



Amir's health stable



The health condition of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah remains stable, said the Amir Diwan on Thursday. In a statement, Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah also prayed to Almighty Allah to bestow good health and swift recovery upon His Highness the Amir. (KUNA)

Opinion

Prophet Abraham to his son: 'Change the threshold of your door'

By Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

SINCE the formation of the first society, there have been efforts to enact leadership methods in order to make decisions on behalf of society and to avoid chaos. With time, these societies evolved until they became states that have fixed standards according to the nature of the people and their culture.

However, they all agreed on one thing, which is hearing the citizen's voice directly both in modern democracies and in countries that have chosen other governing systems.

All of this was aimed for the ruler to remain in direct contact with his people, including the custom of good governance that is currently based on full respect for human rights, the rule of law, effective participation, transparent and accountable processes and institutions, and an efficient and effective public sector.

If any of these standards become corrupt as a result of the irresponsible practice of those in the executive decision-making circles, chaos ensues. Here is where the intervention of the political leadership should happen in order to work on correcting the paths.

In ancient Islamic countries, the ruler worked to monitor the conditions of the subjects either directly or through trustworthy eyes that he appoints in the provinces, or through offices where the employees were characterized by honesty and impartiality, in accordance with the noble Quran verse: "Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and to judge with justice when you judge between people..."

In some countries, they have adopted the so-called open assemblies, which are attended by commoners in order to report their grievances to the ruler, who in turn works on delivering justice where it is due.

Grievances offices exist in all countries, but under different names, and they operate with the utmost transparency to the extent that those working in them are anonymous. Nonetheless, the basic criterion of grievances offices is justice. There is also the so-called "undercover client" who brings before the ruler the violations that occur in institutions.

Therefore, there are countries that have progressed and risen, while others have witnessed many disasters because they chose favoritism and quotas, which rendered such countries off-balance. As soon as it emerges from one crisis, it falls into another, because its institutions revolve

Continued on Page 5

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Day by Day

NO thief can elude the hands of justice and the law. Eventually, their actions, deceitful plans and manipulative schemes will lead to their downfall. They will face the consequences before both man-made and divine justice.

Divine justice ensures that God is not unjust to His creation. Illicit gains torment those who acquire them, causing inner turmoil, straining their mental faculties, and weighing heavily on their consciousness throughout their lives. The ill-gotten wealth they consume becomes a burden, haunting them for hours and days on end.

Reflecting on the outcomes of thieves, it becomes evident how tragic their fates unfold. ... Yet tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar

Minister quizzed on foreign company tax cancellations since 2010

MP Al-Matar decries 'moral crime' at landfill

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: Members of the parliamentary Environment, Food and Water Security Affairs Committee recently visited the landfill along the Seventh Ring Road.

Chairman of the committee MP Hamad Al-Matar described the situation as a "moral crime". He pointed out the absence of scientific, technical and moral considerations in handling the waste materials. He said around 7,000 tons of waste and 11,000 tons of sand are dumped in the landfill daily; disclosing the area measures 4.5 million square meters. He asserted this is wastage of public funds due to the wasted economic value of some items included in the garbage; such as glass, all kinds of plastic and wood which should be recycled.

He cited other problems like pollution, leakage of methane gas and the places where workers are residing are not suitable for human beings; hence, this is considered a violation of human rights. He stressed the need to provide the workers protection, as well as infection, pollution and noise allowances; confirming the committee will follow up the issue with the concerned institutions to find the best solutions.

In addition, Al-Matar has unveiled his plan to submit a bill on amending the Advocacy Law in order to exempt the lecturers at the School of Law in the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) from certain regulations applied on their counterparts in the College of Law at Kuwait University.

Continued on Page 5

Kuwait, Manila clear path for domestic worker recruitment

Pact aims to enhance worker protections

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: Talks between Kuwait and the Philippines have led to an agreement on a clear working mechanism for the resumption of the recruitment of domestic workers from the Philippines, reports Al-Anba daily quoting a source privy to domestic labor affairs.

The source confirmed that the agreement puts an end to any suspension in the future, addresses all previous problems and activates the role of the shelter in a way that guarantees the rights of workers. The source added that the objective is to grant full protection for foreign workers without resorting to the embassies.

In a related development, domestic labor affairs expert Bassam Al-Shammari praised the flow of negotiations and meetings between the Kuwaiti and Philippine governments.

He stressed the importance of convergence of views, hoping that the mechanisms for the recruitment of workers will be issued soon to avoid the recurrence of previous problems and for the agreement to be completed to pave way for the recruitment of workers soon - before the holy month of Ramadan.

He added: "This will enable the labor recruitment offices and companies to cover the domestic labor market's need for workers. A majority of the citizens in Kuwait prefer skilled and trained Filipino workers. Stable labor supply means stable recruitment costs. We are hoping that the agreement with the Philippines could be a motivation for other labor exporting countries to take the same step - especially Nepal, Ethiopia and Indonesia among others."

Kuwait eyes stricter penalties for expat residency violators

Extended stays under review

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: The new residency law, scheduled to be discussed during the session on Tuesday, seeks to increase the penalty imposed on a foreigner who visits Kuwait and remains here in violation without residency. It stipulated that the penalty should be imprisonment for a period of one year and/or a fine ranging between

KD 1,000 and KD 2,000. The duration of the visit has been extended to three months instead of one month, renewable with the approval of the Minister of Interior, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The new residency law stipulates this penalty in Article 27, which is concerned with foreigners who violate Article 11, which stipulates that "an expatriate who entered the

State of Kuwait with the intention of visiting may remain for a period not exceeding three months. He must leave upon its expiry unless he obtains a residence permit from the Ministry of Interior."

The new law increased the violation of residency law to KD 2, as well as the fine for the delayed registration of a newborn to KD 2 in the first month, and KD 4 for each day after that, in the event of a violation of Article 6, which stipulates that, "Every expatriate who has a child born in the State of Kuwait must submit, within four months from the date of birth, the newborn's passport or travel document to the concerned authority in the Ministry of Interior in order to obtain a residence permit or a grace period to leave the State of Kuwait." The same penalty applies to anyone who violates residency.

Article No. 31 stipulates in its fourth paragraph that an amount of KD 3,000 must be paid in the event that an expatriate works for other sponsors other than his own, in violation of the requirements of his residency.



Kuwaiti, Iranian FM's discuss Gaza developments at the Geneva meeting.

MoFA photo

Israel faces mounting international pressure

Kuwait advocates ceasefire at Geneva forum

GENEVA, Dec 14, (Agencies): Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah highlighted the painful reality of the Palestinian people, speaking of the forced eviction and systemized violence, and urging the international community for immediate intervention to arrive at a ceasefire and allow for the delivery of aid.

Sheikh Salem spoke at the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva, sponsored by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), affirming Kuwait's support to all

efforts and endeavors helping refugees and displaced people.

The Minister, in recognition of the imminence of the risks and challenges faced by refugees, called for putting forth active and sustainable mechanisms to address current and emerging situations.

The State of Kuwait is quite proud of the strategic and exemplary relationship tying it with UNHCR, as it is also proud of its status

Continued on Page 5

Kuwait records 4,500 heart attack cases in seven months, says KHF

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: The President of the Gulf Heart Association and member of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Heart Foundation Dr. Muhammad Zubaid has announced the preparation of a study to monitor the causes of heart diseases and chronic diseases in the country.

In a press statement issued on the sidelines of the inauguration of the 15th Conference of the Gulf Heart Association, which

was held with the cooperation of the Kuwait Heart Foundation, Dr. Zubaid revealed that 4,500 acute heart attacks were recorded in government hospitals in the last seven months.

He indicated that the study began on May 15, and will continue until the number of participants in it is approximately 10,000 patients, adding that the stage of research into the causes and identification of age groups and others will then begin.

Continued on Page 5

DGCA inks \$21.7 mln weather system deal

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14, (KUNA): The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) signed a deal worth KD 6.7 million (USD 21.7 million) with Finland's Vaisala company, to execute a project on surface observation system and airport meteorological system in Kuwait International Airport.

In a statement to KUNA on Thursday, DGCA's Acting Director-General Emad Al-Jalawi said the project aims to develop forecast surveillance around the airport's three runways to enhance flight safety.

On his part, DGCA's deputy director-general for planning and projects affairs Saad Al-Otaibi said the project will provide better visibility along the runways, while also presenting thorough information on wind speed and humidity rate.

In the same context, Vaisala's Vice President for Meteorology and Aviation, Weather and Environment Panu Partanen told KUNA that "this contract with DGCA for three runways at Kuwait International Airport is the largest single airport instrumentation contract for Vaisala ever. "It includes the design, manufacturing, delivery, installation, maintenance, technical support and user training," he added.

The project is set to be launched in February 2024 and will be fully operational in 2025.

NewsWatch

GAZA: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) started on Thursday the second phase of distributing flour to thousands of displaced Palestinians South of the Gaza Strip, including Khan Yunis and Rafah cities.

The Strip is going through a food crisis, especially flour and bread, due to the continuous closure of borders since the start of the Israeli occupations war early October, in addition to the destruction of many bakeries, while others closed due to gas shortage, said head of KRCS volunteer teams in Gaza Ahmad Abu Diyaa to KUNA. (KUNA)

BAGHDAD: Iraq announced arresting a number of people involved in bombing the US Embassy that occurred a few days ago, noting that a number of them are connected to the security forces.

In a statement on Thursday, Commander-in-Chief of Iraqi Armed Forces, Major General Yahya Rasool said that intelligence personnel were able to determine who had helped and provided logistic support to the perpetrators to execute their act. (KUNA)

Prayer Timings

Fajr	05:09	Asr	14:33
Sunrise ..	06:34	Maghrib ..	16:51
Zohr	11:43	Isha	18:13

Local

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



The KEPC group at the meeting.

KEPC participates in COP28, calls for justice and equality

By Suzanne Nasser

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: The Kuwait Environmental Protection Society (KEPC) participated in the "Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change COP28" in the blue zone, designated for official delegations, governments and stakeholders, as it is the only Kuwaiti civil organization that has observer status in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The society commended the keenness of the Arab League to hold a meeting of the group of Arab negotiators with Arab civil society organizations to enrich discussions, convey the voice of civil society institutions, and benefit from their observations and studies in the negotiations, adding, "This may be one of the best, purposeful and useful practices at the climate summit."

Kuwait Environmental Protection Society participated in the meeting of the "Arab Negotiators Group" in COP 28, co-chaired by the Minister Plenipotentiary of the League of Arab States Dr. Mahmoud Fathallah, and Dr. Al-Baraa Tawfiq from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The society was represented at the meeting by environmental engineer Yousef Abdul Redha Al-Ramzi, and the official spokesman and founding member of the Environmental Engineers Team, and a member of Kuwait Environmental Protection Society Eng. Ahmed Al-Hazeem.

In this regard, Eng. Al-Ramzi said, "The meeting of Arab negotiators with civil society institutions is a daily meeting organized by the Arab Negotiators Group under the auspices of the League of Arab States."

The meeting will be chaired by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in partnership with the League of Arab States, represented by Dr. Mahmoud Fathallah, Director of the Environment Department in the Secretariat of the Council of Environment Ministers of the League of Arab

States, and from Saudi Arabia, Dr. Al-Baraa Tawfiq.

The meeting with the group of Arab negotiators opens the way for civil society, including societies and networks, in addition to youth and women, to participate and discuss the questions and proposals of civil society institutions.

The method of permanent communication between Arab negotiators and civil societies in the Arab world was discussed, along with supporting civil society through funding or capacity building and greater civil society participation, and establishing a mechanism for their effective participation in meetings. The importance of the role of civil society and integrating it through an independent administration within the League of Arab States was also discussed.

Research

As for scientific research, the limited work teams result in preventing and disrupting scientific publishing. This makes us focus on one part and move on to the next without focusing on the details.

With regard to international communication, the Arab League has promised that this part will be discussed in intensive meetings in the coming days."

It is worth mentioning that the Arab negotiators or the Arab group at the climate summit in Dubai stressed the necessity of activating the "principle of justice and shared responsibility" as stated in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which "supports taking different approaches to address emissions according to different national circumstances and priorities."

Eng. Al-Ramzi stressed the importance of "strengthening adaptation capabilities and reducing vulnerability to climate change within the scope of the 1.5 degree target.

However, this adaptation is conditional on developed countries providing the necessary material and technical support to developing countries to achieve the goals of "sustainable development and combating poverty."

'Imports from Pakistan, Egypt dry up'

Onion prices witness steep rise

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: Onion prices have experienced a sudden surge, witnessing a substantial increase from 150 fils to 500 fils for Indian onions and 350 fils for Turkish and Iranian onions within the past two days. This abrupt escalation is attributed to various obstacles hindering the importation of this product from exporting nations.

To understand the reasons behind this unexpected price hike, Al-Rai visited the Al-Sulaibiya Fruit and Vegetables market and met vegetable dealer Mahmoud Salama who explained that the Kuwaiti market had been relying on a steady supply of onions from Pakistan and Egypt on a daily basis.

Prices were reasonable, and quantities were sufficient until exports from these countries to Kuwait ceased due to drought and insufficient production. Additionally, imports from Sudan were disrupted due to the ongoing war in that region.

Facing these challenges, attempts were made to source onions from Iran and Turkey. However, recent import disruptions from Iran have contributed to the surge in prices, with a 15-kilo burlap bag now costing 4.5 dinars. Salama anticipates that orders from Iran and Turkey, expected to arrive within 20 days, might temporarily alleviate the situation. Nevertheless, he foresees prices continuing to rise until the beginning of the next year.

Local farmer Faisal Al-Damak confirmed that Kuwaiti farms concluded their onion production in June, and the next harvest is not expected until April of the following year. This dependence on importers to meet market demand becomes crucial.

It is worth noting that Jaber Al-Azmi, the head of the Kuwaiti Farmers Union, had previously cautioned about an impending onion crisis in an interview with Al-Rai on May 15.

Registration for Hajj concludes

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: The registration for performing Hajj this year ended Wednesday for both the citizens and Bedouins, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, the online registration continued until 12:00 noon on Wednesday, clarifying it already extended the registration period for one month and the extension ended Wednesday. It then confirmed the registration of 40,000 male and female citizens and Bedouins, indicating most of those who registered are women.

It had earlier been reported that Kuwait's quota this year is 8,000 pilgrims through 63 caravans authorized to serve the pilgrims. The caravans with more than 50 registered pilgrims will be allowed to operate this year, while those whose registrants are below 50 cannot operate this year.

Director of Hajj and Umrh Affairs Khaled Al-Muzain previously issued a cir-

cular to licensed Hajj caravans about the mechanism for registering pilgrims through the electronic platform with the open central registration system, and registration is done automatically and authenticated through the "Kuwait mobile ID" application.

The general conditions for registration are as follows:

1. Kuwaiti,
2. Has never performed Hajj,
3. The group will be among relatives and will be sorted according to seniority.

The candidates for admission to Hajj this year are given a period of five days to complete registration and they must pay 25 percent of the total cost of Hajj as the first payment. In case of cancellation before Jan 31, 2024, the pilgrim will receive full refund and there will be no refund if the cancellation takes place after Jan 31, 2024.

Also, the ministry will organize the Hajj Exhibition from Dec 14-20 with the participation of most Kuwaiti Hajj caravans.

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Mild with light to moderate northwesterly wind, with speed of 12-38 km/h.

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

Weather

erly wind, with speed of 10-35 km/h.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	24	16
Kuwait Airport	23	11

Abdaly	22	11
Jahra	24	13
Salmiyah	23	17
Nuwaisib	24	14
Wafra	23	13

Kuwaiti food companies in 'Food Africa' fair

'Promote nat'l products in int'l exhibitions'

By Islam Abdelfattah

CAIRO, Dec 14, (KUNA): Kuwaiti food companies said Thursday that participating in international exhibitions is a great opportunity to promote national products outside Kuwait, as well as discover latest updates in the food industries, and cooperate with major international companies.

The Kuwaiti companies are participating in the 8th International Exhibition for Food and Beverages (Food Africa) under the Public Authority for Industry's umbrella, held in Cairo between December 12 to 14, said companies' spokespersons in a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA).

The exhibition offers innovative ways to showcase small and midsize food businesses and discover wide investment opportunities in international markets, said (Bint Manahi ready meals) factory founder Hanadi Al-Hajri.

Bint Manahi factory produces products to several countries in the MENA region and

seeks to expand its brand to other markets through (Food Africa) exhibition, added Al-Hajri.

The factory specializes in high-quality authentic ready-made frozen products including traditional Kuwaiti dishes.

Bader Al-Daihani, representative for (Aqwat) Factory for Pastries and Sweets stressed the importance of participating in (Food Africa) exhibition to show high-quality Kuwaiti products, and be acquainted with developments in the food industry through experts in the field.

He praised the efforts of the Public Authority for Industry for improving the quality of food products, and providing the opportunity for Kuwaiti factories to participate with more major Arab companies, specialized in the field of food industry.

Assistant Chief of Exported Sales at Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company Badriya Al-Rashed said that this is not the first time the company participates in (Food Africa) exhibi-

tion, an important international food industries exhibition.

According to Al-Rashed, the level of organization and number of expert traders, exporters and importers from all around the world is impressive, contributing to the spread of the company and the increase of its market shares, thanks to the exchange in experience between major companies at the local and international levels.

Most of the products displayed in the Kuwaiti pavilion are flour, pasta, biscuits, baked goods, and olives, she said, pointing out that the products received great praise from the exhibition's audience.

Food Africa began late Tuesday, with over 900 companies representing 32 countries participating, Kuwait being one of them (Official Exhibition Partner).

The Kuwaiti side of the exhibition contained 12 specialized factories in the food industry, including dairy, baked goods, packaging, coffee grinding, spices, olives, sweets, and ready-made foods.

'Expand women's role in Assembly'

Call to change one-vote system

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: Amidst the growing parliamentary and public demands for amending the electoral system, a governmental report has stressed the need to take this step in order to expand women's participation in political life and decision-making, reports Al-Qabas daily.

The National Center for Development Research at the Secretariat General in the Supreme Council for Planning prepared the report; which emphasizes the need to implement the quota system to allocate a fixed number of National Assembly seats for women and change the one-vote system, as it reduces the women's chances to win parliamentary seats.

The daily obtained a copy of the report that linked the achievement of sustainable development goals to the empowerment of women in society. It considers the active participation of women in political life an indicator of society's progress and development, while stressing that gender equality and women's participation in politics enhance economic stability and contribute to strengthening institutions.

Regarding the implementation of the quota system, the report called for allocating a fixed number of seats for women in the Assembly; away from discrimination to guarantee a fair share of parliamentary seats for women and their continuous participation in political life.

The report recommended amending the one-vote system, because it limits women's chances to win parliamentary seats. It encouraged political parties and blocs to nominate equal numbers of women and men on their electoral lists.

It underscored the importance of organizing training workshops to empower and qualify women in an integrated manner, for them to reach decision-making positions. This is in addition to raising public awareness on negative social customs, traditions and practices that perpetuate the stereotypical view about women and obstruct their progress.

Information

It also touched on the need to provide an objective information base about active women and leaders that will serve as reference for research studies, as well as to adopt sustainable and integrated development strategies in line with the curricula of training programs and workshops aimed at political rehabilitation, raising awareness among women and building a knowledge base.

The report indicated that Kuwait has declined in the Gender Gap Index since the establishment of the index, especially in the percentage of women in the Parliament as it ranked 110th in 2006 and 135th out of 146 countries in 2023, during which it ranked fourth in the Gulf. This is the result of the analysis of the female component in every legislature since the women were granted political rights in 2005.

The report pointed out that the exclusion of the female component from the composition of the Parliament is matched by a remarkable presence at the level of women's participation in the electoral process, as majority of voters are women. This indicates women's lack of confidence in female candidates; since the mentality of Kuwaiti society still bears certain images of appropriate work for women, and many still see parliamentary work as men's work, while women are more suited for administrative ministerial work.

The report confirmed that the one-vote system remains an obstacle to Kuwaiti women's entry into the legislature. This system allows the voter to elect one candidate in the constituency in which he is registered and 10 candidates are declared winners in each of the five constituencies. Therefore, the choice is always governed by societal, tribal, family and ideological calculations; thereby, reducing the female candidates' success rate. This explains the low number of women representation in the legislative authority.

Although the report considers the history of female ministers in Kuwait below expectation, it confirmed that the country has advanced since the index was established in terms of the percentage of women in ministerial positions as it ranked 109th in 2006 and 106th out of 146 countries in 2023.

The report called for activating the role of the media in all its forms to raise awareness among women in various aspects, while developing an educational media plan that helps change the societal view of women, focusing on their strengths and creativity, and developing media policies in terms of adopting the concept of empowerment and reducing the negative media influence that is broadcasted by some ill-considered programs and dramas marginalizing the role of women in the social, economic and political fields.

Bid to provide jobs for 'mentally challenged'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: The National Office for Human Rights has implemented a specialized program designed to facilitate the integration of individuals with mental disabilities into the workforce. The initiative involves practical work experience at various commercial stores for members of the "21 Center," a facility catering to individuals with mental disabilities, in collaboration with "360 Mall," reports Al-Rai daily.

Ali Al-Thuwaini, a member of the Diwan's Rights Committee for Persons with Special Needs, informed Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that this program is part of a three-week awareness campaign launched by the Diwan.

The first week has concluded with active participation and a focus on giving and production.

The primary objective of this initiative is to enhance community awareness regarding the integration of individuals with mental disabilities into the local job market.

Authority takes part in CoSP

'Nazaha' goes digital to fight graft

WASHINGTON, Dec 14, (KUNA): Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) showcased late Wednesday its digital transformation efforts to counter corruption and boost transparency during participation at the 10th Conference of State Parties (CoSP) held in Atlanta, US, on December 11-15.

The CoSP is the main policymaking body of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC)

While providing a visual presentation titled "digital transformation and bolstering transparency in anticorruption in the State of Kuwait," Assistant Secretary General for the Prevention Sector at Nazaha Abrar Al-Hammad highlighted Kuwait's efforts to establish digital infrastructure and collection of data at government institutes, an effort enabling launch of digitize and cloud services in Kuwait as well as bolstering information security.

She indicated that the idea focused on streamlining services for citizens via separating between service providers and recipients, which in turn would provide the utmost transparency in accordance with international standards of anticorruption and ease of obtaining data and services.

Al-Hammad tabbed the Sahel (easy)

government application in Kuwait, saying that it provided a unified platform for government services enabling citizens and residents alike to apply for government transactions and documents with ease as the namesake of the aforementioned application suggested.

The Sahel application boosted productivity on part of employees and provided more transparency in government transactions, affirmed Al-Hammad.

Services highly susceptible to corruption were linked to the Sahel application to prevent malpractice and stop any attempt at bribery at the public sector, she said, noting that the application had received favorable reviews from users.

Nazaha's chairman Abdulaziz Al-Ibraheem headed the Kuwaiti delegation to the CoSP 10.

The conference is attended by over 2,000 participants from government, regional and international bodies as well as representatives from the public and private sectors, civil society, in addition to the youth.

The conference reviews national and international efforts in anti-corruption as well as challenges faces the implementation of the UNCAC.

'Avoid very hot showers'

'Fungal infections thrive in rains'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: Dr. Manar Al-Enezi, the Head of the Dermatology Department at Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital and Treasurer of the Kuwaiti Dermatologists Association, has provided guidance to prevent fungal infections, which tend to be prevalent during the rainy season, reports Al-Rai daily.

In a statement to KUNA, Dr. Al-Enezi explained that fungal infections thrive in conditions of increased humidity, making the rainy season conducive to their spread. She noted that cold weather and low humidity levels can lead to dry and cracked skin, resulting in itching and eczema.

To safeguard the skin during this period, Dr. Al-Enezi emphasized the importance of using moisturizing creams, preferably applied immediately after daily showers. She recommended avoiding very hot water during showers, opting for lukewarm water instead, and reducing the time spent in the shower.

Dr. Al-Enezi highlighted the significance of incorporating a variety of vegetables and fruits into one's diet due to their antioxidant and vitamin content. Additionally, she stressed the need to consume foods rich in vitamin C, as it boosts the immune system's efficiency in combating skin diseases during the winter season.

Furthermore, Dr. Al-Enezi mentioned that the annual conference of the Kuwaiti Dermatologists Association will commence next Saturday under the patronage of the Minister of Health, Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadhi. The conference aims to showcase the lat-

'Moderate in day and cold at night'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14, (KUNA): The weekend weather is predicted to be moderately stable during the day and cold at night, said the Kuwait meteorological center on Thursday.

Official at the center Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi said in remarks to KUNA that the weather map showed the stability in Thursday's forecast, with moderate to high northwestern winds in coastal areas with speeds of 12-38 km.

The highest temperature is at 24 degrees Celsius at daytime and lowest is nine at nighttime, added Al-Qarawi.

Friday morning's weather is predicted to be moderate with highest temperature being between 21-19 degrees Celsius. Northwestern winds will be at moderate speeds of 10-35 km. At nighttime, the temperature is expected to drop to 13-11 degrees Celsius.

Saturday morning's weather forecast is moderate with the highest temperature between 21-19 degrees Celsius. The northwestern winds will be at speeds between 8-30 km. At nighttime, the temperature is expected to drop to between 8-10 degrees Celsius.

est scientific research on the diagnosis and treatment of common skin diseases such as atopic dermatitis, acne, and psoriasis.

Family visas eyed for KU expats

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: The concerned authorities have submitted a report to the Ministry of Interior about the need for Kuwait University to find a mechanism for allowing the expatriate academic staff to obtain family visa for their wives and children in order to achieve family stability like those employed in the medical field, reports Al-Anba daily.

In compliance with the directive of the ministry, representatives of the concerned authorities discussed their request with Kuwait University officials recently. Acting Secretary General of the University Dr Fayeze Al-Dhafiri, acting Deputy Secretary General for Scientific Affairs

Dr Fahd Al-Fadhli and acting Director of the University Affairs Department Khaled Al-Ali attended the meeting.

They discussed ways to establish a mechanism for the expatriate academic staff to bring their wives and children to the country, provided the staff meet the conditions.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education, through the educational districts, has started determining the number of students whose parents were granted houses in the new residential areas; in preparation for transferring the students to schools that will open near their new homes in the next academic year, reports Al-Anba daily.

diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

'Kuwait must be showcased globally, redefine its image'

"SAUDI Arabia, with Riyadh as the cultural and tourism capital, and the UAE, exemplified by Dubai's opulence, have succeeded in rewriting their narratives globally," columnist **Abdulaziz Mubarak Al-Maousherji** wrote for **Al-Rai** daily.

"These achievements are not accidental but the outcome of deliberate, systematic efforts by leadership, government, and the private sector. They've successfully crafted a narrative akin to the 'American Dream' campaign, which entices immigrants with the promise that anyone can achieve their dreams in the United States."

"In the words of American poet Frank X. Walker, 'If you don't tell your story, someone else will write it about you.'" Thus, investing in media and creating international content reflecting Kuwaiti culture has become imperative. Kuwait must be marketed as an economic and financial hub, aligning with the 2035 development plan. This marketing no longer involves simply disseminating brochures, instead, it revolves around promoting an enticing idea or dream to potential investors.

"For Kuwait to be perceived as an attractive hub for work, investment, and tourism in the West, collaborative efforts are essential. The Kuwaiti private sector must join forces to develop a long-term plan for a comprehensive campaign. It's imperative to reestablish Kuwait's image as a commercial and cultural capital, showcasing the global potential of the Kuwaiti private sector in accommodating development and investment. The Kuwaiti media should be prepared to serve diverse languages and communities worldwide."

