigner'? A naturalized Kuwaiti is not a foreigner. Referring to them as such is not only belittling but also discriminatory.

"Adding the term 'foreigner' to the law is perplexing and unnecessary. How can someone simultaneously be both a foreigner and a Kuwaiti? Unless, of course, the intention is for the naturalized individual to remain labeled as a foreigner or treated differently throughout their life and the lives of their descendants."

"Nelson Mandela's skillful political negotiation style offers valuable lessons, particularly when it comes to preventing a country from descending into unknown chaos," columnist **Ahmad Al-Dawas** wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"In 1952, he led a civil disobedience campaign against the ruling white minority that practiced apartheid in South Africa. In 1964, this minority sentenced him to 27 years in prison. During his trial, he famously declared, 'I loved the idea of everyone living in society equally and in harmony together, even if it requires me to sacrifice myself for it.'

"While incarcerated, Mandela negotiated with the ruling class for an agreement that would safeguard the rights of the white minority, and preserve their lands, jobs, and wealth. This strategy helped prevent the potential exodus of white capital and expertise. He urged black citizens to exercise patience to avoid unnecessary bloodshed.

"One of Nelson Mandela's traits was his deep empathy for others. He possessed exceptional skill in negotiation, believing that successful negotiations occur when "concessions" are made, with each party feeling they have gained more than they have lost. In his view, half the battle is in convincing the other party that these concessions are, in fact, a victory or a gain.

"Mandela believed that in any negotiation, all segments of society must be willing to sacrifice some of their demands. He said, "The negotiation process must end in a manner that there is no victor or loser". A successful negotiation would lead one group to say, "We have given up on A, B, and C, but we have gained C, K, and Z". While this process of concessions may hurt all parties involved, it is driven by the principle of "give and take".

"Reflecting on Mandela's legacy after his death in December 2013, former white president of South Africa F.W. de Klerk said, "I would like to point out some of the lessons we learned in South Africa, so that the countries of the world do not slide into internal conflict. One of these lessons is the conviction of the ruling white class that the policy of apartheid is wrong. A new vision and a 180-degree change in positions are needed. Mandela and his followers must understand that they will not win a war by revolting against the existing regime. Everyone must reach a political settlement."

"He added, "These lessons can be applied today to Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, the Congo, Sudan, Myanmar, and Syria, as well as Israel and Palestine."

"I wish some Arab leaders would follow Nelson Mandela's example of political settlement. Upon his release from prison, he chose not to seek revenge on the white minority. Instead, he employed skillful negotiation to prevent bloodshed between the blacks and whites, paving the way for reconciliation. As a result, he won the presidential elections and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and he led his country towards progress.

"We hope that Arab leaders and Islamic groups would take Mandela as an example of political negotiation to avoid bloodshed and prevent the destruction of their nations.

"Our noble Messenger (PBUH) was also a master of negotiation, as evidenced by the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, which played a major role in the spread of Islam. In contrast, in Iraq, neither the Sunni nor the Shiite factions were willing to make concessions. Similarly, in Syria, both the opposition and the regime refused to compromise, which led to the destruction of the country, the loss of countless lives and destruction of properties. The prolonged conflict has caused immense suffering for both sides.

"In our Arab region, no one seems willing to sit at the negotiating table. Instead, each party wants to present itself as the "brave knight", claiming to be right while accusing the other of being wrong."

— **Compiled by PFX Fernandes / Mahmoud Attiyeh**



KUNA photo Undersecretary of the Kuwait National Guard, Lieutenant General Eng. Hashim Al-Rifai presents a memento to Pakistan's Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Lt Gen Sahir Mirza.

Kuwait, Pakistan discuss military ties

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24, (KUNA): Undersecretary of the Kuwait National Guard, Lieutenant General Eng. Hashim Al-Rifai discussed on Tuesday with Pakistan's Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Lieu. Gen. Sahir Mirza ways to enhance military cooperation.

This came in a press statement issued by the National Guard following Al-

Rifai's reception of Gen. Mirza and his accompanying delegations during their official visit to Kuwait.

Al-Rifai conveyed greetings from National Guard Chief Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Deputy Chief Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to the visiting delegation, the statement added.

28 ditched cars, boats lifted, citations issued

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Public Relations Department of Kuwait Municipality has reported the outcomes of field inspections conducted by the General Cleaning and Road Occupation teams in the Mubarak Al-Kabeer branch. These efforts resulted in the removal of 28 abandoned cars and boats, alongside the issuance of 36 citations related to general cleanliness and road obstructions, reports Al-Seyassah.

Additionally, 68 removal stickers were placed, and 28 outdated waste containers were replaced with new ones to improve sanitation standards in the area. These actions reflect the Municipality's commitment to maintaining cleanliness and ensuring public order.

Meanwhile, the acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs Dr. Khaled Al-Ajmi issued administrative circular No. 27/2024, urging owners of private nursery licenses to install surveillance cameras within their facilities to ensure the safety of children, reports Al-Anba daily.

This circular is effective immediately, and relevant authorities are expected to be aware of and enforce its provisions.



Al-Seyassah photo Municipality trucks carry away abandoned cars.

'Royal', Asian get life in jail for cultivating drugs to sell

Law same for all in Kuwait: court

By **Jaber Al-Hamoud**
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: In a landmark verdict, the Court of First Instance (Criminal Division), presided over by Counselor Nayef Al-Dahoum, sentenced a member of Kuwait's ruling family and an Asian accomplice to life imprisonment for cultivating 'marijuana' with the intent to trafficking, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

According to case papers, personnel from the Directorate-General of Drugs Control department arrested a member from the ruling family who was growing marijuana in his home with the help of 3 Asians.

During the arrest, narcotics were found in possession of the suspects. The Public Prosecution charged them with possessing 270 seedlings weighing approximately 25 kilograms of marijuana, 5,130 kilograms

of ready-to-use marijuana, in addition to 4,150 pills.

The security authorities arrested the main suspect, a ruling family member, after discovering the marijuana cultivation facility at his residence. He was aided by three Asian workers, one of whom was also handed a life sentence.

The court's decision highlights Kuwait's stringent stance on drug-related crimes, particularly when it involves members of the country's elite.

The ruling underscores the judiciary's commitment to combating narcotics and upholding justice regardless of social or familial status.

Couple acquitted: The Court of Appeals overturned the conviction of a citizen and his wife, acquitting them of insulting an administrative employee in the Student Affairs Department at a preparatory school for girls.

The incident occurred after a verbal argument erupted between the accused and the employee due to the employee's interference with the hijab of their daughter. The couple was accused of verbally insulting the employee while she was performing

her duties as a public sector employee in the Ministry of Education. Enraged, the student's father confronted the employee, shouting at her. Soon after, the student's mother arrived, forcefully opened the window of the employee's office and shouted insults at her, according to the investigation.

However, Attorney Mohammad Al-Sayegh, who represented the defendants, argued before the Court of Appeals that there was no evidence to support the accusations. He pointed out that the case lacked witnesses and requested the annulment of the first ruling, seeking the acquittal of his clients. The Court of Appeals agreed and acquitted the couple.

In a separate case, the Criminal Court referred the case file of former MP Anwar Al-Fikr to the president of the Court of First Instance. This is the second time the court took this step in relation to Al-Fikr's case, where he is accused of insulting the authority granted to His Highness the Amir during an election conference. Al-Fikr allegedly offended the Amir's powers, defamed the Amiri entity and broadcasted false news intended to harm the State's prestige and national interests during his campaign for the National Assembly elections.

Lawyer accuses 2 men of coaxing her to immorality

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Capital Investigations Department was unable to settle a claim made by a lawyer who accused two citizens of publicly insulting her and inciting her to debauchery after they allegedly told her that her car tire was flat, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to the investigation report, surveillance cameras confirmed the presence of the defendants near the complainant's vehicle at the time of the incident. However, the investigation did not provide sufficient evidence to support the allegations of insult or incitement.

A Kuwaiti woman in her 40s, who works as a lawyer, reported at the Shamiya Police Station that she had been publicly insulted by the driver of a pickup truck and incited to debauchery and immorality by the driver's companion in Shuwaikh Industrial area.

She said: "What happened was that I was parking my vehicle in a lot parallel to the road in Shuwaikh when another vehicle stopped in the middle of the road, the driver opened the front right window, and his companion, who was sitting next to him, said, "Your tire is flat", with the intention of inciting me to immorality and debauchery. I replied, "Trust in God". The driver then directed obscene words at me and left the scene. I followed him and took down the license plate number. I can identify them if they are shown to me."

After the case was registered, it was referred to the Capital Investigations Department, who were able to identify the defendants, two Kuwaiti citizens aged 19 and 21. They voluntarily came to the investigation, and when questioned, the driver of the vehicle completely denied the accusations, explaining that he and his companion had noticed the complainant's tire was flat, so his companion simply informed her that the air in her tire was low, and the complainant responded by saying, "Move it."

The vehicle's driver's companion also denied the charges of insulting and using obscene language. The case file has been forwarded to the concerned authority to continue the investigation.

Blogger jailed 2 years for insulting ruler, neighbors

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Criminal Court has sentenced a tweeter to two years in prison for a series of charges, including insulting the Amir, challenging his authority, insulting Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan, and spreading false news about the country's internal situation, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Despite denying the charges, the tweeter's defense was rejected by the court, which found his denial invalid, leading to his conviction on the relevant charges.

In a separate case, the Court of Cassation upheld a verdict of the Court of Appeal which imposed a 2,000 dinar fine on a citizen convicted of collecting funds to finance ISIS -- a terrorist organization.

The Public Prosecution had charged the man with harming national interests, financing terrorism, and joining banned groups, further underlining Kuwait's commitment to countering terrorism and preserving national security.

Principal insulted: Shamiya detectives have been assigned to summon a Kuwaiti citizen who is accused of publicly insulting an educator at a school in Nuzha, reports Al-Anba daily.

The 1975-born Kuwaiti principal of the school reported that the guardian of one of her students approached her with a summons request. An argument ensued between them, during which the guardian insulted and cursed her, saying: "I advise you not to say a word... be quiet... don't shout... don't raise your voice... you are not a respectable administrator."

She affirmed that there were witnesses to the insult she experienced. A case has been registered and referred to the investigations for further action.



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Renewal of memorandum of understanding for cultural cooperation

Action Group Holdings gold sponsor of the French Institute of Kuwait activities

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: His Excellency Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Action Group Holdings, announced the renewal of the Golden Sponsorship Program for cultural events cooperation with the French Institute of Kuwait in order to strengthen the bilateral relations. Sheikh Mubarak stressed, "This sponsorship aims to enable and enhance cooperation of bilateral relations between Kuwait and France in the cultural, educational and social fields."

The French Ambassador to the State of Kuwait, His Excellency Olivier Gauvin, expressed gratitude to His Excellency Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of Action Group Holdings, for renewal and continuation of his valuable support for the promotion of cultural programs of the French Institute of Kuwait. He stressed that this long-term cooperation partnership reflects a joint commitment between the French Institute of Kuwait and the Action Group Holdings to strengthen French-Kuwaiti friendship and to confirm the close ties between the people of the two countries through promotion of cultural dialogue.

Sheikh Mubarak added that "the signing of this memorandum is within the framework of the close, historical and distinguished relations that bind the two friendly countries in various fields, it aims to enhance cooperation and cultural exchange, which highlights Kuwait's interest and openness to different cultures."

The Director of the French Institute of Kuwait, Mr. Benoit Cathala, said, "The French Institute of Kuwait encourages and promotes interest of the French culture and works by conveying it to Kuwaiti society, as culture is the language



Photo during the signing ceremony of the memorandum of understanding.

that acts as a bridge bringing peoples closer." It is worth noting that the French Institute of Kuwait was established in 2012, and is committed to promoting cultural initiatives and ideas for mutual benefit through diverse cultural exchange. Further, the Director of the institute thanked Sheikh Mubarak and the Action Group Holdings for continued supports and sponsorship of the French Institute's activities, stressing the importance and depth of Kuwaiti-French relations.

For his part, Sheikh Mubarak further stressed "the importance of cultural events because it contributes directly to consolidating the common benefits between people, which leads to understanding between civilizations, pointing out that Kuwait and France have a historical relationship that extends for more than six decades, since relations began in 1961. In addition, to the role of France in the liberation of Kuwait in 1991."

In addition, Sheikh Mubarak stated "There is a desire in the State of Kuwait at the governmental and private sector levels to enhance bilateral cooperation in various fields. Among these endeavors, we agreed to renew the Action Group Holdings golden sponsorship of the French Institute of Kuwait for the cultural events that will be held in Kuwait during its season for upcoming year 2025." It is worth noting that in 2017, Sheikh Mubarak was awarded by the French government with the highest French civilian award, Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur (Knight of the Legion of Honour), for his role in strengthening bilateral Kuwaiti-French relations.

After signing ceremony of the memorandum of understanding, souvenirs were exchanged.

Sabah Al-Ahmad City expansion, new cultural projects approved

Municipal Council rejects Injaz Market proposal

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: In a significant session yesterday, the Municipal Council, chaired by Abdullah Al-Mahri, approved several key projects and regulations, aligning with Kuwait's developmental goals.

The council addressed six objections raised by the Minister of Municipality, Abdul Latif Al-Mishari, five of which pertained to seasonal camp regulations.

The following are the major approvals:

Expansion of Sabah Al-Ahmad Residential City

-- The council approved a 400,000-square-meter expansion, bringing the total area to 1.6 million square meters, aligning with Law No. (2) of 2015 to accommodate urban growth.

Agricultural and Livestock Development Areas -- Final amendments to regulations for agricultural and livestock zones were endorsed, including specifications for building heights, setbacks, and land use. Notable changes include a 10 percent building allowance for agricultural plots and 15 percent for purebred Arabian horse breeding plots.

Cultural and Infrastructure Projects -- The "Jableh Cultural" project was granted initial approval, with coordination required before commencement.

The approval was given for the study, design, and supervision of the road network in the Kabd area. 55 sites were allocated for communication towers across Kuwait.

The other approvals include, establishing a training center for the Kuwait Accountants and Auditors Association; a sewage treatment plant for South Saad Al-Abdullah Housing City and construction of a mosque in Fahad Al-Ahmad, while the proposal for the establishment of Injaz Market has been rejected.

The council dismissed the municipality's proposal to revitalize the struggling Injaz Market in Al-Rai. The plan included transforming the Shabra Market site into exhibition halls with restaurants, gardens, and facilities. However, persistent issues like shop closures and low demand led to its rejection.

The council referred updates on the Kuwait Metro project to its technical committee for further review.

The council announced a 15-day mid-year break from January 6 to 20, 2025, with committee work resuming on January 21.

Education Minister forms committee to address 'complaints' against employees

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Ministry of Education announced that Minister Jalal Al-Tabtabaei has issued a decision to form a neutral committee tasked with reviewing complaints and grievances from citizens and residents regarding employees of the Ministry, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

This initiative aims to create a fair work environment that will contribute to improving the educational and administrative processes.

In a statement, Al-Tabtabaei emphasized that the committee is impartial and composed of legal specialists from four different institutions -- the Fatwa and Legislation Department, the Kuwait University, the Civil Service Bureau and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training.

This approach seeks to foster institutional integration and provide

objective, independent opinions, reinforcing transparency and credibility.

Al-Tabtabaei highlighted the importance of an open-door policy to hear citizens' feedback while adhering to rules and regulations.

He also reiterated his commitment to enhancing administrative procedures to ensure the highest standards of integrity and justice.

The Ministry explained that the committee will address complaints related to suspicions of financial and administrative corruption, ensuring these matters are thoroughly examined by neutral experts.

The committee has already started its work, reviewing 21 topics referred directly by Minister Al-Tabtabaei, all of which involve concerns over financial and administrative integrity.



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Farwaniya Governor honors winner of Quran memorization, recitation award

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah received this morning at the governorate's office the Kuwaiti citizen Mohammed Hamad Al-Ali who won first place in the Kuwait International Award for Memorization and Recitation of the Quran in ten recitation categories.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, Sheikh Athbi honored and encouraged Mohammed Al-Ali, and praised his dedication to religious activities and his commitment to preserving the sacred rituals of Allah Almighty and Islamic law, values that are prioritized by the people of Kuwait and contribute to promoting Islamic morals and values in society.

In conclusion, Mohammed Hamad Al-Ali expressed his gratitude to Sheikh Athbi for his support, recognition, and encouragement in memorizing the Quran, as well as for the warm reception.



Farwaniya Governorate Farwaniya Governor with Mohammed Hamad Al-Ali.

Arabi Club organizes caricature exhibition for Arabian Gulf Cup

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24, (KUNA): Al-Arabi Club hosted on Monday, a caricature exhibition for the Arabian Gulf Cup (Khaleej Zain 26), organized in collaboration with the Kuwaiti Caricature Association.

The exhibition featured the participation of over 40 artists from elite caricature artists across the Gulf countries, Yemen, and Iraq.

The sponsor of the exhibition, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Youssef Al-Sabah, Head of Kuwait Football Association expressed to KUNA, his happiness at being present at the exhibition, which showcases impressive paintings and drawings by artists from all the countries participating in the ongoing

tournament. For his part, the President of the Kuwaiti Caricature Association, Mohammad Thalab, told KUNA that the exhibition will continue for three days, emphasizing the association's commitment to cooperating with all sectors, including sports, to serve Kuwait, especially during important events, and to integrate the artistic and cultural aspects into sports.

The exhibition, which included more than 80 portrait drawings of former players, media personalities, and beautiful caricatures related to sports, was attended by several football stars in Kuwait, sports enthusiasts, and art lovers.



Group photo taken during the exhibition.



Paintings in the exhibition.

Legacy of glory preserved

Al-Bloushi's museum honors Kuwait sports achievements

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24, (KUNA): The personal museum of Kuwait sports historian Hussein Al-Bloushi is the first museum in Asia dedicated to football.

The museum highlights the history of sports in Kuwait and its achievements in Arabian Gulf Cup tournaments, leading up to Kuwait hosting the 26th edition (Khaleeji Zain 26).

In this regard, Al-Bloushi told KUNA on Monday that the museum, located in his home in the Abdul-



KUNA photo
Sports historian Hussein Al-Bloushi

lah Mubarak and welcomes visitors daily. The public attending Khaleeji Zain 26 can enjoy a tour filled with history and memories that will allow them to relive the glory of Kuwaiti sports and explore other collections, gathered over decades.

Al-Bloushi noted that the museum houses over 10,000 items, including rare sports memorabilia from Kuwait's early days and past Arabian Gulf Cup editions.

He also noted that the museum houses a vast archive featuring newspaper articles and media reports he wrote during his extensive career in sports journalism.

The archive includes interviews with players, coaches, and sports officials, in addition to live coverage of major tournaments like the Arabian Gulf Cup, the Olympic Games, and the World Cup.

The museum also contains historical documents, photographs, old match tickets, and championship programs held in Kuwait since the 1950s. Additionally, it features rare archival photos of Kuwait's first teams and players who are considered icons in the history of Kuwaiti sports.

KU launches podcast for students

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Kuwait University has announced the launch of its podcast called "#KU_podcast - From the students, for the students" starting today, which will feature a number of students who have excelled in their fields of specialization and will share their inspiring stories and experiences with the community.

Acting Secretary-General and official spokesperson of Kuwait University Prof. Mishari Al-Aifan explained that the goal of the KU Podcast, which will be streamed on the official Kuwait University Instagram account, is to highlight the outstanding achievements of university graduates and continuing students who have excelled in their fields. Each episode will feature a guest who will share their success story with the community.

The program was entirely prepared and presented by students from the Department of Media at the College of Arts' Radio and Tel-

evision Department who recently achieved a remarkable milestone by winning the "Wave" award at the national level in Kuwait.

The team consists of Dhari Al-Kharshan (editor), Mohammed Al-Rundi (production manager), Abdullah Jaber (director of photography and lighting), photographers Fahad bin Khudhair and Lulwa Mashari, Yousef Al-Subaie (sound and mixing), and Eman Al-Shaya and Mohammed Al-Rundi (design and editing), with behind-the-scenes support from Sayedo Noro Dia and Mohammed Al-Waqyan.

The first episode of the KU Podcast will be launched today, and it will be hosted by media researcher and graduate of Kuwait University's Media Department Abdulaziz Al-Dhafiri.

Prof. Mishari Al-Aifan said Kuwait University encourages all students and members of the academic community to follow the podcast episodes and actively participate by sharing their opinions and experiences through the available platforms.

Kuwait charity wraps up refugee aid program in southern Turkiye

ANKARA, Dec 24, (KUNA): Kuwait Namaa Charity concluded on Tuesday a relief program to support 4,880 Syrian refugees in Urfa, Gaziantep, Kilis, Antakya, and Reyhanli in southern Turkiye.

The program included distributing food, winter clothes, heating materials, and medicine to orphans and impoverished families, said Relief Director at Namaa Charity, Khaled Al-Shammari in a statement to KUNA.

Namaa Charity is dedicated to

reinforcing Kuwait's humanitarian role by providing relief and aid to the disadvantaged, especially during the winter, he added.

Founded in 1977 as an integrated institutional development system to contribute to human building and the renaissance of societies, Namaa Charity is working to enhance its action with the values of integrity, institutional and transparency in its humanitarian work areas inside and outside the State of Kuwait.

Gulf fans bring vibrant festivities to Mubarakiya during Khaleeji Cup 26

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Between the grandeur of the past and the vibrancy of the present, the Mubarakiya heritage area came alive with non-stop celebrations, music, and chants as supporters from Iraq, Yemen, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries gathered to cheer for their teams in the "Khaleeji 26" Cup. Souk Mubarakiya buzzed with excitement due to the large number of visitors who came to show their support for their teams well into the night.

A team from the daily visited the festivities, where the energy was palpable, with a remarkable turnout of visitors from the Gulf countries, Iraq, and Yemen. They marveled at the preparations for the Khaleeji Cup 26 and described the atmosphere in Mubarakiya as beyond their expectations.

They praised the people of Kuwait for their generosity, high moral values, and warmth.

Mohammed Al-Jabri from the UAE remarked on the unprecedented atmosphere at Mubarakiya due to the vibes of



A large crowd of visitors gathered at the heritage area of Al-Mubarakiya Market to cheer for their teams during the Khaleeji Cup 26 celebration.

the Khaleeji Cup 26, calling it "global" and praising the exceptional organization of the event.

He expressed admiration for Kuwait, saying, "Kuwait is truly beautiful, and so are its people."

Khalifa Al-Muhairi echoed the sentiment, highlighting the



Photos by Rezk Taufiq

kindness of the Kuwaiti people, especially for providing free tickets.

Marwan Al-Muhairi, also moved by the hospitality of Kuwaitis, said, "You have embarrassed us with your generosity, but this is not surprising coming from you."

Iran must

It has proven that Syria's sectarian diversity will never be used to undermine its unity. This diversity, which has historically been a source of strength for Syria, was valued long before the rise of the Baath Party. Changing the superficial features of some mosques does not alter the essence of faith or the unity of Arab Syria.

The tomb of Sayyida Zainab (may Allah be pleased with her), which is visited with reverence by both Sunni and Shiite Syrians, illustrates the deep belief of the Sunni Syrian people in her as a symbol of injustice, much like the suffering endured by the Syrian people under Baathist rule. Syrians shared in the victimization of Sayyida Zainab, as they too endured over six decades of dictatorship, governed by risk-averse leaders who came to power through coups or with the support of military tanks.

Thus, the claims of the corrupt Iranian regime, which sought to prevent Sayyida Zainab from being "captivated" twice, only served to fuel sectarian

conflict, which was always supported by both the Iranian regime and the Baath Party.

On the early morning of December 8, all false hopes were shattered, and the undeniable truth of Arab Syrian identity was revealed.

Today, signs of great change are beginning to emerge, particularly in Iraq's attempts to break free from the Persian hegemony over Baghdad, which was known as the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, the intellectual hub of the Islamic world for six centuries, and the center of the Islamic world itself. These efforts toward liberation began with the removal of the images of Iranian regime leaders and some of their agents from the streets of Baghdad.

While it is true that escaping this Persian invasion has come at a great cost in the form of bloodshed, destruction, hunger, and poverty, affecting Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, only Yemen's capital Sanaa remains under Iranian control today.

However, in the way of a domino effect, once the first stone falls, the others follow until the round is complete.

What is happening today in Yemen clearly shows that the Houthis face a grim fate at the hands of the Yemeni people.

What happened to the fascist Baathist regime in Syria will be repeated in Yemen. Sham (Syria) must serve as a lesson for Tehran to study carefully. Tehran is living on a "hot plate", with the people having suffered for 45 years due to a group of short-sighted individuals who sought to steer the region in a direction far removed from reality.

Yet, the great Iranian people remain alive, vibrant with youth, and capable of breaking free from the medieval regime they are trapped under. Starting with Syria, known since ancient times as the "pulsating heart of Arabism", the Arab giant has begun to stir. The Iranian regime of chaos must come to terms with the fact that the game is over.

Kuwait issues

In an interview with Kuwait TV, Al-Gharib warned about the risks posed by individuals seeking quick access to tickets, who may be susceptible to

electronic scams.

He stressed that tickets should only be obtained through recognized and official sources, adding that the Public Relations and Security Media General Department continues its awareness campaigns to educate the public about these fraudulent schemes.

In other news, the Ministry of Interior has introduced a new electronic service that enables Kuwaiti citizens to obtain driving licenses through the Sahel application. This innovative service simplifies the process of obtaining a driving license by utilizing the traffic services option available within the application.

New flag

The flag change represents a symbolic shift in diplomatic representation and reflects the evolving political landscape regarding Syria's international relations. Members of the Syrian community in Kuwait expressed joy at seeing the new flag flying over the embassy building.

One community member described the event as a moment of triumph, stating it marked the end of years of perceived injustice under the former regime.

The change occurred following diplomatic and community initiatives, highlighting the role of grassroots efforts in shaping international relations.

KISR shines

20 percent on community service, which includes factors such as the amount of information available on the institution's website, the extent to which partners benefit from it, the institution's social contributions, and its role in supporting the achievement of global sustainable development goals (SDGs).

The SCImago ranking, which is published annually, is conducted in collaboration with the Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Elsevier Foundation (a global leader in scientific and technical information through the Scopus

database), and SCImago Group that specializes in providing analytical data and methodologies for measuring scientific performance.

DGCA rolls

The service will be available 24/7 to ensure the smooth operation of the process.

Individuals holding security permits must attend in person to return their 2024 permits and collect the 2025 permits. The new permits will not be activated until these procedures are completed.

If the old permit is lost, the concerned individual must submit a loss certificate and pay the required fees at the permits center in Kuwait International Airport's Building 1. Permits for the supporting airport building (T4) can be collected from its own security permits center.

The 2024 security permits will expire on January 1, 2025. Therefore, all airport entities must adhere to the delivery and receipt schedule before this date.



Editor-in-Chief Ahmed Al-Jarallah engages in a discussion with the Yemeni Football Chief Ahmed Al-Essa with Khaled Al-Sudi, Head of the media committee at Al-Seyassah office. Also at the meeting Jamal Al-Fadhli, retired Major General Faisal Al-Jazzaf, and Saud Al-Farhan.

Yemeni delegation visits Arab Times

Editor-in-Chief Ahmed Al-Jarallah meets President of Yemen Football Association

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Editor-in-Chief of Arab Times and Al-Seyassah newspapers Ahmed Al-Jarallah received at his office the President of the Yemeni Football Association and businessman Ahmed Al-Essa, who was accompanied by his advisor and Head of the media committee Khaled Al-Sudi.

Also in attendance at the meeting were Jamal Al-Fadhli, retired Major General Faisal Al-Jazzaf, and Saud Al-Farhan. After welcoming the guests, Al-Jarallah engaged in a discussion with them about sports-

related matters and the role of the media in highlighting these issues.

The attendees reflected on memories of the Gulf championships and their impact in strengthening the fraternal and sports ties between the countries of the region.

Al-Essa affirmed the importance of Yemen's participation in the "Khaleeji Zain 26" Championship, and praised the excellent organization and warm reception provided to the participating delegations. He stressed the vital role of the media as a key partner in supporting sports events.



Photos by Rezk Taufiq
Ahmed Al-Jarallah with Ahmed Al-Essa.

Al-Huwaila 'advocates' for economic independence of productive families

Kuwait promotes women's empowerment at Bahrain forum

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24, (KUNA): Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwaila affirmed Tuesday that productive families are a cornerstone of economic and social development in the State of Kuwait.

She emphasized the state's commitment to enhancing women's roles and empowering them across all sectors to contribute to sustainable development.

This came in a speech delivered by Al-Huwaila during her participation in the high-level event on "Productive Families and Entrepreneurship," held in the Kingdom of Bahrain with the attendance of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs. The event aims to shed light on efforts to support productive families and empower them economically.

Speaking to KUNA, Al-Huwaila said that Kuwait has prioritized empowering women in productive families by developing programs and initiatives, enhance economic and social capabilities, and encourage women to join the private sector workforce.

She added that this approach reflects the leadership's belief in the critical role of women in building the national economy and contributing to achieving sustainable development goals.

Al-Huwaila noted that the Ministry of Social Affairs manages various projects supporting productive families, most notably the "Business Incubators and



KUNA photo
The Minister of Social Affairs during her participation in the event on Productive Families and Entrepreneurship.

Development Projects," which includes the "From My Own Hands" initiative and "Boutique 33." She emphasized that these initiatives aim to provide a comprehensive environment for nurturing and supporting small enterprises, particularly during their early critical stages.

The minister explained that the project includes organizing training sessions and specialized workshops for beneficiaries in fields such as tailoring, design, painting, cooking, and handicrafts.

It also offers technical support and advisory services to develop their projects. Furthermore, the Ministry has organized 15 marketing exhibitions

in recent years to promote the products of productive families locally and internationally.

She added that government efforts include facilitating procedures for establishing small businesses, providing affordable loans, and offering venues to display products through permanent and seasonal exhibitions at various locations, including ministry-affiliated cafes and open markets.

Additionally, initiatives to expand the presence of "Boutique 33" across Kuwait's governorates have been launched.

Al-Huwaila highlighted that joint efforts between the Ministry of Social Affairs, the private sector, and supporting entities have enabled 214 beneficiaries to transition from receiving social assistance to becoming entrepreneurs or joining public and private sector employment, enhancing their economic independence and raising their income levels.

She stressed that supporting productive families achieves multiple objectives, including boosting household income, creating job opportunities, reducing reliance on government jobs, strengthening social cohesion, preserving heritage and handicrafts, and promoting sustainable consumption and recycling.

In conclusion, Al-Huwaila expressed her gratitude to the Kingdom of Bahrain for its warm hospitality and excellent organization, commending the efforts of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs in enhancing Arab cooperation in the field of productive families and entrepreneurship.

She reiterated Kuwait's commitment to continuing its efforts to achieve greater social welfare and economic stability for the people of Arab countries.

Continued from Page 1



French centrist presidential election candidate Emmanuel Macron, left, waves at supporters as French centrist politician Francois Bayrou looks on during a meeting in Pau, southwestern France, on April 12, 2017. (AP)

New French government named after previous one collapsed in budget fight

PARIS, Dec 24, (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron's office announced a new government Monday, after the previous Cabinet collapsed in a historic vote prompted by fighting over the country's budget.

Newly named Prime Minister Francois Bayrou put together the government that includes members of the outgoing conservative-dominated team and new figures from centrist or left-leaning backgrounds.

Coming up with a 2025 budget will be the most urgent order

of business. The new government enters office after months of political deadlock and pressure from financial markets to reduce France's colossal debt.

No single party holds a majority in the National Assembly.

Bayrou's decades of political experience are seen as key in efforts to restore stability. Marine Le Pen's far-right party helped bring down the previous government, and Bayrou's Cabinet will seek to rely on moderate lawmakers from right and left to stay in power.

Defense bill signed despite objections to trans care ban

Biden vetoes effort to add federal judgeships

WASHINGTON, Dec 24, (AP) — President Joe Biden has vetoed a once-bipartisan effort to add 66 federal district judgeships, saying "hurried action" by the House left important questions unanswered about the life-tenured positions.

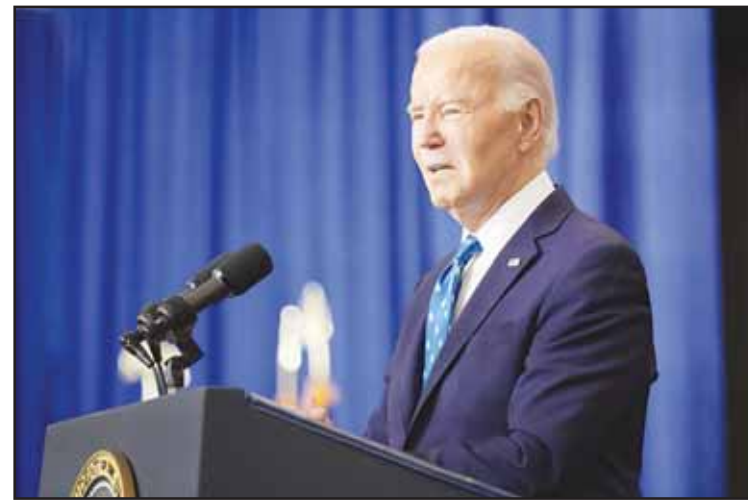
The legislation would have spread the establishment of the new trial court judgeships over more than a decade to give three presidential administrations and six Congresses the chance to appoint the new judges. The bipartisan effort was carefully designed so that lawmakers would not knowingly give an advantage to either political party in shaping the federal judiciary.

The Democratic-controlled Senate passed the measure unanimously in August. But the Republican-led House brought it to the floor only after Republican Donald Trump was reelected to a second term in November, adding the veneer of political gamesmanship to the process.

The White House had said at the time that Biden would veto the bill.

"The House of Representative's hurried action fails to resolve key questions in the legislation, especially regarding how the new judgeships are allocated, and neither the House of Representatives nor the Senate explored fully how the work of senior status judges and magistrate judges affects the need for new judgeships," the president said in a statement.

"The efficient and effective administration of justice requires that these questions about need and allocation be further studied and answered before



President Joe Biden speaks at the Department of Labor in Washington, on Dec. 16, 2024. (AP)

we create permanent judgeships for life-tenured judges," Biden said.

He said the bill would also have created new judgeships in states where senators had not filled existing judicial vacancies and that those efforts "suggest that concerns about judicial economy and caseload are not the true motivating force behind passage of this bill now."

"Therefore, I am vetoing this bill," Biden said, essentially dooming the legislation for the current Congress. Overturning Biden's veto would require a two-thirds majority in both the

House and Senate, and the House vote fell well short of that margin.

Organizations representing judges and attorneys had urged Congress to vote for the bill. They argued that the lack of new federal judgeships had contributed to profound delays in the resolution of cases and serious concerns about access to justice.

Sen. Todd Young, R-Ind., reacted swiftly, calling the veto a "misguided decision" and "another example of why Americans are counting down the days until President Biden leaves the White House." He alluded to a full par-

don that Biden recently granted his son Hunter on federal gun and tax charges.

"The President is more enthusiastic about using his office to provide relief to his family members who received due process than he is about giving relief to the millions of regular Americans who are waiting years for their due process," Young said. "Biden's legacy will be 'pardons for me, no justice for thee.'"

President Biden on Monday signed into law a defense bill that authorizes significant pay raises for junior enlisted service members, aims to counter China's growing power and boosts overall military spending to \$895 billion despite his objections to language stripping coverage of transgender medical treatments for children in military families.

Biden said his administration strongly opposes the provision because it targets a group based on gender identity and "interferes with parents' roles to determine the best care for their children." He said it also undermines the all-volunteer military's ability to recruit and retain talent.

"No service member should have to decide between their family's health care access and their call to serve our nation," the president said in a statement.

The Senate forwarded the bill to Biden after passing it last week by a vote of 85-14. In the House, a majority of Democrats voted against the bill after House Speaker Mike Johnson insisted on adding the provision to ban transgender medical care for children. The legislation easily passed by a vote of 281-140.



Romanian Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu, the leader of the Social Democratic party, center left, and members of his government team pose with Romanian President Klaus Iohannis, center right, after a swearing in ceremony at the Cotroceni Presidential palace in Bucharest, Romania, Monday, Dec. 23, 2024. (AP)

Move could end protracted political crisis

Romanian lawmakers narrowly approve new coalition

BUCHAREST, Romania, Dec 24, (AP) — Romanian lawmakers voted narrowly in favor of a new pro-European coalition government led by incumbent Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu.

The move could usher in an end to a protracted political crisis in the European Union country following the annulment of a presidential election by a top court. Parliament approved the new administration in a 240-143 vote in Romania's 466-seat legislature.

The new coalition is made up of the leftist Social Democratic Party, or PSD, the center-right National Liberal Party, PNL, the small ethnic Hungarian UDMR party and national minorities. It caps a month-long period of turmoil in which far-right nationalists made significant gains in a Dec. 1 parliamentary election, a week after a first-round presidential race saw the far-right outsider Calin Georgescu emerge as the front-runner.

"It will not be an easy mandate for the future government," Ciolacu, whose PSD party topped the polls in the

parliamentary election, said in a statement Monday.

"We are aware that we are in the midst of a deep political crisis," he said. "It is also a crisis of trust, and this coalition aims to regain the trust of citizens, the trust of the people."

Romania's 16 ministerial positions will be shared among the parties, which will hold a slim majority in the legislature. It's widely seen as a tactical partnership to shut out far-right nationalists whose voices found fertile ground amid high living costs and a sluggish economy.

Ciolacu, who came third in the first-round presidential ballot despite polls indicating he would win the most votes, has served as prime minister since June 2023.

After parliament's approval, President Klaus Iohannis swore in the new government and warned the new Cabinet that it's entering a "difficult new period" in which "for many Romanians, there are major concerns."

Romania was plunged into turmoil after Georges-

cu's surprise success in the presidential race, after allegations of electoral violations and Russian interference emerged. Days before the Dec. 8 runoff, the Constitutional Court made the unprecedented move to annul the presidential race.

"We go through complicated times, but I think we all learned from mistakes of the past," Ciolacu said. "I hope that together with my colleagues in the coalition, we'll find the best solutions to get past the challenges we have in front of us."

Ciolacu said that the new government would aim to quickly organize the rerun of the presidential election in which the new coalition has agreed to put forward an agreed common pro-European candidate.

Cristian Andrei, a political consultant based in Bucharest, said that the new government made up of the same political parties will likely embrace "soft populist" rhetoric such as economic patriotism, anti-austerity, and a peace solution in neighboring Ukraine to counter the rise of far-right populism.

Meloni defends hard-line approach

Italy pushes ahead with dormant migrant vetting centers in Albania

MILAN, Dec 24, (AP) — Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni's government vowed to open controversial migrant processing centers in Albania that have remained dormant after Italian courts refused to validate the transfer of the first two groups of migrants.

Government ministers "repeated the firm intention to continue to work ... on so-called 'innovative solutions' to the migration phenomenon," Meloni's office said in a statement. It gave no timeline.

The statement cited a court ruling last week by Italy's highest court that said Italian judges could not substitute for government policy on deciding which countries are safe for repatriation of migrants whose asylum requests are rejected.

The decision does allow lower courts to make such determinations on a case-by-case basis, short of setting overall policy.

Meloni told reporters in Finland over the weekend that the high court ruling "had substantially proved the Italian government was correct."

Italy has earmarked 650 million euros (\$675 million) to run the centers over five years. The centers opened in October ready to accept up to 3,000 male migrants a month picked up by the Italian coast guard in international waters.

But two groups of migrants who were brought to Albania by an Italian coast guard ship were instead routed back to Italy after courts refused to validate their transfer.

The Italian courts both asked the European Court of Justice to determine a list of safe countries for repa-



Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni attends a press conference during the North-South Summit in Inari, Finland, on Dec. 22, 2024. (AP)

triation. The timing of the European court decision was not clear, but was expected to take months.

The statement from Meloni's office said the plan to process migrants outside EU borders in Albania had received strong backing from other leaders on the sidelines of last week's EU summit in Brussels.

A hard-line approach to migration got another boost last week when Italian Vice Premier Matteo Salvini was acquitted of a charge of illegally detaining migrants whom he blocked from disembarking in Italy while he was interior minister in August 2019.

America

Mangione pleads not guilty: The man accused of fatally shooting the CEO of UnitedHealthcare pleaded not guilty on Monday to state murder and terror charges while his attorney complained that comments coming from New York's mayor would make it tough to receive a fair trial.

Luigi Mangione, 26, was shackled and seated in a Manhattan court when he leaned over to a microphone to enter his plea. The Manhattan district attorney charged him last week with multiple counts of murder, including murder as an act of terrorism.

Mangione's initial appearance in New York's state trial court was preempted by federal prosecutors bringing their own charges over the shooting. The federal charges could carry the possibility of the death penalty, while the maximum sentence for the state charges is life in prison without parole.

Prosecutors have said the two cases will proceed on parallel tracks, with the state charges expected to go to trial first.

One of Mangione's attorneys told a judge that the "warring jurisdictions" had turned Mangione into a "human ping-pong ball" and that New York City Mayor Eric Adams and other government officials had made him a political pawn, robbing him of his rights as a defendant and tainting the jury pool. (AP)

Mangione

had made him a political pawn, robbing him of his rights as a defendant and tainting the jury pool. (AP)

FAA probes holiday drone show: The Federal Aviation Administration said Monday that it has launched an investigation into why several drones collided and fell from the sky during a holiday show over the weekend in downtown Orlando, Florida, injuring a 7-year-old boy who required surgery.

The drones fell into a crowd of thousands of people watching the show at the city's Lake Eola Park Saturday night. The show was permitted through the FAA.

"Our thoughts are with the family and all those impacted by the outcome of this event," the city of Orlando said in a statement. "The city remains in contact with the vendor and FAA who will conduct a thorough investigation."

Adriana Edgerton told Orlando television station WESH that her son, Alexander, required surgery after being hit in the chest with a drone. "The blade cut his mouth, but there's an actual imprint of the drone on his chest," Edgerton said.

Sky Elements Drone Shows, the Fort Worth, Texas vendor that put on the show, didn't immediately respond to an emailed inquiry on Monday. On the company's website, it said, "Every step of the way, we put accuracy, execution, and compliance first." (AP)

Man faces murder charges: A man is facing murder and arson charges in New York City for allegedly setting a woman on fire inside a subway train and then watching her die after she was engulfed in flames, police said Monday.

The suspect, identified by police as Sebastian Zapeta, was taken into custody hours after the woman died on Sunday morning.

Zapeta, 33, is a Guatemalan citizen who entered the U.S. illegally after he had been previously removed in 2018, said Jeff Carter, a spokesman for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Surveillance video showed the suspect approach the woman, who was sitting motionless and may have been sleeping, on a stationary F train at the Coney Island-Stillwell Avenue subway station in Brooklyn and set her clothing on fire, police said. (AP)

Clinton hospitalized with fever but in good spirits

WASHINGTON, Dec 24, (AP) — Former President Bill Clinton was admitted Monday to MedStar Georgetown University Hospital in Washington after developing a fever.

The 78-year-old was hospitalized in the "afternoon for testing and observation," Angel Urena, Clinton's deputy chief of staff, said in a statement.

"He remains in good spirits and deeply appreciates the excellent care he is receiving," Urena said.

Clinton, a Democrat who served two terms as president from January 1993 until January 2001, ad-

mitted the Democratic National Convention in Chicago this summer, and campaigned ahead of November's election for the unsuccessful White House bid of Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris.

In the years since Clinton left the White House, he's faced some health scares.

In 2004, he underwent quadruple bypass surgery after experiencing prolonged chest pains and shortness of breath. Clinton returned to the hospital for surgery for a partially collapsed lung in 2005, and in 2010 he had a pair of stents implanted in a coronary artery.

Clinton responded by embracing a largely vegan diet that saw him lose weight and report improved health.

In 2021, the former president was hospitalized for six days in California while being treated for an infection that was unrelated to COVID-19, when the pandemic was still near its height.

An aide to the former president said then that Clinton had a urological infection that spread to his bloodstream, but was on the mend and never went into septic shock, a potentially life-threatening condition.

Europe

American gets 15 yrs: A Russian-born U.S. citizen already imprisoned in Russia on a bribery conviction has been handed a second 15-year jail term for espionage, Russian news agencies reported Tuesday.