"Practical steps include increasing newspapers in foreign languages, collaborating with translation companies to translate government content, and establishing government-sponsored social media accounts that depict Kuwaiti culture to the Western world. It's crucial to convey that Kuwait is a paradise, not merely an oil well for the world. In essence, Kuwait, often referred to as the Pearl of the Gulf, must be showcased to the world, necessitating a concerted effort to redefine its global image."

Also:

"My visit to the central prison: I received an invitation from the Human Construction Society for Social Development, along with my colleagues from the College of Architecture, to visit the Central Prison in Kuwait," columnist **Dr. Youssef Abdel Mohsen Al-Haroun** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily. "The purpose of the visit was to enhance the outdoor spaces, specifically the courtyards, to create a more humane living environment for the prisoners. The goal is to improve rehabilitation areas, instill hope, and facilitate smoother integration into society upon release. I express my gratitude to the association for providing this opportunity and appreciate the Ministry of Interior's collaboration in realizing this initiative."

"Upon entering the prison, my initial observation was the imposing, towering walls surrounding the facility like a fortress, equipped with observation decks at regular intervals."

"The prison's design is structured to prevent external intrusion and internal escape, resembling a maze within a complex. We were transported via a bus through the entrance to various sections within the prison, including the drug rehabilitation center, the main central prison, and the women's prison. While this article won't delve into the much-needed renovations inside the buildings, the focus is on the neglected outdoor spaces."

"These outdoor areas, currently in a state of disrepair, require attention to provide some semblance of comfort for the prisoners, offering an escape from their challenging reality. This isn't about gifting individuals who may have committed crimes; instead, it's about fostering positive change. Prisons should serve as institutions for reflection, regret, and character improvement, aiming to break the cycle of recidivism."

"Careful design, particularly for outdoor spaces, is essential, including the provision of amenities like gyms, running tracks, football fields, gardens, and even agricultural spaces and nurseries. These additions would give prisoners something to look forward to daily and channel their energy in a positive manner."

"This experience prompted a re-evaluation of my perspective on architecture. While we often consider architecture's positive and functional aspects, we may overlook its negative consequences. The design of a prison not only regulates freedom and movement but also impacts the psychological and emotional well-being of individuals."

"Reflecting on discussions with medical professionals, it led me to contemplate how Islamic teachings guide us to live our lives with freedom and adherence to rules. While Shariah includes punishments for specific crimes, the concept of imprisoning offenders

is a human construct. This realization raises questions about the effectiveness of conventional prison systems, considering that individuals often leave in worse conditions than when they entered."

"Perhaps it's time to explore more innovative approaches to rehabilitation. For instance, in Norway, open prisons with cells resembling small apartments have proven successful. Kuwait should strive to design its prison spaces uniquely, aligning with Islamic standards and values while prioritizing humanity."

"One proposal is to elevate the role of mosques within prisons, with multiple mosques serving as reminders that genuine change comes through seeking forgiveness and drawing closer to God. In this context, the mosque and architecture act as catalysts for positive transformation, potentially turning prisons into true rehabilitation centers."

"A continuous struggle or an achievement for the homeland... The State is above all others. The State's entity is its people and institutions, upon which it was built and established. Since its independence, the rulers and people have been working hard to develop it, ensure national prosperity and build its international reputation," columnist Major General **M. Faisal Al-Jazzaf** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"What is happening today is a struggle to break the State's prestige, seize its capabilities and weaken it in an unprecedented manner. The parties involved in the conflict are known and exposed. Whenever we overcome one crisis, another appears. Who benefits from all of this? We do not need more crises, as the people are now between 'punishment and security' and there are armies of electronic flies operated by fake paid platforms whose aim is to destroy the country, not its stability. Today, we see the parliamentary-governmental consensus, regardless of satisfaction or lack thereof, but this remains a source of security for the conduct of the State's work, as people are waiting for stability and development."

"Paying money to hit below the belt is an open method to sabotage democracy, which is a safety valve enshrined in the Constitution, because it is the basic pillar of the process of political action."

"For all this, we say: 'Enough of deepening the rift between the components of society. The people are now aware of what is going on around them, as everyone who tries to undermine national unity knows, and therefore they are the ones who will be expelled by the people."

"The government must move forward without looking back."

"The Parliament has a historical responsibility to ensure political and public stability, and to make decisions without retreating or stopping. It is a shared constitutional responsibility for the security of the nation."

"We ask God to protect Kuwait and its people, and to grant His Highness the Amir good health and wellness, as well as His Highness the Crown Prince. May God protect both of them. May God have mercy on our righteous martyrs."

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"Gulf visa... The interior ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) agreed on a unified tourist visa, meaning that any expatriate holding a visa from any Gulf country can enter any other GCC member-State, provided that his first destination is the country that granted him the visa, just like the European Union!" columnist **Talal Al-Saeed** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"In Kuwait, there is a strong protest against the Kuwaiti Interior Ministry's approval of this decision. Everyone knows that the decision is considered effective, whether the State of Kuwait accepts or rejects it, because the rest of the Gulf states have approved it! The main reason behind the public opposition to this decision is the entry of the 'undesirables' or nationalities prohibited from entering the State of Kuwait on a Gulf visa!"

"The truth is different. If we take Dubai as an example, we find that it is open to all nationalities, but can a single expatriate miss his departure date and there is not a single violator of the Residency Law, and not a single citizen dares to employ an expatriate who violates the law? Violations continue around the clock!"

"For us, there are about 20,000 or more who entered for a visit and did not leave, and there are more than 150,000 violators of the Residency Law having fun in the country. The unbelievable aspect is that there are 70,000 cars whose owners are dead or have left the country permanently, idling on the streets of Kuwait!"

"Our problem is the weak security and the audacity of those arriving against the law. From time to time, the Interior Ministry grants grace periods to violators, and each violator sets his travel date for the period he likes."

"Finally, have you heard about a fake domestic labor office that employs violators, and people deal with it, except in the State of Kuwait? The fault is not in the Gulf visa, the fault is in the weak security. By the way, there is no law that forces us to allow the 'undesirables' to enter Kuwait."

— Compiled by **Mai Elsoukary**

5 jailed in 'Enough of Frivolity' case

E-transfer, renewal of cars begin Jan 1, 2024

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: The Court of Cassation, presided over by Judge Saleh Al-Muraishid, issued a ruling in one of the cases resulting from the infamous protest titled, "Enough of Frivolity".

The court upheld the verdict issued by the Court of Appeals, which sentenced five citizens to a jail term of one year and eight months each with hard labor, and suspended the execution of the sentence for a period of three years on bail of KD 300. The court had also imposed a fine of KD 500 each on all 17 defendants.

The Public Prosecution had referred the suspects to trial on charges of challenging the authority of HH the Amir and resisting orders of the police officers in charge of maintaining security and order at the road intersection of the Arabian Gulf Street and Shuhada Street, between the National Assembly building and the Amiri Hospital.

The suspects were also accused of assaulting the officers, dropping the iron security barriers on them, and throwing some objects at them - as indicated in the case documents. They had caused injuries to some police officers, as detailed in the forensic and preliminary medical reports.

The prosecution also charged the suspects with participating in a gathering of more than five people in a public place for the purpose of committing a crime, which is demonstrating without a permit, disturbing public security by gathering on the public road near the intersection, and resisting police officers to prevent them from performing their job duties in maintaining security and order.

They, along with more than twenty people, had participated in a demonstration on the public road by walking from the square opposite the National Assembly towards the intersection of the Gulf Street and Shuhada Street, without obtaining a license from the concerned authority. They had also insulted the police officers verbally.

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E-transfer starts Jan 1: Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Lieutenant General Anwar Al-Barjas has asked Insurance Regulatory Unit Director Mohammad Al-Otaibi to take the necessary measures towards the issuance of a decision to activate the electronic document system called 'Bima' to start the processing of transfer and renewal of vehicle ownership through the 'Sahel' application, which was announced last week, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

As per Resolution 81/1976 in the executive regulations of the Traffic Law, this online service will start on Jan 1, 2024.

Al-Barjas indicated in the letter he sent to Al-Otaibi that this is in compliance with the instruction of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Al-Khaleel to push for the digital transformation of the Interior Ministry, particularly the digitization of services provided to the public.

He reiterated that the ministry is keen on offering all services online, including the renewal and transfer of the ownership of vehicles, as discussed in the meeting with representatives of Kuwait Insurance Federation on Nov 27, 2023 at the Ministry of Interior's Information Systems General Department in Subhan.

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3 'wanted' cars seized: Highway patrol officers affiliated with the General Traffic Department impounded three wanted vehicles after monitoring them in Shuwaikh, the Abdullah Al-Salem suburb, and Bayan.

According to security sources, patrol officers witnessed the owners of the vehicles commit traffic violations. They inquired about the vehicles and discovered that these vehicles were required for judicial seizure. They were then impounded and referred to the concerned authorities.

One of the vehicles was seized on the Moroccan Road opposite Abdullah Al-Salem suburb, the second one on Ghazali Road opposite Shuwaikh, and the last one on King Fahad Expressway opposite Bayan.



Items found in drug addict's possession.

Sting on traps dealer

By **Mansour Al-Sultan**

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

Personnel from the Criminal Investigation Department have arrested a drug dealer following an ambush operation in the Mahboula area, and seized from him 11 sachets containing shabu.

The arrest followed confidential information received by the officers, indicating that an Asian expatriate was engaged in promoting narcotic drugs among young individuals in Mahboula. Utilizing a secret source, an arrangement was made to purchase a quantity of shabu and subsequently, during the exchange in Mahboula, law enforcement raided the location, arrested the individual and handed him over to the concerned authorities.

Upon interrogation, the suspect confessed to selling narcotic substances to young people across various areas and gave the name of his partner of the same nationality who, he said, left the country several days ago.

In a related incident, another expatriate was caught doing drugs and police found in possession a bag of shabu and drug paraphernalia at a checkpoint in Mahboula.

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'Report cash frauds': The Public Prosecution has initiated the operations of a virtual task force dedicated to receiving reports of financial fraud crimes conducted through banking channels on a 24/7 basis, urging individuals who have fallen victim to such fraudulent activities to report such incidents, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

The daily added, the Public Prosecution encourages prompt reporting to the respective bank. This swift reporting ensures that the necessary measures are expeditiously taken by the competent authorities to safeguard the funds of the victims.

This development is part of collaborative efforts between the Public Prosecution, the Anti-Money Crimes Department, the General Department of Criminal Investigation, the Kuwait Banks Union, and relevant banking authorities.

Other Voices

'Need to find another system'

By **Ahmad alsarraf**

The Minister of Social Affairs issued a decision regarding the controls for the work of inspection teams on cooperative societies to improve their performance and tighten supervision over them, for the purpose of preserving shareholders' rights. The decision gave the inspection team the right to move to the relevant association, research and review its work and accounts, and audit its financial and administrative status.

It was also permitted to request the data necessary to carry out the inspection mission, and even take testimony from members of the board of directors and employees of the association, and submit a report to the minister.

The issuance of this decision was delayed for more than half a century, but it is better for it to come finally than never, and it is evidence of the validity of all our previous accusations against many coops, and that they have become a subject of permanent doubt, after everyone realized that the system of cooperative societies is ruined and corrupt, and there is no hope in repairing it, despite the efforts of many sincere people.

Its membership also served as a jumping pad for some to reach the National Assembly as legislators, despite all their suspicions. If some of those behind the idea of establishing "cooperative societies" came back to life, they would cry about the bad conditions they are in today, after it was once a pioneering and noble idea. But just as many things have been ruined in the state, the societies have followed them into ruin and deprivation, with the absence of laws and the weakness of desire. Government" in punishing those who abused their trust!

Some believe that the problem of associations lies in two things:

1 - The majority of its council members, or all of them, do not know anything about how to manage a central market, let alone the management of the association as a whole, and their rejection of the idea of obligating the market to a professional body, and the reason for the rejection is known, and the ministry's inability to impose it is known.

2 - Members of the boards of di-

rectors of associations, unlike members of the boards of directors of banks and joint-stock companies, are not required to own a significant number of the association's shares, so someone who owns shares in it worth one hundred dinars can become its president.

Many complain about the high prices of the coops compared to the prices of the central markets, despite the fact that the association does not originally aim to make a profit, but rather to provide a good service to the people of the area.

Also, all of the cooperatives lands and buildings are provided free of charge by the state, so how can their prices be higher than others, which bear many high expenses that the association cannot bear?

The reason for the higher prices in the association than others is due to the following:

■ Almost all cooperative societies insist that the supplier, whom some call a greedy merchant, but he is definitely not, provides free goods worth 500 dinars, for example, if he wants to introduce a new product or product to the market, and this is unfair to the consumer, the owner of the association. The real dealer, not the merchant, who will try to compensate for the "compliance condition" by increasing prices from what he sells to other retail stores, which do not demand such an unfair discount.

■ Delaying the payment of the merchant's dues for several months, so the merchant, who supplies the goods to the association, and is aware that its price will be greatly delayed, is forced to bear the price of the commodity with the costs of delaying payment.

■ Some coops also delay the payment of the merchant's claims, and ask him to review the banks with which these associations deal, so that they can pay his bills in exchange for a high discount rate, and this is also ultimately borne by the consumer, not the merchant. There are many other reasons.

The bottom line is that the current system of cooperative societies is not only corrupt, but also creates corruption. The evidence is that even the board of directors of a single cooperative society, for seventy years, has not escaped the charge of dismissal due to deviation, the most recent of which was the referral of the entire board of directors of a cooperative society in Jahra to the prosecution due to thefts. This means that there is an urgent need to find an alternative system.

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National products promoted

Marketing festival in Mishref Co-op

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: Chairman of the Purchasing and Marketing Committee at Mishref Cooperative Society Moaz Al-Yahya said the 'Final King' Festival showcasing national products in the central market in Mishref and the Mubarak Al-Abdullah suburbs is the culmination of marketing festivals throughout the year, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

In a press statement, Al-Yahya disclosed that the festival, which started on Dec 3 and will continue until Dec 25, offers discounts up to 50 percent on a large variety of items from national and local companies. He explained the 'Misk Al-Khattam' promotional event is unique as it is held every year with a variety of items, hence, it has gained massive popularity since its launching.

He stressed that the cooperative is keen

on supporting national products which, in turn, support the national economy, as it encourages local companies to meet the growing market needs for food and consumer products presented through marketing festivals.

He pointed out that encouraging shoppers to learn about and consume locally made products is a key factor in supporting self-sufficiency and reducing dependence on imported products, which may cause major disruption in the market at a time of global crises.

He said the aim of the cooperative is to provide the best services and products to its shareholders and all shoppers with excellent quality and price, as well as dedication to providing full support for the products of the dear homeland and allocating distinguished places for them in the markets.

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Meetings eyed to discuss conducting study, laying down integrated plan

PADA plans to conduct workshops for people with disabilities

Municipality okays MoSA request to develop Rawda Suburb Center

'GE in 5-year deal to provide services for N. Shuaiba power plant'

By Inass Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: The Kuwait Municipality approved the request of the Ministry of Social Affairs to amend the requirements contained in the Municipal Council's decision issued on 21/09/2020 regarding the development of the Rawda Suburb Center located in Rawda Block 2.

The approval came with a condition that necessitates the amendment to be according to the technical opinion, which includes the addition of Clause No. 7. This clause represents authorizing the concerned departments to move and modify the dimensions and area of the sites to a limit not exceeding the designated areas, in the event of conflict with any existing infrastructure services or any regulatory reasons during installation.

Also, Clause No. 3 was approved to be amended as follows, "Demolition of all buildings speci-



Saud Al-Dabbous

fied on the sketch copy No. 1 of the transcript before installation, with the exception of the expansion of the central market."

Develop

The transcripts approved by the Director General of Kuwait Municipality Saud Al-Dabbous included the items approved by the Municipal Council in its decision issued on 21/09/2020 regarding the approval of the Ministry of Social Affairs' request to develop the Rawda Suburb Center located within Rawda, Block 2. This includes expanding the central market in the east side to cover

an area of 4,420 square meters, allocating a site for the catering and wholesale branch in the south of the Central Market building with an area of 450 square meters, and allocating space for a shop complex with shops and a branch of family supplies, vegetables and fruits with an area of 2,950 square meters. It also includes the demolition and cancellation of all the sites specified in the first sketch copy of the transcript, which are the bank branch building, two shops and store branches, the photography branch building, the site of the Diwaniyah for the elderly, the vegetable and fruit branch building, and the site of the catering and wholesale branch.

Meanwhile, the MEED magazine said the US General Electric has signed a 5-year agreement to provide services for the North Shuaiba Electric Power Plant, through its gas energy business unit, with the existing joint alliance between the Malaysian TNB Remaco company and the Kuwaiti Dow Engineering Company, which the Shuaiba North Power Plant in Al-Ahmadi, reports Al-Anba daily.

Under the terms of the agreement, GE Vernova will supply spare parts, repairs and field services, as well as what it called the predictive and advanced forecast-based maintenance for the three gas turbines at

the 876 MW power plant.

Combustion

The magazine pointed out that the US company will also upgrade the combustion technology that the three gas turbines are currently working on, which was originally supplied to the station, to the most advanced low-NOx combustion system, which is an improvement to the operation of the station that will reduce emissions levels and increase ability to shut down operation and extend inspection periods.

In this context, Chairman of the Board of Directors of TNB Remaco, Mohamed Nazri Bin Bazile, said, "We are cooperating with Vernova on the services agreement because they have the technological expertise and a proven track record in gas turbine services to help ensure that the Shuaiba North Power Plant operates according to the highest levels of reliability."

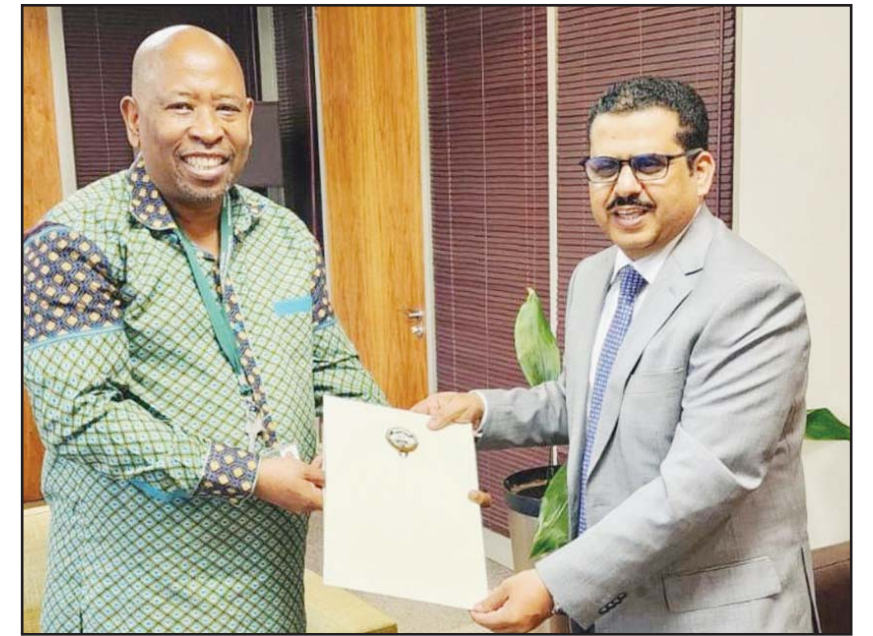
The magazine concluded by saying that Vernova, as an important long-term player in the Kuwaiti energy sector, the technologies it possesses in the field of gas energy today support more than a third of the electricity generation capacity in Kuwait, in addition to its strong participation in the transfer of knowledge at the local level through General Electric's technology center in Kuwait.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: Director of the Vocational Rehabilitation Center at the Public Authority for Disabled Affairs (PADA) Al-Anoud Al-Wazzan revealed that the Educational Sector in PADA, the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), and the Ministry of Education will hold a series of meetings soon to discuss the need to conduct a study, lay down an integrated plan and approve the technical curricula for rehabilitation management; in addition to conducting technical workshops that are compatible with the needs of the labor market, reports Al-Anba daily.

In a statement to the daily, Al-Wazzan confirmed that the sector has organized many technical workshops in Salmiya Center and South Sabahiya Complex for People with Disabilities.

He enumerated the types of workshops as follows: sculpture, ceramics, artistic works, printing, dyeing, secretarial work, computers, carpentry and decoration, artistic binding, handicrafts and art, design and decorative arts, metal works, bamboo, electricity, decoupage, agricultural works, rehabilitation, embroidery, weaving, home economics, perfume and candle making.

Asked about the partners' campaign to employ people with disabilities, Al-Wazzan confirmed that the campaign is continuing. "Last month, the fifth batch was launched to train people with disabilities through the coordinated efforts of PADA and the Human Construction Society for Social Development. This batch constitutes an addition to the labor market, because the skills of the manpower are developed through specialized programs," he concluded.



Ambassador Al-Shibli presenting his credentials to Ndimeri.

KUNA photo

Kuwait envoy to S. Africa presents credentials

Kuwaiti Ambassador Salem Al-Shibli presented his credentials as an Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the State of Kuwait on Wednesday to the Acting President of the honorary missions in International Relations and Cooperation Ministry (DIRCO) Luvuyo Ndimeri.

The two sides also delved into relations between the two countries, Kuwait Embassy in South Africa said in a state-

ment. Ambassador Al-Shibli noted on the importance of strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries, which will celebrate 30th anniversary of relations in 2024.

Ndimeri expressed his sincere wishes and success for the ambassador in his duties, and in serving the interest of the two countries and peoples. (KUNA)

Korean envoy to Kuwait speaks at COP28

'Korea is moving forward towards carbon neutrality strategy by '50'

By Inass Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: At the COP28 conference, the largest conference on climate change, which is currently being held in the UAE, the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Kuwait Ambassador Chung Byung-ha revealed that 123 countries have pledged to work together to triple the world's renewable energy generation capacity and double the global average annual rate of energy efficiency by 2030.

He explained that his country participated in the Zero Nuclear Initiative to triple nuclear energy capacity by 2050. Korea is moving forward towards a carbon neutrality strategy by 2050. Kuwait is committed to reaching carbon neutrality in the oil sector by 2050 and in all sectors by 2060. The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) invested USD 523 million in the field of green energy during the past ten years. Both Korea and Kuwait are moving in the same right direction.

Ambassador Byung-ha said this in a speech he delivered at the opening of the sixth edition of the Smart Cities Forum recently at the Jumeirah Hotel under the slogan "Energy Transformation", which was organized by the Korean Embassy in Kuwait.



Chung

Participation

The forum witnessed the participation of representatives of prominent bodies in the two countries, the most important of which is Kuwait's Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, the Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIIC), the Korean Presidential Committee on Carbon Neutrality and Green Development, the Korea Green Energy Corporation, and the Korea Overseas Urban Development Infrastructure Corporation.

The ambassador explained that the Korean Embassy in Kuwait took the initiative in 2017 to hold a Smart Cities Conference to explore ways for enhancing cooperation in new fields between the two friendly countries and to find solutions to the common challenges they face together.

He stressed that the transformation in the field of energy is a daunting task and a heavy burden on the shoulders of the North and South of the world.

Ambassador Byung-ha said, "Energy transition is not an enemy or a monster that we must fight or avoid, but rather it is a challenge that we must face together to ensure more sustainable, comprehensive and realistic climate measures."

Consume

Korea is one among the countries that consume the most energy in the world. Kuwait is one of the top countries that supply energy in the world. The time has come for both countries to strive towards a new model of bilateral cooperation in the field of energy through the transition from simple energy trade to an energy transforma-

tion that is more future-oriented and more climate-friendly.

Next year marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of bilateral cooperation relations between Kuwait and Korea in the field of energy, which began before the establishment of diplomatic relations."

He expressed his confidence that cooperation in the field of energy will raise relations between the two countries to another positive level, pointing out that the Smart Cities Conference is an attempt to facilitate the efforts of the two countries with regard to exchanging ideas, reviewing accounts, listening to practical alternatives, and increasing awareness about the issue.

Ambassador Byung-ha concluded by explaining that the Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol proposed the "Carbon-Free Alliance" initiative in September as a realistic solution for countries to reach carbon neutrality, by creating an open platform to develop global dialogue, not only in the field of renewable energy, but also in the fields of nuclear, hydrogen, and other zero-carbon energies, including carbon capture technology as a practical solution to achieving carbon neutrality. Also, Korea has been supported by safe nuclear energy since 1978, and it is now exporting nuclear power plants to partner countries. There are three nuclear power plants in the Emirates that were built by Korean companies, generating 4,200 megawatts of electricity. There is also another power station awaiting full operation.

Supports

Korea supports projects that produce, store and use green hydrogen in order to achieve the hydrogen economy. In addition, Korean companies are currently working with some countries to make carbon capture technology a reality.

Furthermore, Director of Renewable Energy at the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Ahmad Al-Dousari said Kuwait is continuing its balanced steps in the field of renewable energy.

In a press statement issued on the sidelines of the conference, he highlighted the ambitious and large projects, in accordance with New Kuwait 2030 vision, to achieve 15 percent of the use of renewable energy.

Al-Dousari also affirmed the start of a pilot project to determine the necessary and appropriate technology for the State of Kuwait, in addition to the Shagaya project, which is supervised by KISR, as it is based on the use of wind energy, solar energy, and photovoltaic energy technology.

He explained that the project aims to reach a production of 4,500 megawatts, adding that he is expecting this goal to be achieved before 2030, targeting 15 percent for renewable energy production.

Renewable

Al-Dousari said, "There are ambitious plans that we are working on. We are working on a decision to purchase renewable energy produced by others, the study of which has been completed with the participation of consumers, as well as plans to train and qualify engineers."

He expressed his aspiration to participate in meetings and conferences with countries that focus on renewable energy in order to obtain expertise, benefit and joint cooperation.

To be continued

'Chinese firm wins wastewater treatment contract'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: MEED magazine reported that the Ministry of Public Works awarded the Chinese State Construction Engineering Company a contract to

build a wastewater treatment plant in South Al-Mutlaa, Jahra Governorate, whose estimated budget is believed to be 175 million dinars (equivalent to \$582 million), to

treat 400 thousand cubic meters of water per day, reports Al-Anba daily.

The magazine added that the scope of work in the project in-

cludes building underground buffer tanks with a capacity of 50,000 cubic meters and a tank unloading station of the same capacity.

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Three-day conference to include over 25 workshops and 90 lectures

Light to be shed on latest findings in dermatology, laser, cosmetology

By Marwa Al-Bahravi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: Head of the Dermatology Department at Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital, Chairman of the Scientific Committee of the Annual Conference of the Kuwait Society of Dermatologists, and Treasurer of the society Dr. Manar Al-Enezi announced the launch of the annual conference on December 16 under the patronage of the Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-

Awadhi.

In a press statement, she revealed that the conference will continue for three days at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel.

Dr. Al-Enezi explained that she considers this conference as "the biggest conference for dermatology, laser and cosmetology" in the State of Kuwait. It will shed light on the latest findings in these fields, including skin diseases and their treatment, diseases of the hair, nails and mucous membranes, cosmetic

medicine and laser.

The conference will include several activities, including more than 25 workshops and 90 lectures, with the participation of 60 international lecturers from inside and outside the State of Kuwait.

It aims to encourage scientific research, as participants will present several scientific papers, and the scientific committee of the conference will choose the best among them and honor those responsible for them.

Prophet Abraham

Continued from Page 1

in a vicious circle due to the absence of decision-making.