A Moscow court brought espionage charges against Gene Spector in August 2023, although details surrounding the case were not made public.

Spector, formerly an executive at a medical equipment company in Russia, was previously sentenced to 3.5 years in prison in September 2022 for enabling bribes to an aide of former Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich. The aide, Anastasia Alekseyeva, was sentenced to 12 years in April for taking bribes of two expensive overseas vacation trips.

Dvorkovich was a deputy prime minister under Dmitry Medvedev in 2012-2018. He is currently head of the international chess federation FIDE. (AP)

Ethnic party banned: Kosovo's election authority on Monday barred the main ethnic Serb party from competing in the upcoming parliamentary election, justifying the move by pointing to its nationalist stance and close ties to Serbia.

The Central Election Commission declined to certify Kosovo's main ethnic Serb party, Srpska Lista, or Serb List.

Some commission's members mentioned how Srpska Lista leader Zlatan Elek has never referred to Kosovo as an independent republic, but instead as "Kosovo i Metohija," meaning Serbia's autonomous province of



The Choristers of St Paul's choir, including girls for first time in 900-year history, rehearse for the Christmas services in St Paul's Cathedral, in London, Monday, Dec. 23, 2024. (AP)

Kosovo, as Belgrade calls it.

The commission officials also said that the Serb party holds close ties with Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and other Serb leaders who also refuse to recognize Kosovo's independence.

There was no immediate reaction from Srpska Lista.

The move may further aggravate the already tense ties between Kosovo and Serbia, despite efforts by the international community to normalize them. (AP)

Safer schools urged: Hundreds walked in silence in Croatia's capital on Monday, seeking action after a pupil was killed and three other children were wounded in a knife attack at a

school in Zagreb.

Organized by teachers' unions, the march asked authorities to do more to ensure that schools in Croatia are safe for children. Similar events were held in other cities and towns.

"We need support from government institutions, school teams, media, civil society organizations and all the people who are involved," about 50 teachers' groups and other organizations said in a joint statement.

Croatia's ministry of education said it has held meetings of expert teams tasked with finding ways of improving school security. Minister Radovan Fuchs said measures could include locking school doors or entry control.

Officials said the suspected attacker was a 19-year-old former student of the primary school in Precko and still

lives in the neighborhood. The young man was cutting himself when police apprehended him.

School attacks are rare in Croatia and in the Balkans as a whole. In May 2023, a teenager in neighboring Serbia opened fire at a school in the capital, Belgrade, killing nine fellow students and a school guard. (AP)

Sanctions expanded: The Swiss Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education, and Research (EAER) announced on Monday an expansion of its sanctions targeting Russia and Belarus. The measures affect 52 ships, mainly part of Russia's shadow fleet.

In a statement issued from Bern, the ministry outlined the addition of 54 individuals and 30 Russian companies and organizations to the sanctions list, including military officials, senior executives in energy companies, and entities involved in export activities.

The ministry reported that the 30 newly sanctioned companies and organizations are Russian defense contractors and shipping companies that transport Russian crude oil and petroleum products.

The list also includes 32 additional entities that have been placed under stricter export controls in the commercial sector.

The ministry stated that the targeted ships are circumventing the price cap on Russian crude oil and petroleum products, transporting military goods for Russia or stolen grain from Ukraine.

According to the statement, the sanctions include a freeze on assets and a ban on providing funds, economic resources, or technical services. (KUNA)

Sri Lankan family shattered by disaster, reunited by determination

From mud to hope: 'Baby 81' recounts life 20 years after tsunami

KURUKKAL MADAM, Sri Lanka, Dec. 24, (AP): Pulled from the mud as an infant after the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, and reunited with his parents following an emotional court battle, the boy once known as "Baby 81" is now a 20-year-old dreaming of higher education.

Jayarasa Abilash's story symbolized that of the families torn apart by one of the worst natural calamities in modern history, but it also offered hope. More than 35,000 people in Sri Lanka were killed, with others missing.

The 2-month-old baby was washed away by the tsunami in eastern Sri Lanka and found some distance from home by rescuers. At the hospital, he was No. 81 on the admissions registry.

His father, Murugupillai Jayarasa, spent three days searching for his scattered family, with little left to his name in those early hours but a pair of shorts.

First he found his mother, then his wife. But their infant son was missing.

A nurse had taken the baby from the hospital, but returned him after hearing that his family was alive.

The ordeal, however, was far from over. Nine other families had submitted their names to the hospital, claiming "Baby 81" as their own, so the hospital administration refused to hand over the child to Jayarasa and his wife without proof.

The family went to the police. The matter went to court. The judge ordered a DNA test, a process that was still in its early stages in Sri Lanka.

But none of the nine other families claimed the baby legally, and no DNA testing was done on them, Jayarasa said.

"The hospital named the child 'Baby 81' and listed the names of nine people who claimed the child, omitting us," he said.

"There was a public call to all those who said the child was theirs to subject themselves for DNA testing, but none of them came forward," he recalled. Jayarasa said his family gave DNA samples and it was proven



Jenita Jayarasa, left, the mother claimant of the infant dubbed "Baby 81" holds the child and father claimant Murugupillai Jayarasa, center, shouts as a doctor, center, tries to prevent them from taking the infant, inside a ward at a hospital in Kalmunai, about 210 kilometers (131 miles) east of Colombo, Sri Lanka, Wednesday, Feb. 2, 2005. (AP)



Jayarasa Abilash, right, known as Baby 81 after he was swept away by the 2004 Indian ocean tsunami, shares a light moment with his father Murugupillai at his residence in Kurukkalmadam, Sri Lanka, Dec. 17, 2024. (AP)

the child was theirs. Soon, the family was reunited. Their story drew international media attention, and they even visited the

United States for an interview. Today, Abilash is sitting for his final high school exam. Solid and good-natured, he hopes to attend a



Jayarasa Abilash, popularly known as "Baby 81", naps in the arms of his mother Jenita, as his father, Murugupillai, helps make him comfortable during a photo opportunity in New York, Wednesday, March 2, 2005. (AP)



Jayarasa Abilash, known as Baby 81 after he was swept away by the 2004 Indian ocean tsunami goes through his photo album at his residence in Kurukkalmadam, Sri Lanka, Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2024. (AP)

university to study information technology. He said he grew up hearing about his story from his parents, while

classmates teased him by calling him "Baby 81" or "tsunami baby." He was embarrassed, and it worsened every time the anniversary of the tsu-

nami arrived.

"I used to think 'Here they have come' and run inside and hide myself," he said as journalists returned to hear his story again.

His father said the boy was so upset he wouldn't eat at times.

"I consoled him saying, 'Son, you are unique in being the only one to have such a name in this world,'" he said.

Later, as a teenager, Abilash read more about the events that tore him from his family and brought him back, and he lost his fear.

He knows the nickname will follow him for life. But that's all right.

"Now I only take it as my code word," he said, joking. "If you want to find me out, access that code word."

He continues to search online to read about himself.

His father said memories of those frantic, searching days 20 years ago remain fresh, even as others fade.

Over the years, the extensive publicity his family received has also affected them negatively, Jayarasa said.

His family was excluded from many of the tsunami relief and reconstruction programs because government officials assumed they had received money during their visit to the U.S.

The experience also led to jealousy, gossiping and ostracizing of the family in their neighborhood, forcing them to relocate.

The father wants his son and other family members to remain grateful for their survival, and he wants Abilash to become someone who can help others in need.

From time the boy was a toddler, his father collected small amounts of money from his work at a hairdressing shop. When Abilash turned 12, the family erected a small memorial to victims of the tsunami in their front yard. It shows four cupped hands.

The father explained: "A thought arose in my mind that since all those who have died have gone, leaving Abilash behind for us, why not a memorial site of our own to remember them every day."

Bangladesh requests India to hand over Sheikh Hasina

DHAKA, Dec. 24, (AP): Bangladesh has sent a formal request to India to extradite ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who fled to New Delhi in August amid the student-led protests that ended her 15 years in power, the country's foreign affairs adviser said Monday.

Md Touhid Hossain told reporters at his office in Dhaka that the country has sent a diplomatic note to India's Foreign Ministry. "We have informed India about our request to bring her back for the judicial process," Hossain said. He didn't give details.

India's Foreign Ministry said it had received Bangladesh's request but didn't immediately provide details.

Hasina's son, in a statement posted on his Facebook page, criticized the move hours after Monday's request by the interim government, questioning the process and credibility of a tribunal that is dealing with the charges against her.

"The judges and prosecutors appointed by unelected ... regime to conduct farcical trial process through International Crimes Tribunal makes it a political witch hunt that forsakes justice and marks another ongoing onslaught to prosecute (Hasina's) Awami League leadership," said Saheb Wazed, her son.

"The Kangaroo tribunal and subsequent request for (Hasina's) extradition comes while hundreds of leaders and activists are extrajudicially killed, framing of outrageous murder charges, illegal incarceration of thousands by law enforcement and violent attacks including looting, vandalism and arson are going on with impunity everyday fueled by denial of the regime," he said.

Hasina fled to India after being ousted in a mass uprising in July and August in which authorities say hundreds of people were killed and thousands more injured. She faces many court cases over the deaths, including some on charges of crimes against humanity.



In this Jan. 7, 2024 photo, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina checks her watch as she waits for the official opening time to cast her vote in Dhaka, Bangladesh. (AP)

Beijing slams US annual defense policy bill

China condemns Philippine missile strategy as reckless

BEIJING, Dec. 24, (Agencies): China said a plan by the Philippines to deploy midrange missiles would be a provocative move that stokes regional tensions.

The Philippines top army official told reporters in Manila earlier on Monday that the military plans to acquire a midrange system to defend the country's territory amid tensions with China in the South China Sea.

"Yes, there are plans, there are negotiations, because we see its feasibility and adaptability," Lt. Gen. Roy Galido said.

The U.S. deployed its Typhon midrange missile system in the northern Philippines in April and troops from both countries have been training jointly for the potential use of the heavy weaponry. They have agreed to keep the system in the Philippines indefinitely to boost deterrence.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said that deployment of a midrange missile by the Philippines would intensify geopolitical confrontation and an arms race.

Irresponsible

"It is an extremely irresponsible choice for the history and people of itself and the whole of Southeast Asia, as well as for the security of the region," she told a daily briefing.

China, which opposes U.S. military assistance to the Philippines, has been particularly alarmed by the deployment of the Typhon system, which can fire the Tomahawk Land Attack Missile. The Tomahawk can travel more than 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers), putting China within its range.

Under President Joe Biden, the U.S. has strengthened an arc of alliances in the Indo-Pacific to counter China, including in any confrontation over Taiwan.

The Philippines would not necessarily buy the Typhon system, Galido said.

The army is working not only with the United States but with other friendly countries on a long list of weapons platforms that it plans to acquire, he said.

The Philippines defense plan includes protecting its exclusive economic zone, which reaches 200 nautical miles (370 kilometers).

"It is paramount for the army to be able to project its force up to that extent, in coordination, of course, with the Philippine navy and the Philippine air force," Galido said.

Also:

BEIJING: China has lodged solemn representations with the United States over signing into law the Na-



Philippine military chief Gen. Romeo Brawner Jr. center, listens as an exhibitor explains the Wind Demon, a long range air to surface cruise missile, during the Asian Defense and Security Exhibition on Wednesday, Sept. 25, 2024, in Manila, Philippines. (AP)

tional Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2025, which contains negative China-related content, a foreign ministry spokesperson said on Tuesday.

Spokesperson Mao Ning made the remarks at a daily press briefing in response to a query that U.S. President Joe Biden signed the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2025 into law on Monday.

Mao stressed that the U.S. side has played up the "China threat" year after year, preached military support to Taiwan, abused state power to suppress China's scientific, technological and economic development, and restricted economic and trade exchanges as well as people-to-people exchanges between China and the United States.

The U.S. move has undermined China's sovereignty, security and development interests, and disrupted efforts from both sides to stabilize bilateral relations.

"China is strongly dissatisfied with and firmly opposed to this, and has lodged stern representations with the U.S. side," she said.

The spokesperson said that China urges the U.S. side to discard the Cold War mentality and ideological bias, view China's development and China-U.S. relations in an objective and rational way, earnestly abide by the one-China principle and the three China-U.S. joint communiqués.

She urged the United States to stop arming Taiwan, stop politicizing and weaponizing science, technology and economic and trade issues, stop seeking excuses for increasing military expenditure and maintaining hegemony, and refrain from implementing the negative China-related provisions of the above-mentioned NDAA.

China will take resolute and forceful measures to safeguard its sovereignty, security and development interests, Mao said.

Lat/Am

Mexico slams Trump threat:

On Monday, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum expressed support for Panama after U.S. President-elect Donald Trump threatened to retake control of the Panama Canal.

"The Panama Canal belongs to the Panamanians," said Sheinbaum.

Trump said on Sunday that the fees charged by Panama "are ridiculous" and he "will demand that the Panama Canal be returned to us." Furthermore, Trump said that once he reaches the White House, he will strike Mexican drug cartels as terrorist organizations.

Sheinbaum said Mexico would never accept foreign interference and was confident that an agreement on migration, trade and tariffs would be reached.

Trump has threatened Canada and Mexico with 25 percent tariffs on their products for failing to con-

trol migration into the United States. (Xinhua)

Brazil bridge mishap kills 3:

A bridge over the Tocantins River in northeastern Brazil collapsed, leaving at least three dead and 15 others missing, the civil defense of the state of Maranhao said on Monday.

According to the Federal Highway Police, three trucks, several motorcycles and at least two cars were on the bridge when it collapsed on Sunday afternoon. At the point where the bridge collapsed, the river reached a depth of 50 meters.

The authorities have confirmed the death of a 25-year-old woman and a 42-year-old man, while the identity of the third victim has not yet been determined.

The 533-meter-long bridge connected the cities of Estreito in Maranhao state with Aguiarnopolis in Tocantins state and was a part of the BR-226 federal highway.

Brazil's Minister of Transport Renan Filho declared an investment

of 100 million reais (about 16.2 million U.S. dollars) to reconstruct a bridge immediately and assured that the new bridge will be delivered in 2025. (Xinhua)

Drug lord walks free:

One of Colombia's legendary drug lords and a key operator of the Medellín cartel has been deported back to the South American country, after serving 25 years of a 30-year prison sentence in the United States.

A short while later, Fabio Ochoa was again a free man.

Ochoa arrived in Bogota on a deportation flight on Monday afternoon, wearing a modest grey sweatshirt and carrying his personal belongings in a plastic bag. After stepping out of the plane, Ochoa was met by immigration officials in bullet proof vests. There were no police on site to detain him.

Immigration officials took his fingerprints and confirmed through a database that Ochoa is not wanted by Colombian authorities. (AP)

Africa

Cyclone death toll 120:

The death toll from Cyclone Chido, an intense tropical cyclone that made landfall in northern Mozambique, has risen to 120, with 868 people injured and more than 680,000 affected, according to the latest figures released by Mozambique's national disaster relief agency on Monday.

Northern provinces of Mozambique, including Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa have suffered extensive damage from heavy downpour, storms, and flooding caused by Cyclone Chido, according to the National Institute for Disaster Risk Management and Reduction (INGD).

Over 150,000 homes have been destroyed or partially damaged, along with 250 schools, 89 public buildings, and 52 health facilities. Nearly 110,000 students have been impacted, the INGD update showed.

In response to the displacement, the government has set up two

emergency shelters, currently housing 1,349 people. (Xinhua)

272 days without blackouts:

South Africa has had no load-shedding, or rolling blackouts, for 272 days as of Dec. 23, the longest stretch of uninterrupted power supply in five years, Minister of Electricity and Energy Kgosietsso Ramogkopa said Monday.

More than 16 billion rand (about 870 million U.S. dollars) has been saved as a result, the minister told a media briefing in Pretoria, the administrative capital of South Africa.

"This is the longest stretch of uninterrupted power supply in five years. The energy availability factor (EAF) is now at 62.5 percent, which is an improvement from 55.4 percent last year," Ramogkopa said. The EAF is a percentage that measures how much maximum energy a power plant can supply to the electrical grid.

"We want to improve the EAF to reach 70 percent in 2025 so that we can support the economic growth

and bring confidence in the country's economy and investment. Eskom is now becoming more efficient," he said. Ramogkopa attributed the improvement to better leadership at Eskom, the national power utility. (Xinhua)

Call to push peace tasks:

The African Union (AU) and United Nations (UN) missions in South Sudan called on Monday for the parties in the transitional unity government to prioritize the implementation of pending peace tasks within the 2018 revitalized peace agreement in 2025, ahead of the 2026 elections.

The AU Mission in South Sudan, the UN Mission in South Sudan, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, an East African bloc, acknowledged the progress made by the government and parties to the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in 2024. (Xinhua)

UAE	DFMGI	Change	Closing pts	SAUDI	TASI	Change	Closing pts
↑		+0.48	5,080.36	↓	-0.29	-0.29	11,913.95
				↓	-0.84	-0.84	30,118.38
				↓	-0.32	-0.32	39,036.85
				↓	-1.27	-1.27	112,645.75

Business

Fostering knowledge in the investment banking realm

Markaz sponsors Business Valuation Masterclass for Kuwait University students with Professor Damodaran

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" proudly sponsored an intensive Business Valuation Masterclass, organized by Kuwait University's Financial Trading Center, as part of the College of Business Administration, and conducted by Professor Aswath Damodaran from New York University (NYU), Stern School of Business. This sponsorship highlights Markaz's commitment to fostering knowledge, financial literacy and excellence in the financial sector, and the investment banking realm.

As a prominent academic in corporate finance and business valuation, Professor Damodaran has been the recipient of multiple awards and fellowships, including the David Margolis Teaching Excellence Fellowship, and the Richard L. Rosenthal Award for Innovation in Investment Management and Corporate Finance.

The comprehensive course provided a unique opportunity for participants to expand their knowledge in the field of business valuation. Under the guidance of Dr. Sulaiman AlBader, Assistant Professor of Investments and Finance at Kuwait University, and the recipient of the Excellence-in-Teaching Award from the University of Illinois in 2010 exceptional



Participants pose for a group photo.

students were selected to join this highly insightful training. The course covered key valuation principles and advanced techniques including discounted cash flow models, valuation best practices, estimation vs. economic uncertainty,

and analyzing and comparing complex scenarios. Commenting on Markaz's role in sponsoring this course, Mr. Ahmad F. AlFalah, Managing Director of Investment Banking at Markaz, said: "We are proud to have supported the

efforts of the Financial Trading Center, to give students an opportunity to learn and thrive in evaluating investments. We would like to highlight their role in bringing such initiatives to Kuwait and offering programs that advance the students'

knowledge, emphasizing the importance of Investment Banking and benefiting from Professor Damodaran's global experience. We value educational programs that aim to foster knowledge and build human capacity in Kuwait, as that is one

of our key pillars of our Corporate Social Responsibility strategy."

As part of the sponsorship, Markaz invited the participating students to present their learnings, and showcase their ability to apply the learned principles in real-world scenarios and enhanced skills. The session was attended by Mr. Diraar Y. Alghanim, Chairman, Mr. Ali H. Khalil, CEO, Mr. Abdullatif Al-Nusif, Managing Director of Wealth Management and Business Development and Mr. Ahmed F. AlFalah, Managing Director of Investment Banking, at Markaz. Following the presentation, Markaz awarded the students with certificates, recognizing their dedication and passion in completing this impressive training program.

Markaz's sponsorship stems from its efforts to support the building of human capacity, which is one key pillar of the company's corporate social responsibility pillar. In line with this, Markaz often sponsors educational events and programs. This sponsorship is one of Markaz's many initiatives to support educational and professional events and programs in the financial industry, that aim to teach Kuwait's youth valuable skills, making them an asset to Kuwait's future and the needs of the Market.

Oil prices rise as US inflation slows, but supply concerns limit dividends

Brent crude futures rose by 37 cents

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Oil prices saw a modest increase on Tuesday following US data showing a larger-than-expected slowdown in inflation, which raised hopes for further monetary easing. However, expectations of higher supply next year capped the gains, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The Brent crude futures rose by

37 cents, or 0.5 percent, reaching \$73.31 per barrel and the West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures increased by 40 cents, or 0.6 percent, to \$69.86 per barrel.

Tony Sycamore, a market analyst at IG, noted that "risk assets, including US stock futures and crude oil, started the week on a firmer footing."

The positive sentiment was fueled by data showing inflation easing, which helped alleviate concerns following the US Federal Reserve's recent interest rate cut. Sycamore also pointed to the passage of US Senate

legislation to end the short government shutdown over the weekend as a contributing factor.

Despite the recent uptick in prices, benchmark crude oil prices had dropped over 2 percent last week, driven by concerns about global economic growth and oil demand after the Federal Reserve signaled caution regarding further monetary easing.

Moreover, research from Sinopec, Asia's largest oil refiner, projected that China's oil consumption will peak in 2027, putting further pressure on prices.

On the supply side, reports that the Druzhba pipeline, which transports oil from Russia and Kazakhstan to several European countries, had resumed operations after a brief shutdown due to technical issues, helped ease concerns about supply disruptions. Prior to the shutdown, the pipeline was transporting 300,000 barrels per day.

Lastly, data from Baker Hughes showed that the number of active US oil rigs rose by one to 483 last week, the highest level since September, signaling potential increases in domestic production.

Scammers are becoming more advanced

Gulf Bank issues online safety guidelines to prevent fraud in support of 'Diraya' campaign

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: As part of its continued support for the Central Bank of Kuwait's "Diraya" campaign, Gulf Bank has cautioned against blindly trusting internet search engines. The Bank urges individuals to exercise vigilance when searching online and to confirm that the website they are accessing is the official platform of the intended organization before making payments or sharing personal and banking details.

Gulf Bank emphasized the dangers of depending solely on search engine results, which can sometimes direct users to fraudulent websites.

The Bank further highlighted that scammers are becoming more advanced, expertly replicating the design and branding of reputable institutions to mislead users. These



Let's be aware campaign logo

fraudulent websites expose users to significant risks, including online scams and the theft of sensitive banking details.