Under such an atmosphere, unjust laws are issued to a large segment of people, because they take into account stakeholders and not the public. In addition to this is the confusion of officials, irrespective of whether they are prime ministers or ministers.

This is because they deviate from what is stipulated in the Constitution or the law, as a result of either their fear of parliamentary accountability, or their inability to make a decision.

This is why the ruler is the judge who works to control government performance. If there is an oversight in approving laws by the legislative authority, he may stop them so that they do not harm his subjects.

In Kuwait today, there is an imbalance in several standards regarding governmental and parliamentary performance, and there is a violation of the constitution.

Therefore, people today are perturbed and do not know the direction the state is heading towards. Is it working in accordance with the "New Kuwait 2035" vision, or are institutions treating crises using painkillers and working on borrowed time?

There is no doubt that this is the most horrific thing that any country is going through. Hence, it must be decided by a strong, supreme hand that restores everyone's size and sets the boundaries between institutions. This is particularly necessary when there is a small group of advisors who control the course of the state, and people's rights have been overlooked, either by advising officials to ignore the implementation of the laws, or passing a text that makes them useless, or to be in violation of the Constitution.

In this regard, there is a lesson in Islamic history for everyone who seeks safety and security. It is the story of the Prophet Abraham (Peace Be Upon Him) and the wife of his son Ishmael (Peace Be Upon Him). When he visited them, he had asked her about their condition, and she replied, "We are in distress and poverty."

He then said to her, "When your husband comes, greet him, and then tell him to change the threshold of his door."

Therefore, the way out of our current situation is to change the threshold of advisors and executive officials who have proven that they are not qualified for the tasks assigned to them.

MP Al-Matar

Continued from Page 1

Al-Matar explained that the bill aims to treat the School of Law lecturers at PAAET like their counterparts at Kuwait University in terms of allowing them to engage in private legal practice while working at PAAET.

On the other hand, the Petitions and Complaints Committee on Thursday discussed a number of citizens' complaints included in its agenda. Minister of Health Ahmed Al-Awadhi attended the meeting.

The Real Estate and Housing Affairs Committee also met on the same day to deliberate on the items in its agenda; while the Business Environment Improvement and Small Enterprises Committee discussed the proposal to amend National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises Law number 98/2013. Representatives of the Ministry of Finance, Kuwait Investment Authority and National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises attended the meeting.

Meanwhile, MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf asked Minister of Justice and State Minister for Housing Affairs Faleh Al-Raqaba if he appointed a relative as head of the National Assembly Affairs Department. If yes, the lawmaker asked why the job was not advertised as per the relevant regulations and in line with the equal opportunities principle. He wants to know why the employee occupying the position before the appointment of the minister's relative was not given a copy of the decision to transfer him to another post.

MP Mehalhal Al-Mudhaf asked Al-Raqaba if any tax imposed on foreign companies has been canceled, because of the date of issuing the relevant court rulings and if the State stopped collecting such tax since 2010. If yes, he inquired about the amount of this tax and the date of the issuance of the most recent final court decisions against the Ministry of Finance leading to the cancellation of tax. He wants to know the penalties imposed on employees in charge of collecting tax for failure to carry out their task.

Moreover, Assembly Speaker Ahmed Al-Saadoun presided over the meeting of the Assembly Office on Thursday. Present at the meeting were Deputy Speaker Muhammad Al-Mutair, Secretary Osama Al-

Shaheen, Observer Falah Al-Hajri, Chairman of the Financial and Economic Affairs Committee MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri, Chairman of the Legal and Legislative Affairs Committee MP Muhammad Al-Sayer, Chairman of the Parliamentary Priorities Committee MP Abdullah Fahad, Secretary General Khalid Saad Busleeb and National Assembly Department Head Dr Hanan Al-Deghaishem. They discussed various items in the agenda of the Office.

Lastly, items in the agenda of the legislative session scheduled for Dec 19, 2023 are as follows:

- Report of the Interior and Defense Affairs Committee about the proposal to amend the Foreigners Residency Law;

- Second report of the Legal and Legislative Affairs Committee on the proposal to reform the constituencies;

- Amiri Speech delivered by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at the inaugural session of the legislature on Oct 31, 2023;

- Report of the fact-finding committee tasked to investigate the armament deals (Eurofighter and Caracal helicopters);

- Report of the Oil and Energy Affairs Committee about the second reading of the bill on the establishment of Kuwait Shareholding Company for Advanced Petrochemical Industries;

- Report of the Financial and Economic Affairs Committee on the proposed transformation of Kuwait Airways Corporation into a shareholding national company and increasing the children social allowance;

- Reports of the Legal and Legislative Affairs Committee on the proposed amendment of the Traffic, Advocacy and National Assembly laws, as well as the Penal Code;

- Report of Interior and Defense Affairs Committee on the proposed amendment of the Traffic Law;

- Report of the Bedouins Affairs Committee on the proposal to grant social and career rights to Bedouins;

- Report of the Human Resources Development Committee on the proposed amendment of Civil Service Law number 15/1976;

- Report of the Financial and Economic Affairs Committee on exempting the heirs of the beneficiary of loans granted by Kuwait Credit Bank from paying the remaining installments in case of the borrower's death;

- Report of the Legal and Legislative Affairs Committee on the proposed amendment of the Public Institution for Social Security Law including the zero interest loans for retirees;

- Report of the Health, Social and Labor Affairs Committee on the proposed amendment of the Cooperative Societies Law;

- Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee on the military treaty between Kuwait and Turkey;

- Report of the Public Facilities Committee on the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation Bill;

- Request of several MPs to allocate two hours of the session for deliberation on the strategic alternative to the salary scale.

Kuwait advocates

Continued from Page 1

as one of the largest donating countries, he mentioned.

Sheikh Salem also addressed the ongoing unprecedented conditions conflicts and natural catastrophes saying this requires international will and partnership.

Furthermore, the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister took note of the recent and worrisome UNHCR reports stating that number of refugees and displaced people around the globe had reached 117 million people.

The top diplomat renewed Kuwait's firm unwavering stance by the Palestinian people in their struggle towards attaining full legitimate rights of an independent state.

He also addressed the United Nations' Security Council failure to adopt a resolution calling for a ceasefire, as well as its failure to heed to UN Secretary General warnings of the total collapse of international peace and security.

In spite of this, Sheikh Salem expressed his hope that political and diplomatic efforts could culminate in improving humanitarian situation of Palestinians, and urged the UNSC to mobilize its capabilities towards the protection of civilians.

The Foreign Minister underscored political negotiations and preventative diplomacy as an imperative mechanism to addressing root cause of regional conflicts.

Meanwhile Sheikh Salem met on Thursday his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amirabdollahian on the sidelines of the Global Refugee Forum 2023 in Geneva.

During the forum, which kicked off in Geneva on Wednesday, both sides discussed the latest development in the occupied Palestinian territories, and explored ways to end the

Israeli occupation attacks on Gaza.

Sheikh Salem reaffirmed Kuwait's solidarity with the Palestinian people and its continuous fight for their rights to establish the independent state of Palestine, calling on the importance to strengthen the international joint action for an immediate ceasefire, and the entry of humanitarian aid.

The meeting also discussed the bilateral relation between both countries and explored various topics of common interests.

Elsewhere, Israel vowed to keep fighting in Gaza until it crushes Hamas after one of the deadliest single battles of the war for its soldiers, even as it faces mounting international calls for a cease-fire and ease on the part of its closest ally, the United States.

The ambush in Gaza City, one of the hardest hit areas of the war, showed Hamas' resilience and called into question whether Israel can defeat it without wiping out the entire territory. Support for Hamas has surged among Palestinians - in part because of the militant group's stiff resistance to a far more powerful foe - while the U.S. has expressed growing discomfort over civilian deaths.

U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan was visiting Israel on Thursday, days after President Joe Biden said that Israel was losing international support because of its "indiscriminate bombing."

Kuwait records

Continued from Page 1

Revealing that one heart transplant operation was performed in Kuwait last year, and another this year, Dr. Zubaid said he is anticipating a boom in heart transplant operations in the country with the cooperation of the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, for the benefit of patients and the improvement of Gulf health services.

He explained that the conference will include discussions on many important topics to raise the level of community awareness on how to deal with heart attacks. The conference includes participants from various Gulf countries and a number of Arab and foreign countries, as well as Gulf heart societies. They will discuss the latest developments in heart diseases, as well as the diseases that pertain to the GCC countries and the difficulties faced in dealing with them.

About 20 percent of heart attack patients arrive at the hospital in ambulances, compared to 90 percent in European countries. This affects the speed of treatment and reflects the need to intensify the aspect of awareness on ways to deal with heart attacks.

Heart disease is the number one cause of death locally, in the Gulf, and globally as well. In Kuwait and other Gulf countries, the main causes of the disease are smoking and the high rate of chronic diseases.

Kuwait has worked over the past 15 years to provide medicines for all chronic diseases in all its facilities, including primary health care centers and public hospitals, in order to make it easier for the patient to obtain medicine at any time and from anywhere, which reduces the rates of heart disease.

Dr. Zubaid said, "The Gulf Heart Association, which was established 21 years ago, is proud of what it has provided throughout its journey. It has realized many achievements, including encouraging scientific research related to heart diseases, and supporting doctors to conduct research.

It cooperated with the European Heart Association, the American Heart Association, and the World Heart Association. This cooperation recently resulted in enabling cardiologists working in the Arabian Gulf region to take the European Heart Association exam. This will have a significant impact in opening the way for doctors to obtain prestigious and recognized certificates.

The Gulf Heart Association has been holding these scientific conferences, which enable doctors in the region to meet and discuss diseases specific to our environment, discuss our aspirations and the difficulties we may face, and celebrate the successes we achieve."

In addition, the Secretary General of the Kuwait Heart Foundation Dr. Rashid Al-Awaish gave a speech during the opening of the conference in which he said the number of participants from outside the country exceeded 90 participants.

He indicated that the association, through the conference, seeks to improve medical services by discussing the latest findings of specialized research in the field of heart diseases.

Dr. Al-Awaish affirmed the keenness of the foundation, since its inception in 1982, to spread awareness and knowledge among people about the importance of maintaining a healthy heart and avoiding everything that leads to heart disease.

He said, "Besides its awareness campaigns, the foundation has sought to conduct field tests for everyone who wishes to undergo these tests, through the mobile unit, which was provided with all specialized medical supplies and personnel."

Bureaucracy, flaws negatively 'affect' housing file in Kuwait

Experts discuss challenges hindering projects

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: Several experts addressing the housing issue in Kuwait attribute its exacerbation to governmental bureaucracy and mismanagement in releasing developed lands with infrastructure. The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) possesses extensive lands capable of accommodating 150,000 housing applications, reports Al-Rai daily.

According to specialists participating in the "Out of the Drawers" program on Al-Rai channel, said unsustainable real estate financing, reliant on the state budget, has negatively impacted the distribution of housing applications, leading to an inflation of approximately 90,000 applications. The annual growth of housing applications is estimated at around 8,000, with the cost of meeting applications over 20 years reaching an estimated 92 billion dinars.

Challenges hindering housing projects' completion were discussed, including parliamentary treatment of housing issues and external factors like contractor delays and the absence of the private sector. The greatest challenge identified was energy production and distribution to residential cities.

Adel Al-Majed, Deputy Chairman of the Board of Directors and CEO of Boubyan Bank Group, emphasized the need for land liberation and realistic housing solutions. He argued for a shift in real estate financing toward income-based models, similar to global practices, to ensure sustainability.

Anwar Al-Hulaifa, Deputy Director General for Investment Affairs and Private Sector Projects at the General Authority for Housing Welfare, discussed the existing housing applications, reaching around 90,000, and the challenges faced in keeping up with housing requests. He highlighted the need for efficient energy provision and coordination with various agencies for timely distribution.

The discussion emphasized the importance of providing lands and effective financing mechanisms to address the housing crisis. The conversation also touched on the necessity of realistic and sustainable approaches to housing development in Kuwait.

Expat undergoes a 'rare operation'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: Vascular surgery consultant at Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital Dr Hussein Safar confirmed that a Lebanese patient underwent a rare surgery after suffering from severe heart failure and stiffness and narrowing of the left carotid artery, reports Al-Anba daily.

In a statement to the daily, Safar revealed that the surgery was conducted in coordination with cardiac surgery consultant Dr Ashraf Abdel. He said a treatment plan was drawn up and the patient was transferred from the Cardiac Care Unit at Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital to the Chest Diseases Hospital, where a cleaning and patching surgery was performed on the left carotid artery of the patient. "After completing the operation, the aortic valve was changed and arteries were transplanted to the heart. Performing such a joint operation reduces the incidence of brain clots and paralysis," he explained.

He added the patient was transferred from Intensive Care Unit (ICU) to the ward and he is in good health condition. He thanked the assistant doctors, the Anesthesia Department led by Dr Muhammad Onsi and the nursing staff for their contributions to the successful surgery.

MoE work teams to raise career level of employees

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: The Ministry of Education has confirmed the formation of work teams tasked to raise the career level of employees assigned in the main office, educational districts, schools and kindergartens, reports Al-Anba daily.

The daily obtained a copy of the letter that acting Undersecretary of the ministry Anwar Al-Hamdan sent to the assistant undersecretary for Public Education stating: "Please agree on the formation of work teams as per Civil Service Commission (CSC) Resolution number 16/2011 on the mechanism for forming teams in government agencies and its amendments in accordance with CSC Decision number 40/2016. Two teams should be formed in the main office and in each educational district on the dates specified for raising the career level in the classified job groups in January and July 2024.

The Public Education Sector is in charge of preparing draft decisions in the educational districts, while the team leaders will select the members whose number should not exceed 10 in accordance with Article Four of CSC Resolution number 16/2011. No member shall be added to the team unless it is approved by the undersecretary and provided the number does not exceed that stipulated by the law -- 10 plus the team leader.



From left – Ambassadors of Belgium, Dooms; of the European Union HE Koistinen and Ambassador of Spain HE Moro Aguilar.

Embassy of Spain in Kuwait celebrates the handing over of EU Presidency to Belgium

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: The Embassy of the Kingdom of Spain in Kuwait held a reception at the residence of the Spanish Ambassador, HE Miguel Moro Aguilar, to mark the end of the six-month Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which lasted from July 1 until December 31, 2023.

This landmark event was also attended by HE Anne Koistinen, Ambassador of the European Union to the State of Kuwait, and HE Christian Doms, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium to Kuwait. Belgium will be taking over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union on January 1, 2024, for another period of six months.

Speaking at the event, Ambassador of Spain HE Miguel Moro Aguilar, began his address by mentioning the complex, turbulent international context of the Spanish Presidency, plagued with geopolitical tensions, with the wars and terrible suffering caused in Gaza or in Ukraine.

According to the Spanish envoy, one of the strategic goals of the Spanish Presidency in this volatile scenario was precisely to strengthen the European Union strategic autonomy, reflected in the "Granada Declaration" approved at the informal European Council of October in Granada, Spain and in the organization of the Third Summit of the European Political Community.

Strengthening

Particular attention was also paid to the strengthening of EU relations with Middle Eastern and North African countries as well as with the Gulf region, where the EU-GCC Ministerial meeting in Muscat early October offered a great occasion for an impulse in the relations between the two blocs.

Regarding Kuwait, Moro Aguilar said: "We are glad to see that the EU, under this semester, has experienced a significant improvement in the visa procedures for Kuwaitis, a reality that is already paving the way for a closer people-to-people relationship.

The EU and Kuwait also held a recent fruitful Human Rights dialogue and political consultations in Brussels, opening promising avenues for future collaboration in the different domains. "We are almost ready in a few weeks to pass the baton to our Belgian friends, with which we have already collaborated closely in the last few months to guarantee and smooth, effective transition. Our high appreciation goes as

well to Ambassador Koistinen and her team at the EU Delegation, for their valuable efforts and the good team work in the last period."

For her part, HE Ambassador HE Anne Koistinen thanked the Spanish Embassy for their role played locally during the last six months and praised cooperation with the Spanish Embassy, including the preparation of a very generous Schengen visa cascade for Kuwaiti nationals and holding a joint visit for EU Ambassadors to the Shagaya Renewable Energy Complex on October 25.

She further elaborated that during the upcoming Belgian Presidency the EU Delegation will continue playing an important role in organizing and hosting regular meetings of 16 EU Member States Ambassadors in Kuwait. This is an important platform for EU Member States to exchange views and coordinate their work in Kuwait.

In his address, Ambassador of Belgium HE Christian Doms began thanked his Spanish colleague, HE Miguel Moro Aguilar for the hard work he and his team have carried out to advance on the European agenda in Kuwait.

Transition

He is confident that this will facilitate a smooth transition to the Belgian Presidency.

"The 3 key words of the agenda of the Belgian Presidency are -- "Protect, Strengthen and Prepare". These priorities will be structured around 6 themes -- protection of the Rule of Law, democracy and unity; strengthening competitiveness; a just ecological transition; strengthening the social and health program of the EU; protection of individuals and borders; promoting Europe on the world stage."

The ambassador of Belgium concluded his remarks by mentioning some specific actions and initiatives that will be taken in the Middle East/ Gulf Region, such as strengthening the EU's partnership with the Gulf States and working towards stability in the Gulf region.

The Presidency of the Council rotates among the EU member states every 6 months. During this six-month period, the EU Member State that holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union determines the agenda and priorities of the Council as well as presides over its meetings, to broker compromises among the EU Member States.

«Mujezat Al-Shifa»: reveals the role of royal jelly in protecting the respiratory system

The nutrition consultant at Mujezat Al-Shifa Company said: Scientists at the University of Ljubljana, in Slovenia, have proven the role of royal jelly and bee products in reducing the rate of influenza infection among people, in addition to what scientists at the University of Zagreb, Croatia have found, that royal jelly enhances immunity by activating the production of lymphocytes and the production of antibodies. .



She added: Scientists have proven that royal jelly eliminates many of the aggressive bacteria and fungi that infect patients with influenza, in addition to discovering proteins in royal jelly that have the ability to fight bacteria and fungi that infect the respiratory system with pneumonia.

World News Roundup

Europe

Court delays deal

EU President lauds 'Italy-Albania pact'

BRUSSELS, Dec 14, (AP) — A top European Union official has endorsed an agreement that would see Albania host thousands of migrants picked up at sea and transferred there by the Italian authorities, just as the Albanian Constitutional Court delayed the deal so legal concerns can be addressed.

In a letter to EU leaders, meeting Thursday in Brussels, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen praised "important initiatives" on restricting migration by some of the bloc's 27 member countries, including "the operational arrangement between Italy and Albania."

"This serves as an example of out-of-the-box thinking, based on fair sharing of responsibilities with third countries in line with obligations under EU and international law," von der Leyen wrote, in a letter outlining the progress made on halting the arrival of people without authorization.

Under the five-year deal announced last month, Albania would shelter up to 36,000 migrants for a year, or about 3,000 a month, who try to reach Italy without proper documentation, mostly in perilous sea voyages.

It would involve people rescued or "intercepted" by the Italian navy in international waters. Those migrants picked up in Italy's territorial waters would retain their right under international and EU law to apply for asylum in Italy and also have their claims processed there.

Albania would house the migrants at two facilities while Italy fast-tracks their asylum requests. Italy would remain legally responsible for the migrants throughout the process. It would welcome them in should they be granted international protection or organize their deportation from Albania if refused.

3 arrested in Denmark: Three people were arrested in coordinated actions across Denmark and one person in the Netherlands on suspicion of plotting to carry out "an act of terror," Danish police said Thursday.

Flemming Drejer, operative head of Denmark's Security and Intelligence Service, known by its acronym PET, said that Denmark was not changing the terror threat level, which has been at "serious," the second-highest level, since 2010.

In January 2020, a Danish court upheld a nationwide police ban on the gang, saying that the LTF should be dissolved as illegal under Denmark's constitution.

The gang had been behind feuds, violence, robberies, extortion and drug sales in the Danish capital and "had used violence and illegal means to achieve its goal," the Copenhagen District Court said then. In September 2018, police in Denmark issued a temporary ban against the LTF and said anyone seen wearing its logo could face prosecution. (AP)

Court acquits Blackwater founder: An Austrian court on Thursday acquitted five people, including the founder of the Blackwater security firm, who were accused of exporting two crop-spraying aircraft that were allegedly refitted for military purposes without the necessary permits.

The state court in Wiener Neustadt found that the modified aircraft were not "war material," the Austria Press Agency reported. It also found that the defendants had acted "very prudently" and sought advice on export permits.

The trial stemmed from an investigation into a local company, Airborne Technologies GmbH, which fits out aircraft with sensors and other equipment.

Prosecutors said that two Ayres Thrush agricultural aircraft were equipped with armor, extra tanks and a special camera that could be used for marking and illuminating targets. They said one was sent to Malta in 2014, with Kenya as its declared destination, and landed in troubled South Sudan, while the other was sent to Bulgaria in 2015. (AP)

Pope calls for treaty to regulate AI: Pope Francis on Thursday called for an international treaty to ensure artificial intelligence is developed and used ethically, arguing that the risks of technology lacking human values of compassion, mercy, morality and forgiveness are too great.

Francis added his voice to increasing calls for binding, global regulation of AI in his annual message for the World Day of Peace, which the Catholic Church celebrates each Jan. 1. The Vatican released the text of the message on Thursday.

For Francis, the appeal is somewhat personal: Earlier this year, an AI-generated image of him wearing a luxury white puffer jacket went viral, showing just how quickly realistic deepfake imagery can spread online. (AP)

War crimes convictions upheld: Appeals judges at a special Kosovo court upheld Thursday the convictions of a former commander in the Kosovo Liberation Army for arbitrarily detaining and torturing prisoners and murdering one of them during Kosovo's war for independence, but reduced his sentence by four years.

The commander, Salih Mustafa, was convicted a year ago and sentenced to 26 years' imprisonment for the crimes committed at a KLA compound in Zilash, Kosovo, in April 1999. He was acquitted of one charge of mistreating detainees who were perceived as supporters of Serbia.

While dismissing all Mustafa's appeals against his convictions, the appeals chamber at the Kosovo Specialist Chambers cut his sentence to 22 years of imprisonment, saying it was higher than international and domestic sentencing standards in comparable cases. (AP)

Armenia, Azerbaijan exchange POWs: Armenia and Azerbaijan on Wednesday exchanged prisoners of war, in line with an agreement announced last week that also promised the two countries would work towards a peace treaty and was hailed by the European Union as a major step toward peace in the tumultuous region.

Azerbaijan brought back two servicemen, while 32 soldiers returned to Armenia, officials in both countries reported.

Azerbaijan waged a lightning military campaign in September in the separatist region of Nagorno-Karabakh. The offensive ended three decades of rule there by ethnic Armenians and resulted in the vast majority of the 120,000 residents fleeing the region, which is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan. (AP)



Russian President Vladimir Putin speaks during his annual news conference in Moscow, Russia, Thursday, Dec. 14, 2023. (AP)

Putin declares 'no peace' in Ukraine until Kremlin's goals are achieved

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Thursday there would be no peace in Ukraine until the Kremlin realizes its goals, which remain unchanged after nearly two years of fighting that has sent tensions soaring between Moscow and the West.

Speaking at a year-end news conference that lasted over four hours and offered him an opportunity to reinforce his grip on power, Putin gave some

rare details on what Moscow calls its "special military operation."

He dismissed the need for a second wave of mobilization of reservists to fight in Ukraine - a move that has been deeply unpopular. He said there are some 617,000 Russian soldiers there, including around 244,000 troops who were called up to fight alongside professional military forces.

"There will be peace when we will achieve our

goals," Putin said, repeating a frequent Kremlin line. "Victory will be ours."

Putin highlighted Russian military gains in Ukraine as the conflict's second winter approached.

"Almost all along the line of contact our armed forces, let's put it modestly, are improving their positions, almost all in an active stage of action and there is an improvement in the position of our troops all along," he said. (AP)

Politics

House approves impeachment inquiry

Biden challenges GOP priorities

WASHINGTON, Dec 14, (AP) — The House on Wednesday authorized the impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden, with every Republican rallying behind the politically charged process despite lingering concerns among some in the party that the investigation has yet to produce evidence of misconduct by the president.

The 221-212 party-line vote put the entire House Republican conference on record in support of an impeachment process that can lead to the ultimate penalty for a president: punishment for what the Constitution describes as "high crimes and misdemeanors," which can lead to removal from office if convicted in a Senate trial.

Biden, in a rare statement about the impeachment effort, questioned the priorities of House Republicans in pursuing an inquiry against him and his family.

"Instead of doing anything to help make Americans' lives better, they are focused on attacking me with lies," the president said following the vote. "Instead of doing their job on the urgent work that needs to be done, they are choosing to waste time on this baseless political stunt that even Republicans in Congress admit is not supported by facts."

Authorizing the monthslong inquiry ensures that the impeachment investigation extends well into 2024, when Biden will be running for reelection and seems likely to be squaring off against former President Donald Trump - who was twice impeached during his time in the White House. Trump has pushed his GOP allies in Congress to move swiftly on impeaching Biden, part of his broader calls for vengeance and retribution against his political enemies.

The decision to hold a vote came

as Speaker Mike Johnson and his team faced growing pressure to show progress in what has become a nearly yearlong probe centered around the business dealings of Biden's family members. While their investigation has raised ethical questions, no evidence has emerged that Biden acted corruptly or accepted bribes in his current role or previous office as vice president.

"We do not take this responsibility lightly and will not prejudge the investigation's outcome," Speaker Mike Johnson and his leadership team said in a joint statement after the vote. "But the evidentiary record is impossible to ignore."

House Democrats stood in united opposition to the inquiry resolution Wednesday, calling it a farce perpetrated by those across the aisle to avenge the two impeachments against Trump.

Political stunt

"This whole thing is an extreme political stunt. It has no credibility, no legitimacy, and no integrity. It is a sideshow," Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., said during a floor debate.

Some House Republicans, particularly those hailing from politically divided districts, had been hesitant in recent weeks to take any vote on Biden's impeachment, fearing a significant political cost. But GOP leaders have made the case in recent weeks that the resolution is only a step in the process, not a decision to impeach Biden. That message seems to have won over skeptics.

"As we have said numerous times before, voting in favor of an impeachment inquiry does not equal impeachment," Rep. Tom Emmer, a member of the GOP leadership team, said at a news conference Tuesday.

Emmer said Republicans "will con-

tinued to follow the facts wherever they lead, and if they uncover evidence of treason, bribery or other high crimes and misdemeanors, then and only then will the next steps towards impeachment proceedings be considered."

Most of the Republicans reluctant to back the impeachment push have also been swayed by leadership's recent argument that authorizing the inquiry will give them better legal standing as the White House has questioned the legal and constitutional basis for their requests for information.

A letter last month from a top White House attorney to Republican committee leaders portrayed the GOP investigation as overzealous and illegitimate because the chamber had not yet authorized a formal impeachment inquiry by a vote of the full House. Richard Sauber, special counsel to the president, also wrote that when Trump faced the prospect of impeachment by a Democratic-led House in 2019, Johnson had said at the time that any inquiry without a House vote would be a "sham."

Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-S.D., said this week that while there was no evidence to impeach the president, "that's also not what the vote this week would be about."

"We have had enough political impeachments in this country," he said. "I don't like the stonewalling the administration has done, but listen, if we don't have the receipts, that should constrain what the House does long-term."

Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., who has long been opposed to moving forward with impeachment, said that the White House questioning the legitimacy of the inquiry without a formal vote helped gain his support. "I can defend an inquiry right now," he told reporters this week. "Let's see what they find out."



Derek and Suzi Alkonis pose with a photo of their son Lt. Ridge Alkonis on Wednesday, June 1, 2022, in Dana Point, Calif. Lt. Ridge Alkonis, a U.S. Navy officer jailed in Japan over a deadly car crash that killed two Japanese citizens, has been transferred to U.S. custody. Lt. Ridge Alkonis' wife said Thursday he's being returned to the United States. (AP)



Trump



Dr. Berger

America

Trump rails against opponent: Donald Trump on Wednesday made his third trip to Iowa this month and urged his supporters to turn out in "big numbers" when Republicans cast the first presidential nomination votes in 33 days.

The former president, who has remained far ahead of his rivals in national polls and those of likely Iowa caucusgoers, pressed his supporters not to be complacent despite his frontrunner status.

"We have to put big numbers up, really big numbers," Trump said. Addressing Iowa voters directly, he said: "We are leading by a lot but you have to go out and vote. That margin of victory is so, so powerful."

He also insulted his GOP rivals and President Joe Biden and boasted about everything from keeping Iowa at the forefront of the Republican nominating process to bringing back the phrase "Merry Christmas," though he didn't offer details explaining when he thought it had gone missing.

He vowed that if he won the November 2024 election, the economy would be thriving again by Christmas of that year. (AP)

Ex-professor faces lawsuit: A former professor at Harvard Medical School and founder of one of the nation's largest fertility clinics is being accused of secretly impregnating a patient in 1980 after promising the sperm would come from an anonymous donor, according to a lawsuit filed Wednesday.

Sarah Depoian, 73, said she and her husband first went to Dr. Merle Berger, now-retired professor of obstetrics, gynecology and reproductive biology, in 1979 to discuss intrauterine insemination. Depoian said Berger told her the sperm would come from an anonymous donor "who resembled her husband, who did not know her, and whom she did not know," according to the lawsuit filed in the United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts.

The artificial insemination that Berger

performed resulted in a successful pregnancy, and Depoian's daughter, Carolyn Bester, was born in January 1981. Earlier this year, Bester conducted a home DNA test and discovered Berger was her biological father,

according to the lawsuit. (AP)

2 LA County men exonerated: Two men who spent decades in prison for crimes



New Mexico Supreme Court Chief Justice Shannon Bacon questions attorney Valerie Chacon, who is representing Hobbs, during the oral arguments dealing with local municipalities implementing ordinances restricting abortion on Wednesday, Dec. 13, 2023 in Santa Fe, N.M. The New Mexico Supreme Court is weighing whether to strike down local abortion restrictions by conservative cities and counties at the request of the attorney general for the state where abortion laws are among the most liberal in the country. (AP)

they didn't commit have been exonerated and freed, the Los Angeles County district attorney announced Wednesday.

Giovanni Hernandez and Miguel Solorio had their convictions vacated earlier this year and on Wednesday a judge found them factually innocent, the District Attorney's Office said in an email.

At a news conference, District Attorney George Gascón apologized to both men.

"It's truly devastating when people are wrongfully convicted, especially when they were so young at the time of their arrest. In the case of Mr. Solorio, he was 19 years old. Mr. Hernandez was just 14 years old," Gascón said. (AP)

Stranger charged with murder: A stranger accused of breaking into the home of a Detroit synagogue leader was charged with her murder Wednesday, nearly two months after her body was found outdoors with multiple stab wounds, authorities said.

There was not a "shred of evidence" that Samantha Woll was killed as a result of anti-Semitism or any hate crime, prosecutor Kym Worthy said.

Michael Jackson-Bolanos, 28, of Detroit, was charged with murder, home invasion and lying to police. A not-guilty plea was entered during his appearance in 36th District Court, and he was subsequently returned to jail without bond.

Attorney Brian Brown said he will vigorously defend Jackson-Bolanos. (AP)

Lat/Am

'Meeting to ease tensions'

Guyana, Venezuela to tackle Essequibo spat

GEORGETOWN, Guyana, Dec 14, (AP): The leaders of Guyana and Venezuela headed for a tense meeting Thursday as regional nations sought to defuse a long-standing territorial dispute that has escalated with Venezuelans voting in a referendum to claim two-thirds of their smaller neighbor.

Pushed by regional partners, Guyanan President Irfaan Ali and Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro agreed to meet at the Argyle International airport on the eastern Caribbean island of St. Vincent. The prime ministers of Barbados, Dominica and Trinidad and Tobago said they also would attend.

The meeting is aimed at easing the tensions that have flared over Essequibo, a vast border region rich in oil and minerals that represents much of Guyana's territory but that Venezuela claims as its own.

Venezuela's president followed the referendum by ordering his state-owned companies to explore and exploit the oil, gas and mines in Essequibo. And both sides have put their militaries on alert.

It was unclear if the session would lead to any agreements or even ease the border controversy.

Guyana's president has repeatedly said the dispute needs to be resolved solely by the International Court of Justice in the Netherlands.

"We are firm on this matter and it will not be open for discussion," Ali wrote Tuesday on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Venezuela insists the Essequibo region was part of its territory during the Spanish colonial period, and argues the 1966 Geneva Agreement between their country, Britain and Guyana, the former colony of British Guiana, nullified the border drawn in 1899 by international arbitrators.

In a letter sent Tuesday to Ralph Gonsalves, prime minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Guyana's president said the Geneva Agreement states that the International Court of Justice should settle any border controversy.

Ali also said he was concerned about what he described as "inaccurate assertions" made by Maduro's own letter to Gonsalves.

6 killed in Mexico: Six people have been killed in a shootout between drug cartel gunmen in the northern Mexico state of Zacatecas, authorities said late Tuesday.

The Zacatecas state security council said the bodies were found in a rural area known as Boquilla del Carmen. It said the dead appeared to belong to one of the gangs but did not mention its name.

Police and soldiers also found two people wounded, as well as one armed suspect and guns and a grenade. The wounded were taken for treatment.

They also found a kind of rural camp often used by cartels for training and operations like holding kidnapping victims. The council said the camp was destroyed to prevent it being used again.

Canadian man killed at gym: A Canadian man with a criminal record in his home country has been killed in a shooting at a mall in the Caribbean coast resort of Cancun, Mexican authorities said Wednesday.

Prosecutors in the coastal state of Quintana Roo did not give the man's name. They said the shooting occurred at a gym inside the mall. They said he had been convicted in Canada of gang-related offenses, including possession of illicit funds. Jason Kung, a spokesperson for Global Affairs Canada, said the office was "aware of reports of the death of a Canadian citizen in Mexico," but "due to privacy considerations, no further information can be disclosed."

It would not be the first time Canadians killed in the area were later found to have criminal backgrounds.

In January 2022, two Canadians - one of them sought by Interpol - were killed at a nearby resort in Playa del Carmen, apparently because of debts between international drug and weapons trafficking gangs.

Lula ally as new Supreme Court justice: Brazil's Senate approved the appointment of Justice Minister Flávio Dino on Wednesday to take a seat on the country's Supreme Court.

Dino, a former leftist state governor who cracked down on supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro after they rampaged through government buildings last January, was approved for the court of 11 justices on a vote of 47-31.

The vote, which came after a full day of speeches by senators in a divisive hearing, underscored that the opposition led by the rightist Bolsonaro is not strong enough to block the agenda of his leftist successor, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

Dino will replace former Chief Justice Rosa Maria Weber, who stepped down in September after turning 75, the age limit for the nation's Supreme Court justices.

Colombian congress probes president: A Colombian congressional committee on Wednesday ordered a preliminary investigation into President Gustavo Petro over allegations of crimes in the financing of his election campaign.

The Commission of Investigation and Accusation, which has judicial functions in dealing with complaints against the president, said it ordered the probe after analyzing information provided by prosecutors following revelations of alleged irregular campaign contributions involving Petro's son.

Colombia's presidents have immunity from being investigated by the prosecutor's office.

Prosecutors initially charged Petro's son, Nicolás Petro, with receiving unjustified money - cash that was not from his earnings as a deputy from Atlántico.

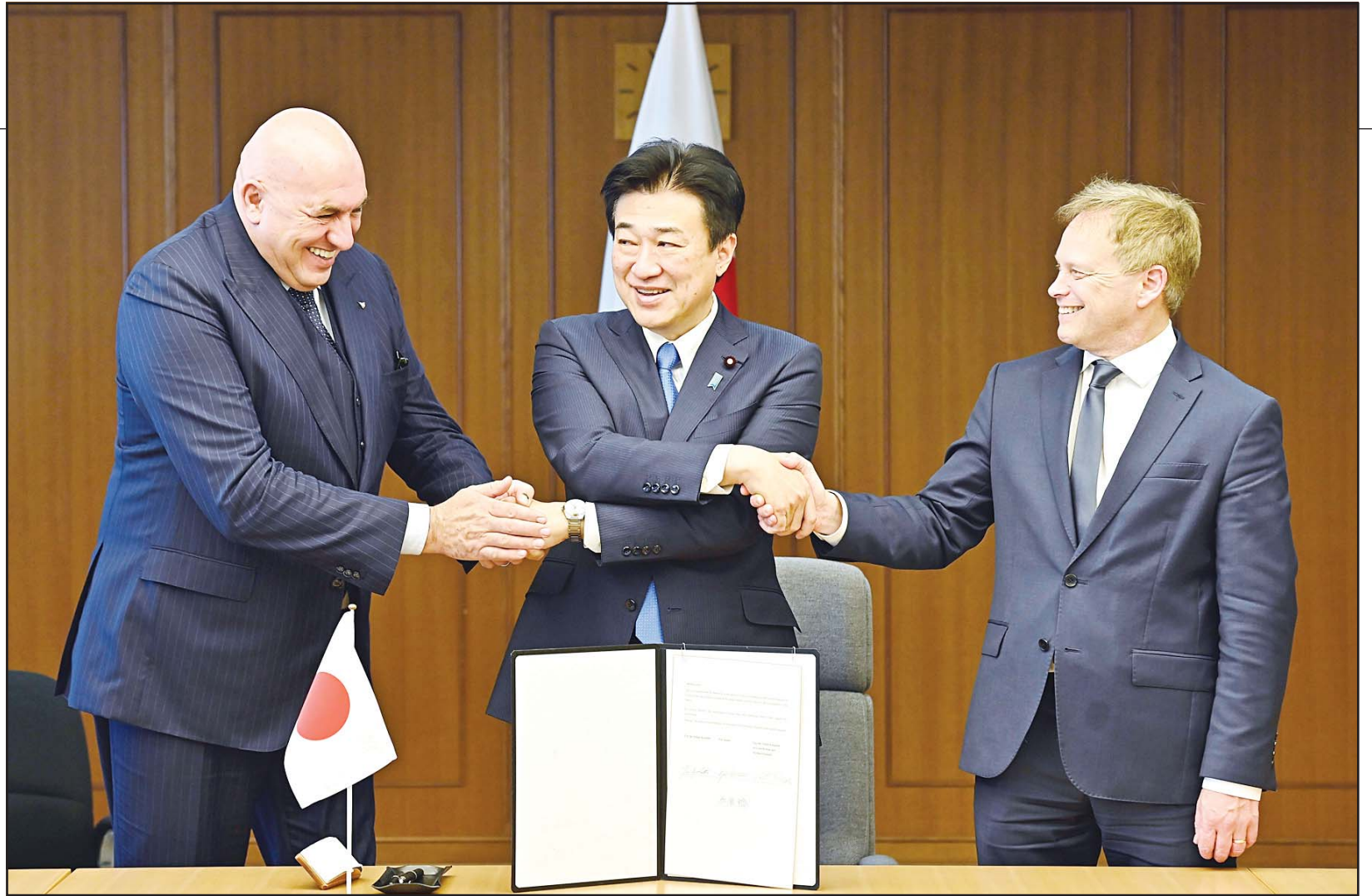
Authorities probe surge in targeted killing: Colombian authorities on Wednesday were investigating the alleged kidnapping and murder of a Hmong American comedian and activist who was found dead Monday in a wooded area of the northern city Medellín.

Prosecutors told reporters that Tou Ger Xiong, 50, arrived in Medellín on Nov. 29. He went to meet a friend in the city on Dec. 10. Hours later he called a friend in the United States to tell him that he was kidnapped and his captors demanded a \$2,000 ransom to free him, according to prosecutors.

Yiri Amado Sánchez, sectional director of Medellín prosecutor's office, indicated that another friend of the activist reported the kidnapping for ransom - a common occurrence in the city.



Maduro



Britain's Defense Minister Grant Shapps, right, Italy's Defense Minister Guido Crosetto, left, and Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara, center, shake hands after a signing ceremony for Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP) at the defense ministry Thursday, Dec. 14, 2023, in Tokyo, Japan. (AP)

Japan, UK and Italy establish new jet fighter collaboration amid rising China, Russia concerns

The defense ministers of Japan, Britain and Italy signed an agreement on Thursday to establish a joint organization to develop a new advanced jet fighter, as the countries push to strengthen their cooperation in the face of growing threats from China, Russia and North Korea.

The three countries had agreed last year to merge earlier individual plans - for Japan's Mitsubishi F-X to succeed the retiring F-2s developed with the United States and Britain's Tempest - to produce the

new combat aircraft for deployment in 2035. Japan, which is rapidly building up its military, hopes to have a greater capability to counter China's rising assertiveness while welcoming Britain's bigger presence in the Indo-Pacific region.

Defense Minister Minoru Kihara said at a joint news conference with his British and Italian counterparts, Grant Shapps and Guido Crosetto, that co-developing a high-performance fighter aircraft is "indispensable to securing air superiority and

enabling effective deterrence" at a time that Japan faces an increasingly severe security environment.

Kihara said no individual nation can defend itself today, adding that securing the technology and funding to develop an advanced fighter jet involves large risks. He said the joint trilateral Global Combat Air Program is a "historic program" enabling the countries to work together to create a new fighter jet while reducing risks. (AP)



Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Wednesday announced plans to replace some of his Cabinet ministers to address public criticism and distrust over his governing party's widening slush funds scandal that has shaken his grip on power. The scandal mostly involves the Liberal Democratic Party's largest and most powerful faction formerly led by assassinated ex-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Its key members, including those in top Cabinet and party posts, were suspected of systematically failing to report several hundred million yen (several million dollars) in funds in possible violation of campaign and election laws, media reports say. (AP)



H.E. Mohamud



J. Yellen

Africa

Somalia secures \$4.5 bln deal: Somalia on Wednesday secured a \$4.5 billion debt relief deal from its international creditors, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank said, which will allow the nation to develop economically and take on new projects.

The deal comes as part of a debt forgiveness program - called the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative - overseen by both organizations. As a result of its participation in the program, Somalia's external debt will fall from 64 percent of GDP in 2018 to less than 6 percent of GDP by the end of 2023, the IMF and World Bank say in a joint news release.

Somalia's national debt currently exceeds \$5 billion, according to official figures.

"Somalia's debt relief process has been nearly a decade of cross-governmental efforts spanning three political administrations. This is a testament to our national commitment and prioritization of this crucial and enabling agenda," said Somalia's President, H.E. Hassan Sheikh Mohamud in a statement.

U.S. Treasury said it intends to cancel 100 percent of Somalia's remaining claims and "urges Somalia's other bilateral creditors to be equally generous and to move expeditiously."

The deal is "a significant milestone in Somalia's path to continued recovery and meaningful reform to promote greater stability and economic opportunities for the Somali people," U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said.

Ali Yasin Sheikh, deputy governor of Somalia's central bank, told The Associated Press Wednesday that debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative comes as a relief for his country, which is eager to secure new funding for public projects.

In addition, he said, now it will be easier for Somalia to attract new investors.

"Debt forgiveness will lead to a change in the world's perception of the country's

Asia

Coal mine accident kills 3 in northern China

Taiwan opposition visits China before elections

TAIPEI, Taiwan, Dec 14, (AP): A leader of Taiwan's main opposition Nationalist Party is visiting rival China less than one month before the self-governing island republic holds elections for president and the legislature under intense pressure from Beijing.

In a news release Thursday, the party - also known as the Kuomintang or KMT - said vice chair Andrew Hsia and his delegation departed for China on Wednesday at the invitation of Taiwanese businesspeople. It called the trip a mission to maintain contacts and contribute to "peace, stability and prosperity between the two sides."

Though the party said the invitation was accepted in October, the visit comes at a sensitive time as the Nationalists seek to regain the presidency and legislature from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party, which has been shunned by China for its insistence that Taiwan is an independent country.

China claims Taiwan is part of its territory, to be brought under its control by military force if necessary. The Nationalists ruled Taiwan under martial law for almost four decades after fleeing to the island amid the Communist takeover of mainland China in 1949 and formally agree with Beijing that both sides are part of a single Chinese nation.

Most surveys show the party's ticket of former national police chief Hou You-yi and his running mate, ex-legislator Jaw Shaw-kong, are well behind the DPP's William Lai, currently vice president, and vice presidential candidate Bi-khim Hsiao, Taiwan's former representative to the United States. That appears to reflect the prevailing sentiment among Taiwanese of maintaining their current status of de-facto independence, even while maintaining close economic ties with China.

On Wednesday, China's Taiwan Af-

fairs Office denounced Lai as a "troublemaker" and "war-maker." Spokesperson Zhu Fenglian said Taiwanese should reject independence "for the sake of their peace, stability and well-being."

In its statement, the Nationalist Party said it is committed to Taiwan's security and democracy, and to peace and stability between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. It accused the DPP of generating "fake news" concerning contacts between Nationalist officials and the ruling Chinese Communist Party, saying that was an attempt to smear a "normal and appropriate agenda to conduct exchanges on the mainland to serve Taiwan compatriots and Taiwan businesspeople."

The statement said Taiwanese on the mainland needed particular care "at a time of heightened tensions between the U.S. and Beijing authorities," and leaders must maintain channels of communication.

That appeared to cast Hsia in the role of go-between, although there was no indication he had been entrusted with carrying any specific messages to the Chinese authorities. The statement did not say whether Hsia would be meeting any high-ranking Chinese officials.

Contacts between Taiwan politicians and China have come under particular scrutiny in the run-up to the election amid concerns Beijing will seek to influence the vote by offering favors and spreading disinformation. Prosecutors have been looking into trips to China by grassroots ward chiefs during which their expenses were covered by the Chinese government, saying that is part of a long-term "united front" strategy of steering votes toward pro-unification politicians.

The Nationalists said Hsia was due to visit cities including Chengdu, Nanchang, Zhongshan, Xiamen, and

Chongqing on what it termed a listening tour.

It's at least his second trip to China in 2023; a visit in February included a meeting with the head of China's Taiwan Affairs Office, Song Tao.

Since President Tsai Ing-wen first took office in 2016, China has refused all contact with Taiwan's government over her refusal to recognize the "One China" principle embodied in an earlier agreement brokered by the Nationalists and mainland Communists known as the "92 Consensus."

The vast majority of Taiwan's 23 million people support the status quo of de-facto independence. Tsai, who is limited to two four-year terms, says there is no need to make a formal declaration that would likely spark a military response from China.

Also:

BEIJING: An accident in a coal mine in northern China's Shanxi province left three people dead, state broadcaster CCTV reported Thursday.

Four people were cleaning a bunker used to store coal when the accident occurred on Wednesday. It was unclear what caused the accident. Rescue workers were able to save one person, but the three others died after resuscitation efforts failed, the report said.

The accident occurred at Huajin Coking Coal Company in Shanxi, a major coal-producing region.

China has been working to improve mine safety to combat accidents, which happen with some frequency. A coal mine explosion killed 11 people in Shanxi in August, and a coal mine fire in southern China's Guizhou province killed 16 people in September.

Last month, a major fire at a coal mining company building in Shanxi killed 26 people and injured dozens of others, but the blaze was not in the mine itself.



Thai soldiers stand beside seized 50 million methamphetamine pills hidden in sacks during a news conference at Thongphaphum Police station in Kanchanaburi province, Thailand, Wednesday, Dec. 13, 2023. Thai police have seized what is being called a record haul of methamphetamine tablets in the western province of Kanchanaburi, close to the Myanmar border. (AP)

Gunmen kill four in Nigeria: At least four Nigerian soldiers were killed while two South Koreans were abducted during an attack by gunmen in Nigeria's oil-rich southern Rivers state, authorities said.

The gunmen ambushed a convoy escorting the Koreans on a work trip in the Ahoada East council area, resulting in a shootout, Maj. Jonah Danjuma, an army spokesman, said in a statement on Tuesday.

"Troops are currently combing the general area to fish out the perpetrators of this dastardly act. Additionally, efforts are ongoing to ensure that the unaccounted oil workers are found," Danjuma said.

Abductions for ransom are common in parts of Nigeria, but it has been especially widespread in Rivers and other parts of the oil-rich Niger Delta region where many foreign companies in the oil and engineering sectors operate. The region also struggles with high poverty and hunger despite its natural resources.

Hostages are usually released after the payment of large ransoms, though security forces in the past have succeeded in freeing some. Danjuma urged locals to provide any intelligence that would help in making arrests. (AP)

USD down

The exchange rate of the US Dollar against the Kuwait Dinar fell on Thursday to KD 0.307, while the exchange rate of the Euro was up to KD 0.355 compared to Wednesday.

The Central Bank of Kuwait said in its daily bulletin on its website that the exchange rate of the Pound Sterling was up to KD 0.388, the Swiss Franc was up to KD 0.354, and the Japanese Yen stood firm KWD 0.002. (KUNA)

oil plunges

The price of Kuwaiti oil barrel dropped USD 4.64 to USD 74.38 per barrel (pb) on Tuesday compared with Wednesday's USD 79.02 pb, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Thursday.

In the international markets, the Brent crude went up by USD 1.02 to USD 74.26 pb, whilst the West Texas intermediate dropped 86 cents to USD 69.47 pb. (KUNA)

The International Monetary Fund picked Wednesday Saudi Minister of Finance Mohammed Aljadaan to chair the International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC) for a term of three years, effective January 4, 2024.

"The Kingdom's chairmanship of the IMFC for 2024-2027 reflects the trust of the international community in the Kingdom's leadership globally and regionally, and the pivotal role it plays in promoting international multilateral efforts," Aljadaan told the Saudi Press Agency.

IMF selects Saudi minister as chairman of IMFC

Minister Aljadaan will succeed Nadia Calvino, Spain's First Vice President and Minister for Economic Affairs and Digital Transformation, who has chaired the IMFC since January 3, 2022.

"I thank the Former Chair of the IMFC, Ms. Nadia Calvino, for her accomplishments during her term, and I look forward to working with the IMFC members and the IMF management to promote the stability and effectiveness of the international monetary and financial system," Minister Aljadaan added.

Prior to his ministerial appointment in November 2016, Aljadaan served as Chair of the Board of the Capital Market Authority of Saudi Arabia.

Before that, he worked as a private lawyer specializing in commercial law, finance and financial market transactions, privatization, and partnership between the public and private sector.

At the international level, Aljadaan serves on the Ministerial Council of the OPEC Fund for International Development. (KUNA)

Market Movements

14-12-2023

	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts
SAUDI Tadawul	+141.46	11,542.93	JAPAN Nikkei	-240.10	32,686.25
UAE DFM	+42.76	3,982.07	EGYPT EGYX 30	-51.10	24,722.82
PHILIPPINES PSEI	+154.74	6,410.48			
PAKISTAN KSE 100	+306.82	65,616.06			

Business

Kuwaiti banks witness 1.1% surge in deposits

Central Bank's bond offerings grow by 2.6%

By Ahmad Fathi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: During the first 11 months of this year, local banks experienced a notable surge in their accounts and deposits at the Central Bank of Kuwait, marking a 1.1 percent increase, equivalent to approximately 56 million dinars. The total rose from 5.71 billion dinars in December 2022 to 5.128 billion dinars by the end of November.

However, on an annual basis, these accounts and deposits saw a significant decline of 5.5 percent, totaling 299.3 million dinars, compared to 5.427 billion dinars at the end of November 2023. Concurrently, the Central Bank's issuance of bond offerings and corresponding tawarruq experienced a growth of 2.6 percent, reaching 210 million dinars during the 11 months of the current year compared to the same period last year. The Central Bank launched 38 issues with a combined value of 8.2 billion dinars, covered by banks approximately 12 times, with a total value of 98.7 billion dinars. This compares to 35 issues in the same period of 2022 with a total value of 8.02 billion dinars, covered by banks at a ratio of 11.3 percent, with a total value of 90.7 billion dinars.

Banks are exhibiting an in-

Net profit amounts to KD 73 mln KIPCO sells its GIG stake for KD 256 mln to Fairfax

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14, (KUNA): Kuwait Projects Company (KIPCO) announced on Thursday the completion of the sale deal of its entire stake of 46.3 percent of Gulf Insurance Group (GIG) to Fairfax Financial Holdings for 256 million KD (around USD 832 million).

The company said in a press conference that its net profit from the deal amounted to KD 73 million (about USD 237 million) and that the purchase price was set at KD two per share, provided that 54 fills are deducted from this amount, which is the value of the cash distributions that GIG worked to distribute in 2022.

Sheikha Dana Nasser Al-Sabah, KIPCO's CEO said that the company's success in completing the transformational merger deal has led to the growth of its investment portfolio.

Increased demand to boost their deposits and accounts with the Central Bank, as well as acquiring Central Bank bonds. This demand stems from the ample liquidity enjoyed by banks, resulting from the substantial volume of deposits amid limited investment channels. This scarcity arises, particularly with the notable surge in inflation in asset prices over the last two years due to the rise in interest rates by the US Federal Reserve, followed by most central banks globally.

In 2022, the discount rate increased seven times, reflecting the

Since then, the company been considering opportunities to exit or invest in order to achieve the ultimate goal of growth and create greater value for company's shareholders, she added.

She added that the sale of KIPCO's stake to GIG is an evidence of the company's successful strategy of acquiring and expanding companies then exiting them in a timely manner based on the remunerative financial return.

KIPCO was established in 1975 and listed on the Kuwait Stock Exchange in 1984 and its authorized capital is 504 million dinars (about 1.5 billion dollars).

Its purposes are to own shares of Kuwaiti or foreign companies, as well as own shares in limited liability or foreign companies, or participate in the establishment, management, lending and guaranty of these companies with others.

Central Bank of Kuwait's effort to enhance cash flow within the banking sector and the national economy. Simultaneously, this strategy aims to sustain the appeal of the Kuwaiti dinar as a lucrative and reliable savings vessel and keep pace with interest rate hikes by the US Federal Reserve. The discount rate rose from 1.50% to 3.50% on December 7th.

In 2023, the Central Bank continued its monetary policy adjustments. Last January, the discount rate increased by half a percentage point to 4.0%, and in August, it rose by 25 basis points to 4.25%.

Shares continue slide

Pfizer's 2024 forecast falls short amid lower demand

NEW YORK, Dec 14, (AP): Pfizer heads into 2024 with a lower-than-expected sales forecast for its COVID-19 vaccine and treatment after weaker demand had already forced it to trim 2023 projections.

The drugmaker announced on Wednesday initial expectations for the new year that include about \$8 billion in combined sales from its Comirnaty vaccine and the treatment Paxlovid. That falls more than \$5 billion short of estimates on Wall Street.

The company's forecast for overall earnings and revenue next year also missed consensus. Pfizer shares continued their largely year-long slide in midday trading.

Pfizer leaders told analysts Wednesday that they expect vaccination and treatment rates to be about the same next year as they were in 2023. But they wanted to be conservative and offer a "good floor" for expectations to avoid creating any more uncertainty, CEO Albert Bourla said.