To help protect users, Gulf Bank provided the following recommendations:

1. Make sure the URL matches the official website and includes "HTTPS" along with a padlock icon for added security.
2. Verify search results by comparing them with the official website to ensure authenticity.
3. Avoid clicking on links unless certain of their legitimacy.
4. Avoid linking your email to one-time password (OTP) codes.
5. Activate two-factor authentication to enhance the security of your devices and prevent unauthorized access.
6. Pay government fees through the "Sahel" app or the official website of the relevant authority.
7. Verify the credibility of platforms before making payments on shopping or service websites.
8. Do not respond to requests for

civil ID verification from unknown sources.

9. Refrain from responding to SMS or emails that request payments or additional information for deliveries or civil IDs.

The "Diraya" campaign, launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait in partnership with the Kuwait Banking Association, seeks to educate bank customers about essential banking services and empower them with the knowledge to carry out secure transactions.

The campaign also promotes financial inclusion, cybersecurity, and awareness of customer rights and responsibilities, while emphasizing the advantages of digital financial transactions and providing guidance on how to minimize related risks.

Cryptocurrency market experiences mixed performance

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The cryptocurrency market saw varying prices today as the market correction continued. Bitcoin (BTC), the largest cryptocurrency by market capitalization, recorded a decline, marking its first weekly loss since Donald Trump's victory in the 2020 US Presidential Election, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Bitcoin settled at \$95,113.45, but is down more than 7 percent over the past seven days, reflecting its biggest

weekly loss since September. Meanwhile, Ethereum (ETH), the second-largest cryptocurrency, rose by 0.96 percent to \$3,295.85. Ripple (XRP) dropped 1.11 percent, reaching \$2.1793, while Dogecoin (DOGE) fell slightly by 0.16 percent, closing at 31.25 cents.

The crypto market underwent a correction last week after the Federal Reserve policymakers reduced their expectations for monetary easing in 2025, which caused Bitcoin to

fall below the \$100,000 mark.

This followed a period of positive momentum, particularly after Trump's re-election in 2024, which was seen as beneficial for the sector.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump has announced on Truth Social that he has selected Bo Hines, a former college football player, to serve as the executive director of the President's Council of Advisors on Digital Assets.

Hines, who previously ran for Congress as a Republican, will be

working alongside David Sachs, who has been appointed as the newly designated "AI and Crypto Czar".

Sachs is expected to help implement strategies aimed at fostering innovation in the cryptocurrency and digital asset sectors.

In summary, while Bitcoin faces a correction, Ethereum shows some resilience and broader developments in the political and regulatory landscape continue to shape the future of cryptocurrencies.

Asian stocks mostly advance in quiet Christmas Eve trading

HONG KONG, Dec 24, (AP): Asian markets were mostly higher on Tuesday, with Chinese markets logging gains of more than 1% after the Chinese finance minister promised a more pro-active approach to government spending in the coming year.

U.S. futures were little changed in quiet Christmas Eve trading and oil prices rose.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 slipped 0.3% to 39,036.85.

Honda's shares surged more than 12.2% as the Japanese automaker announced an up to 1.1 trillion yen (\$7 billion)

share buyback after it announced Monday that it was seeking a merger with its larger but troubled rival Nissan.

The two companies said they had signed a memorandum of understanding on Monday and that smaller Nissan alliance member Mitsubishi Motors Corp. also had agreed to join the talks on integrating their businesses.

Nissan's shares rose 6%. The Hang Seng in Hong Kong added 1.1% to 20,098.29 and the Shanghai Composite index was up 1.3% at 3,393.53.

Chinese Finance Minister Lan Fo'an told a financial work conference

that Beijing will increase the fiscal deficit in 2025 and step up spending, issuing more government bonds and increasing transfers to local governments to help ensure they can deliver guarantees to the public for housing, heating and food, according to the ministry's website.

The comments were the latest by top leaders aimed at assuaging concern over the slowing growth of the world's second-largest economy.

South Korea's Kospi lost 0.1% to 2,440.52 as a report said consumer sentiment dropped sharply in December

after President Yoon Suk Yeol declared martial law and then was impeached by lawmakers.

Elsewhere in Asia, Australia's S&P/ASX 200 advanced 0.2% to 8,220.90.

Taiwan's TaieX gained 0.1%, with shares in Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co., the world's biggest computer chip maker, hitting a record high.

On Monday, the S&P 500 ended 0.7% higher at 5,974.07. The Dow Jones Industrial Average eked out a 0.2% gain to 42,906.95. The tech-heavy Nasdaq composite rose 1% to 19,764.89.

Al-Fulaij stresses historical ties

NBK celebrates KOC's 90th anniversary



Mr. Salah Al-Fulaij and Mr. Ahmed Al-Eidan



NBK delegation with KOC officials.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: A delegation from National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), headed by Mr. Salah Al-Fulaij, Chief Executive Officer of NBK - Kuwait, visited the headquarters of Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) to extend congratulations on the company's milestone 90th anniversary.

On this occasion, Mr. Al-Fulaij presented a commemorative souvenir symbolizing the deep-rooted historical ties between the Bank and KOC—a document marking the opening of the company's first account with National Bank of Kuwait KOC opened a current account with NBK shortly after the bank's inauguration, making it one of the first 500 accounts in NBK's history, opened within just two months of the bank commencing operations.

Commenting on the occasion, Al-Fulaij stated: "We are honored to be here today to celebrate the 90th anniversary of this esteemed and pioneering institution in the field of oil and gas exploration, a leader not only in Kuwait but across the entire region."

Al-Fulaij highlighted the enduring partnership between NBK and KOC, emphasizing that it dates back to the earliest days of the bank's founding and the commencement of its operations over 70 years ago. He noted that the opening of KOC's first current account at NBK marked the beginning of a longstanding relationship, built over decades, between two of the most prominent and pioneering economic entities in Kuwait and the GCC.

He underscored NBK's deep-rooted and exceptional relationship with the oil sector, highlighting the Bank's active role in developing the skills and potential of young professionals within the sector, reinforcing its commitment to supporting the growth and sustainability of this vital industry.

"Throughout the years, NBK has been instrumental in financing the oil sector, spearheading numerous significant deals for major projects. This has firmly established the Bank as the leading partner for sector companies in driving their expansion initiatives.

With a dedicated and highly specialized team focused on the oil industry, NBK provides efficient and timely financing solutions," Al-Fulaij added. Furthermore, he highlighted that the bank's commitment to actively participating in financing oil sector projects, including those of KOC, reflects its confidence in the robust financial position of KOC and its subsidiaries. He further emphasized the exceptional management expertise within KOC,



The souvenir documents the opening of the first KOC account at the National Bank of Kuwait.

Al-Fulaij: Our enduring partnership with KOC dates back to the earliest days of NBK's inception and has only grown stronger over the years.

Al-Eidan: NBK stands as a trailblazer in delivering exceptional services and tailored financing solutions to KOC.

which is well-equipped to execute its growth plans in alignment with the 2040 strategy.

In the meantime, Ahmed Al-Eidan, CEO of Kuwait Oil Company, expressed pride in the decades-long historical relationship with NBK, commending the Bank's financing services for their positive impact on the company's growth journey.

Al-Eidan highlighted NBK's pivotal role as a key partner to KOC in advancing the sustainability agenda, a priority area that the company holds in high regard.

He commended NBK's leadership in delivering top-tier services and innovative financing solutions, underscoring the longstanding and robust collaboration between the bank and the company—a partnership rooted in decades of shared success and mutual commitment.

KOC was officially launched on December 23, 1934, under the name Kuwait Oil Company Limited. This establishment resulted from a partnership between two international companies: "Anglo-Iranian Oil Company", now known as British Petroleum (BP), and "American Gulf Oil Company," which is today recognized as Chevron. In that year, the company was granted the concession to explore for oil in Kuwait, marking the beginning of the country's oil industry.

Held in Madrid in collaboration with IE Business School

KFH celebrates graduates of Building Leadership Excellence program



Abdulla Abu Alhous with the graduates in a group photo.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) announced the successful conclusion of the Building Leadership Excellence program, a transformative leadership initiative in partnership with IE Business School, Headspring, and the Financial Times.

Group Chief Human Resources and Transformation Officer, Zeyad AlOmar

Group Chief Human Resources and Transformation Officer at KFH, Zeyad Abdullah AlOmar, highlighted the importance of the initiative and KFH's commitment to leadership development, indicating that the program represents a pivotal step in KFH's strategy to invest in its talent and cultivate leaders who will contribute towards achieving further leadership and excellence for KFH.

He said: "At KFH, we believe that investing in our employees is key to sustaining our growth and achieving our strategic ambitions. The Building Leadership Excellence program is a cornerstone of our efforts to equip

high-potential leaders with the skills and confidence needed to navigate an ever-changing business environment. We are immensely proud of this graduating cohort and look forward to the impact they will make within their teams and the bank."

Alomar indicated that the Building Leadership Excellence Program has been tailored based on the latest trends in the banking industry and leadership programs, capitalizing on numerous extensive learning sessions that keep pace with KFH Group as a leading banking group. It is a flagship program designed to equip KFH Leaders with the tools and latest thinking to enhance their effectiveness as Leaders. The program consists of 3 modules, Leading Self, Leading Team, and Leading Business. Also, it embodies various traits such as interdependence, resilience and inclusiveness, enabling participants to collaborate and concurrently address challenges by working together. It is worth noting that all KFH Group

leaders went through an intricate selection process to ensure the KFH talent pipeline is further supported with this new cohort.

Alomar extended gratitude to IE Business School, Headspring, and the Financial Times for their unwavering support in shaping this transformative

initiative.

KFH Group Chief Operations Officer, Abdulla Abu Alhous

Speaking at the graduation ceremony, KFH Group Chief Operations Officer, Abdulla Abu Alhous, lauded the program's participants, indicating that it is a significant milestone in their journey towards leadership and excellence. "The advanced knowledge, insightful discussions, and hands-on experience you gained have upskilled you to embrace challenges, adapt to evolving environments, and lead with integrity and vision. As future leaders, KFH will rely on you to help us achieve our aspiration of becoming one of the world's 100 largest banks," Abu Alhous added.

Vice President, Corporate Partnerships – MEA, Bassém Banna

Meanwhile, Bassém Banna, Vice President, Corporate Partnerships – MEA said: "We are delighted to welcome KFH's high-potential leaders to the IE campus in Madrid as they celebrate the successful completion

of the 2024 Building Leadership Excellence flagship program. Over the past four months, participants have embarked on a transformative journey, engaging in a curriculum tailored to their roles and designed to strengthen essential leadership competencies."

He added that through immersive learning experiences and customized leadership modules, participants engaged with cutting-edge academic insights from top faculty and tackled real-world challenges directly relevant to their environments.

"In its third consecutive year, this bespoke programme exemplifies the strong and expanding partnership with KFH, a collaboration we are deeply proud of. Together, we remain committed to empowering the next generation of leaders with the advanced skills and strategic vision necessary to drive sustainable growth and innovation for KFH in an ever-evolving business landscape," He concluded.



Zeyad Abdullah AlOmar

Mideast economies hit by regional conflicts in 2024, cooperation with China gains momentum

Oil-producing nations in the Gulf sustain steady growth

ISTANBUL, Dec 24, (Xinhua): Amid the chaos of escalating conflicts in the Middle East in 2024, a complex economic landscape has emerged: While the warring nations grapple with crippling economic setbacks, oil-producing nations in the Gulf sustain steady growth, driven by rising oil prices and strategic economic transformation.

Most countries in the Middle East now recognize the importance of pursuing economic diversification and common development with the broader group of developing countries. In this process, deepening cooperation with China has emerged as a broad regional consensus. This year, cooperation between China and Middle Eastern countries has continued to progress steadily.

Heavy Economic Toll On Warring Nations

The conflicts in the Middle East have inflicted heavy human casual-

ties and a significant economic toll on those countries directly involved.

The Palestinian territories are nearing economic collapse, with their largest economic contraction on record. Gaza's economy shrank by 86 percent in the first half of 2024, while the West Bank saw a 23-percent decline in economic activity over the same period amid challenges including a deep fiscal crisis, strained labor market, income disparity, and weakened demand, according to a World Bank Economic Monitoring Report published in December under the title of "Impacts of the Conflict in the Middle East on the Palestinian Economy." The political upheaval in Syria is expected to have far-reaching consequences, further exacerbating the country's already deteriorating economy. Though the Syrian interim government has announced its determination to initiate economic reforms, the broader economic outlook remains uncertain.

In Lebanon, long-term Israeli attacks, despite a recent ceasefire, have destroyed infrastructure, weakened public services, and hindered economic progress in the country.

Fighting simultaneously on multiple fronts, Israel has also faced significant economic repercussions. Israel's central bank revised downward its growth forecast for 2024 to 0.5 percent, as

the country is grappling with substantial economic challenges, including a hard-hit business sector, a decline in foreign investments, and a reduced appetite for capital from international investors.

Meanwhile, neighboring Jordan has been affected by declines in tourism receipts, according to another World Bank report published in mid-October.

Ramona Mubarak, head of Risk Management for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) at Fitch Solutions, said that the Suez Canal, a major source of foreign currency for Egypt, used to generate around 750 million U.S. dollars per month, but its revenues significantly decreased this year, averaging 300 million dollars per month.

Türkiye, sharing a long border with Syria, faces significant economic challenges as well, including inflation and sharp currency depreciation. Additionally, the country is under pressure from hosting millions of refugees, deteriorating trade relations with Israel -- its key regional trading partner -- and managing the broader fallout from ongoing regional conflicts.

In October, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicted that Middle Eastern economies could face extended recovery periods, with per capita GDP declining by 10 percent even 10

years after the conflict.

Economic Stability For Peaceful Countries

Amid recurring armed conflicts, some countries have managed to maintain economic stability and growth through strategic diversification and reforms.

The mid-October World Bank report forecasted modest growth for the MENA region, with the GDP growth rate rising from 1.8 percent in 2023 to 2.2 percent in 2024. This increase is driven by Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, where growth is projected to rise from 0.5 percent in 2023 to 1.9 percent in 2024.

Oil and gas revenues remain crucial for GCC countries, with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, and Qatar continuing to capitalize on their vast energy reserves.

In addition, these countries seek to unlock more promising sectors in addition to traditional pillar industries.

The UAE has invested heavily in sectors such as tourism, real estate, finance, and technology.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 initiative focuses on transforming the country's economy by expanding non-oil sectors like entertainment, tourism, and non-oil exports, opening new avenues for foreign investment.

The regional geopolitical conflicts

have had an indirect yet limited impact on the GCC countries, IMF Director for the Middle East and Central Asia Jihad Azour said in an interview in late October.

Among GCC economies, non-oil sector growth is projected to reach 3.7 and 4 percent for 2024 and 2025, respectively, partly supported by ongoing economic diversification efforts, he said.

In the meantime, Egypt, also not directly engaged in conflicts, is showing signs of recovery despite facing significant challenges, such as high inflation. A report published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development on Dec. 4 forecasted Egypt's economic growth to reach 3.7 percent in the current fiscal year 2024-2025, driven by receding inflationary pressures, recovering domestic demand, emerging investment projects, and growing gas and oil exports. Growth is expected to strengthen further in the next two fiscal years, with forecasts of 5.0 and 5.2 percent, respectively.

Türkiye, mired in economic woes rather than conflicts, has implemented a series of monetary and fiscal policies, including interest rate adjustments, and other efforts to stabilize local currency and tame high inflation. The annual inflation rate eased to 47.09 percent in November, marking its lowest

point since June 2023. Additionally, the Turkish government has implemented measures to control rising food and energy prices while focusing on boosting domestic production and reducing import dependency to alleviate inflationary pressures.

Better Economic Development Via Cooperation With China

Over the past year, cooperation with China has brought vitality and momentum to many Middle Eastern economies.

In an interview with Xinhua in September, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Investment Khalid Al-Falih said trade between China and Saudi Arabia continues to grow rapidly, with trade volume surpassing 100 billion dollars in 2023. This upward trend has extended into the first half of 2024, he added.

Around 750 Chinese joint ventures or companies currently operate in Saudi Arabia, contributing to major construction projects, including the Neom megaproject, according to Al-Falih.

"China is leading the whole world in the green industry and renewable energy. There are a lot of technologies -- cars, batteries, and robotics -- that the world is trying to follow," Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan told Xinhua in an exclusive interview at the 8th Future Investment Initiative conference held in Riyadh in October.

Murad Yousuf Behbehani Group introduces APM Monaco products for the first time in Kuwait at its showrooms



Photos from the event

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: In December 2024, Murad Yousuf Behbehani Group announced the availability of APM Monaco products, the glob-

ally renowned luxury jewelry brand celebrated for its contemporary and elegant style, at its exclusive showroom in the prestigious Avenues

Mall in Kuwait.

Murad Yousuf Behbehani Group offers a new destination for modern jewelry enthusiasts at The

Avenues Mall, catering to customers seeking the latest trends in contemporary fashion through the exquisite offerings of APM Monaco.



Some of the photos from MVCSK's annual Christmas carols concert.

Festive spirits shine bright at MVCSK's 'Glorious Light' event

Men's Voice ushers in Christmas 2024 with music concert

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Men's Voice and Choral Society Kuwait (MVCSK) ushered in the festive season with their 24th annual Christmas Carols event on Dec 5. Held at the National Evangelical Church of Kuwait (NECK), the evening's theme 'Glorious Light' was filled with the joy and exuberance that Christmas brings.

The event commenced with an opening prayer by Rev. Fr. Geevarghese John, followed by the choral group's theme song 'Abide with Me,' invoking divine bless-



One of the officials delivers a speech at the MVCSK event.

ings. Ninan Joseph, President of MVCSK, delivered the welcome message.

The choir captivated the audience with a repertoire of timeless hymns, anthems, and songs. The fifty five-member senior choir, led by Ajith Babu and assistant choir master Rejo Abraham Mathew, filled the atmosphere with heavenly melodies. Highlights included the Malayalam classic 'Yahoodiyella' and a set of delightful acapellas.

Fr. Joseph Valiyaveetil from Holy Family Co-Cathedral

Church delivered the Christmas sermon, emphasizing the significance of songs in Christian worship and liturgy. The junior choir, under the direction of George Varughese, mesmerized the audience, showcasing the promise of the next generation.

The evening's compere, Ms. Juliann Meriah George, added a personal touch with her testimony of being part of the choir in her youth. As MVCSK celebrates its 25th year, a commemorative logo was unveiled by Thomas John, Patron and founding member of MVCSK,

signaling a series of major events planned for the milestone year.

Shijo Thomas, Secretary of KTMCC, extended his felicitations on behalf of KTMCC, and MVCSK Joint Secretary, Philji Jacob, delivered the vote of thanks. The evening concluded with a closing prayer and benediction by Rev. C.M. Eapen from St. Peter's CSI Church, and the timeless anthem 'Silent Night.'

The MVCSK and its dedicated followers eagerly anticipate the landmark 25th year, promising a year filled with music and cel-

ebration.

The organizers of this concert, left no stone unturned to ensure a memorable and heartwarming evening for everyone - Akash John Thomas, Shibu Simon, Thomas Thomas along with the office bearers President - Ninan Joseph, Secretary - Mathew Varughese and Joint Secretary - Philji Jacob. Kudos to the Committee Members, Organizers, Choir Masters and Members of Men's Voice and Choral Society on presenting an enthralling and heartwarming Christmas Concert.



A group photo of the award winners with officials

70,000 Indian schools students compete

Thanima Kuwait honors top students with APJ Abdul Kalam Pearl of the School Awards

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Beneath the banner of Thanima Kuwait, the APJ Abdul Kalam Pearl of the School Awards for the year 2024 were presented to students from 26 Indian schools in Kuwait who have excelled in both academic and extracurricular fields. Neha Winner received the Bini Antony Memorial Award, presented to the student achieving the highest marks in the 7th grade at United Indian School.

The chief guest, Joel Jacob, Executive Admin Manager of the United Group of Schools, inaugurated the event, and the keynote address was given by Dr. Dheeraj Bharadwaj, CEO of City Group Co KSCP.

Fahad S. Al Muqayyem, a Kuwaiti student from Al Amal Indian School, is the first local student chosen as a Pearl in the history of this award. The distinguished guests in attendance awarded certificates and mementos to the winners who all got selected from more than 70,000 students from various Indian Schools.

Khalida (Integrated Indian School), Anfal Bernadette (Indian Public School), Neora Laraina D'Souza (IEAS-Don Bosco Kuwait), Joachim Thomas (Learners Academy), Anamika Karthik (ICSK - Kaitan), Abida Rafiq (ICSK - Senior), Mathew George (United Indian School), Evin Binu Varughese (ICSK - Amman), Sadia Mesbah (Jabriya Indian School), Farah Awad (Global Indian International), Poojita Balasubramanian (GIS), Bhama Sameer (New Indian School), Alyssa Susan Joseph (Indian School of Excellence), Nivedita Prashant (United International), Manya Bhansali (ICSK Junior), Aarush Sridhara Kidiyoor (SIMS), Eric Paul Mathew (Indian International), Nazni Naushad (Kuwait



Students honored with APJ Abdul Kalam Pearl of the School Awards for the year 2024.

Indian School), Melanie D'Costa (Carmel), Arfa Ala Ayub Basha (Aspire), Nakshatra Neeraj Binu (Indian Educational), Samant Dixit (DPS), Huzaiifa Areeb Bawja (Smart Indian School), Fatema (Indian Central School), Mohammed Zayed Asif (New Gulf Indian School), and Fahad S. Al-Maktoum (Al Amal Indian School) were rewarded with certificates and mementoes.

Members of Children's Thanima, Seraphine Freddy, Amaya Ann Jogi, Angeline Rose Savio, Diya Sangeeth, and Malavika Vijesh volunteered to or-

ganize the award ceremony.

Mathew Varughese (CEO - Bahrain Exchange), Mustafa Hamza (Chairman & CEO Metro Medical Group), K.S. Varughese (MD- GAT), Muhammad Ali (Operation Manager - Mango Hypermarket), Rana Varughese (Thanima Treasurer), Jinu K. Abraham (Thanima Office Secretary), Suresh Karthik (Karate Athlete), Shivani Chauhan (Indian International Volleyball Player), Babuji Bathery (Program Convener), Dilip DK (Onathanima Convener), and Jojimon (Thanima General Convener) were present.