In mid-October, Pfizer said sales of both the vaccine and treatment were turning out weaker than expected. The company cut revenue projections for this year by \$9 billion. Two weeks later, Pfizer said sales of the treatment and vaccine had slid 97% and 70%, respectively, in the third quarter.

Comirnaty and Paxlovid combined



A man walks by Pfizer headquarters, Friday, Feb. 5, 2021 in New York. Pfizer released a financial outlook for next year that doesn't match with Wall Street expectations as sales of COVID-19 products slide. Shares tumbled more than 7% before the opening bell Wednesday, Dec. 13, 2023. (AP)

to rake in more than \$56 billion in sales last year, easily making them Pfizer's two top-selling products.

But a down year for both was widely expected as demand slid and drugmakers switched to selling on the commercial market instead relying on the more stable payout of bulk government contracts.

Bourla also noted Wednesday in a call with analysts that the virus that

triggered a global pandemic in 2020 is no longer "top of mind," and that there's some COVID-19 fatigue and anti-vaccine rhetoric in the market.

Chief Financial Officer David Denton also called the virus unpredictable and said it was hard to model its performance. Even so, he said Pfizer expects both the market-leading treatment and vaccine to remain significant products.

Wyden did not identify the governments involved. Google spokesman Matt Bryant said the company has always "required a court order" to compel disclosure of data associated with push notifications. As for disclosure of such data when it is requested by a foreign government, Bryant said that would depend "on applicable law, which vary by region" and other considerations including international norms

Apple mandates court orders to access push notification

WASHINGTON, Dec 14, (AP): Apple is now requiring that U.S. law enforcement agencies obtain a court order for information on its customers' push notifications, the alerts that iPhone apps send users that can reveal a lot about their online activity.

Push notifications alert smartphone users to breaking news alerts, incoming messages, weather bulletins and other content. The policy shift was not formally announced but rather appeared in an updated version of Apple's law enforcement guidelines posted online. Apple's main competitor in mobile operating systems, Google, already had such a policy in place for its Android system.

The Cupertino, California, company did not immediately respond to questions about it.

The privacy-enhancing policy was added following last week's disclosure by Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden that his of-

Q3 score of 77.66 surpassed

Saudi Ports Authority achieves record LSCI score

RIYADH, Dec 14, (PR Newswire): In a significant development that aligns with the objectives of the National Transport and Logistics Strategy (NTLS), Saudi Arabia has solidified its competitiveness and global standing. The Saudi Ports Authority (Mawani) attained its highest improvement in the UNCTAD's Liner Shipping Connectivity Index (LSCI) for Q4 2023, securing a remarkable score of 79.01 points. This achievement adds to the recent major records, including a score of 77.66 during Q3.

Several factors contributed to this accomplishment. In 2023, 28 new cargo services were added in collaboration with leading shipping liners. The Kingdom also made significant progress in container handling, rising from the 24th position to the 16th position in the Lloyd's List One Hundred Ports rankings. Additionally, Saudi Arabia jumped 17 places in the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index (LPI) to secure the 38th position out of 160 countries.

Mawani's success can be attributed to its continuous infrastructure upgrades and modernization efforts. The optimization of operations, implementation of initiatives to automate port operations, and deployment of cutting-edge equipment align with their mission to adopt smart technologies. Furthermore, Mawani's commitment to facilitating import and export procedures has promoted national exports and fostered global maritime trade, ultimately reducing the cost of port operations.

The Liner Shipping Connectivity Index (LSCI) aims to enhance global port connectivity and increase the number of shipping lines. It achieves this by considering various sub-indicators such as the frequency of scheduled vessels visit per week, standardized ship capacity, and the availability of regular service routes provided by shipping lines for inbound and outbound transportation. These indicators evaluate the level of connectivity between ports across different countries and their associated shipping line networks.

Officials eye three rate cuts in coming year

Fed holds key interest rate steady

WASHINGTON, Dec 14, (AP): The Federal Reserve kept its key interest rate unchanged Wednesday for a third straight time, and its officials signaled that they expect to make three quarter-point cuts to their benchmark rate next year.

Speaking at a news conference, Chair Jerome Powell said that Fed officials are likely done raising interest rates because of how steadily inflation has cooled.

"Inflation keeps coming down, the labor market keeps getting back into balance and, it's so far, so good," Powell said after the Fed's 19-member policy committee ended its latest meeting.

On Wall Street, traders celebrated the prospect of lower rates ahead. Stock prices soared and bond yields sank after the Fed's policymakers signaled that they envision three interest rate cuts in 2024.

The Fed's latest policy statement and Powell's remarks at his news conference marked a major shift in the central bank's outlook on interest rates and the economy. Just two weeks ago, Powell had said it was "premature" to conclude that the Fed has finished raising its key benchmark rate or to "speculate" about cuts in that rate.

But on Wednesday, he signaled that the Fed is almost certainly done raising rates. And he acknowledged that Fed officials had discussed the prospect of rate reductions in their meeting that ended Wednesday.

He also conceded that his warning, in a high-profile speech last year, that the "pain" of higher unemployment would accompany a sharp decline in inflation, was overly pessimistic. Instead, inflation has slowed significantly toward the Fed's 2% target, even while unemployment, at 3.7%, and the pace of layoffs, have remained low.

In response to a question, Powell said the Fed recognizes that keeping rates high for too long, and waiting too long to cut them, could endanger the economy.

"We're aware of the risk that we would hang on too long" before reducing borrowing rates, the Fed chair said. "We know that's a risk, and we're very focused on not making that mistake."

Diane Swonk, chief economist at KPMG, said she thought the Fed's message Wednesday was: "We're done."

The Fed, she said, has the "luxury" of leaving rates elevated, for now, in case the economy and inflation re-accelerate, "while declaring that they're done hiking, and that cuts are in the making."

Wall Street investors are betting that rate cuts could begin as soon as March, while economists generally foresee rate cuts beginning in May or June.

Throughout his news conference, Powell expressed optimism that inflation, which has bedeviled American consumers and businesses for more than two years, is edging down toward the Fed's 2% target. He noted, by example, that inflation has eased in goods, housing and services - three categories the Fed has been closely monitoring.

The Fed chair downplayed one concern that some economists have expressed - that the final step down to 2% inflation, from its current level of about 3%, could be harder than the previous slowdowns in price increases.

"We kind of assume that that it will get harder from here," he said. "But so far it hasn't."

The Fed kept its benchmark rate at about 5.4%, its highest level in 22 years, a rate that has led to much higher costs for mortgages, auto loans, business borrowing and many other forms of credit. Higher mortgage rates have sharply reduced home sales. Spending on appliances and other expensive goods that people often buy on credit has also declined.

Conversely, interest rate cuts by the Fed, whenever they happen, would reduce borrowing costs across the



Federal Reserve Board Chair Jerome Powell speaks during a news conference about the Federal Reserve's monetary policy at the Federal Reserve, Wednesday, Dec 13, 2023, in Washington. (AP)

economy. Stock prices could rise, too, though share prices have already rallied in expectation of rate cuts, potentially limiting any further increases.

So far, the Fed has achieved what few observers had thought possible a year ago: Inflation has tumbled without an accompanying surge in unemployment or a recession, which typically coincide with a central bank's efforts to cool the economy and curb inflation. Though inflation remains above the Fed's 2% target, it has declined faster than Fed officials had expected, allowing them to keep rates unchanged and wait to see if price increases continue to ease.

On Wednesday, the Fed's quarterly economic projections showed that its officials envision a "soft landing" for the economy, in which inflation would continue its decline toward the central bank's 2% target without causing a steep downturn. The forecasts showed that the policymakers expect to cut their benchmark rate to 4.6% by the end of 2024 - three quarter-point reductions from its current level.

A sharp economic slowdown could prompt even faster rate reductions. So far, though, there is no sign that a downturn is imminent.

In its quarterly projections, the

Fed's policymakers now expect "core" inflation, according to its preferred measure, to fall to just 2.4% by the end of 2024, down from a 2.6% forecast in September. Core inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy costs, is considered a better gauge to inflation's future path.

The policymakers foresee unemployment rising to 4.1% next year, from its current 3.7%, which would still be a low level historically. They project that the economy will expand at a modest 1.4% next year and 1.8% in 2025.

One reason the Fed could be able to cut rates next year, even if the economy pouts ahead, would be if inflation kept falling, as expected. A steady slowdown in price increases would have the effect of raising inflation-adjusted interest rates, thereby making borrowing costs higher than the Fed intends. Reducing rates, in this scenario, would simply keep inflation-adjusted borrowing costs from rising.

The Fed is the first of several major central banks to meet this week, with others also expected to keep their rates on hold. Both the European Central Bank and the Bank of England will decide on their next moves Thursday.

Yearly increase at 0.9%

Flat growth in US producer prices

WASHINGTON, Dec 14: Wholesale inflation in the United States was unchanged in November, suggesting that price increases in the economy's pipeline are continuing to gradually ease.

The Labor Department reported Wednesday that its producer price index - which tracks inflation before it reaches consumers - was flat from October to November after having fallen 0.4% the month before. Measured year over year, producer prices rose just 0.9% from November 2022, the smallest such rise since June.

Excluding volatile food and energy costs, so-called core wholesale prices were unchanged from October and were up just 2% from a year ago - the mildest year-over-year increase since January 2021. Among goods, prices were unchanged from October to November, held down by a 4.1% drop in gasoline prices. Services prices were also flat.

Wednesday's report reinforced the belief that inflation pressures are cooling across the economy, including among wholesale producers. The figures - which reflect prices charged by manufacturers, farmers and wholesalers, can provide an early sign of how fast consumer inflation will rise in the coming months.

Year-over-year producer price inflation has slowed more or less steadily since peaking at 11.7% in March 2022. That is the month when the Federal Reserve began raising its benchmark interest rate to try to slow accelerating prices. Since then, the Fed has raised the rate 11 times, from near zero to about 5.4%, the highest level in 22 years.

The Fed is expected later Wednesday to announce, after its latest policy meeting, that it's leaving its benchmark rate unchanged for the third straight meeting. Most economists believe the Fed is done raising rates and expect the central bank to start reducing rates sometime next year.

On Tuesday, the Labor Department reported that consumer prices rose just 0.1% last month from October and 3.1% from a year earlier. But core prices, which the Fed sees as a better indicator of future inflation, were stickier, rising 0.3% from October and 4% from November 2022. Year-over-year consumer price inflation is down sharply from a four-decade high of 9.1% in June 2022 but is still above the Fed's 2% target.

"The data confirm the downturn in inflation, although consumer prices are moving lower more gradually," said Rubeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics. "For the Fed, there is nothing in today's figures that changes our expectation that (its policymakers) will hold policy steady today, and rates are at a peak."

Despite widespread predictions that the Fed rate hikes would cause a recession, the U.S. economy and job market have remained surprisingly strong. That has raised hopes the Fed can pull off a so-called soft landing - raising rates enough to tame inflation without sending the economy into recession.

China-made passenger jets on display in HK

Chinese aerospace company CO-MAC has showcased its domestically-developed C919 passenger jet in Hong Kong, giving officials and media a close-up look at the narrow-bodied aircraft.

A welcome ceremony for the C919 and an ARJ21, another Chinese-made jet made by the state-owned Commercial Aircraft Corp of China, was held at the Hong Kong international airport on Wednesday, a day after both flew into Hong Kong for the first time.

At the event, Hong Kong's leader John Lee said China's successful development of the large passenger jet indicates its "leading position in the transportation manufacturing industry." He added that the two airplanes' visit to Hong Kong demonstrates the importance that China places on Hong Kong's aviation industry.

More than 1,000 orders have been placed for the C919, Lee said, and Hong Kong's Civil Aviation Department has participated in

certifying the aircraft and training pilots to fly it.

COMAC is preparing to take on Airbus and Boeing in the market for single-aisle commercial aircraft. But while it designed many of the C919's parts, some key components are still sourced from the West, including its engine.

The C919 is due to perform a fly-over the city's scenic Victoria Harbor on Saturday, giving people on the waterfront a glimpse of the new aircraft, weather permitting. (AP)

BP denies ex-CEO Looney a \$41 million payout

The former chief executive of BP has been denied a \$24.4 million pound (\$41 million) payout after he was found to have misled the company over his past relationships with colleagues, the energy giant said Wednesday.

Bernard Looney resigned in September after acknowledging he had not been "fully transparent" in his disclosures about his work relationships.

BP said the company sought assurances from Looney in 2022

about the relationships but has concluded that his statements were "inaccurate and incomplete."

"Mr. Looney knowingly misled the board," BP said. "The board has determined that this amounts to serious misconduct."

The firm said the 32.4 million pounds' worth of salary, pension, bonus payments and shares have been forfeited as a result. Some payments already given to Looney, including 50% of the cash bonus paid for the 2022 financial year, will

be "clawed back," it added.

The move reflects "the decision by the board that Mr. Looney should not retain any variable pay relating to service following the date of the misleading assurances," BP said.

Looney took on the role in February 2020 after spending his career at BP, having joined as an engineer in 1991. He has been replaced by chief financial officer Murray Auchincloss on an interim basis while BP searches for a new CEO. (AP)

The Conversation

Initiative enters second decade

Growth of autocracies will expand Chinese global influence via BRI

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

By Richard Carney

Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen

China currently faces daunting challenges in its domestic economy. But weakness in the real estate market and consumer spending at home is unlikely to stem its rising influence abroad.

In mid-October 2023, China celebrated the 10-year anniversary of its Belt and Road Initiative, or BRI. The BRI seeks to connect China with countries around the world via land and maritime networks, with the aim of improving regional integration, increasing trade and stimulating economic growth. Through the expansion of the BRI, China also sought to extend its global influence, especially in developing regions.

During its first decade, the initiative has faced a barrage of criticism from the West, mainly for saddling countries with debt, inattention to environmental impact, and corruption.

It has also encountered unexpected challenges - notably the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to massive supply chain issues and restrictions on the movement of Chinese workers overseas. Yet, as the BRI heads into its second decade, global economic trends suggest it will continue to play an important role in spreading Chinese influence.

I'm an associate professor of global studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen, where I teach about business-government relations in emerging economies. In my new book, "China's Chance to Lead," I discuss which countries have already and are now most likely to seek out and benefit from Chinese spending. Understanding this helps explain why China and the Belt and Road Initiative are poised to benefit greatly from the global economy over the next several decades.

In October 2013, China President Xi Jinping announced the launch of the maritime portion of the BRI during a speech in Jakarta. At the time, Indonesia appeared to be an ideal candidate for Chinese infrastructure spending, yet it was Malaysia - surprisingly - that emerged as a far more avid participant.

In comparison to Malaysia, Indonesia's economy was three times larger and its population nearly nine times bigger, yet its gross domestic product per capita only was one-third as high. Indonesia also had enormous potential to increase its already substantial natural resources exports to China. Taken together, these factors point to Indonesia's far greater demand for infrastructure that would aid its economic development.

Furthermore, Indonesia's democratic institutions were more conducive to attracting foreign investment. Its checks and balances enhanced policy stability and reduced political risk. By contrast, Malaysia's government, which was dominated by a single ruling party coalition, lacked comparable checks and balances.

Despite Indonesia's numerous advantages, Malaysia attracted a far larger

volume of BRI spending during its first several years. Data provided by the China Global Investment Tracker indicates the value of newly announced infrastructure projects in Malaysia surged from US\$3.5 billion in 2012 to over \$8.6 billion in 2016. Spending in Indonesia, meanwhile, rose modestly from \$3.75 billion to \$3.77 billion over the same period.

Malaysia also enthusiastically participated in the Digital Silk Road, or DSR, launched in 2015. The DSR is the technological dimension of the BRI that aims to improve digital connectivity in Belt and Road countries. Malaysia Prime Minister Najib Razak engaged Jack Ma, the co-founder of Chinese tech giant Alibaba, as an adviser to develop e-commerce in 2016. This led to the creation in 2017 of a Digital Free Trade Zone, an international e-commerce logistics hub next to the Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

With this foundation in place, Malaysia's capital went on to become the first city outside China to adopt Alibaba's City Brain smart city solution in January 2018. City Brain uses the wealth of urban data to effectively allocate public resources, improve social governance and promote sustainable urban development. Dubai and other cities in the Middle East followed.

Digital Silk Road projects in Indonesia during that period were far fewer, slower and less ambitious. They primarily involved the expansion of Chinese smartphone and e-commerce firms in Indonesia.

What accounts for these contrasting responses? The short answer: their political regimes. And understanding that could be key to the global spread of Chinese influence in the coming years.

In the lead-up to the May 2018 election, Malaysia's ruling party and its allies worried they could lose power after six decades of rule. Desperate to bolster support, Najib quickly identified numerous infrastructure megaprojects in which Chinese state-owned businesses could partner with Malaysian counterparts.

Indonesia, by contrast, placed far greater emphasis on projects led by private business. For example, the Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park, "the world's epicenter for nickel production," is one of the largest Chinese investments in Indonesia and a joint venture between private Chinese and Indonesian companies.

As I discuss in my book, when rulers in autocracies with semi-competitive elections, like Malaysia's, have a weak hold on power, their desire for Chinese spending is amplified. This relates to clientelism, or the delivery of goods and services in exchange for political support.

A higher level of state control in autocracies grants political leaders greater influence over the allocation of clientelist benefits, which aids leaders' reelection efforts.

Even if China's future growth is lower than the pre-pandemic period, these four features of the global economy are poised to benefit China and the Belt and Road Initiative over the next several decades.

1. Global rise of autocracies

Over 60% of developing countries are autocratic, according to data provided by the Varieties of Democracy Project. This represented 72% of the global population in 2022, up from 46% in 2012.

For decades, the World Bank and affiliated regional development banks were

the only game in town for development financing to low- and middle-income countries. Consequently, these global lenders could demand liberalizing reforms that were sometimes contrary to the interests of incumbent rulers, especially autocrats.

China's rise has created an attractive alternative for autocratic regimes, especially since it does not impose the same kinds of conditions that often require loosening state controls on the corporate sector and reducing clientelism. Between 2014 and 2019, I find that 77% of total BRI spending on construction projects went to autocracies, and primarily to those with semi-competitive elections.

2. Demand for Chinese infrastructure spending

The economies of developing countries have grown more than twice as quickly as advanced economies since 2000 and are projected to outpace advanced economies in the decades ahead. On the eve of the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991, developing economies accounted for 37% of global GDP; by 2030, the International Monetary Fund projects they will account for around 63%.

At the same time, the global infrastructure financing gap - that is, the money needed to build and upgrade existing infrastructure - is estimated to be around \$15 trillion by 2040. To fill this gap, the world must spend just under \$1 trillion more than the previous year up through 2040, with most of this spending directed toward low-income economies.

Because many of these fast-growing, low-income countries are predominantly semicompetitive autocracies, China is well-positioned to expand its global influence via the Belt and Road Initiative.

3. Emerging tech

The advent of what is known as Industry 4.0 technologies, such as artificial intelligence, big data analytics and blockchain, could enable developing countries to leapfrog stages of development.

By creating new technical standards to be used in these emerging digital technologies, China aims to lock in Chinese digital products and services and lock out non-Chinese competitors wherever its standards are adopted.

In Tanzania, for example, the Chinese company contracted to deploy the national ICT broadband network constructed it to be compatible only with routers made by Chinese firm Huawei.

Incorporating digital technologies into hard infrastructure projects - digital traffic sensors on roads, for example - presents more opportunities for China to use the Belt and Road Initiative to promote adoption of its technologies and standards globally.

4. Urbanization

Finally, the developing world's urban population is expected to rise from 35% in 1990 to 65% by 2050. The biggest increases will likely occur in the semi-competitive autocracies of Africa. A desire for sustainable urbanization will increase the demand for infrastructure that incorporates digital technologies - once again amplifying the opportunity for China and the BRI.

Understanding what drives the demand for the Belt and Road Initiative, and the trends that will propel it into the future, is vital for the West to devise an effective strategy that counters China's rising global influence. (AP)

World Bank calls recovery 'fragile'

China's economy forecast to 'slow sharply' in 2024

BANGKOK, Dec 14, (AP) - China's economy will slow next year, with annual growth falling to 4.5% from 5.2% this year despite a recent recovery spurred by investments in factories and construction and in demand for services, the World Bank said in a report issued Thursday.

The report said the recovery of the world's second-largest economy from setbacks of the COVID-19 pandemic, among other shocks, remains "fragile," dogged by weakness in the property sector and in global demand for China's exports, high debt levels and wavering consumer confidence.

The estimate that growth would be around 5% this year but then fall in coming months was in line with other forecasts. Growth is expected to slow further in 2025, to 4.3% from 4.5% next year, the World Bank said.

The economy has yoayed in the past few years, with growth ranging from 2.2% in 2020 to 8.4% in 2021 and 3% last year. Stringent limits on travel and other activities during the pandemic hit manufacturing and transport. Job losses due to those disruptions and to a crackdown on the technology sector, combined with a downturn in the property industry, have led many Chinese to tighten their purse strings.

Most of the jobs created during China's recovery have been low-skilled work in service industries with low pay, it noted. Chinese also are cautious given the threadbare nature of social safety nets and the fact that the population is rapidly aging, putting a heavier burden for supporting elders on younger generations.

"The outlook is subject to consider-

able downside risks," the report said, adding that a prolonged downturn in the real estate sector would have wider ramifications and would further squeeze already strained local government finances, as meanwhile softer global demand is a risk for manufacturers.

The report highlights the need for China to pursue broad structural reforms and said moves by the central government to take on the burden of supporting cash-strapped local governments also would help improve confidence in the economy.

China's leaders addressed such issues in their annual Central Economic Work Conference earlier this week, which set priorities for the coming year, but state media reports on the gathering did not provide specifics of policies.

Real estate investment has fallen by 18% in the past two years and more needs to be done to resolve hundreds of billions of dollars in unpaid debts of overextended property developers, the report said.

It said the value of new property sales fell 5% in January-October from a year earlier while new property starts dropped more than 25%. The slowdown was worst in smaller cities that account for about 80% of the market in the country of 1.4 billion people.

Some of that weakness has been offset by strong investment in manufacturing, especially in areas such as electric vehicles and batteries and other renewable energy technologies and in strategically important areas such as computer chips that are receiving strong government support.

Inflation pinching Hungary's popular Christmas markets

BUDAPEST, Hungary, Dec 14, (AP) - On a cold night in Hungary's capital, shoppers at one of Europe's most famous outdoor Christmas markets browsed through food stalls of steaming local specialties and sipped from paper cups of hot mulled wine. A holiday light show played on the facade of the St. Stephen's Basilica.

But despite the Christmas cheer, a cost-of-living crisis in the Central European country means that many Hungarians and tourists alike are getting sticker shock at the beloved annual markets.

A bowl of Hungary's trademark goulash soup for \$12. Stuffed cabbage for more than \$18. A sausage hot dog for \$23. Such were the prices on Monday at the bustling Budapest square. In a country where the median net wage is below \$900 per month, the ballooning costs have left some Hungarians

feeling that the markets aren't priced for them.

"This isn't designed for Hungarian wallets," said Margit Varga, a first-time visitor from the southern city of Pecs. "The prices are simply unreal, regardless of whether it's for tourists or for Hungarians."

The price of food at the popular Advent Basilika market, and at the nearby market on Vorosmarty Square, have caused a wave of coverage in local media in recent weeks. Some outlets compared prices to similar markets in wealthier Vienna, less than three hours away by train, and found some Budapest food items to be more expensive.

Ami Sindhra, a 29-year-old visitor from London, said she'd recently visited a Christmas market in Cologne, Germany, and found that food at the Budapest market was "a lot more expensive."

With inflation down in Europe, people are talking cut in rate

The ECB may say not so fast

FRANKFURT, Germany, Dec 14, (AP) - The inflation plaguing European shoppers has fallen faster than expected. The economy is in the dumps. That has people talking about interest rate cuts by the European Central Bank, perhaps as soon as the first few months of next year.



Gerard White, wearing a Santa hat and waiting for his wife to finish work, sits outside the Bank of England, which is expected to hold interest rates for the third time in a row, as fresh data has pointed towards potential cracks in the economy, in London, Thursday Dec. 14, 2023. (AP)

BoE holds interest rates at a 15-year high despite worries about economy

LONDON, Dec 14, (AP) - The Bank of England kept borrowing rates unchanged Thursday despite mounting worries over the state of the British economy, and it showed little sign that it is contemplating cutting them anytime soon - unlike the U.S. Federal Reserve.

The central bank left its main interest rate at a 15-year high of 5.25%, where it has stood since August following the end of nearly two years of hikes. Six of the nine members of the Monetary Policy Committee voted to keep rates on hold while three wanted a quarter-point hike.

While the interest rate increases

have helped in the battle against inflation, the squeeze on consumer spending, primarily through higher mortgage rates, has weighed on British economic growth.

On Wednesday, the U.S. Federal Reserve also kept rates on hold. The European Central Bank, which sets policy for the 20 European Union countries that use the euro currency, is expected to do the same Thursday.

The Fed also signaled that it expects to make three interest rate cuts next year, while market expectations also foresee cuts by the ECB.

But that looks a ways off for the

Bank of England.

In its statement Thursday, the bank said monetary policy would need to be "sufficiently restrictive for sufficiently long to return inflation to the 2% target sustainably in the medium term."

Holding that high rate follows two years of hikes that targeted a surge in inflation, first stoked by supply chain issues during the coronavirus pandemic and then Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which pushed up food and energy costs.

The Bank of England has managed to get inflation down from a four-decade high of over 11% - but there's still a ways to go for it to get back to its 2% target.

capital, said that while "Paris was lagging easily 50% behind the rest of the major cosmopolitan cities in pricing, it's catching up fast. Rents, food, clothing. So, you have got to be careful now."

Europe's falling inflation and economic stagnation - output declined 0.1% in the July-to-September quarter - mean the ECB may be the first major central bank to pivot to rate cuts, said Frederik Ducrozet, head of macroeco-

nomics research at Pictet Wealth Management.

But the expectations vary, from Deutsche Bank's prediction that March is a possibility to Pictet's view that June is most likely. Lagarde has emphasized that decisions will be made based on the latest information about how the economy is doing.

"It remains to be seen how strong Lagarde will be able to push back

against market pricing. She is more likely to stress the ECB's data dependence, refraining from committing to any specific sequencing," Ducrozet said in a research note.

Expectations of a March rate cut may be "excessive euphoria," said Holger Schmieding, chief economist at Berenberg bank, cautioning that inflation could rise again before falling further. He doesn't see a rate cut before September.