Campaign to start on Dec 26

IMA Kuwait announces Holy Quran campaign

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Indian Muslim Association (IMA) Kuwait is pleased to announce the launch of its month-long Holy Quran Campaign under the Central Theme - 'The Character of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the Holy Quran.'

The campaign will commence on December 26, 2024, and continue until January 23, 2025, aims to foster a deeper connection with Holy Quran among Muslims across Kuwait.

The Inaugural Ceremony will take place at Unit level on 26th December 2024, with programs occurring in various parts of Kuwait. The Campaign will culminate with a grand concluding event on 23rd January 2025 at a central venue.

Campaign objectives:
The month-long initiative has been designed to achieve the following objectives:

- To connect Muslims with the Quran and encourage them to read it.
- To promote correct recitation of

the Quran.

- To emphasize understanding the Quran.

- To instill a desire to act upon Quranic teachings.

- To spread Quranic teachings throughout the community.

Target Audience

The campaign aims to reach approximately 10,000 people across various segments of society, including:

- General Muslims
- Students and youth
- Women, children, and intellectuals

Business professionals

Engagement methods

A variety of channels and activities will be used to maximize participation and engagement:

- Weekly Dars-e-Quran (Quran study sessions)
- Friday Sermons
- Family & Group Meetings
- Flyer and Folder Distribution

Quranic Quiz Competitions

- Media Platforms: Radio Kuwait, Kuwait TV, YouTube, WhatsApp, and other social media networks.

Indian Muslim Association (IMA) Kuwait is a well-established organization dedicated to promoting Islamic values, fostering community engagement, and encouraging knowledge of the Quran among Muslims. Through its initiatives, IMA strives to inspire individuals to embody the teachings of the Quran in their daily lives.

IMA Kuwait cordially invites all members of the community to actively participate in this campaign, benefit from its programs, and enhance their understanding and connection with the Holy Quran.

For further details or inquiries, please contact:

Indian Muslim Association (IMA) Kuwait

Email: pr@imakuwait.org
Phone: 9969 7642 / 6000 1424
Website: www.imakuwait.org

Top account with most winners, highest returns

KIB announces Al Dirwaza weekly winners

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced the winners of the weekly draw held under the Al Dirwaza account's 2024 campaign, which is distinguished by the highest number of winners throughout the year. The fourth weekly draw, based on customers' November deposits, recently took place in the presence of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, as well as representatives from the Bank. The KD 1,000 prize was awarded Dalal Jamel Mahmoud Abu Tahoun, Jameelah Abdullah Meshaleh Almutairi, Jean Alyas Elmouallem, Mohammad Jassim Ibrahim Alfawaz, Mohammed Husain Hatim Ali, whilst the KD 500 prize was awarded to Ahmed Magdy Ebrahim Ramadan, Izdehar Mahmud Mohammed Almasry, Hamed Nasser Abboud Kayed, Abdullah Yahya Alsayed Mostafa Alsayed Abdalrasoul, Hatem Alsayed Abu Alezz Ahmad, Kamal Saleh Abdelnazar Farhat, Ajeelah Mahan Khshafan Alshammari.

It serves to note that AlDirwaza account is a savings account for individual customers, based on the Wakala investment principle, launched by KIB as one of its banking products for individuals. The account is currently the best of its kind in the sector, with annual expected profits of up to 2% disbursed on a monthly basis, where the customer gets an expected profit of 2% for the first 3 months from the account opening date and up to 1% expected rate onward. The expected profits are automatically deposited into the customer's account within the first day of the beginning of each month.

Al Dirwaza account holders are eligible to enter the weekly, monthly and annual draws on the condition of



maintaining at least KD 100 in their account. For the weekly and monthly draws, each KD 1 that has completed a full month's cycle in the account will count for one chance, and chances are calculated based on the lowest monthly balance preceding the draw. As for the mega draw, chances are calculated for each KD 1 that completes a two-month cycle in the account - based on the lowest two monthly balances prior to the draw.

Al Dirwaza account is also in compliance with the provisions of Islamic Sharia and approved by the KIB's Sharia Supervisory Board. Furthermore, the account comes with a wide range of benefits, including the ease

of opening the account, which does not require a salary transfer, and the customer's ability to open it remotely without visiting a branch through KIB Online on the Bank's website or KIB Mobile application on smartphones.

Additionally, Al Dirwaza account automatically grants customers instant issuance of an ATM card, with a KD 2,000 ATM daily withdrawal limit, as well as the ability to issue credit cards against the cash collateral in the account. To open the account and participate in its draws, a minimum of KD 100 is required and can only be withdrawn upon account closure.

6,000 students compete in global math challenge

Kuwait students win several awards at 25th UCMAS India Int'l Competition '24

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The 25th International Competition 2024 was hosted by UCMAS - INDIA at the North Campus of New Delhi on Saturday, Dec 14.

The tournament featured an impressive participation of 6,000 students from Malaysia, Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, Canada, Costa Rica, Cote Di' Ivoire, Egypt, Germany, Ghana, Guinea, India, Indonesia, Iran, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Maldives, Mauritius, Mongolia, Myanmar, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Somaliland, Sri Lanka, UAE, USA, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe. Young students as early as 6 to 13 years old are competing to win events in the various categories they competed for. Each UCMAS student participating in the competition received a paper ranging between 100-200 arithmetic math problems depending on their UCMAS level and age. They were given a time of 8 minutes to finish as many problems as they could.

From Kuwait, eight participants traveled to Delhi India to participate in the UCMAS -INDIA's 25th International Competition 2024 and below are the winners in different categories:

Mira Fathallah: 3rd place (Basic level), Akshay Venkatakrishnan: 3rd place (Basic level), Akshara Venkatakrishnan: 3rd place (Basic level) Vihaan Jain: 2nd place (Elementary Level) Nikunj Harikrishnan Pillai: 2nd place (Elementary level), Jouri Mohamed Kamal: 3rd place (Elementary



Kuwait students pose with their awards.

level), Andrew Ile: 3rd place (Elementary Level), Yatharth Jain: 2nd place (Higher level)

Mrs. Annu Thomas, Operations Head at UCMAS Kuwait, who accompanied the students to Malaysia, stated, "On behalf of our Managing Director, Nandan Menon, we extend our heartfelt congratulations and appreciation to all the participants for their outstanding efforts and achievements." The competition became a manifestation of young talents' dedication and excel-

ence, highlighting the positive impact of the UCMAS program on students in Kuwait. We would also like to thank ITL WORLD Travels for their assistance with all air, hotel, and logistics arrangements."

UCMAS Kuwait is located in Salmiya, Block 12, and has been representing Universal Concept of Mental Arithmetic System (UCMAS), an international education organization that is widely recognized as a leader in whole brain development programs.

Obituary

Pioneer of new wave cinema movement

India's legendary filmmaker Shyam Benegal dies at 90

NEW DELHI, Dec 24, (AP): **Shyam Benegal**, a renowned Indian filmmaker known for pioneering a new wave cinema movement that tackled social issues in the 1970s, has died after suffering from chronic kidney disease. He was 90.

His contribution to cinema was recognized as a director, editor and screenwriter. He was also credited with a new genre of filmmaking.

Benegal passed away on Monday at Mumbai's Wockhardt Hospital, and his cremation will take place on Tuesday, the Press Trust of India news agency reported, citing his daughter Piya.

"Benegal had been suffering from chronic kidney disease for several years but it had gotten very bad. That's the reason for his death," Piya said.

Many paid tribute to the legendary filmmaker on social media platform X.

Filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt wrote that Benegal told stories without pretense. "They were raw and real, about the struggles of ordinary people. His films had craft and conviction."



Benegal

"Deeply saddened by the passing of Shyam Benegal, whose storytelling had a profound impact on Indian cinema. His works will continue to be admired by people from different walks of life," India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted.

He was a mentor to top Indian actors, including Shabana Azmi, Smita Patil, Naseeruddin Shah, and Om Puri who made their mark in Bollywood's popular cinema as well.

"I have lost my foster father, a man

to whom I owe more than I can say," posted Naseeruddin Shah.

"Shyam Benegal was not just a legend; he was a visionary who redefined storytelling and inspired generations," said actor Manoj Bajpayee.

Benegal came into the limelight in the 1970s, with a series of films that challenged mainstream Bollywood. His films *Ankur* (1974), *Nishant* (1975), *Manthan* (1976), and *Bhumika* (1977) represented a parallel cinema dealing with the social realities of a poor nation.

"Ankur" explored the feudal divide in India, while "Manthan" was based on the story of the country's cooperative dairy milk movement.

Benegal was widely known for his series "Bharat Ek Khoj," a landmark 53-episode television series based on the book *Discovery of India*, written by India's first prime minister, Jawahar Lal Nehru, and chronicled the

country's troubled passages, from ancient times to modernity.

He also directed a 2023 biopic on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who led Bangladesh's freedom struggle against Pakistan in the 1970s. Former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who fled to India in August following a student movement, is the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Benegal was born in December 1934, in Hyderabad in southern India, and had an early launch in the world of cinema. He earned an Economics degree from Hyderabad's Osmania University and established the Hyderabad Film Society. He also ventured into advertising, where he directed over 900 sponsored documentaries and advertising films.

Benegal is survived by his wife Nira Benegal and daughter Piya.

Appeal dropped

Baldwin case finally closed

SANTA FE, N.M., Dec 24, (AP): New Mexico prosecutors won't pursue an appeal of a court's decision to dismiss an involuntary manslaughter charge against **Alec Baldwin** in the fatal shooting on a cinematographer on the set of a Western movie, the Santa Fe district attorney's office announced Monday.

Special Prosecutor Kari Morrissey withdrew the appeal of a July decision at trial to dismiss the charge against Baldwin in the death of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins during a rehearsal on set for the movie "Rust" outside Santa Fe in October 2021.

"Today's decision to dismiss the



Baldwin

appeal is the final vindication of what Alec Baldwin and his attorneys have said from the beginning - this was an unspeakable tragedy but Alec Baldwin committed no crime," said defense attorneys Luke Nikas and Alex Spiro.

"The rule of law remains intact in New Mexico."

Representatives for the state attorney general could not be reached immediately.

The decision to drop the appeal solidifies the decision by Judge Mary Marlowe Sommer halfway through trial to dismiss the case on allegations that police and prosecutors withheld evidence from the defense.

Baldwin's trial was upended by revelations that ammunition was brought into the Santa Fe County sheriff's office in March by a man who said it could be related to Hutchins' killing. Prosecutors said they deemed the ammo unrelated and unimportant, while Baldwin's lawyers say investigators "buried" the evidence in a separate case file and filed a successful motion to dismiss.

The district attorney's office said that under state law the New Mexico attorney general would have carried forward the appeal but "did not intend to exhaustively pursue the appeal on behalf of the prosecution."

"As a result, the State's efforts to continue to litigate the case in a fair and comprehensive manner have been met with multiple barriers that have compromised its ability to prosecute to the fullest extent of the law," local prosecutors said.

Baldwin, the lead actor and co-producer for "Rust," was pointing a gun at Hutchins during a rehearsal on set when the revolver went off, killing Hutchins and wounding director Joel Souza. Baldwin has said he pulled back the hammer - but not the trigger - and the revolver fired.

In April, a judge sentenced movie weapons supervisor Hannah Gutierrez-Reed to the maximum of one and a half years at a state penitentiary on an involuntary manslaughter conviction in Hutchins' death.

Prosecutors blamed Gutierrez-Reed for unwittingly bringing live ammunition onto the set of "Rust," where it was expressly prohibited, and for failing to follow basic gun safety protocols.

Assistant director and safety coordinator David Halls pleaded no contest to the negligent use of a deadly weapon and was sentenced to six months of unsupervised probation. A no contest plea isn't an admission of guilt but is treated as such for sentencing purposes.

Film



This image released by Focus Features shows Willem Dafoe, (left), and Lily-Rose Depp in a scene from 'Nosferatu.' (AP)

Lovely Depp shines in a stylish vampire story

'Nosferatu' is a deep but distant chill

LOS ANGELES, Dec 24, (AP): Oh, the weather outside is frightful. But don't head to the multiplex to stay warm. Not if you're seeing "Nosferatu," anyway. Bring your hand warmers, toe warmers, heart warmers and soul warmers - this update of the 1922 silent vampire classic will chill you to the bone.

But it may not terrify you. Everything in Robert Eggers' faithful, even adoring remake, from his picturesque 19th century German town to those bleak mountain snowscapes leading to that (brrr) imposing castle in Transylvania, looks great. But with its stylized, often stilted dialogue and overly dramatic storytelling, it feels more like everyone is living in a quaint period painting rather than a world populated by real humans (and, well, vampires) made of flesh and, er, blood.

Eggers, who writes and directs here, has described being haunted since youth with F.W. Murnau's 1922 "Nosferatu," starring Max Schreck (which borrowed so much from Bram Stoker's 1897 novel "Dracula" that the author's estate sued for copyright infringement). Eggers has said he wanted to present a true vampire, meaning the original folk variety - the horrifying, ugly, venal sort. Not the seduce-you-in-a-dinner-jacket kind.

And certainly not the "veggie vampire" who drinks only animal blood (think "Twilight"). No, Eggers' vampire, Count Orlok, wants only human blood - preferably from a lovely damsel. The damsel here would be young wife Ellen (Lily-Rose

Depp), the focus of Orlok's obsessive desires. In a nod to changing times, Eggers brings the character to the forefront and suggests that in 19th century society, she was unfairly seen as "hysterical" when actually, she was, you know, possessed. The lovely Depp fully commits to the high drama - but we don't learn much about what's in her head. Like everything here, it's a stylized performance that feels like a piece of art but keeps us at a distance.

After a prologue in which Ellen's spiritual connection to Orlok is established, we begin our story in fictional Wisborg, on the Baltic coast. Ellen has just been married to handsome, fresh-faced Thomas Hutter (Nicholas Hoult, giving his all), who aims to gain employment with a real estate firm.

Assignment

But first, Thomas is told by the shady-looking boss, he must undertake an out-of-town assignment, traveling into the Carpathian mountains to obtain the signature of a shadowy client on the deed for a local fixer-upper. And he sets off, to the protestations of Ellen, who has been having some truly terrible dreams.

Note to self: When accepting job assignments, maybe think twice if your boss is sending you, solo, deep into wintry Transylvania? But if Thomas had used his noggin and sat home by the fire with his bride, we would have no movie.

Waiting for Thomas in the dark, lonely castle - the exteriors

of which were actually filmed in Transylvania - is Orlok himself (Bill Skarsgård, truly unrecognizable in heavy, ugly makeup). They get down to business, but Thomas unfortunately cuts his finger, and his blood awakens a thirst in Orlok. Thomas soon realizes he's in a very bad place and needs to get back to his wife forthwith.

Back in Wisborg, Ellen is staying with the couple's friends, the Hardings (Aaron Taylor-Johnson and Emma Corrin, not given much to work with), and suffering from seizures and spells. Orlok is calling to her, staking his claim. The friends are trying to help, and when traditional medicine fails they turn to a specialist in the occult - and a gift to the rest of us, because he's played by Willem Dafoe.

Dafoe's naturally witty presence gives us a sense of relief from the stylized dialogue as the movie travels to its inevitable conclusion, and surely what true horror fans are waiting for: Orlok's climactic confrontation with Ellen.

For such fans, the frightening tableau of a skeletal Orlok lying atop a drained Ellen will be satisfying enough to make the experience worthwhile. The rest of us might leave with the same feeling we had in the beginning: a deep but distant chill.

"Nosferatu," a Focus Features release, has been rated R by the Motion Picture Association "for bloody violent content, graphic nudity and some sexual content." Running time: 133 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four.

Variety

NEW YORK: Netflix will have one of its biggest days Wednesday since the site launched in 1998 when it airs two NFL games for the first time.

"NFL Christmas Gameday on Netflix" begins with a two-hour pregame show at 11 a.m., before Pittsburgh hosts Kansas City. Baltimore faces Houston in the second game.

The streaming giant agreed to a three-year contract in May to carry Christmas Day games.

Netflix's 282.3 million subscribers in over 190 countries will be able to stream the games, marking the first time one outlet has distributed an NFL game globally. Netflix will have the games available in five languages - English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and German.

The games will also air on CBS affiliates in Kansas City, Pittsburgh, Baltimore and Houston. NFL policy dictates that games on cable or being exclusively streamed must also be on an over-the-air station in the competing teams' markets. It

will also be available on mobile devices in the US for those who have NFL+.

The biggest reason is money. The league is getting \$150 million from Netflix for the two games this season. It also continues the NFL's moves into streaming - Thursday night games are in their third season on Amazon Prime Video and the "Sunday Ticket" package moved to YouTube TV last year.

That's true, but the league wasn't about to give up Christmas after seeing the ratings. Last year's three games averaged 28.68 million viewers. The early afternoon contest between the Las Vegas Raiders and Chiefs led the way, averaging 29.48 million.

The Chiefs, Steelers, Ravens and Texans played on Saturday, giving them the same turnaround they would have if they played on Sunday and then Thursday.

All four have clinched playoff spots in the AFC, but seeding remains up for grabs.

Kansas City (14-1) can clinch the top seed - which would mean a first-round bye and home field throughout the playoffs - with a win over the Steelers. Pittsburgh and Baltimore are

ted atop the AFC North at 10-5, with the Steelers holding the tiebreaker due to a better conference record.

Houston (9-6) has wrapped up the AFC South and holds the fourth seed.

Netflix hopes so. Brandon Riegg, Netflix's vice president of non-fiction series and sports, said the system was stress tested, and then some, during the Nov. 14 bout, along with internet service providers reporting they were also overwhelmed by the surge that occurred before and during the fight.

The bout peaked at 65 million concurrent streams, including 38 million concurrent streams in the United States. According to the website Down Detector, nearly 85,000 viewers logged problems with outages or streaming leading up to and during the fight.

Possible? Yes. Likely? No.

The largest audience for a streamed-exclusive NFL game was 23 million on Peacock for last season's AFC wild-card game between the Miami Dolphins and Chiefs.

Nielsen will measure the ratings for the Christmas Day games, with early numbers expected late afternoon on Thursday.

It will probably beat kickoff for both games, but especially around 5:45 p.m. EST. That would be near halftime of the Ravens-Texans game, and when Beyoncé will be performing.

Mariah Carey will kick off the day with a taped performance of "All I Want for Christmas is You."

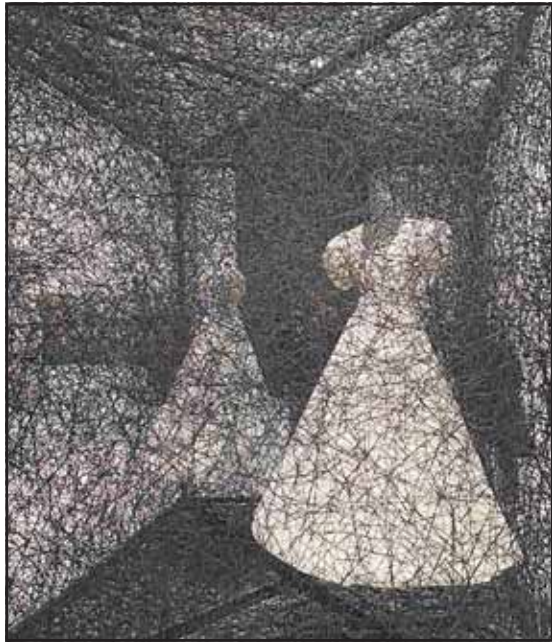
There is no word if Taylor Swift will make the trip to Pittsburgh to watch her boyfriend, Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce. Swift has been spending time in Kansas City since she wrapped up her Eras Tour two weeks ago.

The NFL will have at least two games on Dec. 25 in 2025 and '26, with Netflix slated to have at least one each year. Amazon Prime Video will have a night game with Christmas on a Thursday next year. (AP)



Swift

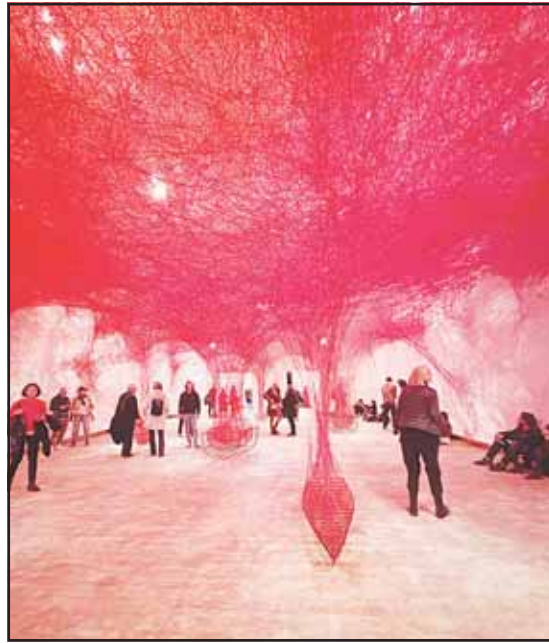
NEWS/FEATURES



The artist's dress displayed in the mirror and surrounded by elastic threads symbolizes a state of confusion and loss.



The accumulation of bags hanging from woolen threads resembles a stacked staircase.



The red threads that symbolize energy, memory, life, and vital connections in the artist's works.



The artwork of artist Chiharu Shiota at the Grand Palais exhibition.

Paris' Grand Palais invites visitors to immersive Chiharu Shiota exhibition

Paris' majestic glass-domed Grand Palais is inviting visitors to take a stroll through famed artwork of Japanese artist Chiharu Shiota. The Soul Trembles is an exhibition immersing visitors in a reflective journey of

the complexity of the human experience.

The Berlin-based artist is known for her work in interwoven yarn, wires, and the diverse mediums of daily life to create installations that mirror the intricacies of

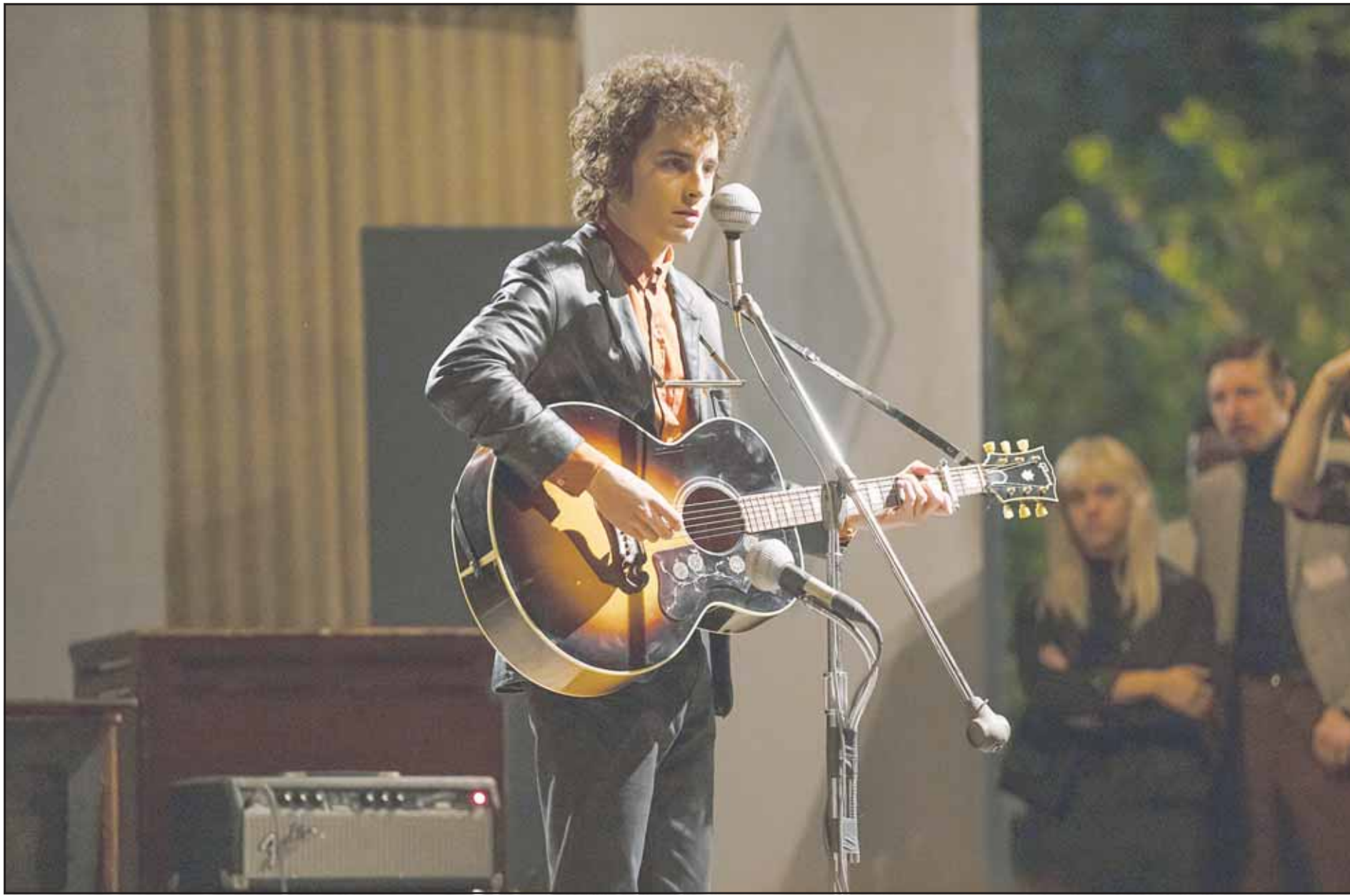
emotions, connections and memories.

The red, black and white coloring of entangled webs carry powerful symbolism as red represents energy and vitality, while black stands as an allegory for loss

and darkness and white represents purity and renewal.

Alongside the installations, the exhibition also offers a chronology of Shiota's career with photographs and documentaries showcasing her creative journey. (KUNA)

Film



This image released by Searchlight Pictures shows Timothée Chalamet in a scene from 'A Complete Unknown.' (AP)

Chalamet rocks in 'A Complete Unknown'

Dylan biopic is electric in more ways than one

LOS ANGELES, Dec 24, (AP) — "A Complete Unknown" certainly lives up to its title. You are hardly closer to understanding the soul of Bob Dylan after watching more than two hours of this moody look at America's most enigmatic troubadour. But that's not the point of James Mangold's biopic: It's not who Dylan is but what he does to us.

Mangold - who directed and co-wrote the screenplay with Jay Cocks - doesn't do a traditional cradle-to-the-near-grave treatment. He concentrates on the few crucial years between when Dylan arrived in New York in 1961 and when he blew the doors off the Newport Folk Festival in 1965 by adding a Fender Stratocaster.

That means we never learn anything about Dylan before he arrives in Manhattan's Greenwich Village with a guitar, a wool-lined bomber jacket, a fisherman's cap and ambition. And Dylan being Dylan, we just get scraps after that.

The world spins around him, this uber-cypher of American song. Women fall in love with him, musicians seek his orbit, fans demand his autograph, record executives fight over his signature. The Cuban Missile Crisis melds into the Kennedy assassination and the March on Washington. What does Dylan make of all this? The answer is blowing in the wind.

Any sane actor would run away from this assignment. Not Timothée Chalamet, and "A Complete Unknown" is his most ambitious work to date, asking him not only to play in-

secure-within-a-sneer but also to play and sing 40 songs in Dylan's unmistakable growl, complete with blustery harmonica. Daniel Craig has been called brave for his role this awards season in "Queer." Try playing "Subterranean Homesick Blues" in front of a crowd.

The last big non-documentary attempt to understand Dylan was Todd Haynes' "I'm Not There," which split the assignment among seven actors. Chalamet does it all, moving from callow, fresh-faced songsmith to arrogant, selfish New Yorker to jaded, staggering pop star to Angry Young Man. There are moments when Chalamet tilts his head down and looks at the world slyly, like Princess Diana. There are others when the resemblance is uncanny, but also moments when it is a tad forced. You cannot deny he's got the essence of Dylan down, though.

Adapted

The movie's title is pulled from Dylan's lyrics for "Like a Rolling Stone" and it's adapted from Elijah Wald's book "Dylan Goes Electric! Newport, Seeger, Dylan, and the Night That Split the Sixties." Dylan isn't a producer but did consult on the script.

It's not the most glowing profile, though the sheer brilliance of the songs - so many the movie might be deemed a musical - show Dylan's undeniable genius. Chalamet's Dylan is unfaithful, jealous and puckish. The movie

suggests that adding electric guitar at Newport in '65 was less a brave stand for music's evolution than a middle finger to anyone who dared put him in a box.

In some ways, "A Complete Unknown" uses some of the DNA from "I'm Not There." The best clues to what's going on behind Dylan's shades are the refracted light from others, like Joan Baez, Johnny Cash, Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger and a girlfriend called Sylvie Russo, based on Dylan's ex Suze Rotolo, who is pictured on 1963's album cover for "The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan."

Talent

Edward Norton is a handgrip Seeger hoping to harness Dylan for the goodness of folk, astonished by his talent. Monica Barbaro is a revelation as Baez, Dylan's on-again-off-again paramour. Boyd Holbrook is a shark-like, disrupting Cash, with the movie's best line: "Make some noise, B.D. Track some mud on the carpet." And Elle Fanning is captivating as Russo, the sweetheart sucked into this crazy rock drama.

It's Baez and Russo who dig the deepest into trying to find out who Dylan is. They don't buy his stories about learning from the carnival and call him on his facade-building. "I don't know you," Russo says, calling him a "mysterious minstrel" and urging him to "Stop hiding." Too late, sister.

There are some lovely moments, especially the morning after Baez spends the night and she wakes to him working on "Blowin' in the Wind." They spar a bit (he calls her songs "oil paintings at a dentist office," and she calls him worse than a jerk) but they come together on the side of his bed in their underwear, he fumbling through what will be one of the greatest protest songs in history, and she supplying delicate harmony.

Mangold - who directed the Cash biopic "Walk the Line" - is always good with music and clearly loves being in this world. There's one scene that initially puzzles - Dylan stops on the street to buy a toy whistle - and you wonder why the director has wasted our time. Then we see Dylan pull it out at the top of the recording of "Highway 61 Revisited" and suddenly it answers all those years of wondering what that crazy sound was.

There are points to quibble - Dylan never faced a shout of "Judas!" from an enraged folkie at Newport; that came a year later in Manchester - but "A Complete Unknown" is utterly fascinating, capturing a moment in time when songs had weight, when they could move the culture - even if the singer who made them was as puzzling as a rolling stone.

"A Complete Unknown," a Searchlight Pictures release in theaters Friday, is rated R for "language." Running time: 141 minutes. Three and a half stars out of four.

Books

H'wood thriller 'Close-Up' pits legacy vs love

NEW YORK, Dec 24, (AP) — Drawn by sheer possibility and that magic, golden-hour light of Los Angeles, Zoe Ann Weiss moves from London to California when she gets her two-book-deal break. It's that Hollywood allure that also prompts her to accept an invitation from a famous actor on her 30th birthday, sparking a string of events that leads her to inspiration - and desperation.

In reality, this is Australian author Pip Drysdale's fifth book. In this fictional world, "The Close-Up" is written as Zoe's overdue sophomore book, inspired by the things she sees and experiences now that she has access to celebrity life via Zach Hamilton, an old flame who made his big break as an action star and was recently dubbed sexiest man alive.

The book's title and the fact that both the real author and her fictional character are thriller writers are about as far as the similarities go - fortunately for Drysdale, as her character finds herself running into worse luck and more dangerous secrets than she ever could have anticipated.

Because when the press leaks that Zach has a new love interest, the hate comes unrelenting.

Character

Zoe soon finds herself the target of a stalker who seems to be following the plot of her debut novel - the one in which a human heart is left on the protagonist's windshield and the main character dies in the end. She could just walk away and hope this all blows over, but Zoe needs to deliver the manuscript for her second book yesterday, and every scary thing that happens to her becomes fodder for her new novel. Each sexy, scandalous detail of Zach's life and their romance can be catalogued and used, if she can blur the lines enough to get around the non-disclosure agreement and not ruin the good thing she is going with him.

All the while, LA nudges her, almost a character itself. The city's influence is undeniable and persistent, persuasive in its ability to make your dreams come true even if, as the narrator notes, odds are you won't make it there.

Combined with the present-tense, first-person perspective quintessential of thrillers, Drysdale drives up suspense by leaning heavily on the foreshadowing and fourth-wall breaking, particularly early on before things really pick up speed.

An unforeseeable penultimate reveal follows a rapid-fire, late-stage progression of twists and turns that would leave your head spinning if Drysdale wasn't so skillfully keeping track of all the criss-crossing threads.

Everything is explained in the end in a bold but gratifying plot-dump - a relief after all the buildup. Because it's not so much about the plot points as much as it is about the underlying theme that calls into question the impact of a person's life and actions. What makes "The Close-Up" compelling is Zoe's constant struggle with her legacy, with taking agency in her life and making it meaningful, weighing her career versus her relationships.



This cover image released by Gallery Books shows 'The Close-Up' by Pip Drysdale. (AP)

Variety

DARWIN, Australia: Burt, the huge crocodile that rose to fame with a cameo in the movie "Crocodile Dundee" and continued to impress visitors with his fiery temper and commanding presence, has died.

Burt died over the weekend, the Crocosaurus Cove reptile aquarium in Darwin, Australia, said. He was at least 90 years old.

"Known for his independent nature, Burt was a confirmed bachelor - an attitude he made clear during his earlier years at the crocodile farm," Crocosaurus Cove wrote in social media posts.

"He wasn't just a crocodile, he was a force of nature and a reminder of the power and majesty of these incredible creatures. While his personality could be challenging, it was also what made him so memorable and beloved by those who worked with him and the thousands who visited him over the years," the aquarium wrote.

A saltwater crocodile, Burt was estimated to

be more than 5 meters (16 feet) long. He was captured in the 1980s in the Reynolds River and became one of the most well-known crocodiles in the world, according to Crocosaurus Cove.

The 1986 movie stars Paul Hogan as the rugged crocodile hunter Mick Dundee. In the movie, American Sue Charlton, played by actress Linda Kozlowski, goes to fill her canteen in a watering hole when she is attacked by a crocodile before being saved by Dundee.

Burt is briefly shown lunging out of the water. But the creature shown in more detail as Dundee saves the day is apparently something else. The Internet Movie Database says the movie goofed by depicting an American alligator, which has a blunter snout.

The Australian aquarium where Burt had lived since 2008 features a "Cage of Death" which it says is the nation's only crocodile dive. It said it planned to honor Burt's legacy with a commemorative sign "celebrating his extraordinary life and the stories and interactions he shared throughout his time at the park." (AP)

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark.: A federal judge on Monday struck down key parts of an Arkansas law that would have allowed criminal charges against librarians and booksellers for providing "harmful" materials to minors.

U.S. District Judge Timothy Brooks found that elements of the law are unconstitutional.

"I respect the court's ruling and will appeal," Arkansas Attorney General Tim Griffin said in a statement to The Associated Press.

The law would have created a new process to challenge library materials and request that they be relocated to areas not accessible to children. The measure was signed by Republican Gov. Sa-

rah Huckabee Sanders in 2023, but an earlier ruling had temporarily blocked it from taking effect while it was being challenged in court.

"The law deputizes librarians and booksellers as the agents of censorship; when motivated by the fear of jail time, it is likely they will shelve only books fit for young children and segregate or discard the rest," Brooks wrote in his ruling.

A coalition that included the Central Arkansas Library System in Little Rock had challenged the law, saying fear of prosecution under the measure could prompt librarians and booksellers to no longer carry titles that could be challenged.

"This was an attempt to 'thought police,' and this victory over totalitarianism is a testament to the courage of librarians, booksellers, and readers who refused to bow to intimidation," said Holly Dickson, executive director of the ACLU of Arkansas.

But supporters of the law, known as Act 372, say they will continue to fight for its implementation. (AP)



Hogan

US moves to phase out cold remedy phenylephrine

Decongestant in many cold medicines doesn't work: FDA

WASHINGTON, Dec. 24, (AP) — Changes are coming to the cold and cough aisle of your local pharmacy: US officials are moving to phase out the leading decongestant found in hundreds of over-the-counter medicines, concluding that it doesn't actually relieve nasal congestion.

Phenylephrine is used in popular versions of Sudafed, Dayquil and other medications, but experts have long questioned its effectiveness. Last month the Food and Drug Administration formally proposed revoking its use in pills and liquid solutions, kicking off a process that's likely to force drugmakers to remove or reformulate products.

It's a win for skeptical academics, including researchers at the University of Florida who petitioned the FDA to revisit the drug's use in 2007 and again in 2015. For consumers it will likely mean switching to alternatives, including an older decongestant that was moved behind the pharmacy counter nearly 20 years ago.

Doctors say Americans will be better off without phenylephrine, which is



Decongestant pills containing phenylephrine are displayed in Philadelphia on Monday, Dec. 9, 2024. (AP)

often combined with other medicines to treat cold, flu, fever and allergies.

"People walk into the drugstore today and see 55,000 medicines on the shelf and they pick one that is

definitely not going to work," said Dr. Brian Schroer of the Cleveland Clinic. "You take away that option and it will be easier for them to self-direct toward products that really will help

them."

The FDA decision was expected after federal advisers last year voted unanimously that oral phenylephrine medications haven't been shown to relieve congestion.

Experts reviewed several recent, large studies indicating that phenylephrine was no better than a placebo at clearing nasal passages. They also revisited studies from the 1960s and 1970s that supported the drug's initial use, finding numerous flaws and questionable data.

The panel's opinion only applied to phenylephrine in oral medications, which account for roughly \$1.8 billion in annual U.S. sales. The drug is still considered effective in nasal sprays, though those are much less popular.

Phenylephrine wasn't always the top choice for cold and allergy products. Many were originally formulated with a different drug, pseudoephedrine.

But a 2006 law required pharmacies to move pseudoephedrine products behind the counter, citing their potential to be processed into methamphet-

amine. Companies such as Johnson & Johnson and Bayer decided to reformulate their products to keep them readily available on store shelves - and labeled many of them as "PE" versions of familiar brand names.

Consumers who still want to take pills or syrups for relief will probably need to head to the pharmacy counter - where the pseudoephedrine-containing versions of Sudafed, Claritin D and other products remain available without a prescription. Purchasers need to provide a photo ID.

Beyond those products, most of the other options are over-the-counter nasal sprays or solutions.

Saline drops and rinses are a quick way to clear mucus from the nose. For long-term relief from seasonal stuffiness, itching and sneezing, many doctors recommend nasal steroids, sold as Flonase, Nasacort and Rhinocort.

"These medicines are by far the most effective daily treatment for nasal congestion and stuffiness," Schroer said. "The biggest issue is they're not great when used on an as-needed basis."

Nasal steroids generally have to be used daily to be highly effective. For short-term relief, patients can try antihistamine sprays, such as Astepro, which are faster acting.

Phenylephrine-based sprays will also remain on pharmacy shelves.

The experts who challenged the drug's effectiveness say it's quickly broken down and rendered ineffective when it hits the stomach.

"This is a good drug, but not when it's swallowed," said Leslie Hendeles, professor emerita at the University of Florida's College of Pharmacy, where he co-authored several papers on the ingredient. "It's inactivated in the gut and doesn't get into the bloodstream, so it can't get to the nose."

When Hendeles and his colleagues first petitioned the FDA on phenylephrine, they suggested a higher dose might be effective. But subsequent studies showed that even doses 400% higher than those currently recommended don't treat stuffiness.

The FDA and other researchers concluded that pushing the dosage even higher might carry safety risks.

Animal population shrinking

Climate change making plants less nutritious, hurting grazing animals

By Ellen Welti

Smithsonian Institution

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

□ □ □

More than one-third of all animals on Earth, from beetles to cows to elephants, depend on plant-based diets. Plants are a low-calorie food source, so it can be challenging for animals to consume enough energy to meet their needs. Now climate change is reducing the nutritional value of some foods that plant eaters rely on.

Human activities are increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide levels and raising global temperatures. As a result, many plants are growing faster across ecosystems worldwide.

Some studies suggest that this "greening of the Earth" could partially offset rising greenhouse gas emissions by storing more carbon in plants. However, there's a trade-off: These fast-tracked plants can contain fewer nutrients per bite.

I'm an ecologist and work with colleagues to examine how nutrient dilution could affect species across the food web. Our focus is on responses in plant-feeding populations, from tiny grasshoppers to giant pandas.

We believe long-term changes in the nutritional value of plants may be an underappreciated cause of shrinking animal populations. These changes in plants aren't visually evident, like rising seas. Nor are they sudden and imminent, like hurricanes or heat waves. But they can have important impacts over time.

Predators

Plant-eating animals may need more time to find and consume food if their usual meal becomes less nutritious, exposing themselves to greater risks from predators and other stresses in the process. Reduced nutritional values can also make animals less fit, reducing their ability to grow, reproduce and survive.

Research has already shown that climate change is causing nutrient dilution in human food crops. Declines in micronutrients, which play important roles in growth and health, are a particular concern: Long-term records of crop nutritional values have revealed declines in

copper, magnesium, iron and zinc.

In particular, human deficiencies in iron, zinc and protein are expected to increase in the coming decades because of rising carbon dioxide levels. These declines are expected to have broad impacts on human health and even survival, with the strongest effects among populations that are highly dependent on rice and wheat, such as in East and Central Asia.

The nutritional value of livestock feed is also declining. Cattle spend a lot of time eating and often have a hard time finding enough protein to meet their needs. Protein concentrations are falling in grasses across rangelands around the world. This trend threatens both livestock and ranchers, reducing animals' weight gains and costing producers money.

Nutrient dilution affects wild species too. Here are some examples.

Giant pandas are a threatened species with great cultural value. Because they reproduce at low rates and need large, connected swaths of bamboo as habitat, they are classified as a vulnerable species whose survival is threatened by land conversion for farming and development. Pandas also could become a poster animal for the threat of nutrient dilution.

The giant panda is considered an "umbrella species," which means that conserving panda habitat benefits many other animals and plants that also live in bamboo groves. Famously, giant pandas are entirely dependent on bamboo and spend large portions of their days eating it. Now, rising temperatures are reducing bamboo's nutritional value and making it harder for the plant to survive.

Insects are essential members of the web of life that pollinate many flowering plants, serve as a food source for birds and animals, and perform other important ecological services. Around the world, many insect species are declining in developed areas, where their habitat has been converted to farms or cities, as well as in natural areas.

In zones that are less affected by human activity, evidence suggests that changes in plant chemistry may play a role in decreasing insect numbers.

Many insects are plant feeders that are likely to be affected by reduced plant nutritional value. Experiments have found that when carbon dioxide levels increase, insect populations decline, at

least partly due to lower-quality food supplies.

Not all insect species are declining, however, and not all plant-feeding insects respond in the same way to nutrient dilution. Insects that chew leaves, such as grasshoppers and caterpillars, suffer the most negative effects, including reduced reproduction and smaller body sizes.

Benefit

In contrast, locusts prefer carbon-rich plants, so rising carbon dioxide levels could cause increases in locust outbreaks. Some insects, including aphids and cicadas, feed on phloem - the living tissue inside plants that carries food made in the leaves to other parts of the plant - and may also benefit from carbon-rich plants.

Declines in plant food quality are most likely to affect places where nutrients already are scarce and animals struggle now to meet their nutritional needs. These zones include the ancient soils of Australia, along with tropical areas such as the Amazon and Congo basins. Nutrient dilution is also an issue in the open ocean, where rapidly warming waters are reducing the nutritional content of giant sea kelp.

Certain types of plant-feeding animals are likely to face greater declines because they need higher-quality food. Rodents, rabbits, koalas, horses, rhinoceroses and elephants are all hind-gut fermenters - animals that have simple, single-chambered stomachs and rely on microbes in their intestines to extract nutrients from high-fiber food.

These species need more nutrient-dense food than ruminants - grazers like cattle, sheep, goats and bison, with four-chambered stomachs that digest their food in stages. Smaller animals also typically require more nutrient-dense food than larger ones, because they have faster metabolisms and consume more energy per unit of body mass. Smaller animals also have shorter guts, so they can't as easily extract all the nutrients from food.