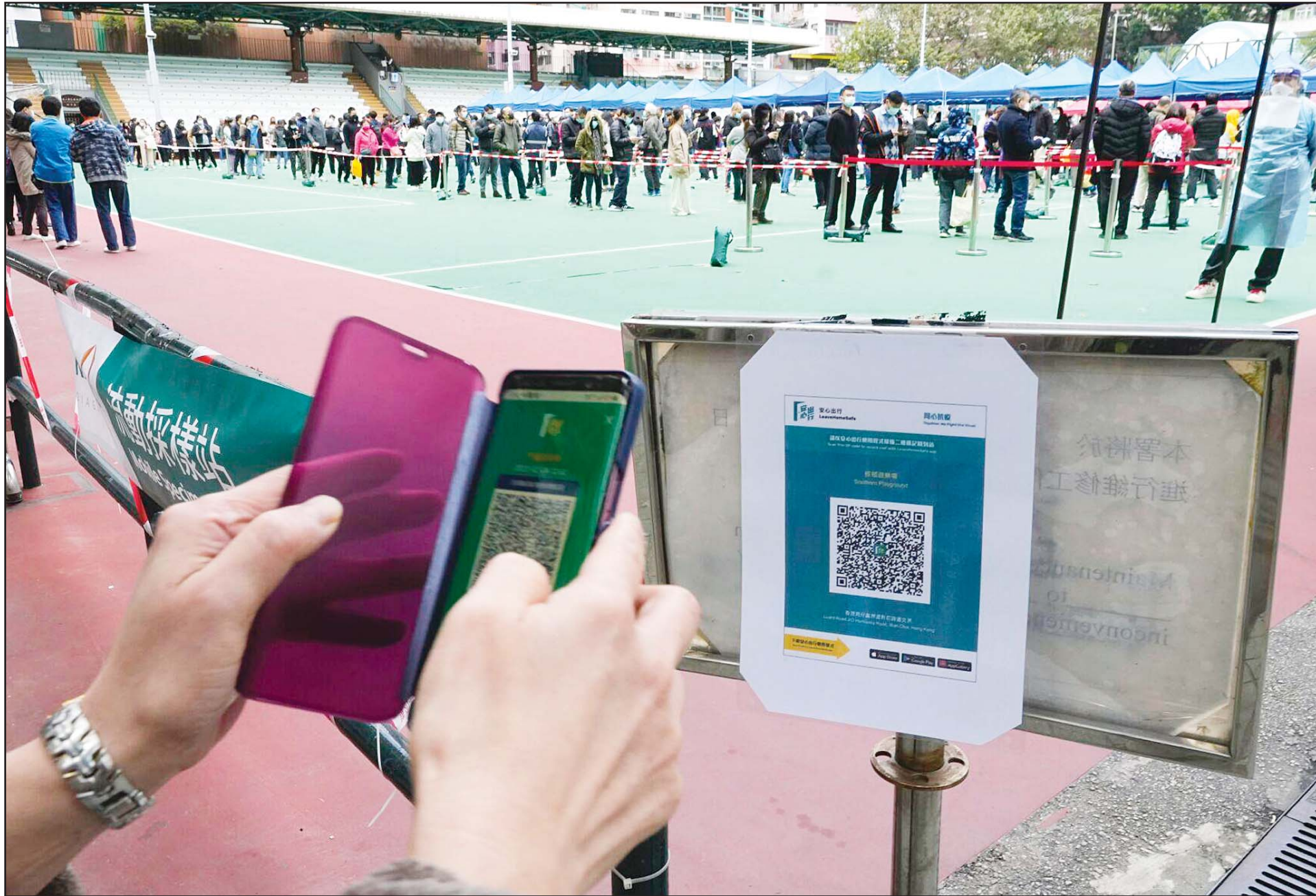
INNOVATION

Business Plus



Security threats you didn't know about

Scan with caution: Dark side of QR code convenience



QR codes are visual patterns that store data smartphones can read. (AP)

Like barcodes, QR codes are designed with data redundancy. Even if as much as 30% of the QR code is destroyed or difficult to read, the data can still be recovered

By Scott Ruoti
University of Tennessee

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

Among the many changes brought about by the pandemic is the widespread use of QR codes, graphical representations of digital data that can be printed and later scanned by a smartphone or other device, but there are some security risks. The Federal Trade Commission warned again in December 2023 about the danger of scanning a code from an unknown source.

QR codes have a wide range of uses

that help people avoid contact with objects and close interactions with other people, including for sharing restaurant menus, email list sign-ups, car and home sales information, and checking in and out of medical and professional appointments.

QR codes are a close cousin of the bar codes on product packaging that cashiers scan with infrared scanners to let the checkout computer know what products are being purchased.

Bar codes store information along one axis, horizontally. QR codes store information in both vertical and horizontal axes, which allows them to hold significantly more data. That extra amount of data is what makes QR codes so versatile.

While it is easy for people to read Arabic numerals, it is hard for a

computer. Bar codes encode alphanumeric data as a series of black and white lines of various widths. At the store, bar codes record the set of numbers that specify a product's ID. Critically, data stored in bar codes is redundant. Even if part of the bar code is destroyed or obscured, it is still possible for a device to read the product ID.

QR codes are designed to be scanned using a camera, such as those found on your smartphone. QR code scanning is built into many camera apps for Android and iOS. QR codes are most often used to store web links; however, they can store arbitrary data, such as text or images.

When you scan a QR code, the QR reader in your phone's camera deciphers the code, and the resulting

information triggers an action on your phone. If the QR code holds a URL, your phone will present you with the URL. Tap it, and your phone's default browser will open the webpage.

QR codes are composed of several parts: data, position markers, quiet zone and optional logos.

The data in a QR code is a series of dots in a square grid. Each dot represents a one and each blank a zero in binary code, and the patterns encode sets of numbers, letters or both, including URLs. At its smallest this grid is 21 rows by 21 columns, and at its largest it is 177 rows by 177 columns. In most cases, QR codes use black squares on a white background, making the dots easy to distinguish. However, this is not a strict requirement, and QR

codes can use any color or shape for the dots and background.

Position markers are squares placed in a QR code's top-left, top-right, and bottom-left corners. These markers let a smartphone camera or other device orient the QR code when scanning it. QR codes are surrounded by blank space, the quiet zone, to help the computer determine where the QR code begins and ends. QR codes can include an optional logo in the middle.

Like barcodes, QR codes are designed with data redundancy. Even if as much as 30% of the QR code is destroyed or difficult to read, the data can still be recovered. In fact, logos are not actually part of the QR code; they cover up some of the QR code's data. However, due to the QR code's redundancy, the data represented by these missing dots can be recovered by looking at the remaining visible dots.

QR codes are not inherently dangerous. They are simply a way to store data. However, just as it can be hazardous to click links in emails, visiting URLs stored in QR codes can also be risky in several ways.

The QR code's URL can take you to a phishing website that tries to trick you into entering your username or password for another website. The URL could take you to a legitimate website and trick that website into doing something harmful, such as giving an attacker access to your account. While such an attack requires a flaw in the website you are visiting, such vulnerabilities are common on the internet. The URL can take you to a malicious website that tricks another website you are logged into on the same device to take an unauthorized action.

A malicious URL could open an application on your device and cause it to take some action. Maybe you've seen this behavior when you clicked a Zoom link, and the Zoom application opened and automatically joined a meeting. While such behavior is ordinarily benign, an attacker could use this to trick some apps into revealing your data.

It is critical that when you open a link in a QR code, you ensure that the URL is safe and comes from a trusted source. Just because the QR code has a logo you recognize doesn't mean you should click on the URL it contains.

There is also a slight chance that the app used to scan the QR code could contain a vulnerability that allows malicious QR codes to take over your device. This attack would succeed by just scanning the QR code, even if you don't click the link stored in it. To avoid this threat, you should use trusted apps provided by the device manufacturer to scan QR codes and avoid downloading custom QR code apps. (AP)

Climate crisis demands action

COP28 nations commit to revolutionizing global food systems

By Paul Winters
University of Notre Dame

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

For the first time ever, food and agriculture took center stage at the annual United Nations climate conference in 2023. More than 150 countries signed a declaration, committing to make their food systems - everything from production to consumption - a focal point in national strategies to address climate change.

While the declaration is thin on concrete actions to adapt to climate change and reduce emissions, it draws attention to a crucial issue.

The global food supply is increasingly facing disruptions from extreme heat and storms. It is also a major contributor to climate change, responsible for one-third of all greenhouse gas emissions from human activities. This tension is why agriculture innovation is increasingly being elevated in international climate discussions.

At present, agriculture provides enough food for the world's 8 billion people, although many do not have adequate access. But to feed a global population of 10 billion in 2050, croplands would need to expand by 660,000 to 1.2 million square miles (171 million to 301 million hectare) relative to 2010. That would lead to more deforestation, which contributes to climate change.

Further, some practices widely relied on to produce sufficient food, such as using synthetic fertilizers, also contribute to climate change.

Simply eliminating deforestation and these practices without alternative solutions would decrease the world's food supply and farmers' incomes. Fortunately, innovations are emerging that can help.

In a report released Dec. 2, the Innovation Commission for Climate Change, Food Security and Agriculture, founded by Nobel-winning economist Michael Kremer, identifies seven priority areas for innovation that can help ensure sufficient food production, minimize greenhouse gas emissions and be scaled up to reach hundreds of millions of people.

I'm an agriculture economist and executive director for the commission. Three innovations in particular stand out for their ability to scale up quickly and pay off economically.

With extreme weather leaving crops increasingly vulnerable and farmers struggling to adapt, accurate weather forecasts are crucial. Farmers need to know what to expect, both in the days ahead and farther out, to make strategic decisions about planting, irrigating, fertilizing and harvesting.

Yet access to accurate, detailed forecasts is rare for farmers in many low- and middle-income countries. Our assessment shows that investing in technology to collect data and make forecasts widely available - such as by radio, text message or What-

sApp - can pay off many times over for economies.

For example, accurate state-level forecasts of seasonal monsoon rainfall totals would help Indian farmers optimize sowing and planting times, providing an estimated US\$3 billion in benefits over five years - at a cost of around \$5 million.

If farmers in Benin received accurate forecasts by text message, we estimate that they could save each farmer \$110 to \$356 per year, a large amount in that country.

More sharing of information among neighboring countries, using platforms like the World Meteorological Organization's Climate Services Information System, could also improve forecasts.

Another innovation priority involves expanding the use of microbial fertilizers.

Nitrogen fertilizer is widely used to increase crop yields, but it is typically made from natural gas and is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. Microbial fertilizers use bacteria to help plants and soil absorb the nutrients they need, thereby reducing the amount of nitrogen fertilizer needed. Studies have found that microbial fertilizers could increase legume yields by 10% to 30% in healthy soil and generate billions of dollars in benefits. Other microbial fertilizers work with corn, and scientists are working on more advancements.

Soybean farmers in Brazil have been using a rhizobia-based microbial fertilizer for decades to improve their

yields and cut synthetic fertilizer costs. But this technique is not as widely known elsewhere. Scaling it up will require funding to expand testing to more countries, but it has great potential payoff for farmers, soil health and the climate.

A third innovation priority is livestock, the source of roughly two-thirds of agriculture's greenhouse gas emissions. With demand for beef projected to rise 80% by 2050 as low- and middle-income countries grow wealthier, reducing those emissions is essential.

Several innovative methods for reducing livestock methane emissions target enteric fermentation, which leads to methane belches.

Adding algae, seaweed, lipids, tannins or certain synthetic compounds to cattle feed can change the chemical reactions that generate methane during digestion. Studies have found some techniques have the potential to reduce methane emissions by a quarter to nearly 100 percent. When cattle produce less methane, they also waste less energy, which can go into growth and milk production, providing a boost for farmers.

The method is still expensive, but further development and private investment could help scale it up and lower the cost.

Gene editing, either of livestock or the microorganisms in their stomachs, could also someday hold potential.

The Innovation Commission also identified four other priorities for innovation:

- Helping farmers and communities implement better rainwater harvesting.
- Lowering the cost of digital agriculture that can help farmers use irrigation, fertilizer and pesticides most efficiently.

- Encouraging production of alternative proteins to reduce demand for livestock.

- Providing insurance and other social protections to help farmers recover from extreme weather events.

While promising agricultural innovations exist, commercial incentives to develop and scale them up have fallen short, leading to underinvestment, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

However, innovation funding has a track record of generating very high social rates of return. This creates an opportunity for public and philanthropic investment in developing and deploying innovations at a scale to reach hundreds of millions of people. Of course, to be effective, any potential innovation must be consistent with - and driven by - national strategies and planned in conjunction with the government, the private sector and civil society.

Two decades ago, global leaders, frustrated that lifesaving vaccines were not reaching hundreds of millions of people who needed them, created Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance. They invested billions of dollars to scale up these innovations, helped to immunize over 1 billion children and halved child mortality in 78 lower-income countries. (AP)

editor's choice



State honor: Pennsylvania declares 2023 the 'Taylor Swift Era'

HARRISBURG, Pa., Dec 14, (AP) — She's Time's Person of the Year. She's the Spotify global artist. She's helmed the first tour to gross more than \$1 billion and then the highest-grossing concert film of all time. And now Taylor Swift can add one more accolade: A state House of Representatives resolution is recognizing 2023 as the Taylor Swift era in her home state of Pennsylvania.

Lawmakers approved the resolution on Swift's 34th birthday. Pennsylvania (Taylor's Version) has benefited from her Midas touch over the past year, sponsors say. The frenzy for tickets to her tour prompted legislative action in the state - and elsewhere, albeit slowly - to address Ticketmaster's shortcomings. Swift buoyed the local economy on her tour stops in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, and donated proceeds to hunger relief organizations as she blazed through. Nationally, she's encouraged thousands of people to register to vote, particularly young people.

The pure heft of the Pennsylvania native turned Miss Americana has displayed musically, culturally and economically over the past year prompted the resolution.

While the resolution had its naysayers, it passed 103-100. Speaker Rep. Joanna McClinton, a Democrat from Philadelphia County, joked, "Haters gonna hate, hate, hate, hate, hate" - echoing the lyrics of Swift's track "Shake It Off." Most Republicans voted against the measure, as did a few Democrats.

She has "transcended the role of pop star," the resolution said. The resolution recognizes her accomplishments throughout the past year, saying she "shines as a role model of courage, self acceptance and self-determination, persisting in the face of personal and professional obstacles and challenges."

Swift grew up near West Reading, in Berks County, about 60 miles (96 kilometers) northwest of Philadelphia. Part of her childhood was spent growing up on a Christmas tree farm, "where every wish comes true," she sings in "Christmas Tree Farm."

Career

Though she left Pennsylvania for Nashville to begin her music career as a teenager, she's had other nods to the Commonwealth in her songs ("gold rush," and "seven," were surprise songs at her Pennsylvania stops on tour.) And her home state hasn't forgotten her. A mural commemorating the artist's youth was posted in her hometown this summer, claiming her as "Reading's own."

Democratic Rep. Maureen Madden of Monroe County was an enthusiastic supporter of the measure and voiced appreciation for how Swift has pushed young people to become politically active.

"I turn 64 years old today, and I think about who's going to carry on our legacy. She's not popular because she writes break-up songs," Madden said on the House floor. "She's popular because the largest

demographic of people eligible to vote, the 18- to 24-year-old demographic, listens to her and does what she says."

Swift's impact as a woman, and on young women specifically, can't be understated, lawmakers said.

The resolution recognized her "singular economic and cultural influence" as demonstrating "the power of female agency, feminine ideas, feminine art and a distinctly feminine narrative."

It comes at a time where women have broken a number of glass ceilings in local politics, Democratic Rep. Jennifer O'Mara of Delaware County, said in a committee hearing for the resolution on Tuesday.

The first woman was elected to serve as mayor of the nation's sixth largest city, Philadelphia, as voters across the state chose the first woman to be Allegheny's county executive. Women, for the first time in the Legislature, are serving as president pro tempore in the Senate and as speaker of the House.

"2023 is the year for women in many ways," O'Mara said. "And I urge you to help us make it Taylor Swift era here in Pennsylvania."

"At first I was thinking, like, why?" Democratic Rep. Tarah Probst of Monroe County, said Tuesday. "But then you're right - the year of women. As you know, women's rights are being taken away left and right and by doing this, we're empowering women in general."

MUSIC

Variety



This image released by MGM shows Erika Alexander (left), and Jeffrey Wright in a scene from 'American Fiction.' (AP)

Film

Trevor Noah to host 2024 Grammys for 4th time

Wright is brilliant in 'American Fiction'

By Lindsey Bahr

Jeffrey Wright's Thelonious "Monk" Ellison is at the end of his rope at the beginning of "American Fiction," a crowd-pleaser that's both funny and smart in its satire of race, media, artists, identity politics and even Hollywood. It opens in theaters this week.

A classic frustrated artist, Monk is a professor and an author who writes literary stories that he wants to see in the world. He's not interested in race, or at least the kind of "Black misery porn" stories that seem to be omnipresent, whether it's in the Black history month advertisement on television with images of addicts and slaves, or at a book convention.

The latest hit that has him fuming is a book called "We's Lives In Da Ghetto," written by a comfortably upper middle class Black woman (Issa Rae) who gives interviews about how dismayed she was in her post-college job at a literary agency that she didn't see stories about "her people." But exploitative and demeaning as they are, those are also the ones that get the book deals, that sell, that draw the big crowds at book events, that get the movie deals.

Monk's books, smart as they are, don't - until one drunken night he writes a parody of the kind of Black novel he hates, under a pseudonym, and suddenly becomes a sensation.

Cord Jefferson, in his directorial debut, establishes the movie's tone well right off the bat in scene in which a white girl is offended that Monk has written a certain word, all seven letters of it, on the blackboard.

"With all due respect, Britney, I got over it. I'm pretty sure you can too," he says. When she pushes back, Jefferson cuts to a closeup of Wright growling before a quick cut to Britney's exit. We overhear Monk in the background angrily asking the remaining students if they actually want to talk

about the reading.

Monk does not suffer fools and seems incapable of not saying exactly what he feels at any given moment, but he's also rubbed a few too many people the wrong way. A few minutes in, he finds himself on an unwanted mandatory break, in Boston, with his family: Mother Agnes (Leslie Uggams), sister Lisa (Tracee Ellis Ross) and brother Cliff (Sterling K. Brown).

Complex

This family is complex and struggling - who isn't - but not in the ways that the novels Monk hates always seem to want Black families to be. Lisa's a family planning doctor trying to recover financially from a divorce and take care of her quickly deteriorating mother. Cliff is also a doctor, a plastic surgeon, discovering after a marriage to a woman that he likes men. They all have lingering trauma from their dead father, worries about money and how they'll afford a care facility for their mom.

Jefferson adapted the story from Percival Everett's "Erasure," which remains relevant 20 years later. It is particularly withering in its send up of white people clamoring for their idea of authentic Black stories, like the literary agent Paula Bateman (Miriam Shor) and the film producer Wiley (a very funny Adam Brody whose character might be a spiritual continuation of his "Thank You For Smoking" assistant). Wiley is currently working on a film called "Plantation Annihilation" in which the ghosts of slaves go on a murderous rampage.

While it's not exactly subtle, it's also not entirely simplistic either - I'm not sure the film ever really reconciles Rae's character in particular, much to the frustration of Monk (and us).

Still, it's hardly a surprise that "American Fiction" won the people's choice prize at the Toronto

Film Festival earlier this year. The film is immensely watchable, staged without flash or pretension, that relies on its sharp script and talented and charismatic actors to carry the audience through. Wright is particularly delightful at the center of it all as he navigates a new relationship as well as the consequences of his lie and how far he's willing to go with it.

"American Fiction," an MGM release in theaters Friday and expanding on Dec. 22, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for "language throughout, some drug use, sexual references and brief violence." Running time: 117 minutes. Three stars out of four.

Also:

LOS ANGELES: As the age-old adage goes, don't mess with success. The Grammy Awards aren't, bringing **Trevor Noah** back as host in 2024.

Noah shared the news Wednesday night on his podcast "What Now? With Trevor Noah."

For those keeping count, the 66th Grammys will mark his fourth consecutive year of hosting duties.

SZA heads into the 2024 ceremony with a leading nine nominations. "Kill Bill," her revenge anthem cloaked in an R&B ballad, earned her nods for record of the year, song of the year, and best R&B performance. "SOS" is also up for album of the year and best progressive R&B album. The 2024 ceremony is the second time SZA has been nominated for record, album, and song in the same year.

Phoebe Bridgers has the second-most nominations, with seven. Six of those are with her band boygenius. **Taylor Swift**, **Olivia Rodrigo**, **Miley Cyrus**, **Billie Eilish**, **Brandy Clark**, **Jon Batiste** and producer **Jack Antonoff** also earned six.

The 2024 Grammy Awards will air Feb. 4 live on CBS and Paramount+ from the Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles. (AP)

ORLANDO, Fla.: Dick Nunis, who helped expand The Walt Disney Company's in-person entertainment ambitions from a single theme park in California to locations around the world during a four-decade career with the entertainment giant, has died. He was 91.

Disney said in a statement Wednesday that Nunis died in Orlando, Florida, surrounded by family. It gave no cause of death.

Nunis began his career at Disney in 1955, training future employees of the soon-to-open Disneyland in Anaheim, California, alongside Walt Disney, who was the father-in-law of Nunis' college friend, **Ron Miller**, an eventual company CEO. By the time Nunis retired in 1999 after 44 years at the company, he was chair of Walt Disney Attractions, overseeing a theme park empire that spanned around the world, from Florida to France to Japan.

"What started as a summer job training future Disneyland employees would ultimately become a storied 44-year career at Disney," Disney CEO **Bob Iger** said in the statement. "Dick took the values and philosophies he learned directly from Walt and incorporated them into everything he did at Disney." (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Anthony Anderson has been nominated for multiple Emmy Awards, and now he'll be presiding over January's strike-delayed ceremony.

The Fox network announced Anderson will host the Jan. 15 ceremony, which honors the best shows, performances and other work on television.

The Emmys are traditionally held in September but have moved into Hollywood's traditional awards season due to this year's actors and writers strikes.

"Succession" is the leading nominee for its final season, with other HBO series like "The White Lotus" and "The Last of Us" also receiving multiple nominations.

Anderson is a seven-time leading comedy actor nominee for his starring role in the ABC series "black-ish." The show ended its groundbreaking eight-season run in 2022.

Anderson is no stranger to headlining an awards show - he served as host of the NAACP Image Awards for eight years.

The Emmys will air live from Los Angeles' Peacock Theater on the **Martin Luther King Jr.** holi-

day beginning at 8 p.m. Eastern and will be available to stream the next day on Hulu. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: A collection of reactions to the death of **Andre Braugher**, the actor whose credits included the gritty "Homicide: Life on the Street" and the silly



Anderson

Andre-Braugher

"Brooklyn Nine-Nine." "I'm honored to have known you, laughed with you, worked with you and shared 8 glorious years watching your irreplaceable talent. This hurts. You left us too soon. You taught me so much. I will be forever grateful for the experience of knowing you. Thank you for your wisdom, your advice, your kindness and your

friendship." - "Brooklyn 99" co-star **Terry Crews**, via Instagram. "Deeply saddened by the news of Andre Braugher's passing. I mourn not only the loss of an extraordinary actor but, more profoundly, the departure of a warm and kind soul. His talent was undeniable, but it was his genuine kindness that truly set him apart. Rest well." - **Shonda Rhimes**

via Instagram. "Andre Braugher. I've worked with a lot of wonderful actors. I'll never work with one better. Stunned and thinking of Ami and his sons and so many memories of this good man that are now a blessing. But too damn soon." - **David Simon**, who wrote "Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets," via X. (AP)

Features

ARABO TIMES

FRIDAY-SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15-16, 2023

People & Places

Film

Copyright curtain lifts

Mickey Mouse, pals to go public in 2024

LOS ANGELES, Dec 14, (AP): M-I-C-K-E-Y will soon belong to you and me.

With several asterisks, qualification and caveats, Mickey Mouse in his earliest form will be the leader of the band of characters, films and books that will become public domain as the year turns to 2024.

In a moment many close observers thought might never come, at least one version of the quintessential piece of intellectual property and perhaps the most iconic character in American pop culture will be free from Disney's copyright as his first screen release, the 1928 short "Steamboat Willie," featuring both Mickey and Minnie Mouse, becomes available for public use.

"This is it. This is Mickey Mouse. This is exciting because it's kind of symbolic," said Jennifer Jenkins, a professor of law and director of Duke's Center for the Study of Public Domain, who writes an annual Jan. 1 column for "Public Domain Day." "I kind of feel like the pipe on the steamboat, like expelling smoke. It's so exciting."

US law allows a copyright to be held for 95 years after Congress expanded it several times during Mickey's life.

"It's sometimes derisively referred to as the Mickey Mouse Protection Act," Jenkins said. "That's oversimplified because it wasn't just Disney that was pushing for term extension. It was a whole group of copyright holders whose works were set to go into the public domain soon, who benefited greatly from the 20 years of extra protection."

"Ever since Mickey Mouse's first appearance in the 1928 short film Steamboat Willie, people have associated the character with Disney's stories, experiences, and authentic products," a Disney spokesperson said in a statement to The Associated Press. "That will not change when the copyright in the Steamboat Willie film expires."

Current artists and creators will be able to make use of Mickey, but with major limits. It is only the more mischievous, rat-like, non-speaking boat captain in "Steamboat Willie" that has become public.

Modern

"More modern versions of Mickey will remain unaffected by the expiration of the Steamboat Willie copyright, and Mickey will continue to play a leading role as a global ambassador for the Walt Disney Company in our storytelling, theme park attractions, and merchandise," Disney's statement said.

Not every feature or personality trait a character displays is necessarily copyrightable, however, and courts could be busy in the coming years determining what's inside and outside Disney's ownership.

"We will, of course, continue to protect our rights in the more modern versions of Mickey Mouse and other works that remain subject to copyright," the company said.

Disney still solidly and separately holds a trademark on Mickey as a corporate mascot and brand identifier, and the law forbids using the character deceptively to fool consumers into thinking a product is from the original creator. Anyone starting a film company or a theme park will not be free to make mouse ears their logo.

Disney's statement said it "will work to safeguard against consumer confusion caused by unauthorized uses of Mickey and our other iconic characters."

"Steamboat Willie," directed by Walt Disney and his partner Ub Iwerks and among the first cartoons to have sound synced with its visuals, was actually the third cartoon featuring Mickey and Minnie the men made, but the first to be released. It features a more menacing Mickey captaining a boat and making musical instruments out of other animals.

In it, and in a clip from it used in the introduction to Disney animated films in recent years, Mickey whistles the 1910 tune "Steamboat Bill." The song inspired the title of the **Buster Keaton** film "Steamboat Bill Jr.," released just a few months before "Steamboat Willie," which in turn may have inspired the title of the Disney short. The copyright wasn't renewed on the Keaton film and it's been in the public domain since 1956.

Another famous animal sidekick, Tigger, will join his friend Winnie the Pooh in the public domain as the book in which the bouncing tiger first appeared, "The House at Pooh Corner," turns 96. Pooh, probably the most celebrated prior character to become public property, took on that status two years ago when A.A. Milne's original "Winnie the Pooh" entered the public domain, resulting in some truly novel uses, including this year's horror film "Winnie The Pooh: Blood and Honey."

Young Mickey could get the same treatment. "Now, the audience is going to set the terms," said Cory Doctorow, an author and activist who advocates for broader public ownership of works.

January 1, 2024, has long been circled on the calendars of public domain watchers, but some say it serves to show how overlong it takes for US works to go public, and many properties with less pedigree than Winnie or Minnie can disappear or be forgotten with their copyrights murky.

Recognizable

"The fact that there are works that are still recognizable and enduring after 95 years is frankly remarkable," Doctorow said. "And it makes you think about the stuff that we must have lost, that would still have currency."

Other properties entering the US public domain are Charlie Chaplin's film "Circus," Virginia Woolf's novel "Orlando" and Eugene O'Neill's play "Long Day's Journey into Night."

The current copyright term passed in 1998 brought the US into closer sync with the European Union, making it unlikely Congress would extend it now. There are also now powerful companies, including Amazon with its fan-fiction-heavy publishing arm and Google with its books project, that in some cases advocate for the public domain.

"There's actually more pushback now than there was 20 some years ago when the Mickey Mouse act was passed," said Paul Heald, a professor at the University of Illinois College of Law who specializes in copyright and international intellectual property law.

In some instances, the US goes well beyond Europe, and maintains copyright on work that is already public in its country of origin, though international agreements would allow the US to adopt the shorter term of other nations on work produced there.

The books of George Orwell for example, including 1947's "Animal Farm" and 1949's "1984," are now public domain in his native Great Britain.



Keaton



Lily Gladstone poses for a portrait on Tuesday, Nov. 28, 2023, in New York. Gladstone has been named one of The Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of 2023. (AP)

Film

A breakout performance in 'Killers of the Flower Moon'

Gladstone is on the cusp of history

NEW YORK, Dec 14, (AP): Lily Gladstone is named after her great-grandmother.

The elder Lily bore many similarities to Gladstone's character in Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon," Mollie Burkhart. Both women, born 10 years apart in the late 19th century, were traditional in nature, well-loved by their Native communities and devout Catholics.

Growing up between Seattle and the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana, Gladstone was familiar with the stories of older generations of Native women - of their encounters with a fast-modernizing America and the brutal attempts to extract resources from tribal lands.

The Osage murders of the early 20th century, a reign of terror in which the Osage were targeted for the headrights to their oil-rich land, took place many miles away, in Oklahoma. But as a tragedy about the sinister exploitation of Native people, "Killers of the Flower Moon" told a tale Gladstone knew intimately.

"I carry my family's legacy. And I'm expected to carry my family legacy, in a way," Gladstone said in a recent interview. She added: "Even though I'm not Osage, it did very much feel like it was in my blood."

Gladstone is the anguished heart and compassionate conscience of "Killers of the Flower Moon." She embodies not just Mollie but generations of Native joy, grace and pain.

It's a performance that's thrust the 37-year-old Gladstone, who first made an impression in Kelly Reichardt's 2016 indie "Certain Women," onto a much larger stage. The Associated Press names her one of its Breakthrough Entertainers of 2023 for an indelible performance that deftly dips into one of American history's darkest chapters.

It's just one of many accolades already bestowed on Gladstone, who was nominated for a Golden Globe on Monday. She's poised to make history, herself. If Gladstone were to win best actress at the Academy Awards, she

would be the first Native American to ever win a competitive Oscar.

Has Gladstone pondered what such a momentous moment would mean? She lowers her head and smiles.

"It is, of course, something I have to think about, insofar as I would just really love to speak some of my language - and teach myself a little bit more of my language - to have and to hold in that moment," Gladstone says. "It would be an incredible moment in my life, but it would mean so much more than just me."

Gladstone, whose father is Blackfeet and Nez Perce, grew up with few Native role models on screen. She counts Val Kilmer's Madmartigan in "Willow" as a character that felt almost like Indigenous representation. "The long hair," she says, grinning. "The sense of humor."

Gladstone initially aspired to be a dancer. Her first hero was Maria Tallchief, America's first prima ballerina. Tallchief was Osage and, like Mollie, grew up in Fairfax, Oklahoma. Gladstone's blankets in "Killers of the Flower Moon" came from the Tallchief family - a physical symbol of the generations of women layered into her performance.

Adapted

David Grann's "Killers of the Flower Moon," from which the film is adapted, closely follows Thomas Bruce White Sr., the federal investigator who solved the Osage murders. Initially, the film was centered on White, too, with Leonardo DiCaprio planned for that role.

"If people are interested in that, it's widely documented. You can read the book," Gladstone says of the investigation. "And that was essentially what the first meeting was with Marty and Leo after the script revisions had happened - talking about how this love story could serve as an access point."

Scorsese and DiCaprio decided to rework the script away from a white savior narrative, centering the film on Ernest Burkhart (DiCaprio), a white man in the crime ring of his uncle Wil-

liam King Hale (Robert De Niro). Burkhart married Mollie and then started poisoning her, seeking to inherit her lucrative headrights.

DiCaprio, in an email, says he's never seen Scorsese "so headstrong" about a casting as he was with Gladstone. One day into shooting, DiCaprio realized she was going to be "the spirit and soul of the film."

"Lily, along with the Osage community, became indelible partners in structuring the narrative of this story," DiCaprio says. "As amazingly detailed as Grann's book was, we knew we needed to dig even deeper, and hear this history from the Osage perspective. Lily became intricately involved in guiding all of us, not only in the storytelling but also the importance of Mollie's heroism within it."

But the hard work lay ahead of capturing one of the most disquieting marriages in recent film. The filmmakers' research suggested there was love, despite everything, between Mollie and Ernest. "Killers of the Flower Moon" transformed into a rendering of American history as a gangster story writ in the home. It took time to find that dynamic. Gladstone recalls shooting one key scene eight different ways, with varying levels of suspense, abuse and love.

"The ones that worked were the ones where there was this complicated love and this tortured complicity on his part," she says. "We somehow made that work because somehow in reality it did work and somehow it still works. You know, this dynamic is not a new one, not an old one. It's just it is a very real one."

When Gladstone first saw the film ahead of its premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, she reached out to her co-star. "I texted Leo and just in our back and forth, it was like: 'Oh my god, we did it.' Because there was always that question."

"Killers of the Flower Moon" was made with extensive collaboration with the Osage, and, often, Gladstone was the go-between. Osage Nation began to feel, to her, like another home.



Director Simon Cellan Jones (right), poses with actor Mark Wahlberg in New York on Dec. 9, to promote their film 'The Family Plan.' (AP)



Knobloch



Gerwig

Variety

WASHINGTON: It seemed only fitting that **Oprah Winfrey** chose to wear a flowing, full-length purple dress for her portrait unveiled Wednesday at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery.

She told the assembled crowd that she wore purple not because a musical remake of the movie that launched her career is coming out later this month: "I chose to wear the color purple because for me, that color has been seminal in my life."

As she pulled a curtain and saw the portrait by **Chicago** artist **Shawn Michael Warren** for the first time, Winfrey exclaimed: "Spectacular. Great job."

The painting shows Winfrey against the backdrop of a prayer garden at her home in **California**. She is holding a sprig from an olive tree.

Warren said he had asked Winfrey to consider how she wanted to be depicted for the generations to come.

Winfrey said her role in **Steven Spielberg's** 1985 film "The Color Purple" served as a foundation for her future. She hosted "The Oprah Winfrey Show" for more than 25 years. "Oprah's Book Club" helped make her recommended titles bestsellers.

She received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2013.

The National Portrait Gallery said in a statement that her contributions to popular culture and her philanthropy earned her a place at the museum.

"Through her rise to fame as host and producer of 'The Oprah Winfrey Show,' Oprah demonstrated an unparalleled ability to connect with people and inspire them to become the best versions of themselves," said Kim Sajat, the gallery's director. (AP)

THE HAGUE, Netherlands: After nearly 200 years in a private collection, a pair of small portraits by 17th century Dutch Master **Rembrandt van Rijn** went on display Wednesday after a long-term loan to the Netherlands' national art and history museum.

The Rijksmuseum said the portraits of **Jan Willem van der Pluym** and his wife **Jaapgen** "disappeared from view for almost two centuries, before resurfacing two years ago."

The paintings, believed to be the last known pair of privately held Rembrandt portraits, were sold at auction this year and given on long-term loan by the family of wealthy Dutch businessman **Henry Holter-**

man, the museum said.

"Given my close relationship with the museum and the fact that the team of experts has been conducting research into these portraits over a period of years, I feel that these works belong in the museum,"

Holterman said in a statement.

The museum said that based on their small size and "dynamic, sketchy style," the portraits likely were painted by Rembrandt as a favor to the couple, who had close links to his family since Jan and Jaapgen's son

Dominicus married the painter's cousin, **Cornelia Cornelisdr van Suytbroek**.

Rijksmuseum Director **Taco Dibbets** welcomed the loan and said the portraits "will bring visitors closer to Rembrandt's family circle." (AP)



Oprah Winfrey and artist Shawn Michael Warren pose together next to Warren's portrait of Winfrey, Wednesday, Dec. 13, during a portrait unveiling ceremony at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery in Washington. (AP)

PARIS: **Greta Gerwig**, actor, writer and film director, notably for the blockbuster "Barbie," will preside over the jury of the 77th Cannes Film Festival in May, the first American female director to be named jury president, the festival announced Thursday.

At 40, Gerwig is also the youngest person to take on that role since **Sofia Loren**, who headed the Cannes jury in 1966 at age 31, the festival noted in a statement.

"I'm overwhelmed, enthusiastic and touched with humility," the statement quoted Gerwig as saying. "I can't wait to discover what voyages await us!" She described Cannes as "the pinnacle of what the universal language of movies can be."

Festival officials, too, were excited, about their choice for jury president for the May 14-25 festival on the French Riviera, a premiere film extravaganza.

"This is an obvious choice, since Greta Gerwig so audaciously embodies the renewal of world cinema, for which Cannes is each year both the forerunner and the sounding board," said festival president **Iris Knobloch** and general delegate **Thierry Frémaux**. (AP)

The Conversation

How pacemakers, defibrillators keep your heart in check

By Virginia Singla
University of Pittsburgh

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

Your heart's job is to keep your pulse steady to pump blood throughout your body. Sometimes your heart rate is slower when you're relaxing, and sometimes it's faster when you're exercising or stressed. If your heart's ability to keep the beat starts to go awry, cardiac electrophysiologists like me look for outside help from an implantable device.

There are two common implantable devices for the heart: artificial pacemakers and defibrillators. Artificial pacemakers keep blood and oxygen flowing during times of stress. Defibrillators are devices that detect dangerously fast heart rates and deliver shocks like those used during cardiopulmonary resuscitation, also known as CPR, to restart the heart.

Understanding how these devices work requires appreciating how the heart's electrical system works and the weak links that cause malfunctions.

Circulate

Abnormally slow heart rates result from breakdowns in two principal areas of the heart.

First, the sinoatrial, or SA, node sets your "resting" heart rate, usually somewhere between 60 and 100 beats per minute. This is the base effort needed to circulate enough blood to sustain normal bodily function. Elevated levels of certain hormones circulating in the body, such as adrenaline and serotonin, can increase heart rate above resting levels.

Trained athletes frequently have a lower resting heart rate due to extra physical conditioning. Like any other muscle, the heart becomes stronger with training. Because their heart functions more efficiently, athletes require fewer heart beats overall to circulate blood.

The atrioventricular, or AV, node is the second key area of the heart's electrical wiring. The atrioventricular node takes information about how fast the heart is beating from the sinoatrial node and relays it to the ventricles, the muscular portions of the heart that allow it to pump blood to the rest of the body.

When the atrioventricular node breaks down, the ventricles don't receive the electrical signal from the sinoatrial node instructing them to "pump," or create a heartbeat. This causes heart rate to become dangerously slow.

If resting heart rate is abnormally low or fails to increase with hormonal changes, pacemakers can help keep blood and oxygen circulating at a healthy rate.

Both the SA node and the AV node naturally slow with age, but sometimes this happens at an accelerated pace and leads to abnormally slow heart rates. Slow heart rates can also be caused by other diseases, including thyroid problems and Lyme disease. In these cases, slow rates are treatable without a pacemaker.

A common pacemaker system has a battery and two wires that can send and receive electrical signals. One wire rests near the sinoatrial node, and the second is in one of the heart's ventricles.

If the wire near the sinoatrial node doesn't detect any electrical activity over a set time, the pacemaker's battery will send an impulse to the ventricle to initiate an electrical signal. Within fractions of a second, the wire in the ventricle should detect that electrical activity. If an impulse is detected, this signifies that the AV node conducted the signal correctly to the

rest of the heart, and the pacemaker does not activate. If the wire doesn't receive this signal, the battery delivers an impulse through the wire directly to the ventricle, causing the muscle to contract and initiate a heartbeat.

The heart's muscle will only contract in response to a pacemaker impulse if the muscle is otherwise healthy. Pacemakers do not keep patients alive if the heart shuts down, such as during a massive infection, blood clot or kidney failure. Pacemakers simply keep the heart rate in a comfortable range if the primary problem in the heart is electrical.

Doctors program a pacemaker's software so the resting pulse doesn't drop below a certain rate, commonly 50 to 60 beats per minute. If the resting rate is set at 60 beats per minute, the pacemaker will wait exactly one second before initiating an electrical pulse. The heart's pulse rate can be higher than this number if the sinoatrial node initiates a heartbeat naturally. If the pacemaker detects activity from the sinoatrial node, it will reset its timer for another full second.

Modern pacemakers also contain sensors to predict whether the heart may benefit from a faster heart rate under certain circumstances. For example, pacemaker batteries contain accelerometers like those used in pedometers to detect if a person is in motion. If these sensors activate, the pacemaker can raise its minimum rate like how the heart would normally respond to exercise. Sensors can also detect if a person begins to breathe more quickly or if the heart begins to contract more powerfully, all signs normally associated with increases in heart rate.

Like pacemakers, a cardiac defibrillator comes with a battery and wires that record the heart's rate. But instead of treating slow heart rates, defibrillators are programmed to detect fast heart rates, usually in the range of 200 beats per minute. Heart rates in this range are often caused by ventricular tachycardia or ventricular fibrillation, which are potentially lethal heart rhythms resulting from the lower chamber of the heart beating too quickly or quivering.

Technology

Certain people are at elevated risk for these types of rhythm disturbances. Many cases of "sudden death" in athletes and other young people are either suspected or proved to be related to ventricular fibrillation.

Defibrillators deliver internal shocks to the heart when their sensors detect either ventricular tachycardia or ventricular fibrillation. These shocks stop the heart for a fraction of a second to give the sinoatrial node a chance to resume its normal activity. These shocks can be painful, so doctors usually also prescribe medications or other procedures to help prevent needing the shocks in the first place.

A defibrillator is like a seatbelt: It is reassuring to have, but ideally it never needs to be deployed.

Pacemakers and defibrillators do require some maintenance. Certain settings, such as how low the pacemaker will allow the pulse to go, can be adjusted over time. Doctors have computers that can communicate with the devices and alter their programming. Some devices use Bluetooth technology.

The battery cannot be recharged and must be replaced, generally after six to 10 years. Battery life depends on how frequently the heart requires the pacemaker to initiate heartbeats. Pacemaker wires occasionally need to be replaced if they fracture or if the insulation wears down after years of bending with each heartbeat. On rare occasions, pacemaker parts are recalled. (AP)

Science behind heartbeat helpers explained

People with hypochondriasis die earlier

Illness anxiety disorder ups death risk

NEW YORK, Dec 14, (AP): A large Swedish study has uncovered a paradox about people diagnosed with an excessive fear of serious illness: They tend to die earlier than people who aren't hypervigilant about health concerns.

Hypochondriasis, now called illness anxiety disorder, is a rare condition with symptoms that go beyond average health worries. People with the disorder are unable to shake their fears despite normal physical exams and lab tests. Some may change doctors repeatedly. Others may avoid medical care.

"Many of us are mild hypochondriacs. But there are also people on the other extreme of the spectrum who live in a perpetual state of worry and suffering and rumination about having a serious illness," said Dr. Jonathan E. Alpert of Montefiore Medical Center in New York.

Relaxation

People with the disorder are suffering and "it's important to take it seriously and to treat it," said Alpert, who was not involved in the new study. Treatment can involve cognitive behavioral therapy, relaxation techniques, education and sometimes antidepressant medication.

The researchers found that people with the diagnosis have an increased risk of death from both natural and unnatural causes, particularly suicide. Chronic stress and its impact on the body could explain some of the difference, the authors wrote.

The study, published Wednesday in JAMA Psychiatry, addressed "a clear gap in the literature," said David Mataix-Cols of the Karolinska Institute in Sweden, who led the research. "We got lucky," he said, because the Swedish classification system for health statistics has a separate code for hypochondriasis, allowing data analysis on thousands of people over 24 years, 1997-2020.

Older research had suggested the risk of suicide might be lower for people with the condition, but "our hunch, based on clinical experience, was that this would be incorrect," Mataix-Cols said. In the study, the risk of suicide death was four times higher for the people with the diagnosis.

They looked at 4,100 people diagnosed with hypochondriasis and matched them with 41,000 people similar in age, sex and county of residence. They used a measurement called person years, which accounts for the number of people and how long they were tracked.

Overall death rates were higher in the people with hypochondriasis, 8.5 versus 5.5 per 1,000 person years. People with the condition died younger than the others, a mean age of 70 versus 75. Their risk of death from circulatory and respiratory diseases was higher. Cancer was an exception; the risk of death was about the same.

Referring an excessively anxious patient to mental health professionals takes care, said Alpert, who leads the American Psychiatric Association's council on research. Patients can be offended, because they feel they're being accused of imagining symptoms.

"It takes a great deal of respect and sensitivity conveyed to patients that this itself is a kind of condition, that it has a name," Alpert said. "And, fortunately, there are good treatments."

Also:

TORONTO: Breast Cancer Canada, a national charity dedicated to saving lives through breast cancer research, has announced a new and innovative partnership with McPeak-Sirois Group for Clinical Research in Breast Cancer to expand access to clinical research in breast cancer throughout Quebec. This funding marks Breast Cancer Canada's first major investment in Quebec research.

The \$2.5 million commitment to McPeak-Sirois Group will be granted over the next five years and will support the Programme Accés-recherche Dr. André-Robidoux aiming at making clinical research more accessible to patients living outside major urban areas. The funding will amplify the geographical reach and impact of the Group while enabling regional hospitals to offer more clinical trials for the benefit of their patients.



A selection of eye drops line a shelf at a pharmacy in Los Angeles on Dec. 12. A series of recalls involving over-the-counter drops is drawing new attention to just how little US officials know about the conditions at manufacturing plants on the other side of the world and the limited tools they have to force products off the market when there's a problem. (AP)

Recalls and infections

Safer eyedrops will require new FDA powers – experts

WASHINGTON, Dec 14, (AP): When you buy eyedrops at a US store, you might assume you're getting a product made in a clean, well-maintained factory that's passed muster with health regulators.

But repeated recalls involving over-the-counter drops are drawing new attention to just how little US officials know about the conditions at some manufacturing plants on the other side of the world – and the limited tools they have to intervene when there's a problem.

The Food and Drug Administration is asking Congress for new powers, including the ability to mandate drug recalls and require eyedrop makers to undergo inspections before shipping products to the US. But experts say those capabilities will do little without more staff and resources for foreign inspections, which were a challenge even before the COVID-19 pandemic forced regulators to skip thousands of visits.

"The FDA is not getting its job done in terms of drug quality assurance inspections abroad," said David Ridley of Duke University and co-author of a recent paper tracking the downturn in inspections. "Very few foreign drugmakers have been inspected in the past four years."

In 2022, FDA foreign inspections were down 79% from 2019, according to agency records collected by Ridley's group. Inspections increased this year but are still far below pre-pandemic levels.

FDA spokesman Jeremy Kahn said: "The FDA works to inspect as many facilities possible, but ultimately industry is responsible for the quality of their products."

An October recall of two dozen eyedrop brands came after FDA staff found cracked floors, barefoot workers and other unsanitary conditions at a Mumbai plant that supplied products to CVS, Walmart and other major retailers. It was the first time FDA staff had visited the site.

That inspection was prompted by an earlier re-

call of tainted eyedrops from a different Indian plant that's been linked to four deaths and more than a dozen cases of vision loss. That plant had also never been previously inspected.

"These are very rare instances, but what we've seen is that these products can cause real harm," said Dr. Timothy Janetos, an ophthalmologist at Northwestern University. "Something needs to change."

Experts point to three possible changes:

Prescription medicines are highly regulated. Before a drugmaker can sell one in the U.S., it must undergo FDA review to establish its safety and effectiveness. As part of the process, the FDA typically inspects the factory where the drug will be made.

Inspections

But eyedrops and other over-the-counter products don't undergo preliminary review or inspections. Instead, they are governed by a different system called a monograph, essentially a generic recipe for all medicines in a particular class. So long as drugmakers attest that they are using the standard recipe, they can launch a product within days of filing with the FDA.

"It's nothing more than electronic paperwork," said Dr. Sandra Brown of the Dry Eye Foundation, a nonprofit advocating for increased regulation. "There's no requirement for the facility to be inspected prior to shipping for sale."

The FDA says it has flexibility to adjust its review process "to ensure safety."

But the agency is asking Congress for the power to require manufacturers of eyedrops and other sterile products to give at least six months notice before shipping products from a new factory. That would give inspectors time to visit facilities that aren't on their radar.

The proposal could face pushback from some over-the-counter drugmakers, who aren't accustomed to preapproval inspections.

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Antetokounmpo scores franchise-record 64 points to help Bucks outscore Pacers

76ers hand Pistons 21st straight loss

MILWAUKEE, Dec 14, (AP): Giannis Antetokounmpo scored a franchise-record 64 points to help the Milwaukee Bucks outscore the Indiana Pacers 140-126 on Wednesday night.

Antetokounmpo broke the team record of 57 set by Michael Redd in 2006 in a 113-111 loss to the Utah Jazz. Antetokounmpo's previous career high was 55 in a 123-113 victory over Washington in January 2023. He had 54 at Indiana on Nov. 9.

Antetokounmpo was 20 of 28 from the field, made 24 of 32 free throws and had 14 rebounds.

BASKETBALL

Antetokounmpo was tackled by Aaron Nesmith on a play underneath with 10:10 remaining, setting off a brief heated exchange involving several players. Nesmith was called for a flagrant-1, and Nesmith and the Bucks' Bobby Portis were assessed technical fouls. Portis was later called for a second technical and ejected with 9:13 remaining, finishing with 19 points.

Damian Lillard added 21 points for the Bucks.

Tyrese Haliburton and Myles Turner had 22 points apiece for the Pacers, who beat the Bucks 128-119 in the semifinals of the In-Season Tournament on Thursday night.

76ers 129, Pistons 111

In Detroit, Joel Embiid scored 30 of his 41 points in the first half and Philadelphia handed Detroit its 21st straight loss to open a home-and-home series.

Detroit matched the longest streak in franchise history, set at the end of the 1979-80 season and start of 1980-81. It is the sixth-longest single-season losing streak in



Milwaukee Bucks' Giannis Antetokounmpo shoots between Indiana Pacers' Myles Turner and Buddy Hield during the first half of an NBA basketball game Wednesday, Dec 13, 2023, in Milwaukee. (AP)

the NBA.

Only the 2010-11 Cleveland Cavaliers and the 2013-14 76ers (both lost 26 straight), along with the 1995-96 Vancouver Grizzlies, the 1997-98 Denver Nuggets and the 2011-12 Charlotte Bobcats (all lost 23 in a row) have lost more games in a row in a season. Philadelphia holds the overall mark of 28, set at the end of 2014-15 and start of 2015-16.

Detroit dropped to 2-22, with the teams set to meet again Friday night in Philadelphia. Bojan Bogdanovic led the Pistons with 33 points.

Lakers 122, Spurs 119

In San Antonio, Anthony Davis had 37 points and 10 rebound and Los Angeles held off Victor Wembanyama and San Antonio, extending the Spurs' franchise-record losing streak to 18.

The Lakers were without LeBron James, with the four-time MVP sitting out the first of two

straight games in San Antonio because of left calf injury. The teams will meet again Friday night.

Wembanyama had 30 points, 13 rebounds and six blocks for San Antonio, which has not won since Nov. 2. Keldon Johnson added 28 points, and Malaki Branham had 16.

Nets 116, Suns 112

In Phoenix, Cam Thomas scored 24 points, Mikal Bridges added 21 in his return to the desert and Brooklyn spoiled the debut of Phoenix's All-Star trio.

The Nets have won seven of their past nine.

It was the first time this season - in the 24th game - that Phoenix's Kevin Durant, Devin Booker and Bradley Beal played on the same night.

The trio's debut was delayed because of various injuries, particularly Beal's sore back, which has limited him to five games this season.

Booker had 34 points and 12 assists, Durant added 27 points and Beal had 14. Jusuf Nurkic had 15 points and a season-high 22 rebounds.

Pelicans 142, Wizards 122

In Washington, Brandon Ingram scored a season-high 40 points, Trey Murphy III added six 3-pointers and 27 points and short-handed New Orleans had its best offensive showing of the season to rout Washington.

CJ McCollum had 22 points and Jonas Valanciunas added 16 points and 18 rebounds, Zion Williamson sat out because of a sprained ankle.

Kyle Kuzma scored 27 points for Washington. The Wizards lost for the 20th time in 23 games, the fastest the team has reached that loss total since the 2012-13 season.

Heat 115, Hornets 104

In Miami, Duncan Robinson scored 23 points, Jaime Jaquez Jr. and Kyle Lowry each added 17 and Miami beat Charlotte to finish off a two-game home-and-home sweep.

Lowry was perfect shooting - 5 for 5 from the floor, 4 for 4 of those on 3-pointers and 3 for 3 from the line. Jimmy Butler had 15 points and 10 assists.

Terry Rozier scored 28 points for Charlotte.

Jazz 117, Knicks 113

In Salt Lake City, Collin Sexton scored a season-high 26 points, Lauri Markkanen punctuated his return to the court with 23 points and Utah beat New York.

After missing eight games because of a strained left hamstring, Markkanen scored both inside and on the perimeter and was only slowed by a minutes restriction. In 25 minutes, Markkanen went 7 for 13 from the field, had four 3s and eight rebounds.

Julius Randle had 32 points and 12 rebounds for New York.

Raptors 135, Hawks 128

In Toronto, Pascal Siakam scored 33 points, Scottie Barnes had 27 points and 10 rebounds and Toronto beat Atlanta to end a four-game losing streak.

O.G. Anunoby added 22 points for the Raptors in the opener of a two-game home set against the Hawks. Trae Young scored 35 points and matched a season high with 17 assists, but Atlanta's season-worst losing streak reached five.

The teams will meet again Friday night in Toronto.

Rockets 117, Grizzlies 104

In Houston, Tari Eason scored a career-high 25 points, Jabari Smith Jr. added 20 points and 10 rebounds and Houston beat Memphis to extended its home winning streak to 11.

Eason came off the bench to shoot 10 for 16 and matched a career high with 14 rebounds.

Jaren Jackson Jr. had a career-high 44 points for Memphis.

Boone, UNLV upset Creighton

Chicago State 'stuns' Northwestern 75-73 behind 30 points from Cardet

EVANSTON, Ill., Dec 14, (AP): Wesley Cardet Jr. scored 30 points and Chicago State stunned No. 25 Northwestern in a 75-73 upset Wednesday night.

Boo Buie made two layups 41 seconds apart to put Northwestern in front 67-65 with 2:30 left in a back-and-forth game. Cardet tied it 26 seconds later and then hit a 3-pointer with 1:23 remaining for a 70-67 lead.

Chicago State (4-9) sealed it with three late free throws from A.J. Neal and two by Noble Crawford.

Northwestern was favored by 24 1/2 points, according to FanDuel Sportsbook.

Cardet shot 13 of 21 and Jahsean Corbett added 17 points for the Cougars, a Division I independent.

Buie had 23 points and Ryan Langborg scored 18 for the Wildcats (7-2), who lost to Chicago State for the first time. Northwestern had won 15 straight against the South Side program since the teams first met in 1981.

UNLV 79, Creighton 64

In Henderson, Nev., Kalib Boone scored 25 points and UNLV led nearly the entire way against Creighton in the Jack Jones Classic. Dedan Thomas Jr. added 16 points and nine assists for the Rebels (4-4). Justin Webster scored 13 and Keylan Boone had 10.

UNLV was a 13 1/2-point underdog, according to FanDuel Sportsbook.