More research is needed to understand what role nutrient dilution may be playing in declines of individual species, including experiments that artificially increase carbon dioxide levels and studies that monitor long-term changes in plant chemistry alongside animals in the field. (AP)

Nearly 30% of species face extinction

AI to eavesdrop in remote wilderness to track, protect endangered species

PUERTO JIMÉNEZ, Costa Rica, Dec. 24, (AP) — The endangered Geoffrey's spider monkeys that dangle high in the rainforest canopy are elusive and hard for scientists to track.

So biologist Jenna Lawson hid 350 audio monitors in trees across Costa Rica's lush Osa Peninsula to spy on them.

The devices recorded the sounds of the forest and surrounding countryside for a week, collecting so much data that Lawson could have spent years listening to it all.

Instead, she fed it into artificial intelligence systems trained to instantly recognize spider monkey calls and detect where the animals traveled. One of the world's largest acoustic wildlife studies when Lawson began the project in 2021, it revealed troubling findings about the health of a treasured wildlife refuge.

Sound

More of this AI-assisted wildlife surveillance is "urgently needed" as some 28% of all plant and animal species are now at risk of extinction, according to a paper published in the academic journal Science this summer. Researchers from Dutch and Danish universities showed that machine-learning techniques can "handle huge amounts of data and uncover sound patterns, allowing for faster, cheaper, and better ecological studies" that can aid in biodiversity conservation. But many technical challenges remain.

Tech giant Microsoft's philanthropic AI for Good Lab announced this month it is hoping to answer some of those technical challenges with a new kind of hardware and computing system for eavesdropping on the planet's wildest places.

"Those remote places are also the most important places on the Earth from a biodiversity perspective," said Microsoft's chief data scientist, Juan Lavista Ferres, in an interview last week by video call from Colombia, where a research team was preparing to test the new approach.

Powered by the sun and energy-efficient AI computer chips, the devices can run for years rather than weeks without human intervention. And they can regularly transmit their data online via low-Earth orbit satellites. It's called Sparrow, short for Solar-Pow-



Biodiversity scientist Jenna Lawson checks one of hundreds of audio monitors she placed to track the calls of endangered Geoffrey's spider monkeys across the Osa Peninsula in Costa Rica, on Monday, March 20, 2023. (AP)

ered Acoustic and Remote Recording Observation Watch.

Pablo Arbelaez, director of an AI-focused research center at the University of the Andes, said a first Sparrow test will happen in a jungle preserve along Colombia's largest river, the Magdalena. Eventually, the researchers hope to get a better idea of how deforestation - and efforts to reverse it - is affecting the population behavior of jaguars, blue-beaked paujil birds, spider monkeys and other endangered species.

Habitats

Another project closer to Microsoft headquarters will monitor forests in Washington state's Cascade Mountains. By late 2025, Lavista Ferres plans to have devices on all continents, from remote corners of the Amazon rainforest to gorilla habitats of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That will then be "open-sourced" to make it accessible to a wide body of researchers in real time, but with measures to obscure sensitive location data.

"What we don't want is these devices to ever be used for poachers to understand where the animals are," Lavista Ferres said.

It was a concern about encroach-

ments on Costa Rican spider monkey habitat that led Lawson, then at Imperial College London, to undertake her ambitious bio-acoustic study three years ago. She persuaded landowners to let her place recording devices on their properties outside Corcovado National Park, a jewel of Costa Rica's decades-long efforts to preserve biodiversity by encouraging wildlife tourism.

"She basically realized the spider monkey is in a really critical situation," said local environmentalist and bug scientist Jim Córdoba-Alfaro. On a follow-up visit last year, he and Lawson trekked across a private reserve with an Associated Press reporter to observe the monkeys and check on the audio monitors.

Compared to the charismatic capuchin monkey and the notoriously loud howler monkey -- both commonly seen or heard throughout Costa Rica - spider monkeys are far more wary of humans and the changes they bring.

"They're the most sensitive of the primates that we have here," said Lawson. "The spider monkey would be the first animal to leave when there's signs of trouble. They would be the last animal to come back once forests are restored because they need mature secondary and primary forest to be able to survive."

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Inter Milan closes gap at the top of Serie A

Bove back on Fiorentina sideline

FLORENCE, Italy, Dec 24, (AP): Inter Milan beat Como 2-0 to cement third place in Serie A and close the gap on top two Atalanta and Napoli.

Carlos Augusto got the opener when he headed home a corner kick in the 48th minute.

Marcus Thuram scored the second in stoppage time with a potent strike into the roof of the net.

It was the first time these teams have played each other in the top division since 2003 and although Inter had lost only one league game all season it struggled to impose itself on 15th-placed Como.

However, it won without exerting itself and the three points were enough to take Simone Inzaghi's men within three points of leader Atalanta and within one of Napoli. Inter has a game in hand over both clubs.

Fiorentina missed a chance to go fourth when it lost at home to Udinese 2-1.

The Florence club won a record eight consecutive Serie A games before losing to Bologna 1-0 on Dec. 15, and it looked to be back on track when Moises Kean converted a penalty after eight minutes to become the first Fiorentina player to reach double figures in the league since Federico Chiesa in the 2019-20 season.

However, Udinese was a different prospect after the break.

Lorenzo Lucca equalized with the aid of sloppy defending four minutes into the second half and then Florian Thauvin found space on the edge of the box to curl in the second eight minutes later.

The result left Udinese in ninth place and Fiorentina in fifth.

The match was a special one for Edoardo Bove, the Fiorentina player whose collapse with a heart issue led to the suspension of its game with Inter Milan on Dec. 1.

Bove was fitted with a defibrillator implant soon after and sat on the Fiorentina bench for the first time since his collapse.

He is not allowed to play but his position on the sideline alongside coach Raffaele Palladino was seen as a step towards normality for the 22-year-old midfielder.



Inter Milan's Carlos Augusto, top, and Como's Ignace Van Der Brempt jump for the ball during a Serie A soccer match between Inter Milan and Como at the San Siro stadium in Milan, Italy. (AP)

'It's a dream come true for all of us'

All-Filipino crew set to make history in the Sydney to Hobart yacht race



Skipper of Philippines entry Centennial, Ernesto Echauz, center, gestures with his crew ahead of the Sydney to Hobart yacht race in Sydney. (AP)

SYDNEY, Dec 24, (AP): There have been plenty of "firsts" in the history of the Sydney to Hobart yacht race which was first held in 1945.

An all-Filipino crew of 15 sailors will make it another when the annual ocean classic begins in Sydney on Thursday.

With veteran sailor Ernesto Echauz at the helm, Centennial 7 will embark on the 628-nautical mile (722 miles, 1,160 kilometers) race. One of six international entrants out of the more than 100-strong fleet, Centennial 7's crew comprises sailors from the Philippines' national team and the Philippines navy.

The boat itself is no stranger to the race. Previously, the TP52 yacht was known as Celestial and claimed the Sydney to Hobart overall handicap victory in 2022 under Sam Haynes after being runner-up the year before.

When shipping their own boat from the Philippines proved too difficult, Haynes helped keep the dream alive by selling Celestial to Echauz in September.

Haynes will still contest the Sydney-Hobart race on board a new Celestial.

"I never knew that it was going to be this boat," Echauz told Australian Associated Press. "We acquired Celestial right away because we were told that it's ready to do the Sydney to Hobart."

"We went through the paperwork, and the most important thing is to be able to get the whole crew, 15 Filipinos."

"They got surprised that, hey, we're going to bring all of the Filipinos. It's a dream come true for all of us. We never expected that we'll be able to join."

The race takes the yachts down the New South Wales state south coast, across the often notorious Bass Strait and to the island state of Tasmania, ending in the state capital Hobart after sailing the last portion

of the race on the Derwent River.

Last year, LawConnect won line honors in the 78th edition of the Sydney to Hobart, holding off defending champion Andoo Comanche by less than a minute in an exciting finish between the super maxis.

The pair of 100-foot yachts had duelled for much of the race and were well ahead of the rest of the fleet of 103 yachts that started last year's race.

LawConnect, which was runner-up in the last three editions of the race, finished in 1 day, 19 hours, 3 minutes, 58 seconds. Comanche's time was 1 day, 19 hours, 4 minutes, 49 seconds - a margin of just 51 seconds.

It was the second-closest finish in Sydney to Hobart history after Condor of Bermuda beat Apollo by seven seconds in 1982.

Comanche holds the race record of 1 day, 9 hours, 15 minutes, 24 seconds, set when it won the race in 2017.

Echauz's crew in March finished second by five minutes to rivals Happy Go in a close finish to the China Sea Race, after claiming line honors on board Centennial 5 last year.

"We've been sailing with each other for years, for decades," Echauz said.

"They are dinghy sailors. Eventually, when we started sailing big boats, we would sail together. We've been sailing in Hong Kong, which is the sailing center for Asia for big boats, but the standard here is a way, way different. It's a completely different level."

The crew placed 12th overall in the Cabbage Tree Island Race near Sydney earlier this month, their first race in Australian waters.

"We just want to finish it. Just finish well, and hopefully nothing breaks and hopefully nobody gets hurt and we don't make any mistakes," Echauz said.

2025 Champions Trophy schedule is announced

Pakistan to face arch-rival India in Dubai

ISLAMABAD, Dec 24, (AP): Pakistan will take on arch-rival India in the marquee group game of the 2025 Champions Trophy in Dubai on Feb. 23 after the ICC finally announced the schedule for the cricket showcase event on Tuesday.

India has refused to travel to Pakistan over security concerns and that forced the ICC to delay its announcement for more than a month.

Pakistan is to host a minimum of 10 games in Rawalpindi, Karachi and Lahore. India is to play its three Group A matches against Bangladesh, Pakistan and New Zealand in Dubai. If India qualifies for the semifinals and the final, those games will also be staged in Dubai.

"The ICC is delighted to release the schedule ... marking the tournament's much-anticipated first return since 2017," ICC chair Jay Shah said in a statement. "The thrilling competition, in which eight teams battle it out to claim the iconic white jackets, will provide fans with 15 matches of unmissable entertainment."

"This edition will take place in Pakistan and the UAE, and with Dubai also serving as the home of the ICC headquarters, it represents an opportunity to showcase the best of cricket with heritage and modernity."

Afghanistan, Australia, England and South Africa will play all their Group B games in Pakistan.

Defending champion Pakistan is hosting its first global cricket event since 1996.

After long deliberations between the ICC Board members, the game's governing body has also agreed that Pakistan will not play in India in the 2024-27 cycle.

It is a tit-for-tat response to India's refusal to travel to Pakistan for the Champions Trophy.

That means Pakistan will go to a neutral venue when India hosts the 2025 women's World Cup and co-hosts the 2026 men's T20 World Cup with Sri Lanka.

As compensation for not hosting India at the Champions Trophy, the ICC awarded the 2028 women's T20 World Cup to Pakistan.

"We are pleased that an agreement has been reached based on the principles of equality and respect, showcasing the spirit of cooperation and collaboration that defines our sport," PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi said.

"Our heartfelt gratitude goes out to the ICC members who played a constructive role in helping us achieve a mutually beneficial solution. Their efforts have been invaluable in promoting the interests of international cricket."

Naqvi said that hosting the Champions Trophy "is a significant milestone for Pakistan, highlighting our commitment to promoting cricket at the highest level and showcasing our capabilities as a premier event organizer. We are dedicated to ensuring that this tournament will be a memorable experience for players, officials and fans alike."

The tournament begins in Karachi on Feb. 19 when Pakistan takes on New Zealand.

Political tensions between Pakistan and India have prevented their teams from touring each other's country since 2012, when Pakistan went to India for a bilateral one-day international series.

Both teams face each other regularly in ICC tournaments - Pakistan went to India last year for the men's World Cup. But before that event, India refused to travel to Pakistan for the Asia Cup and played all its games in Sri Lanka.

The PCB has spent millions of dollars on the upgrade of stadiums in Lahore, Karachi and Rawalpindi and hopes the work will be completed by mid-January.

Schedule:



Pakistan's Tayyab Tahir plays a reverse-scoop during the third International cricket match between South Africa and Pakistan, at the Wanderers stadium in Johannesburg, South Africa. (AP)

Feb 19: Pakistan v New Zealand, National Stadium, Karachi

Feb 20: Bangladesh v India, Dubai International Cricket Stadium, Dubai

Feb 21: Afghanistan v South Africa, National Stadium, Karachi

Feb 22: Australia v England, Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore

Feb 23: Pakistan v India, Dubai International Cricket Stadium, Dubai

Feb 24: Bangladesh v New Zealand, Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi

Feb 25: Australia v South Africa, Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi

Feb 26: Afghanistan v England, Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore

Feb 27: Pakistan v Bangladesh, Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi

Feb 28: Afghanistan v Australia, Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore

Mar 1: South Africa v England, National Stadium, Karachi

Mar 2: New Zealand v India, Dubai International Cricket Stadium, Dubai

Mar 4: Semifinal 1: Dubai International Cricket Stadium, Dubai

Mar 5: Semifinal 2: Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore

Mar 9: Final: Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore

Semi-final 1 will involve India if it qualifies

Semi-final 2 will involve Pakistan if it qualifies

If India qualifies for the final it will be played in Dubai.

Best of the Rest

Dudu rejoins Cruzeiro: Former Brazil international midfielder Dudu has returned to his original club Cruzeiro on a free transfer, the Brazilian Serie A side said on Monday.

The 32-year-old signed a contract that will reportedly tie him to the Belo Horizonte-based club until December 2027. "Dudu has come home," Cruzeiro said in a brief message posted on social media.

The announcement came less than two weeks after Dudu parted ways with Palmeiras by mutual consent after 10 years with the Sao Paulo outfit.

Dudu, who has been capped three times for Brazil's national team, began his professional career with Cruzeiro in 2009 before moving to Dynamo Kyiv two years later. (Xinhua)

Caixinha takes charge of Santos: Veteran Portuguese manager Pedro Caixinha has been appointed manager

of Santos for the 2025 Brazilian football season, the club said on Monday.

Caixinha replaces Fabio Carille, who was sacked last month despite leading Santos to the Serie B title, securing the club's return to Brazil's top-flight.

"Pedro is already active in the execution and planning for 2025 and in defining the squad," Santos said in a statement.

Caixinha has been out of work since parting ways with Bragantino in October. (Xinhua)

Oscar set for Sao Paulo return: Former Chelsea midfielder Oscar is close to rejoining his former club Sao Paulo after parting ways with Chinese Super League (CSL) club Shanghai Port, according to widespread media reports in Brazil.

Oscar has agreed in principle to a three-year contract and will undergo a medical later this week, Globo Esporte reported.

The 33-year-old is expected to join the Brazilian club on a pre-season training camp in the United States starting on January 8, 2025. (Xinhua)

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Lewandowski angry after Barcelona defeat against Atletico

WARSAW, Dec 24, (Xinhua): FC Barcelona striker Robert Lewandowski said he felt disappointed with the 2-1 defeat against Atletico Madrid in La Liga.

Pedri put the "Catalans" in front in the 30th minute, but after the break the team coached by Diego Simeone scored twice to take a victory. The visitor extended its winning streak to 12 games thanks to Alexander Sorloth, who found the net in stoppage time.

"We played a good game, but we didn't

get the points, so we are very angry. After our mistakes, Atletico created chances and scored goals. In the final minutes we should have remained calm," Lewandowski told Polish media on Monday.

After the break the Pole could have put Barcelona ahead, but he missed the target from close range.

"We created a lot of chances. In the last two or three matches I lacked self-confidence in the penalty area. If you

don't turn your shots into goals, it's even more difficult to stay calm and beat the goalkeeper," Lewandowski admitted.

"The calendar is very intense, while we have a young team. We play matches every three days and the most important thing is mental preparation. In some matches, we weren't focused enough. We have to be ready for every next game," the 36-year-old concluded.

Valencia sacked coach Ruben Baraja

on Monday with the club joint bottom of La Liga with just 12 points from its first 17 games of the campaign.

"Valencia CF have decided to bring to an end Ruben Baraja's time as first team coach," reads the communique, explaining, "the dynamic of results during this season has required a decision that has been very difficult to make, but which has been taken with the aim of turning the situation around and achieving better results." Baraja loses

his job a day after the club saved a point with a 98th minute goal in a 2-2 draw at home to fellow struggler Alaves, during which sections of the crowd in the Mestalla Stadium chanted for him to leave.

Former Valencia defender Quique Sanchez Flores, who previously coached Valencia between 2005-2007 and has coached a string of clubs, including Getafe, Atletico Madrid and Sevilla, is favorite to be named as Baraja's replacement.

City is not thinking about the title any more after its 2-1 defeat to Villa

Boxing Day fixtures kick off busy Xmas period in Premier League

LONDON, Dec 24, (Xinhua): The hectic Christmas and New Year fixtures in the Premier League get underway on Dec. 26 with the traditional Boxing Day fixtures opening the door for three rounds of matches in 10 days that stretch quads to the limit, and can be decisive in the title race.

Manchester City is not thinking about the title any more after its 2-1 defeat to Aston Villa on Saturday further deepened its crisis. Pep Guardiola is without injured defenders Ruben Dias and John Stones against Everton on Thursday lunchtime.

Although Everton is stuck in the wrong half of the table, it held Chelsea to a 0-0 draw on Sunday and nobody has kept more clean sheets this season than Everton goalkeeper Jordan Pickford, so this could be another frustrating day for City fans.

Liverpool has a late kick-off at

home to struggling Leicester City and the Liverpool strikers will fancy its chances against a rival that conceded three first half goals at home to Wolverhampton.

Leicester's defense looks vulnerable at the best of times and with Mads Hemansen struggling with a groin strain, out of touch and unpopular deputy goalkeeper Danny Ward will probably start again.

Second place Chelsea was frustrated by Everton, but now has a chance to get back on track at home to Fulham in a south-west London derby.

Although Chelsea goes into the game as favorite, it will have to work hard against a side that gives nothing away and has drawn with Arsenal and Liverpool in its five-match unbeaten run.

Nottingham Forest strengthened its place in fourth with a solid 2-0 win away to Brentford on Saturday and



Liverpool's Luis Diaz, left, takes control of the ball during the English Premier League soccer match between Tottenham and Liverpool at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London. (AP)

now entertains Tottenham, who seems to lack any of the defensive virtues shown by Nuno Espirito Santo's side

as its 6-3 humiliation at home to Liverpool on Sunday so clearly showed.

Like Liverpool, Forest also has rap-

id players in attack, with Hudson Odoi, Morgan Gibbs-White and Anthony Elanga all likely to make Spurs suffer on the break.

Four wins and a draw in its last five matches, culminating in another 3-0 demolition of Manchester United at Old Trafford, has lifted Bournemouth up to fifth and Andoni Iraola's side looks for another three points at home to Crystal Palace.

There is a duel of recently appointed Portuguese coaches when Manchester United visit Wolverhampton Wanderers.

Wolves got off to a perfect start under new coach Vitor Pereira when it won 3-0 away to Leicester at the weekend, while Ruben Amorim's 'new coach bounce' since arriving at United (if there has even been one) evaporated in its thrashing by Bournemouth and ongoing controversy over Marcus Rashford's omission from the

last three squads.

Consecutive 4-0 wins have propelled Newcastle United to the edge of the European places, with striker Alexander Isak in outstanding form. Eddie Howe's side now faces Aston Villa, who is two places and two points above Newcastle after beating Manchester City.

Southampton tightened up in defense following Russell Martin's sacking last week to draw 0-0 away to Fulham, now with new coach Ivan Juric in charge, it will try to be equally Scrooge-like when they entertain West Ham.

Arsenal is without Bukayo Saka for several weeks with a hamstring injury, but he shouldn't be missed when it takes on struggling Ipswich Town on Friday. Although the visitor looks to play attractive football, it tends to be too open at the back against clinical top-flight attacks.

Jokic scores 32 points as Nuggets hand Suns third consecutive loss



Dallas Mavericks guard Kyrie Irving (11) drives past Portland Trail Blazers guard Anfernee Simons (1) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Dallas. (AP)

DENVER, Dec 24, (AP): Nikola Jokic scored 13 of his 32 points in a decisive third quarter, and the Denver Nuggets routed the scuffling Phoenix Suns 117-90 on Monday night.

Michael Porter Jr. had 24 points on 10-of-12 shooting for Denver, which played without guard Jamal Murray (sprained left ankle). The Nuggets have won four of five and they handed Phoenix its third straight loss.

The Suns were missing guards Devin Booker (left groin) and Grayson Allen (concussion protocol). They struggled to find scoring outside of Kevin Durant and Bradley Beal, both of whom had 23 points.

Bucks 112, Warriors 91

In Chicago, Khris Middleton and Brook Lopez each scored 21 points, Bobby Portis added 19 points and 13 rebounds, and the Milwaukee Bucks beat the Chicago Bulls without Giannis Antetokounmpo and Damian Lillard.

Middleton set a season high for the second game in a row after scoring 18 in Saturday's win over Washington. The three-time All-Star missed the first 21 games following surgery on both ankles.

Middleton and Lopez each made three of Milwaukee's 14 3-pointers. Gary Trent Jr. nailed four from beyond the arc and finished with 14 points.

76ers 111, Spurs 106

In Philadelphia, Tyrese Maxey scored 32 points and made two crucial plays in the final minute, and the Philadelphia 76ers rallied after Joel Embiid was ejected to beat Victor Wembanyama and the San Antonio Spurs.

Embiid was thrown out by referee Jenna Schroeder with 2:59 left in the second quarter. The seven-time All-Star

Bucks pound Bulls without Giannis, Lillard



Phoenix Suns forward Josh Okogie (2) drives to the basket between Denver Nuggets forward Spencer Jones, left, and center PJ Hall (13) in the second half of an NBA basketball game in Denver. (AP)

received the first technical for arguing with Schroeder, and received another technical - and ejection - from Schroeder before any more game time elapsed. Embiid was close to Schroeder, but it wasn't clear from replays whether he made contact with the official.

Pacers 111, Warriors 105

In San Francisco, Myles Turner made a 3-pointer from the top of the arc with 16 seconds left and had 23 points and 10 rebounds, Pascal Siakam added 20 points and the Indiana Pacers beat the Golden State Warriors for their fifth straight win.

Jonathan Kuminga came off the bench to contribute 26 points and eight rebounds for the Warriors on a cold night by Stephen Curry. Curry finished with 10 points on 2-for-13 shooting, missing his initial five tries before hitting a 3-pointer for his first field goal with 41 seconds remaining in the third quarter. He missed a 3 for the lead with 47 seconds left.