It was the first appearance at UNLV for Keylan Boone, whose twin brother is Kalib, after a federal judge in West Virginia ruled double transfers could play immediately. Keylan Boone also played at Oklahoma State and Pacific.

Ryan Kalkbrenner led the Bluejays (8-2) with 22 points.

FAU 94, FIU 60

In Boca Raton, Fla., Johnell Davis scored 16 points and Alijah Martin had 14 as Florida Atlantic rolled past rival Florida International.

Bryan Greenlee and Brandon Weatherspoon each scored 12 for the Owls (8-2), who opened the game on a 12-2 run and never looked back.

BASKETBALL

Jaidon Lipscomb scored 17 points for FIU (3-8).

FAU shot 64% to FIU's 36%, out-rebounded the Panthers 43-27 and held a 48-20 edge in points in the paint.

BYU 90, Denver 74

In Provo, Utah, Jaxson Robinson made eight 3-pointers and scored 28 points, both career bests, to lead BYU past Denver. Noah Waterman finished with 22 points and a career-high 14 rebounds for his first double-double with the Cougars. Spencer Johnson added 11 points, 10 rebounds and six assists.

BYU (9-1) shot 50% from the field and coasted to its seventh double-digit win of the season.



Chicago State guard Jahsean Corbett, left, shoots over Northwestern center Matthew Nicholson during the second half of an NCAA college basketball game in Evanston, Ill., Wednesday, Dec 13, 2023. (AP)

Texas unbeaten

Marquette women run past Creighton

MILWAUKEE, Dec 14, (AP): Liza Karlen had 25 points and 12 rebounds for her second double-double of the season, Mackenzie Hare added 15 points and No. 19 Marquette beat No. 20 Creighton 76-70 on Wednesday night in the Big East opener for both teams.

The teams were tied at 64 with 4:28 left in the fourth quarter before Marquette pulled away by scoring on three straight possessions, two by Karlen. Creighton's only field goal in the final four minutes came with 38 seconds remaining.

Rose Nkumu and Jordan King each had 11 points for Marquette (10-0).

Emma Ronsiek led Creighton (7-2) with 29 points. Molly Mogensen scored a season-high 21 points, and Lauren Jensen added 13. Morgan Maly, averaging 16.5 points, was held to four points on 2-of-13 shooting.

Texas 88, Arizona 75

In Tucson, Ariz., Rori Harmon had 19 points, 11 assists and nine rebounds, and Taylor Jones added 16 points as Texas beat Arizona to remain unbeaten.

The Longhorns (11-0) extended their best start in eight years by shooting 51.6% in the game and converting 21 Arizona turnovers into 25 points.

Texas is off its finest start since opening the 2015-16 season with 16 consecutive wins. Kailyn Gilbert led Arizona (7-3) with 26 points.

Olympic Roundup

SKorean Oly chief defends move

Ex-Tokyo Olympics official pleads not guilty to taking bribes tied to Games

TOKYO, Dec 14, (AP): Haruyuki Takahashi, a former member of the Tokyo Olympic organizing committee, appeared in a Tokyo district court on Thursday and pleaded not guilty to taking bribes tied to the Games.

Takahashi was arrested more than a year ago and its unclear when his trial will end. The defense will present its case early next year.

A former executive with the powerful Japanese advertising company Dentsu, Takahashi is charged with accepting around 198 million yen (\$1.4 million) in bribes in exchange for awarding Olympic contracts for the 2021 Tokyo Games.

Takahashi appeared in court just nine days after a separate bid-rigging trial was adjourned with Dentsu and five other companies facing criminal charges. That trial is to resume early next year.

"I assert my innocence on all the charges," Takahashi, wearing a gray suit and burgundy tie, told the judge before the prosecution presented its case. "It was strictly business and it was not a bribe."

South Korea's Olympic chief has defended a decision to send

hundreds of athletes to a military camp next week as part of preparations for the 2024 Games in Paris, citing a need to instill mental toughness in competitors.

About 400 athletes, including women, will arrive at a marine boot camp in the southeastern port city of Pohang on Monday for a three-day training aimed at building resilience and teamwork, the Korean Sport and Olympic Committee said.

Two of Russia's top swimmers have been drug tested by their country's anti-doping agency only twice apiece in 2023, part of a larger trend in the country that adds an extra layer of uncertainty to the IOC's decision to allow some Russian athletes to compete next year at the Paris Olympics.

The Russian Anti-Doping Agency lists on its website the number of tests it gives to individual athletes, in following a best practice it had long been urged to adapt.

It has administered some 10,500 tests in 2023 - a number the IOC highlighted in a memorandum signed by key members of the Olympic movement at a summit last week that "emphasized that doping controls in Russia continue."

Among those tests, only two each were given to defending 100 and 200-meter backstroke champion Evgeniy Rylov and 50-meter backstroke world-record holder Kliment Kolesnikov.



Takahashi

Martínez and Inter Milan keen to upgrade contract

MILAN, Dec 14, (AP): World Cup winner Lautaro Martínez has two targets: To score 100 goals this season and to renew his contract with Inter Milan.

One is more realistic than the other.

SOCCER

Inter is in discussions with its star striker on a new five-year contract and when asked if it could be sorted before the new year, Lautaro said he would gladly sign a new deal "tomorrow" and is very close to finalizing the details.

Lautaro was in buoyant mood in the re-

cent interview with Italian broadcaster Sportmediaset, which also asked him if he had a goalscoring target for this season.

"Let's say 100," the Argentina international responded with a laugh.

"I like to score a lot but the important thing is that Inter wins. My aim is to go up a level every year."

Lautaro has certainly stepped up this year and has grown further after being handed the captain's armband by Inter in the summer.

While 100 goals should be out of reach, breaking the Serie A goal-scoring record of 36 could be a distinct possibility.

Lautaro has 14 in 15 Serie A matches, and weighed in with four assists.

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SPORTS

Track & field glory: Kazma Club top general team competition

Jassim and Hamdan lead Al-Qadsia to victory at Kuwait athletics championship

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: Kazma Club emerged victorious in the overall team competition at the preliminary athletics championship for both general and junior categories, organized by the Kuwait Athletics Federation. Al-Qadsia secured the second spot, while Kuwait claimed the third position.

In the junior team competitions of the same tournament held at the Ahmed Al-Rashdan Track and Field, Al-Qadsia clinched the top spot, surpassing Kazma in second place and Al-Sahel in third place.

The general high jump category witnessed Talal Jassim from Al-



An athlete prepares to jump during the Kuwait athletics championship.

Qadsia Club securing the first position, followed by Khaled Al-Shammari from Al-Shabab Club in second place, and Abdullah Al-Balushi from Kazma Club in third place.

Salem Hamdan of Al-Qadsia Club

claimed the first position in the general category decathlon competitions, with Sultan Al-Rayes from Al-Qadsia Club in second place, and Issa Sami from Kazma Club in third place.

In discus throwing, Abdullah Al-

Zankawi from Al-Tadamon Club took the lead in the general category, followed by Jaafar Muhammad from Al-Kuwait Club in second place, and Hussein Al-Nasser from Al-Sahel Club in third place.

The individual competition in the junior category's three-kilometer

ATHLETICS

race was won by Hamdan Saad from Al-Sahel, with Abdul Rahman Alian from Jahra Club securing second place and Ahmed Saleh from Al-Jahra Club in third place.

For the 110-meter junior category race, Kuwaiti player Faisal Ashwi claimed victory, followed by Khaled Abdel Wahab from Al-Qadsia Club in second place, and Hassan Ali from Kuwait Club in third place.



Players in action during the Kuwait volleyball league match.

Al-Kuwait 'aim' to extend win streak in the volleyball league

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: Al-Kuwait aims to extend its winning streak in the volleyball league as it faces Al-Sulaibikh at 06:30 pm in the Al-Itihad Hall within the eighth round. Additionally, in the same round, Al-Shabab plays Al-Tadamon at 07:15 pm in the same venue. Meanwhile, Kazma competes against Al-Sahel at 05:15 pm in the latter's hall.

Currently leading the team standings with 19 points, Al-Kuwait is set to navigate through challenges from teams with varying scores. Sulaibikh holds 3 points, Al-Shabab and Al-Tadamon enter their match with 6 points each, Kazma boasts 13

points, and Al-Sahel is at the bottom of the standings without any points.

The tournament's format dictates that the top four teams from the preliminary round will qualify for the

VOLLEYBALL

semi-finals, competing for the coveted title. Employing the international point calculation system, a 3-0 or 3-1 victory awards the winning team three points, with none for the losing side. In the case of a 3-2 win, the victor receives two points, while the loser earns one point.

3rd edition of Kuwait dressage league begins

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: Competitions for the third edition of the Kuwaiti Dressage League are set to commence 3:00 pm at the Kuwait Equestrian Center in the Subhan area. The event is backed and sponsored by the Kuwait Equestrian Federation and anticipates a significant turnout of riders. This coincides with

EQUESTRIAN

the introduction of new horses and a rising interest in the art of "horse dressage." The tournament comprises five levels, ranging from beginner to advanced proficiency.

Heading the dressage committee of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation is Sheikha Fajr Al-Sabah. The committee is comprised of Alaa Salem Al-Sultan, Abdullah Al-Awadhi, Nusayba Al-Maousherji, Dana

Bouresli, and Abdullah Al-Amer. The technical management is under the guidance of the internationally experienced Amber Dean Heer.

Sheikha Fajr Al-Sabah stated, "The league consists of 8 rounds, with two tournaments already organized, and there are plans to host international referees for training courses aimed at riders and trainers."

She further emphasized, "We enjoy strong support from numerous club owners and their managements in advancing this sport."

In addition, Al-Amer expressed, "We encourage vaulting riders to partake in dressage tournaments, as they form the nucleus and foundation of equestrianism. Over the last season, we have witnessed the participation of many jumpers in dressage competitions. The art of taming the horse is considered a fundamental pillar of show jumping."



A file photo of the dressage committee with winners of the last tournament.

Al-Kuwait look to rebound from AFC Cup exit

Al-Arabi, Al-Salmiya set for epic battle

By Hassan Musa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14: Kuwait aims to extend its winning streak in the Zain Premier League as it faces Al-Jahra at Mohammed Al-Hamad Stadium in the tenth round. Simultaneously, Kazma takes on Al-Nasr at the Friendship and Peace Stadium at 6:45 pm with the round concluding tomorrow. Al-Salmiya and Al-Arabi clash in a singular showdown at Thamer Stadium at 5:25 pm.

In the initial match, Kuwait (20 points) seeks redemption from its AFC Cup group stage exit and strives to maintain its league lead alongside Al-Arabi. Coach Nabil Maaloul eyes a second consecutive victory after a 2-1 win over Al-Arabi in the last round.

SOCCER

"Al-Abyad" aims to replicate its previous triumph over Al-Jahra (last place with two points), having defeated them 3-1 in the first division, while the "Sons of the Red Palace" seek their first league victory.

In the second encounter, Kazma (13 points) looks to rejuvenate confidence following a significant defeat by Al-Arabi in the last round (4-0). Al-Nasr (13 points) also seeks redemption after a recent loss to Kuwait and aims to return to the path of victories.

An anticipated summit waits as Al-Arabi (20 points) shares Kuwait's goal of compensating for their AFC Cup exit and maintaining positive results. "Al-Akhdar" aims to repeat its victory over Al-Salmiya after a 3-2 win in the league's first division.

Coach Darko Nestorovic relies on his players' high morale after Kazma's defeat in the last round and a "moral" victory over the Lebanese star with a 2-1 score at the end of his Asian career.

On the flip side, Al-Salmiya (14 points) enters the match with multiple objectives: returning to the winning path, breaking the series of draws in the league, and seeking compensation for an early exit from the Crown Prince Cup following a 2-0 loss to Burgan in the preliminary round.

Real welcome Villarreal

Xavi under pressure, Barca visit Valencia after 2 straight defeats

BARCELONA, Dec 14, (AP): Another poor performance by Barcelona in a defeat at modest Antwerp has increased the pressure on Xavi Hernandez to turn things around.

The 3-2 loss in Belgium on Wednesday didn't mean much in practical terms. The final group game of the Champions League came with Barcelona already assured of a spot in the knockout rounds for the first time in three seasons.

However, Xavi could surely have used a good result because his star-filled side had just been outplayed by Spanish league leader Girona 4-2 last weekend, a setback that dealt a blow to its domestic title defense.

After falling at Antwerp, which finished the group in last place, the Barcelona-based sports papers opened fire on their team. "No Forgiveness" was Mundo Deportivo's headline, while Sport went with "Enough Is Enough!" "The defeat that really hurt was the one against Girona," Xavi said this week after trying to find the bright side of his side's stumble against Antwerp that also cost the club a couple of million euros (dollars) in potential prize money.

Xavi is calling Barcelona's Spanish league game at Valencia on Saturday "a final" while insisting that he has the backing of the club and his teammates.

The loss at home to regional rival



Royal Antwerp's Vincent Janssen (left), challenges Barcelona's Jules Koude during the Champions League Group H soccer match between Antwerp and Barcelona at the Bosuilstadion in Deurne, Belgium. (AP)

Girona left Barcelona in fourth place at seven points adrift of the surprising leader. Real Madrid is in second place, five points clear of Barcelona, while Atletico Madrid is level on points with Barcelona in third place but has an extra game to play.

The good news for Barcelona is Va-

lencia has troubles of its own. Rubén Baraja's team is winless in its last four league games and has lost its last five meetings with Barcelona since a draw in December 2020.

SOCCER

Xavi's status has also been damaged by speculation in Spain's sports media regarding the squad list he gave for the Antwerp visit. The list initially did not include team heavyweights Robert Lewandowski and Ilkay Gundogan, but they were both then included and played. Xavi said the decision to later add the two stars was reached in consensus with sports director Deco and other club officials, while Deco said it was the coach's alone.

"You (the press) are generating a controversy where there is none," Xavi said. "I have the complete backing of (club) president (Joan Laporta) and Deco."

Real Madrid hosts Villarreal on Sunday with a chance to move one point ahead of Girona.

Madrid meets the "Yellow Submarine" after fighting back for a 3-2 win at Union Berlin on Tuesday to ensure it finished the Champions League group phase with six wins in as many games.

Jude Bellingham leads La Liga with 12 goals and will face a Villarreal defense that has conceded 29 times. That's the most goals of any team outside the relegation zone.

Atletico faces three games in eight days and the chance to close on, and possibly overtake, Girona and Madrid.

Atletico's visit to Athletic Bilbao on Saturday is on paper the most demanding of the games squeezed in before the league takes a winter break. Bilbao is in fifth place and only five points behind Diego Simeone's bunch.

After that, Atletico hosts Getafe on Wednesday then welcomes Sevilla on Dec. 23 to play a match from Round 4 that was postponed due to a heatwave in September.

Atletico forward Antoine Griezmann is two goals shy of the 173 by Luis Aragonés, Atletico's all-time leading scorer. Griezmann scored in a 2-0 win over Lazio in the Champions League on Wednesday.



Players vie for the ball during the Zain Premier League match.

Best of the Rest

Lipovina stays with Al-Qadsia:

Al-Qadsia has officially declared the continuation of its professional Montenegrin right-back, Vladan Lipovina, with the handball team for the ongoing season. Lipovina showcased exceptional performance during the recent Asian Championship hosted by Al-Azhar, securing a commendable third-place finish.

Despite earlier speculations regarding the player's potential departure post the Asian Championship, Al-Qadsia's management has affirmed that Lipovina will remain an integral part of the team until the conclusion of the season. The "Yellow" team is determined to actively contend for the league title in the current season.

Eddie Jones denies allegation:

Eddie Jones rejected the assertion he betrayed Australian rugby after becoming the coach of Japan, six weeks after quitting the Wallabies following their worst-ever Rugby World Cup campaign.

The charismatic Jones said on Wednesday he felt no guilt in taking the Japan job for a second time amid claims he had an interview with the Japanese Rugby Football Union before the World Cup.

Jones insisted he didn't conduct an interview until December and Masato Tsuchida, the JRFU president, said any conversations with Jones before that came as part of a wider search for the best possible candidate and to get more information.

Jones said his intention had been to stay with Australia until the 2027 World Cup but exercised his right to leave his role one year into a five-year deal after a difference of opinion in how to take the team forward.

"I feel terrible about the results of Australia because I wanted to go back and change Australia," Jones told a news conference in Tokyo after being presented as coach. "But I don't feel any guilt at all about this process."

Jones added: "I gave everything I could for that short period of time but it wasn't good enough. I had a plan of what we needed to do to change Australian rugby and we weren't able to do that. Rugby Australia weren't able to help support that, so I decided to move on."

Asked how he felt about getting accused of being a liar and letting down Australia, Jones said: "Everyone is entitled to their opinion, and I can't control that opinion. The only thing I can control is what I did. It sits well with me. If people feel like that, that's their judgement. I can't control that."

Jones is looking to rebuild his reputation after Australia failed to reach the knockout stage at a World Cup for the first time after pool-stage losses to Wales and Fiji. Before that, he spent seven years with England - and got the team to the 2019 World Cup final - only to be fired after his methods stopped working and the English won just five of their 12 test matches in 2022. (AP)



United States' Bryce Bennett celebrates winning an alpine ski, men's World Cup downhill race, in Val Gardena, Italy. (AP)

Bennett surprises Kilde & Odermatt

SELVA DI VAL GARDENA, Dec 14, (AP): American skier Bryce Bennett surprised the favorites by winning the Val Gardena downhill with a late start number as the men's World Cup speed season finally opened on Thursday a month later than scheduled.

The previous two stops on the circuit were wiped out due to bad weather.

Bennett, who also won this race two years ago, took advantage of improving light on the Saslong course with bib No. 34 and edged two-time defending downhill standings leader Aleksander Aamodt Kilde by 0.03 seconds.

Two-time defending overall World Cup winner Marco Odermatt was pushed down to third, 0.05 back.

The two-meter (6-foot-7) Bennett used his tall frame to absorb the terrain in the technical Ciaslat section that characterizes the course, and crunched into an aerodynamic tuck to make up time on Kilde and Odermatt in the steep final gates.

When he saw the result, Bennett held his arms out wide in apparent disbelief and flashed a wide smile framed by his moustache.

Kilde, who started 10th, had already celebrated as if he had won after edging Odermatt, who started sixth. Kilde and Odermatt were already giving interviews when Bennett came down, prompting them to turn around and see what happened.

Bennett, from Tahoe City, California, rode BMX bikes as a kid, so the bumps in the Ciaslat suit his style. He's never won anywhere else.

Still, it was a sharp improvement for Bennett after his best finish last season was 10th.

It was the sixth victory for the U.S. team in Val Gardena. The recently retired Steven Nyman won three downhill and Bode Miller won a super-G.

Bennett's ski technician is Leo Mussi, who used to also work with Nyman - and four-time Val Gardena downhill winner Kristian Ghedina before that.



David Warner of Australia bats during play on the first day of the first cricket Test between Australia and Pakistan in Perth, Australia. (AP)

Sports

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Pakistan without a specialist spinner for the Test

Warner's powerful 164 in farewell series leads Australia to 346-5 on opening day

PERTH, Australia, Dec 14, (AP): David Warner hit a scintillating century in his farewell Test series as Australia reached 346-5 against Pakistan's inexperienced bowlers on the opening day Thursday of the three-match series.

Warner's commanding 164 off 211 balls - his first Test century in a year - vindicated captain Pat Cummins' decision to bat first on a hard bouncy pitch.

The 37-year-old Warner, who will be retiring after the last test in his Sydney hometown, made Pakistan toil in the first two sessions before he holed out at deep square leg in the last hour. He hit 16 fours and four sixes.

Mitchell Marsh was unbeaten on 15 on his home ground and Alex Carey was 14 not out after reaching the end of a great first day for Australia.

Pakistan went into the Test match without a specialist spinner and handed

debuts to fast bowlers Aamer Jamal (2-63) and Khurram Shahzad (1-62).

More importantly, they twice missed opportunities to dismiss Warner. Shahzad missed an overhead catch at mid-on after Warner completed his 26th Test hundred, and Sarfaraz Ahmed fumbled a difficult stumping chance just before Warner reached 150.

CRICKET

Pakistan had its most productive period in the last session when it claimed three wickets. Shahzad had Steven Smith caught behind for 31 off a delivery that shaped away, and Travis Head on 40 and Warner went while going for aggressive shots against Jamal.

Warner, enduring a lean patch in

Soccer clubs in England, Saudi Arabia fuel record \$888 mln spend on agents fees

ZURICH, Dec 14, (AP): Soccer clubs in England and Saudi Arabia fueled spending on player agents in international transfer deals to a record \$888 million this year, FIFA said on Thursday.

FIFA noted "isolated cases of service fees even surpassing \$10 million," though the soccer body lost a key court ruling in London last month which threatens its global regulations that seek to limit how much agents can be paid from deals.

Test cricket since his double hundred against South Africa at Melbourne last year, was criticized for being given a chance in the Perth test, but the left-

hander responded in style. He and Usman Khawaja, with 41, were ruthless during their century stand in the first session when they romped

more than \$280 million on agent commissions in transfers between two clubs in different countries. Money from player transfers between two clubs in the same country do not count in the FIFA numbers.

The total spend on agents was up 42% on 2022 and more than one third from the previous peak of \$654 million in the pre-pandemic year of 2019.

Italian clubs spending \$115.7 million was the only other collective

national total in nine figures. Saudi Arabian clubs spent \$86 million on agents in a state-backed recruitment program to boost its domestic league with hires such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Neymar and Karim Benzema.

FIFA did not specify details of individual transfers, though said in 224 cases the agent service fee was at least \$1 million, and those deals accounted for nearly 69% of the total spend.

Warner completed his half-century off just 41 balls but slowed down after lunch. He reached his sixth Test

hundred against Pakistan off 125 balls with an upper cut four off Jamal, and celebrated his century with his trademark leap.



Public Authority for Applied Education and Training female team captain receives the championship trophy from official.

KUNA photo

Kuwait University secures third place

PAAET seals futsal championship title

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 14, (KUNA): The female team from the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) clinched the championship title in the futsal competition during the third sports games for higher education. This marked the conclusion of the futsal competitions in the tournament organized by the Kuwait Sports Federation for Schools and Higher Education, which is set to continue until April.

The PAAET team secured their victory with a convincing 3-0 win against their opponents from the American University. The third-place position was claimed by the Kuwait University team, which emerged triumphant over the Australian College in a penalty shootout.

FUTSAL

Walid Nassar, the head of the technical committee for football competitions in the tournament, commended the high level of competition in the female students' futsal matches, particularly highlighting the strength of the final game. He praised the players for their enthusiasm and commitment to delivering their best performances throughout the matches.

Nassar also shared that this edition of the tournament featured three football competitions, alongside two grass football and futsal competitions for students. He emphasized the importance of such sports gatherings as spaces for students to nurture and showcase their athletic talents.

Underlining the commitment to fostering sports in educational institutions, Nassar acknowledged

Kuwait drawn in Group D with Bahrain, Iran and Afghanistan

BANGKOK, Dec 14: The draw for the AFC Futsal Cup placed the Kuwait futsal team in Group D, where they will face off against Bahrain,

FUTSAL

Iran, and Afghanistan. The upcoming Asian Championship is scheduled to take place in the Thai capital,



Kuwait futsal team sings the national anthem prior to a match.

the School Sports Federation, led by Faisal Al-Maqseed, for its efforts in promoting sports awareness among young people. He expressed appreciation for the cooperation of the Ministry of Education and the 16 university educational institutions participating in the session.

The ongoing edition of the session boasts the participation of

Bangkok, spanning from April 17 to April 28.

Group A comprises Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, and China, while Group B features Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, and Australia. Group C consists of Japan, South Korea, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The stage is set for an exciting competition among these nations in the pursuit of the prestigious AFC Futsal Cup.

approximately five thousand students, both male and female, representing various university institutions and a considerable number of secondary schools. The sports competitions cover a range of disciplines, including volleyball, basketball, padel, and triple basketball for both male and female students, with the events set to continue in succession.

PSG advance in tense finish to Champions League group

Porto into round of 16

GENEVA, Dec 14, (AP): Paris Saint-Germain and Kylian Mbappé were left holding a ticket to the Champions League knockout round after a tense finish to the tightest group saw Newcastle let its chance slip.

Porto also earned their place in the round of 16 draw on Monday with a 5-3 victory over Shakhtar Donetsk, which needed to win to advance.

PSG's 1-1 draw at Group F winners Borussia Dortmund - earned by 17-year-old Warren Zaire-Emery's 56th-minute leveler - was enough to secure second place because Newcastle lost 2-1 at home to AC Milan.

"We are still alive," said PSG coach Luis Enrique, whose unseeded team can now be drawn to face Manchester City, Real Madrid or Bayern Munich. "No team will hope to play us in the next round."

Newcastle were in the box seat kicking off the second half with a one-goal lead but ended in last place without even the consolation prize of entering the second-tier Europa League as a third-place finisher.

That reward flipped to Milan when it took the lead in the 84th as substitute Samuel Chukwueze raced clear to score one minute after coming on from the bench. Milan had leveled in the 59th on United States playmaker Christian Pulisic's goal.

Newcastle joined Manchester United in losing at home - United on Tuesday - to finish bottom of a group and give England its weakest round of 16 challenge for 11 years: just defending champions Man City and Arsenal are

in the draw Monday.

"We are absolutely devastated not to go through," Newcastle manager Eddie Howe said.

The 16-team lineup was completed by Porto, which finished runners-up in Group H to Barcelona though the Spanish champions lost 3-2 at Royal Antwerp.

Atletico Madrid's 2-0 win over Lazio ensured they would finish top of Group E and be seeded in Monday's draw. Lazio had already advanced before the final round of games. Last-place Celtic got a stoppage-time goal to beat Feyenoord 2-1.

Man City sent out a team of few regular starters - including former ball boy Micah Hamilton who scored on his debut - to win 3-2 at Red Star Belgrade and ensure the defending champion completed a six-win program atop Group G.

In the other group game that also did



Newcastle United's Tino Livramento, (left), and AC Milan's Christian Pulisic (11) battle for a head ball during the Champions League Group F soccer match between Newcastle United and AC Milan at St. James' Park, in Newcastle, England. (AP)

not affect the final standings, Leipzig beat Young Boys 2-1.

The draw at UEFA headquarters on Monday includes eight former champions who have combined to win 33 of the 67 titles since the European Cup started in 1955.

Group winners (seeded): Bayern Munich, Arsenal, Real Madrid, Real Sociedad, Atletico Madrid, Borussia Dortmund, Manchester City, Barcelona.

Runners-up (unseeded): Copenhagen, PSV Eindhoven, Napoli, Inter Milan, Lazio, Paris Saint-Germain, Leipzig, Porto.

In the round of 16, teams cannot play an opponent from their own country or a team they already faced in the group stage. Draws later in the season for the quarterfinals and semi-

SOCCER

finals are open with no seeding or country protection.

Third-place teams in Champions League groups keep playing in February in the knockout playoffs for the second-tier Europa League, which also are drawn Monday.

Playoffs qualifiers: Galatasaray, Lens, Braga, Benfica, Feyenoord, AC Milan, Young Boys, Shakhtar Donetsk.

Those teams will be unseeded, playing the home leg first, against runner-up teams in the Europa League groups. Those runners-up include Sporting Lisbon, and could add Roma and Brighton after Thursday's games.

Winners of the Europa League playoffs advance to the round of 16 to face group winners like Liverpool and Bayer Leverkusen, current leaders of the Premier League and Bundesliga, respectively.