Thunder 123, Wizards 105

In Oklahoma City, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 41 points and the Oklahoma City Thunder beat Washington, sending the NBA-worst Wizards to their 21st loss in 23 games and 12th straight on the road.

Jalen Williams added 17 points and Isaiah Hartenstein had 16 points and 11 rebounds for the Thunder, who have won eight of nine. Oklahoma City shot 44.3% from the field and made 19 of 22 free throws.

The Thunder led 67-63 at halftime and 91-87 after three quarters. They took control with a 19-3 run to open the final period.

Mavericks 132, Trail Blazers 108

In Dallas, Luka Doncic returned from a two-game absence to score 27 points, Daniel Gafford added 23 off the bench and Kyrie Irving finished with 20 as the Dallas Mavericks beat the Portland Trail Blazers.

Doncic shot 10 of 19 overall and 1 for 7 on 3-pointers after missing Dallas' two previous games with a left heel contusion. He had seven rebounds and seven assists.

The Mavericks have won 14 of their last 17 games following their only losing streak of the season, a four-game skid from Nov. 8-14.

Clippers 114, Grizzlies 110

In Memphis Norman Powell scored 29 points, including four in the final 25 seconds to lead the Los Angeles Clippers to a victory over the Memphis Grizzlies.

With the game tied at 110, Powell hit a 14-foot jumper with 25 seconds left and then converted two free throws to give the Clippers their third win in four games. James Harden had 21 points, nine assists and eight rebounds, and Ivica Zubac finished with 20 points and a season-high 20 rebounds.

Cavaliers 124, Jazz 113

In Cleveland, Darius Garland scored 23 points and the NBA-best Cleveland Cavaliers beat the Utah Jazz for their 17th victory in 18 home games.

Evan Mobley had 22 points and 10 rebounds, Donovan Mitchell also scored 22 points, Sam Merrill scored a season-high 20 and Garland had eight assists for Cleveland. The Cavaliers (26-4) have won five straight by an average margin of 20 points.

Jordan Clarkson scored 27 points off the bench for the Jazz, while Lauri Markkanen had 26 and Collin Sexton had 24. Utah traded Mitchell to Cleveland in exchange for Markkanen, Sexton and multiple draft picks on Sept. 1, 2022.

Heat 110, Nets 95

In Miami, Bam Adebayo scored 17 of his 23 points in the second half and the Miami Heat snapped a three-game skid with a 110-95 win over the Brooklyn Nets.

Nikola Jovic scored 18 points and Tyler Herro added 17 points and 12 rebounds for the Heat, who are 7-0 when holding opponents under 100 points. Miami's Duncan Robinson had 17 points, shooting 5 for 10 from 3-point range.

Cam Johnson and Noah Clowney each scored 19 points for Brooklyn. The Nets' Keon Johnson scored 15 and Tyrese Martin finished with 14.

Knicks 139, Raptors 125

In New York, Karl-Anthony Towns had 31 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists, OG Anunoby also scored 31 points and shot 13 for 15 from the field, and the New York Knicks beat the Toronto Raptors.

Cam Payne had 19 points off the bench for the Knicks, who put seven players in double figures and won their fourth straight. Mikal Bridges finished with 14 points and Jalen Brunson had 12 points and seven assists.

Unable to reach a consensus

FIFPRO against temporary changes to transfer rules

ZURICH, Dec 24, (AP): The world soccer players' union disagreed with FIFA's temporary changes to transfer rules on Monday following the landmark Lassana Diarra judgement.

Former France international Diarra challenged FIFA's rules due to a dispute with a club dating to 2014, and the European Court of Justice ruled in October that some rules were contrary to European Union law because they restricted freedom of movement and were anti-competitive.

FIFA then opened a "global dialogue" and on Monday published interim amendments which take effect in time for the January transfer window. They "strike a balanced compromise," FIFA said in a statement.

But global players' union FIFPRO was against the changes, and accused FIFA of failing to reach consensus.

"Following Lassana Diarra's successful challenge against the legality of Article 17 of the FIFA Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players, FIFPRO informed FIFA of the conditions under which it could negotiate the amendments to the regulations to reflect the ruling," a union statement said.

"Until now, we have been un-

able to reach a consensus. We do not agree with the temporary measures announced by FIFA which have been introduced without a proper collective bargaining process.

"The measures do not provide legal certainty to professional footballers and do not reflect the judgement by the European Court of Justice."

FIFA said there was "a clear understanding" between all parties that the interim measures have no impact on ongoing discussions over long-term amendments to the rules, and introduced interim changes to offer stability and certainty for the upcoming transfer window.

"FIFA looks forward to continuing its close cooperation with key stakeholders as part of the global dialogue launched in October with the objective of developing a robust, transparent, non-discriminatory, objective and proportionate regulatory framework that will apply uniformly to professional football at a global level," it said in a statement.

FIFA legal director Emilio Garcia Silvero posted on X on Monday saying the next goal was to have "a permanent framework that fully aligns with the ECJ's views & has the support of all parties before July 2025."

Diarra took his case to the ECJ after he sued FIFA for damages in the Belgian courts. Diarra cited FIFA rules for the collapse of a move to Belgian club Charleroi after the termination of his contract with Russian club Lokomotiv Moscow in 2014.



Diarra

Tanzania qualify for U-17 Afcon

KAMPALA, Dec 24, (Xinhua): Tanzania qualified for the TotalEnergies CAF U-17 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) 2025 after demolishing South Sudan 4-0 in the semifinal at the on-going Zonal CECAFA qualifiers in Kampala, Uganda on Tuesday.

Tanzania took a 3-0 lead in the first half with goals by Hussein Mbegu, Ng'habi Zamu and Abel Josiah Samsom at the Nakivubo Hamz Stadium.

After the interval, South Sudan tried to fight back but failed. Substitute Juma Abushiri made it 4-0 for Tanzania after 52 minutes.

South Sudan earned a penalty af-

ter 67 minutes when defender Idrisa Kilendewo handled the ball in the box. However, Tanzanian goalkeeper Abraham Messori saved Lazarus Peter George Laku's penalty kick.

Aggrey Morris Ambros, the Tanzanian head coach, said he was happy that his players have worked hard to qualify. "I thank my team for the work well done," added Ambros.

The win sent Tanzania to the final and booked a place in the U-17 AFCON that will take place in Morocco next year.

The other semifinal to decide which team books the second slot to the U-17 AFCON will feature Uganda and 2022 champion Somalia.

Best of the Rest

Hediger dies in avalanche: Sophie Hediger, a member of Switzerland's snowboard cross team at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, has died following an avalanche at a mountain resort, the country's skiing federation said on Tuesday.

The incident occurred on Monday at the Arosa resort in Switzerland. Hediger, 26, competed at the Beijing Games in the women's snowboard cross and the mixed team version of the same event.

Hediger achieved her first two World Cup podium finishes in the 2023-24 season. Her best result was a second place in St. Moritz in January.

"We are shocked and our thoughts are with Sophie's family, to whom we offer our deepest condolences," said Swiss-Ski CEO Walter Reusser in a statement. "(She lost her life) tragically, brutally and far too soon." (AP)

Stokes out for 3 months: England captain Ben Stokes has been ruled out of cricket for at least three months because of a torn left hamstring.

Stokes will undergo surgery on the hamstring next month, the England and Wales Cricket Board said in a statement on Monday.

He was injured a week ago during the third test loss to New Zealand in Hamilton.

The 33-year-old allrounder had already been left out of England's squad announced on Sunday for the Champions Trophy in February and March in Pakistan.

Hamstring issues previously forced Stokes to miss the home summer series against Sri Lanka and the first test in Pakistan in October. (AP)

Trump becomes HK resident: World snooker number one Judd Trump has obtained Hong Kong residency under a talent scheme known as the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme, the Immigration Department of the Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HK-SAR) said on Tuesday.

Trump, 35, is the latest sporting star to take up residency in Hong Kong, joining fellow Englishman Ronnie O'Sullivan, the seven-time world snooker champion, and former NBA star Stephon Marbury of the United States.

O'Sullivan moved to Hong Kong two months ago and Marbury did the same last year.

Trump, who claimed his second UK Championship title earlier December, has collected a total of 30 ranking titles in his career.

In a video released by Hong Kong Talent Entice, the government's office to attract talent, Trump said he was looking forward to making new friends in Hong Kong.

"I love just being around the hustle and bustle of people. For me I really enjoy the energy in Hong Kong," he said.

"So I love to be around people and I love to see people thrive and go about their business." (Xinhua)

Seattle U beats Washington, snaps 19-game losing streak

SEATTLE, Dec 24, (AP): Matthew-Alexander Moncrieffe set career highs with 23 points and 16 rebounds, John Christofilis had two four-point plays and scored 21 and Seattle University beat Washington 79-70 on Monday night, ending a 19-game losing streak to the Huskies that spanned 48 years.

Moncrieffe sank 7 of 11 shots and 9 of 10 free throws for the Redhawks (5-8), who last beat the Huskies 82-76 in 1976. Seattle U nearly ended the skid last season before losing 100-99 in overtime. Moncrieffe notched his sixth double-double of the season. Houran Dan and Paris Dawson both scored 10.

Christofilis had a four-point play and scored six as Seattle U jumped out to a 16-3 lead with 12:24 to go in the first half. The Huskies (8-4) went scoreless over the final 2:04 and trailed 38-23 at halftime.

Moncrieffe scored seven in a 12-5 run in the first

4:30 of the second half and Seattle U pushed its lead to 22. Tyler Harris scored the first 10 points of the half for Washington and Zoom Diallo scored seven in a row later to get the Huskies within 54-45 with 9:27 left to play. Christofilis answered with another four-point play and the Redhawks maintained a double-digit lead until the final 21 seconds.

Harris scored 20 to lead Washington. Great Osobor totaled 19 points and 10 rebounds for his third double-double this season. Diallo scored 13 off the bench before fouling out.

Seattle U made 29 of 32 free throws (90.6%) while Washington was 16 for 23 (69.6%).

The Huskies lead the series 35-5 - losing twice in 22 home games.

Liutauras Lelevicius scored a career-high 17 points, including four in overtime, and Oregon State

rallied to beat Oakland 80-74 on Monday night to advance to the final of the Diamond Head Classic.

The Beavers (10-2) advance to play either Nebraska or Hawaii in the championship game on Christmas Day. The Golden Grizzlies (4-8) will play the loser of the other semifinal for third place, also on Wednesday.

Lelevicius made 5 of 9 shots with two 3-pointers and all five of his free throws for Oregon State, adding nine rebounds. Michael Rataj had 13 points and seven rebounds. Demarco Minor totaled 11 points, five rebounds, four assist and four steals. Josiah Lake II scored 11 off the bench.

Allen Mukeba had 21 points and seven rebounds for Oakland. Malcolm Christie scored 18. Tuburu Naivalurua finished with 14 points and 12 rebounds. Isaiah Jones made 8 of 10 free throws and scored 10.



Inter Milan's Carlos Augusto, center, celebrates after scoring against Como during a Serie A soccer match between Inter Milan and Como at the San Siro stadium in Milan, Italy. Inter won 2-0. (AP)

— See Page 14

Sports

Revitalizing the Blues: Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousef focuses on youth for the future

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Football Association, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousef, commended the exceptional efforts of those involved in organizing the "Khaleeji Zain 26", currently being held in Kuwait. He remarked, "The atmosphere of the tournament has been remarkable, thanks to the dedication of the Supreme Organizing Committee, which has worked tirelessly to overcome challenges and ensure an ideal sports and social experience for both the official delegations and the visiting fans in Kuwait."

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousef emphasized that the timing of the "Khaleeji Zain 26" was perfectly suited to accommodate everyone, highlighting the strong commitment of all participating teams, who have brought their best lineups to compete for the prestigious title.

Addressing the situation with the team, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousef explained, "We attempted to replace defender Hassan Hamdan after he was sidelined due to injury, but the tournament regulations prevented us from doing so. The rules stipulate that replacements must be finalized before the start of the first match for any team."

Looking ahead, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousef outlined plans for Kuwait following the tournament. He stated that the focus would shift to revitalizing the squad by integrating younger players to ensure a promising future for the team. He also expressed admiration for the vibrant attendance at tournament matches held at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium and Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadium, as well as the camaraderie and unity displayed in the fan zones and public areas. "This highlights the importance of the Gulf Championships in fostering brotherhood and love among the peoples of the Arabian Gulf," he concluded.



In this file photo players fight for the ball during the opening match between Kuwait and Oman.

Saudi Arabia seeks redemption against Yemen in must-win Group B encounter

Semifinal spot on the line as Bahrain takes on Iraq

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: Yemen's head coach is warning the team to write the mighty Saudi Arabia off at their peril but says his team will be out to upset the Arabian football heavyweight tomorrow night at the Jaber Al-Mubarak International Stadium.

Yemen lost 1-0 to Iraq in its opening Group B game, but World Cup finalist Saudi Arabia fell 3-2 to Bahrain in its opener, meaning that tomorrow night's encounter is a must-win for both sides in their bid to qualify in the top two.

"Beware of the wounded beast," said Nouredine Ould Ali: "Saudi Arabia is a very respected team but is currently passing through some hard circumstances. Like us, they lost in the first round so they have a very difficult mission, but, like Iraq, they are a strong team with some excellent players, particularly in midfield and attack. I know there are negatives, but I am not going to discuss them."

The Head Coach said he was proud of his players following the opening match, believing they did enough to gain a point after conceding to Aymen Hussein's header on a counter-attack.

The defeat leaves Yemen without a single Khaleeji Zain win after 34 matches, but the head coach believes history can be made here in Kuwait.

"I am not going to blame my current players for the history of past results. Of course, we go into every match wanting to win. This generation has the talent to win and we will keep working together to try. I am confident in my players and hope the Yemen supporters will continue to support their sons here, particularly with all the problems at home with the league stopping."

Tomorrow's match is the first of two on the night, and kicks off at 5.25pm, with the second match between Bahrain and Iraq kicking off at 8.30pm in the Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

Saudi Arabia head coach Herve Renard has told his underperforming superstars that it is "time to wake up" and labeled his side as "average" after losing their opening Khaleeji Zain 26 encounter to Bahrain on Saturday.

Renard has recently returned to the post after a disappointing run of World Cup qualifying results, and the latest 3-2 defeat brought more criticism to



Herve Renard



Nouredine Ould Ali



Dragan Talajic



Jesus Casas

the players, with some believing they are more concerned with their club than their country.

The experienced tactician accepted responsibility following Saturday's defeat and conceded that he has a lot of work to do if Saudi is to qualify for the semi-finals, starting with tomorrow night's match with Yemen at the Jaber Al-Mubarak International Stadium.

"The first round is three games, and the most important is to be in the first or second position at the end of them," said Renard, who addressed the club's country claim. "In the national team you are not playing with eight foreign players like at the club. You are playing for Saudi Arabia, the country, and for a few months, we are not ourselves. It is time to wake up. Time to look in the mirror."

Making matters worse for Arsenal is that fellow right winger Raheem Sterling will also be out for "weeks" with a knee injury, Arteta said.

"(Sterling) needs some further testing tomorrow to understand the extent of the injury," Arteta said. "It's his knee and we have to wait another 24 hours, but unfortunately he's going to be out for a while."

The 23-year-old Saka has been Arsenal's main attacking threat this season and has been directly involved in 15 of the team's 34 Premier League goals, scoring five and adding 10 assists.

"Obviously he's a big player for us," Arteta said. "You just have to see the impact that he has on the team, but it's going to be a really good exercise for all of us to think about ways to overcome another challenge, because we've already had a lot in the season."

"Maybe we are thinking we are very beautiful and very fantastic players but we are not currently. We are only an average team. So, all of us, have to look at the situation and to do what we have to do. Starting with defending very well is most important."

The Saudi Arabia fans are again expected to travel in large numbers to Kuwait for the second match, despite the criticism at home about recent performances, and Renard had a strong message for them.

"We must never give up," he said. "We are still two games to reach the semi-final. This is our goal and we'll think about the World Cup qualifiers later. At the moment we still have two chances and I can understand the disappointment from fans. It is normal when you lose. But they need to know

I am doing my best to put this team in the right way. Not easy but this is football.

"We are not at the level that people are expecting and I have confidence in the players to change things."

"In 2019, we lost the first game and reached the final so football is like this. Not one team here is above everybody. We still have the chance to win this. Football can change quickly."

Tomorrow's match is the first of two on the night, and kicks off at 5.25pm, with the second match between Bahrain and Iraq kicking off at 8.30pm in the Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

Fans are in for a real treat tomorrow night when Group B leaders Bahrain take on reigning champions Iraq at the Khaleeji Zain 26, according to Bahrain's charismatic head coach, Dragan Talajic.

Bahrain shared the top spot with Iraq after both won their opening ties on Saturday, but their dramatic 3-2 win over Saudi Arabia caught the eye of fans with the coach promising more thrills and spills at the Jaber Al-Ahmed International Stadium.

"We have monitored the Iraq team," said Talajic at the pre-match press conference held at the Crowne Plaza. "I have full respect for them and they are very well organized. A very good team that I have watched and analyzed many times. I wish them well for the World Cup, but not for here!"

"We are preparing in the best way. It will be very difficult but, honestly, but I can trust my boys. God willing, we will recover quickly because the game against Saudi Arabia was very tough mentally and physically. But we will play nice football, as will Iraq, so it will be good for the fans to watch."

Talajic said that the last 20 minutes against Saudi Arabia showed the mental toughness of his team and said it was an aspect they had worked hard on in preparation for Iraq.

"We are ready for everything," he said. "I believe in my boys. We are mentally very strong. We know Iraq is a very good team and I respect the team, the people, and the country. They will have big support, but we are Bahraini with a big heart. You will see it tomorrow."

Iraq head coach Jesus Casas has called for unity ahead of his side's crucial second match against Bahrain at the Khaleeji Zain 26 on Tuesday night.

AGCFF General Assembly to convene in Kuwait on Thursday

DOHA, Dec 24, (KUNA): The Arabian Gulf Cup Football Federation (AGCFF) announced that its General Assembly will convene on Thursday in Kuwait to discuss key agenda items. The meeting will focus on strengthening collaboration among Gulf football federations, aiming to foster the development of the sport in the region and meet the aspirations of Gulf audiences.

A highlight of the assembly will be the announcement of the host coun-

try for the next Gulf Cup, Khaleeji Zain 27. This decision reflects the AGCFF's commitment to enhancing Gulf cooperation and advancing regional football championships.

Currently, Kuwait is hosting the Gulf Football Cup, Khaleeji Zain 26, which runs from December 21 to January 3. The event is designed to solidify Kuwait's role as a premier sports hub, bringing Gulf nations together and promoting the development of football in the region.



Kuwait Club scores a point against Al-Nasr in the opening match of the league.

Kuwait Club prepares for Arab Clubs Champ'ship with Doha training camp

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 24: The first volleyball team of Kuwait Club is set to depart for Doha, Qatar, on January 3 to participate in an external training camp ahead of the Arab Clubs Championship. The tournament will take place in Qatar from January 13 to 26, with Kuwait Club and Burgan Club representing Kuwait.

The championship draw placed Kuwait Club in Group B alongside Oman's Al-Seeb, Libya's Al-Hilal, and Egypt's Zamalek. Meanwhile, Burgan Club will compete in Group D with Palestine's Gaza, Qatar, and the UAE's Al-Jazira.

Kuwait Club will be missing player Hussein Al-Masry, who was signed this season from Al-Arabi but is sidelined due to a ruptured Achilles tendon injury

sustained during the Union Championship match against Al-Arabi.

In domestic competition, Kuwait Club secured a convincing 3-0 victory (25-21, 25-12, 25-16) against Al-Nasr in the opening match of the 58th edition of the League at the Volleyball Association Hall in Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex. Kuwait Club is set to play its second league match against Yarmouk tomorrow at 7:00 p.m. in the same venue.

The Volleyball Association has scheduled two additional league matches for Kuwait Club to accommodate its participation in the Arab Clubs Championship.

Historically, Al-Qadisiya has won the championship title 23 times, followed by Kazma with 15 titles and Kuwait Club with 14. Al-Arabi has claimed the title four times, while Al-Jahra has won once.

Saka to be out 'many weeks' with hamstring injury

LONDON, Dec 24, (AP): Arsenal winger Bukayo Saka is expected to be out for "many weeks" with a hamstring injury, manager Mikel Arteta said.

Saka limped off during the first half of Arsenal's 5-1 win at Crystal Palace in the Premier League on Saturday and was pictured leaving the stadium on crutches after the match.

"It is not looking good. He will be out for many weeks," Arteta told a

news conference ahead of Thursday's home game against Ipswich. "I cannot be too specific because I don't know, but it will be many weeks."

Arsenal is third in the Premier League heading into the busy Christmas schedule, with a home game against Manchester United in the FA Cup and the League Cup semifinals against Newcastle also on the horizon in January.

Making matters worse for Arsenal is that fellow right winger Raheem Sterling will also be out for "weeks" with a knee injury, Arteta said.

"(Sterling) needs some further testing tomorrow to understand the extent of the injury," Arteta said. "It's his knee and we have to wait another 24 hours, but unfortunately he's going to be out for a while."

The 23-year-old Saka has been Arse-

nal's main attacking threat this season and has been directly involved in 15 of the team's 34 Premier League goals, scoring five and adding 10 assists.

"Obviously he's a big player for us," Arteta said. "You just have to see the impact that he has on the team, but it's going to be a really good exercise for all of us to think about ways to overcome another challenge, because we've already had a lot in the season."

Nesta fired by last-place Monza

MONZA, Italy, Dec 24, (AP): World Cup winner Alessandro Nesta was fired by last-place Monza on Monday after coaching the club to only one win in 17 Serie A matches.

Monza made the announcement a day after losing 2-1 at home by Juventus.

Former Verona coach Salvatore Bocchetti was hired to replace Nesta, with a contract through the 2026-27

season. Nesta was hired by Monza in June and the team's only league win this season was a 3-0 victory at Hellas Verona in October.

Nesta was a defender on the Italy squad that won the 2006 World Cup and played for Lazio and AC Milan. He has also coached Miami FC, Perugia, Frosinone and Reggina. Monza visits Parma on Sunday.